# Adoption of Adult Voice and the Integrity of the Child Narrator in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Dreams in a Time of War*

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## Abstract

This article evaluates Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's adoption of adult voice in manipulating the child narrator in his childhood memoir *Dreams in a Time of War*. Situating our discussion on theories of narratology, autobiography and rhetoric, we examine the (in)effectiveness of the author's adoption of adult voice as a rhetorical strategy in the articulation of his anticolonial exigency in the memoir. This article, therefore, interrogates the child narrator's claims and knowledge of different historical events as well as his intellectual/critical understanding of the intricate character of colonialism, its structures and his relationship with the adult characters in the memoir. The study reveals that Ngũgĩ's adoption of adult voice in his childhood memoir succeeds in exposing the author's anti-colonialism ideas. However, it suppresses the authentic child narrator's voice; hence, works against the attainment of his intention to persuade the reader on some claims he makes in the memoir about formal education, Christianity and Mau Mau.

**Keywords**: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Dreams in a Time of War*, child narrator, adult voice

## Introduction

*Dreams in a Time or War* is about Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's childhood experience of colonialism and primary school life. In the memoir, Ngũgĩ establishes his anticolonial exigency by exploring the problem of colonialism and its painful impact on the narrator's childhood memory. The author's childhood experience of colonialism in the memoir is also coupled with his introduction to formal

education and Christianity at primary school level. However, the arguments expressed by the narrator on colonialism and education in the memoir are similar to Ngũgĩ's adult arguments in some of his essays. For example, in *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ (2011) has discussed the impact of colonial education system on the Africans. Basing his arguments on the politics of language, the author has argued that, during colonialism, the African languages were associated with negative qualities such as "backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment". He further argues that most of the graduates from the colonial school system developed "a hatred of the people and the culture and the values of the language of our daily humiliation and punishment" (Ngũgĩ, 2011, p. 28). It is ideologies such as these that Ngũgĩ seems to be communicating through the child narrator in *Dreams in a Time of War* with the aim of manipulating his intended reader's attitude towards his childhood encounter with European culture and education.

Studies that have been conducted on *Dreams in a Time of War* have ignored the rhetorical component of Ngũgĩ's craft in the memoir. Generally, there has been a tendency in most of these studies to focus on the major thematic concerns. For instance, Wrong (2016) notes that, through this memoir, Ngũgĩ recollects his boyhood experience and memory of the Mau Mau war against the British rule in colonial Kenya in the 1940s and 1950s. Wrong observes that the author has successfully "exposed the imperial project's inherent racism while acknowledging its transformative impact on reluctant subjects". Nonetheless, Wrong's claim that the tone of the narrator throughout the memoir is "calm and nuanced" raises doubts due to the thematic concerns of the text as well as the traumatic experience which Ngũgĩ faced as a child. Wrong does not also critique Ngũgĩ's violations of the autobiographical tenets such as the employment of the adult voice that influences the child narrator's critique of Christianity, the politics of land dispossession and colonialism.

While acknowledging that *Dreams in a Time of War* addresses the problems of colonialism and the struggle for independence in Kenya during Ngũgĩ's childhood, Busby (2012) argues that the memoir is a remarkable book on Ngũgĩ's political coming-of-age. She contends that the memoir makes a poignant reading that evokes memories of pain for the author. Nonetheless, Busby's study is silent on the authenticity of some of the child narrator's claims on colonialism and other world historical events in the memoir. In this article, therefore, we have critiqued Ngũgĩ's rhetorical

intention in diverting from the child narrator's story/experience and deliberately recounting historical events which happened long before he was born. For instance, we have interrogated the child narrator's mental ability to narrate and critique historical issues such as the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway, the First World War and other pertinent historical issues which he didn't witness or cannot comprehend as a child.

Nyantino (2014), in his comparative study of representation of memory in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Dreams in a Time of War* and Wole Soyinka's *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, has argued that childhood memories have significantly shaped the consciousness of the two writers. In emphasizing the impact of colonialism on Ngũgĩ's childhood, Nyantino refers to the author's ideas in *Writers in Politics,* and asserts that the postcolonial society is intertwined into the social being of the formerly colonized body and mind (Nyantino 2014, 65). In terms of style, Nyantino has pointed out that both Ngũgĩ and Soyinka have employed the first person "I" to emphasize the autobiographical truth in their memoirs and has used songs and oral narratives to make their works authentic. In this article, however, we examine the authenticity of the predominant tone and use of other narrative voices in the text which Ngũgĩ has manipulated to advance his political and ideological agenda in the text.

In her analysis of Ngũgĩ's craftsmanship, Otieno (2014) argues that the author has constructed *Dreams in a Time of War* and *In the House of the Interpreter* through effective plot development, reference to various personalities, narration of the stories and use of different points of views. Otieno also asserts that through the use of the "I" narrative voice, Ngũgĩ has achieved cohesion and unity in the memoirs. However, there is need to closely examine Ngũgĩ's rhetorical intentions in his manipulation of the "I" narrative voice vis-à-vis his political agenda and thematic concerns in the texts. Just like Nyantino's study, Otieno's has also not interrogated the credibility of adult voices in the memoirs in articulating the historical realities in Kenya during colonialism. It is on this basis that we evaluate the rhetorical agenda of Ngũgĩ's manipulation of the narrator in *Dreams in a Time of War*.

In her study "The Intersection of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies" Muchiri (2014) argues that, in *Dreams in a Time of War*, Ngũgĩ's experiences and those of his family reflect that of many families in Kenya during colonialism. She notes that this memoir clearly tackles the

themes of poverty, the Africans' struggle to acquire colonial education, the anti-colonial Mau Mau war in Kenya and the Second World War. Though Muchiri's findings are crucial in informing us on Ngũgĩ's major thematic concerns in the text, her ideas are too general and devoid of any link to Ngũgĩ's rhetorical intentions vis-à-vis his criticism of colonialism and its structures in the text. Her study is equally silent on Ngũgĩ's deliberate imposition of the adult voice on the child narrator in the memoir. Hence, it is crucial to examine the credibility and rhetorical impact of the author's critical diversion from the autobiographical norms. Therefore, in the succeeding sections, we evaluate the narrator vis-à-vis his knowledge on history, intellectual ability and relationship with other characters in the memoir.

**Delineating the Narrator in *Dreams in a Time of War***

*Dreams in a Time or War* covers Ngũgĩ's childhood and primary school life from 1938 to 1953 during which he had dreams of acquiring formal education that he believed would better his life as well as that of his family. In the memoir, the narrator provides details about his birth and the circumstances of that time: "I was born in 1938, under the shadow of another war, the Second World War, to Thiong'o wa Nducũ, my father, and Wanjikũ wa Ngũgĩ, my mother. I don't know where I ranked, in terms of years, among the twenty-four children of my father and his four wives, but I was the fifth of my mother's house" (Ngũgĩ, 2010, p.5). The narrator's claim that he did not know where he ranked among his siblings in the polygamous family informs us of his tender age; hence, his inability to comprehend intricate family affairs. The narrator further informs us that it "was in 1947" when his mother asked him to join school (Ngũgĩ, 2010, p.36). From this information, we can deduce that Ngũgĩ was 9 years old when he started his primary school education in 1947 and 15 years old at the time he completed it. At this level, Ngũgĩ's credibility as a child narrator is revealed from the sense of innocence that can be deduced further from his earliest recollections about his family:

> As a child just beginning to walk, I used to follow, with my eyes, my mothers and the older siblings as they went past the main gate to our yard, and it seemed to me that the forest mysteriously swallowed them up in the morning, and in the evening, as mysteriously, disgorged them unharmed. It was only later when I was able to walk a bit farther from the yard that I saw that there were paths among the trees. I learned that down beyond the forest was the Limuru Township and across the railway line, white-owned plantations where my older siblings went to pick tea leaves for pay. (Ngũgĩ, 2010, p.5)

The child narrator's perception of things as they were can be detected at this level as he recollects his observations of the activities of his family members with an uncritical eye: "I used to follow, with my eyes" as they left home to go to the "white-owned plantations where my older siblings went to pick tea leaves for pay" (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.5). The way he introduces us to the changes in his family that were occasioned by colonialism reveals a child's tone and perspective:

> Then things changed, I don't know how gradually or suddenly, but they changed. The cows and the goats were the first to go, leaving behind empty sheds. The dump site was no longer the depository of cow dung and goat droppings but garbage only. Its height became less threatening in time and I too could run up and down with ease. Then our mothers stopped cultivating the fields around our courtyard; they now worked in other fields far from the compound. My father's *thingira* was abandoned, and now the women trekked some distance to take food to him. (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.5)

From these brief revelations, it is apparent that the narrator in *Dreams in a Time of War* is a child. Therefore, the reader anticipates to be taken through the narrative of colonialism during Ngũgĩ's childhood from a child's point of view or voice. As such, being a childhood memoir, the reader expects Ngũgĩ to be consistent in his narrative of colonialism from the eyes, the memory and the perspective of a child narrator. However, this is not the case as demonstrated in our discussion on the memoir in the successive sub-sections.

When reading *Dreams in a Time of War*, the reader is likely to be attracted by various incidences of the author's adult voice which has been deliberately imposed on the child narrator's recollection and narrative of his experience of colonialism. This brings out the author's adult knowledge of various historical events as well as his political and ideological leanings. In this case, Ngũgĩ's adult narrative voice is used in this memoir to covertly express his political and ideological views on colonialism and rhetorically manipulate his reader vis-à-vis the narrative about himself, his family and the historical issues that dominate the memoir. By employing the adult narrative perspective, the author utilizes his knowledge of history and articulates his cultural, religious and political ideologies that dominate his adult essays and fiction. This has resulted in the manipulation of some tenets of the autobiographical genre and problematized some of the child narrator's claims in the

memoir. Consequently, what the narrator says in some instances may be viewed as the author's adult views on colonialism.

In traditional Greek rhetoric, Aristotle identified ethos (a speaker's trustworthiness or believability) as a crucial component of any rhetorical discourse because of its persuasive appeal to the reader. Keith and Lundberg (2008), have underscored Aristotle's idea by pointing out that persuasive writers can only gain a reader's trust by creating their ethos through calling explicitly on the history of their actions and by pointing out the deeds that exemplify their character (Keith and Lundberg 2008, pp. 37 - 39). In *Dreams in a Time of War,* however, the narrator's credibility has been compromised. The intrusion of Ngũgĩ's adult voice into the child narrator's perspective can easily compromise the reader's trust on some of the narrator's claims in the text. In fact, the contravention of the autobiographical point of view in the memoir compels the readers to engage with the author beyond the narrator's perspective. The reader's engagement is based on the view that some accounts of the narrator are beyond the purview of a child. Lejeune (1989), in his idea of an autobiographical pact in life writing points out that the contract presupposes that the author, the narrator and the protagonist share the same name in the text. He further claims that the autobiographical pact emphases the narrator's honest effort to tell the truth about one's past rather than on the historical accuracy of the narration. The implication of Lejeune's idea, therefore, is that in reading an autobiographical text, there is "the possibility of some kind of verification" on the claims of the narrator in the text (Lejeune 1989, p.3).

**The Child Narrator's Knowledge of History**

In *Dreams in a Time of War*, Ngũgĩ has delved into different historical events which are beyond the scope of the memory of a child. To begin with, the child narrator has elaborately talked about the Berlin Conference of 1885 that led to the partition of Africa into spheres of influence among the European colonial powers and provided details on the rivalry between Germany and Britain over the control of East Africa as if he had actually known these historical events as a child. The narrator further gives details of the war between the German and British soldiers which was triggered by the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian, on June 28, 1914 (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.9). The accuracy with which the child narrator talks about these historical events during the First World War raises a lot of curiosity in the reader since he has not provided

the source of all these details. Therefore, reading through the memoir the reader is invited to figure out how the child narrator would grasp all the tidbits of such historical issues.

Similarly, the narrator's claim that he was able to link the historical facts about the First World War with the birth of his father is an autobiographical invention in the text since he talks as if he were a grown up. We treat this as Ngũgĩ's adult voice that has influenced the flow of the child narrator's story in the memoir. The narrative voice invites the reader to further grapple with the lack of acknowledgement of the source of the information. For example, we are intrigued that at his tender age Ngũgĩ-the-child would comprehend and provide details about Queen Victoria's act of taking over the East African Protectorate between the years 1890 and 1896 (Ngũgĩ 2010, pp.9-10). These details can only be associated with an adult who has received adequate formal education and specifically in history as a subject.

A noticeable digression from the child narrator's voice is clearly evident in the narrator's exposition of historical facts about the completion of the Mombasa-Uganda railway line which he claims eased the traffic of white settlers into the interior of Kenya from 1902 onward. Since the narrator was still very young, it was not possible for him to have acquired the knowledge on the history of the First World War which he claims ended with a Treaty of Versailles of June 1919 and which facilitated the rewarding of white ex-soldiers with African lands. The narrator's claim, for instance, that some of the land that the white soldiers were given belonged to African soldiers who had survived the war can be seen as Ngũgĩ's attempt to arouse strong anger in the reader for the unfairness. Though told from a child's perspective, the memoir cannot side step the momentous historical events that necessitate its telling.

Readers who are well-acquainted with the history of East Africa are aware that the settlement of white settlers met resistance from Africans and that the East African Association, founded in 1921, was a countrywide African political organization which was led by Harry Thuku (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.10). However, Ngũgĩ could not have known these things as a child. Lack of any hint of acknowledgement of the sources of these historical facts points to the understanding that the child narrator was relying on his memory, which raises doubts since the events narrated happened long before he was born.

The child narrator's claim that "Harry Thuku forged political connections with Marcus Garvey's international black nationalism to the West, in America, and with Gandhi's Indian nationalism to the East" (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.10), is part of Ngũgĩ's adult knowledge of these historical events. Therefore, the narrator's reference to Harry Thuku's political activities in Kenya and his links with Garvey's and Gandhi's ideologies, can only be interpreted as Ngũgĩ's anticolonial and anti-imperialism ideology which dominate his adult essays and fiction. Furthermore, the narrator's claim that both Gandhi and Thuku "called for civil disobedience at about the same time in their respective countries" indicates Ngũgĩ's Marxist ideology and advocacy for resistance against oppression. This is clearly depicted in the narrator's claim that the British arrested Thuku in 1922 and detained him at Kismayu in Somalia for seven years to suppress the "Kenyan link between Gandhian nationalism and Garveyite black nationalism" (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.10).

Ngũgĩ's adult voice can further be detected in the implied Marxist ideology and advocacy for revolution in the narrator's claim that "workers reacted to news of Thuku's arrest with a mass protest outside the Central Police Station in Nairobi" (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.10). The child narrator recounts the whole incident as if he were an eye witness when he says that the colonial police, aided by settlers who were drinking beer at the Norfolk Hotel, shot dead 150 protesters and a woman leader called Nyanjirũ Mũthoni. Since the narrator was still very young, the reader is likely to attribute these details to an adult voice that is camouflaging as that of the child narrator. Thus, the reader is forced to attribute this to the author's adult anti-colonial worldview which has been used to manipulate the reader's attitude towards colonialism. Therefore, since the source of this information has not been acknowledged by the child narrator, it is apparent that Ngũgĩ has deliberately imposed his adult voice on the narrator's narrative of colonialism.

The narrative of the formation and role of the King's African Rifles (KAR) during the Second World War cannot be taken by the reader as being part of the autobiographical materials that comes from the child narrator's knowledge about these issues. The details provided about KAR and the song cited by the narrator points clearly to Ngũgĩ's adult voice. This is because the child narrator grasps the specifics about KAR such as its formation in 1902, its key architects and the complex nature of the British Indirect Rule which was initiated by Captain Lugard (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.20). The

song that the child narrator cites which he claims was in Kiswahili language is presented as though he knew it word for word (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.21). The translated version of the song reinforces the possibility of Ngũgĩ's imposition of his adult voice on the narrator's story to advance his political and anti-colonial agenda.

The history of Benito Mussolini and his conquest of Ethiopia in 1936 has been presented as the child narrator's knowledge of world history at his tender age (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.21). Though he claims that he heard about these historical events during the evening oral narrations by adults, it is unbelievable that, from an autobiographical standpoint, the child narrator is able to expound on them just as an expert in history can. This can be attributed to Ngũgĩ's experiment with the autobiographical style to document history.

The narrator's account of his mother's preparation to visit her relatives who were living in the Rift Valley is interrupted by a detailed history of the Mombasa-Uganda railway which started in 1896 in Kilindini, Mombasa, and reached Kisumu in 1901. The author's adult voice usurps the narrator's story about his mother and digresses into the impact of the Kenya-Uganda railway during colonialism by arguing that the construction of the railway paved the way for the development of towns, created employment for the Africans who had lost their lands and facilitated easy access to the Kenyan heartland by the British settlers and Indian businessmen. The author portrays the railway as a conduit that enhanced colonialism in Kenya as illustrated by his claim that the land that belonged to the Africans was divided into "White Highlands only, the Crown lands owned by the colonial state on behalf of the British King, and the African Reservations for the natives" (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.47). The narrator has claimed that a railway station was opened in Limuru on November 10$^{th}$ 1899. However, the narrator has not said how he got all these historical facts since they are the facts of life that shaped his childhood.

Through the adoption of the adult voice on the child narrator, Ngũgĩ has commented on the advent of Christianity in Kenya. The reader is made aware of the fact that when Christianity took root in Kenya, the colonial state left the education matters under the control of Protestant and Catholic missions such as the Church Missionary Society, the Church of Scotland Mission and the Gospel Missionary Society which were founded in 1799, 1891 and 1898 respectively. When narrating

about these historical events, the child narrator talks as if he actually had knowledge of all these details. The credibility of the child narrator is manipulated to bring out knowledge of such historical issues. In this context, Ngũgĩ has again deliberately abandoned the autobiographical genre and engaged in exposing his knowledge of history which he must have researched on.

Some studies have argued that Ngũgĩ's reliance on past historical events that happened long before he was born in *Dreams in a Time of War* informs the reader more on the history of Kenya and enables the reader to comprehend and situate the author within the history of colonialism. For instance, Otieno (2014) argues that Ngũgĩ's act of narrating different events from different periods before he was born, enables him to succeed in ordering the events he has talked about and contributes positively to the development of plot in the autobiography (Otieno 2014, pp.51 - 52). However, Otieno does not recognize that, behind the child narrator, there is an adult narrative voice stringing the detailed historical accounts of Kenya. Readers who hold that honesty and truth are indispensable in ascertaining the credibility of the narrative of events in life writing are confronted with such a reckoning. Eakin (2008) has underscored the importance of the truth of the narrator's story or claims in the autobiography to the reader by asserting that "the reception of memoir is contractual: readers expect autobiographers to exhibit some basic respect for the truth of their lives" and that if the author contravenes the reader's trust, he/she is likely to "suffer the consequences" (Eakin 2008, p.20). Therefore, Ngũgĩ's digression from the autobiographical requirements ironically enhances the persuasive power of his narrative of colonialism in the memoir since by compromising his ethos, he dares the consequences that Eakin hints at.

**The Child Narrator's Critical Ability**

Though the narrator in *Dreams in a Time or War* is a child, his evaluation of colonialism, its structures and other events is akin to that of an adult, a well-informed and formally-educated person or eye witness. For instance, the meticulousness with which he recounts and disapproves of the unjust colonial legal system that caused his father's loss of land and the details that characterize this narrative creates the impression that he actually witnessed the whole transaction. At this point, the reader is forced to contend with the credibility of these claims since they are beyond the intellectual capacity of a child narrator. The following questions that the narrative voice

has raised presuppose an adult understanding of the whole issue of the narrator's father's land problems:

> Did the religious Kahahu know that Njamba was selling the land twice, first in goats to my father and second in cash to him?... Did my father ever reflect on the irony that he had lost out to a black landlord, a product of the white missionary center at Kikuyu, under the same legal system that had created White Highlands out of the African-owned highlands? (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.11)

Since the narrator did not actually witness the act of his father buying land, one is forced to evaluate the whole legal process that led to his father's loss of land. It is impractical for one to narrate about the events that happened before one was born with the authority of an eye witness. Searle (2004) has emphasized the indispensable role of memory in an autobiographical writer's sense of oneself and truth in an autobiography: "My sense that I am the same person over time, from my first-person point of view, is in a large part a matter of my ability to produce conscious memories of earlier conscious events in my life" (Searl 2004, p.198).

In this context, therefore, Searle's main point is that the autobiographical narrator consciously recounts the various events that one experienced in one's past life. Therefore, it is worth noting that, though Ngũgĩ succeeds in expressing his angry tone at the impact of the whole colonial legal system, the reader will have to grapple with a tone independent of the child's. As an adult voice, thus, Ngũgĩ succeeds in his condemnation of colonialism for undermining the traditional African legal system as demonstrated by the declaration, "Orality and tradition lost to literacy and modernity. A title deed no matter how it was gotten trumped over oral deeds" (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.11).

Through the adoption of the adult voice, Ngũgĩ reveals to the reader that tea was among the first cash crops to have been introduced in Kenya during the colonial period. This is revealed through the narrator's claim that tea seeds from India were first introduced in Limuru in 1903 (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.33). It should also be noted that, despite having cited the actual year when the historical event took place, the child narrator has not pointed out the source of it. The reader's sympathy for the child narrator may be aroused for being involved in child labour but his claims, which depict him as being knowledgeable on historical issues that are beyond the grasp of a child, creates a sense of a child being forced to mature too early by circumstances.

Moreover, the child narrator's ability to identify the different dialects which were associated with the Indian community living in the local town can also be attributed to the author's deliberate imposition of an adult voice on the child narrator. At that tender age, Ngũgĩ-the-child was able to know that the different Indians who were living in Limuru included Sikhs, Jains, Hindus and Guajarati (Ngũgĩ 2010, p. 34). At this point, the reader is left wondering how the child knew those languages or dialects that were associated with Indians of different nationalities. Thus, Ngũgĩ has violated the autobiographical principle which requires that the principal narrator in a memoir informs the reader about only those things which he/she actually knew, witnessed or recalls.

Some things in *Dreams in a Time of War* appear to have been exaggerated by the author to attain certain political or ideological objectives and influence the reader to support his views. For instance, after being to school for only one year, the narrator claims that he was able to be promoted from pre-primary to grade two. At this point, we would like to clarify to the reader that, when Ngũgĩ started going to school, there was no pre-primary level in the education system. Pupils started school at class one. Further, the use of "grade two" betrays Ngũgĩ's American influence since in Kenya during the colonial period the classes were referred to as standard one, two, three, etcetera. The author has deliberately done this to justify some claims he has made in the memoir. One such claim is that in only one year of being in school, the narrator claims that he was able to read well long passages and interpret their messages with the critical mind of an adult. The child narrator's claim that there was a passage he read frequently until he started "hearing music in the words" is akin to an adult's critical interpretation of a literary text. For example, the symbolic implications he draws in the following lines which he claims to have read from one of the passages gives away the author's adult anti-colonial worldview that criminalizes the colonialists' appropriation of the African lands:

> God has given the Agĩkũyũ a beautiful country
> Abundant in water, food and luscious bush
> The Agĩkũyũ should praise the Lord all the time
> For he has ever been generous to them (Ngũgĩ 2010, p. 40)

The narrator's claim that he could still hear the music in the lines above even when not reading them hints at the author's adult voice intervention in the narrative process and forces the reader to delve into the symbolic ramifications of the song rather than listening to a child's narrative point

of view. He also claims that, from those lines, he realized that "even written words can carry music" that he loved in the stories he read. The author's adult voice further comes out through the narrator's comment that "this is not a story; it is a descriptive statement". These critical analyses that emerge at this point leave a lot of doubt in the reader about the authenticity of the child's narrative voice in the story. This is because the reader, at this point, is likely to raise the question of how a child who has just been to school for only one year can critically read written texts. Therefore, we conclude that Ngũgĩ has deliberately violated the autobiographical genre in order to advance his anticolonial attitude.

This claim reveals that Ngũgĩ has deliberately recreated the truth about them in order to attain a certain rhetorical impact in the memoir. This is possible because of the long lapse of time between his childhood and the time he wrote the memoir. In his discussion on the autobiographical truth in life writing, Gusdorf (1956) has recommended that the reader should pursue the significance of autobiography "beyond truth and falsity" in a text (Gusdorf 1956, p.89). He proposes that the truth value of the captured past memories in an autobiography is rather a reconstructed past that may or may not be the exact reality as implied in the following:

> The past that is recalled has lost its flesh and bone solidity, but it has won a new and more intimate relationship to the individual life that can thus, after being long dispersed and sought again throughout the course of time, be rediscovered and drawn together again beyond time. (Gusdorf 1956, p.85)

Corresponding with Gusdorf, Smith and Watson (2010) argue that, as a result of the reconstructive character of memory, the self in life writing may be construed as being fragmented and fluid because the "project of self-representation could no longer be read as providing direct access to the truth of the self. Truthfulness becomes a more complex phenomenon of narrators struggling to shape an identity out of an amorphous subjectivity" (Smith and Watson 2010, p. 201).

Drawing from the observations made by Gusdorf and Smith and Watson, we argue that the narrator's interpretation of the implications of the stories he claims to have read from the Old Testament after being to school for only one year betrays Ngũgĩ's imposition of his adult voice on the child narrator. For example, the narrator claims that he identified with David, who, like the

hare in the trickster narratives, had killed Goliath, who he compares with a giant (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.41). His claim that "David, the warrior-poet, remains an ideal" person in his mind is suggestive of the adult author's voice manipulation of the child narrator's narrative perspective. It sounds as if Ngũgĩ-the-adult voice and critic is speaking to the reader and imploring him/her to develop some anticolonial sentiments. The same could be said of the narrator's comment that, while in church, the words "*I was blind and now I see*, from the hymn 'Amazing Grace'" reminded him about the day he learnt to read. The reader is left wondering: how did the child narrator know that the line came from the hymn, "Amazing Grace"? Ngũgĩ, at this point, can be seen to directly indulge in the child narrator's story to assert his biased interpretation of the Bible to suit his anticolonial and ideological views. The reader can also find it difficult and unbelievable that the narrator could read the Bible and comprehend it after being to school for such a short time.

Through the adult narrative perspective, the narrator is able to critically comment on the alienating effect of the colonial education system on him. He recalls an occasion when he and his younger brother went out for sports together but on seeing other pupils in school uniform, the narrator felt embarrassed to walk along with his brother who was in some old traditional garb. Since he did not want to be seen walking with his poorly dressed brother, he asked him to take a different path around the field. The critical evaluation the narrator has given that experience and the wisdom that he exudes at this point is beyond the mental ability of a child. This is revealed when the narrator argues that education made him lose touch with whom he was and the reality in his poor family.

From this incident, Ngũgĩ's adult voice can also be detected in the well-crafted ideological expressions that are imbued with wisdom that is beyond a child's ability such as: "Belief in yourself is more important than endless worries of what others think of you. Value yourself and others will value you. Validation is best that comes from within" (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.45). The child narrator's ability to conclude that the colonial education influenced people negatively by alienating them from each other is therefore questionable. This can be seen as Ngũgĩ's deliberate effort to voice his political ideologies on the colonial education system. Thus, the reader's trust of the narrator's claims is eroded by such open infringement of the autobiographical narrative perspective. Our observation is supported by the arguments put forward by Thompson (1998) in *Persuading Aristotle*. According to Thompson, "Being persuasive is really about speaking

from your heart, your head and your soul" (Thompson 1998, p. 8). To underscore the importance of a speaker's/writer's credibility, character or reputation in the process of persuading his/her audience, Thompson argues that any audience that is confronted by a writer/audience inevitably ponders:

> Who are you? What are your values and beliefs? Why should I trust you? What qualifies you to speak on this subject? What special experience and understanding gives you `standing' to authoritatively discuss this subject? How willing are you to share your own sometimes painful experiences in order to give authenticity to what you are saying? What `added value' do you bring to the table or the public platform? (Thompson 1998, p.8)

He concludes by asserting that "Ethos can build a bridge of trust and confidence with another person." From Thompson's concerns, it is evident that the child narrator in *Dreams in a Time of War* assumes the position of the adult's voice in critiquing the character of colonialism and its structures in the text to enhance his anticolonial ideas. The ideas expressed by the narrator on colonial education in the memoir are similar to Ngũgĩ's arguments in some of his essays. For example, in *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ (2011) has discussed the impact of the colonial education system on the Africans. Basing his arguments on the politics of language, the author has argued that the African languages were associated with negative qualities such as "backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment" during the colonial period. He further argues that most of the graduates from the colonial school system developed "a hatred of the people and the culture and the values of the language of our daily humiliation and punishment" (Ngũgĩ 2011, p.28). It is ideologies such as these that Ngũgĩ seems to be imposing on the child narrator in *Dreams in a Time of War*, with the aim of imparting the same on his intended reader.

Ngũgĩ has further manipulated the child narrator's perspective in order to articulate his anti-racist and anticolonial ideas. This has interfered with the child narrator's story about what he remembers from his childhood. For instance, the author has used the railway and the train to express his anti-racist feelings as demonstrated through the narrator's claim that the passenger train was demarcated into "the first class for Europeans only, second class for Indians only, and third class for Africans" (48). To express his disgust at racial discrimination, Ngũgĩ deliberately omits the word 'only' from the label 'third class for Africans' to imply that there was nothing special with

this class and therefore it could be used by people from other races. In his book, *Re-membering Africa*, Ngũgĩ (2009) has criticized racism by arguing that, in racial politics, "…the self-consciousness of a race is appropriated by another to serve the interests of a dominant race". He further asserts that racism is "a conscious ideology of imperialism and of colonialism and colonial relations" and that even economic and political matters are laced with racial affiliations (Ngũgĩ 2009, p.83).

By adopting the adult voice on the child narrator, Ngũgĩ has further digressed from the autobiographical norms and engaged in ideological advocacy through his critical comments on the politics of female circumcision in *Dreams in a Time of War*. He has deliberately expressed his arguments on the conflict between Christianity and the Agĩkũyũ culture and the tradition of female circumcision on the child narrator. For example, the narrator claims that some missionary societies condemned female circumcision as "barbaric and unchristian" and forced the African teachers to "sign a declaration solemnly swearing never to circumcise children; never to become a member of the Kikuyu Central Association…; never to become a follower of Kenyatta…; and never to join any party unless it was formed by the government or missionaries" (Ngũgĩ 2010, pp. 70-71). At this point, again, the reader may question how the child narrator knew these details yet he was not a teacher himself. Therefore, we can say that the intention of asserting his cultural and political ideologies in this context is to manipulate the reader into detesting the colonial state and Christianity for undermining the Agĩkũyũ cultural practices and African political engagements. In the preface to *Writers in Politics*, Ngũgĩ (1981) has acknowledged that he has been engaged in several ideological debates that involve questions of culture, education, language, literature and politics. He argues that it is a people's culture that embodies their values and moral worth which govern their interaction with one another and with the world. He further asserts that a people's cultural values normally form a "basis of their collective and individual image of self, their identity as a people, since culture is an ideological expression of the totality of their activities" (Ngũgĩ 1981, p. 9). The child narrator in *Dreams in a Time of War* seems to be imbued with such ideas although he is still young and in the lower primary school level.

Furthermore, Ngũgĩ's adult ideological convictions can be detected in the exposition of the child narrator's experience and interpretation of the Christian songs and biblical quotations when he first

attended a church service at Manguo School. The narrator's claim that the hymns sung on that day evoked "contemporary events and experiences through biblical imagery" is an exaggeration of the child's ability to critically delineate the symbolic implications of the songs in relation to the colonial realities (Ngũgĩ 2010, 73). The expression "what the Lord did then could do now: give strength to the lowly and scatter their enemies" can be seen as the adult Ngũgĩ's strong anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist sentiments (Ngũgĩ 2010, 74). The description of the preacher's behaviour during his sermon depicts Ngũgĩ's revolutionary advocacy and his anti-oppression worldview as exposed in the following:

> He would tear off his shirt, baring his chest and beating it, acting out his humiliation, as he implored his God, the God of Isaac and Abraham, to do for the present people what he had done ages ago for the children of Israel, freeing them from oppression, leading them from slavery, across hot deserts, through roaring seas, blinding their pursuers. It was as if he had been an eyewitness to the exodus. (Ngũgĩ 2010, p. 74)

In this context, the author problematizes the child narrator's claim that he could read and connect the Old Testament stories and the Christian hymns to the turbulent colonial realities that affected his family and the Agĩkũyũ community. Similarly, the narrator's claim that he could interpret the events and anecdotes biblically invites the reader's doubt to the truthfulness of such a claim since he had only gone to school for a short time and was still young (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.88).

In *Dreams in a Time of War*, Ngũgĩ has employed the adult narrative perspective through adult characters so as to advance his ideological arguments against colonialism and other forms of oppression and exploitation. Although the adult characters have been used to talk about some events in the text that the child narrator had not witnessed, there are some instances where Ngũgĩ intrudes into what the characters are saying. For instance, the narrator paraphrases Ngandi's narrative of displacement of Africans from their land by stating that "According to Ngandi, Ole Ngurueni, a tale of displacement, exile, and loss, was really a story of Kenya; people's resistance was a harbinger of things to come" (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.80).

At this point, it is suggestive that the child narrator could critically interpret Ngandi's arguments. Therefore, it is clear that, through Ngandi, Ngũgĩ's advocacy for anti-colonialism through armed struggle comes out clearly. He has only used Ngandi as his mouthpiece through whom he can

indirectly express his anti-colonial ideology. It is as if the author has transferred his arguments in his essays into the memoir. For example, in *Homecoming*, Ngũgĩ (1972) has argued that, in 1952, the colonial regime was involved in acts of "indiscriminate terrorism" which forced "workers and peasants to take to the forests". He further argues that the Mau Mau violence, through "its four years of spectacular resistance to the enemy forces", was anti-injustice and was meant to counter "white violence" and their "savage acts" (Ngũgĩ, 1972, p.29). The author describes the Mau Mau war as a "collective resistance" through which the Africans defended "their lives and property" and "for four years were able to withstand the military might of British imperialism" (Ngũgĩ, 1972, p. 49). However, the author's skewed defense of the Mau Mau activities and absolving the fighters from any crimes may raise some questions from the readers. This is because, though they had a just cause, the Mau Mau guerrillas also committed atrocities against their fellow Africans whom they killed for not taking the oath or being perceived as betrayers. Some of those killed by the guerrillas were relatives of colonial chiefs and home guards.

Furthermore, in *Dreams in a Time of War*, Ngũgĩ has covertly asserted his adult anti-colonial worldview through Ngandi as demonstrated when the narrator quotes lines of a song that Ngandi liked singing. The narrator claims that the exact words of the song were: *Come my friend, let's reason together. For the sake of the future of our children. May darkness in our country end* (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.85). He also claims that Ngandi sang this song in a "tremulous voice" and with "a sad strain below the words". The choice of these words in the song betrays Ngũgĩ's adult voice since the "darkness" that is referred to in the song metaphorically refers to colonialism in Kenya. The author has picked this line deliberately to manipulate the reader's attitude towards colonialism which he has conceptualized in the imagery of darkness. The narrator's claims in the following also smell of the author's covert wishes:

> Waiyaki's last wish in 1891, the call to arms in defense of the land, was Ngandi's first article of political and legal faith. The other was the Devonshire declaration of 1923 that Kenya was an African people's country and the interests of the African natives had to be paramount. (Ngũgĩ 2010, p.86)

The claim that Ngandi supported acts of resistance in defence of land as politically and legally prudent cannot be the child narrator's interpretation of Ngandi's oral narrations. This is actually

Ngũgĩ's strategy to digress into acts of political and ideological advocacy which is crafted cleverly to persuade the reader to accede to the author's advocacy for armed resistance as the only effective reaction against colonialism and other forms of imperialism. This is what the author also does even in his works of fiction in which most of his protagonists are engaged in anti-colonial resistance. For instance, in *Re-membering Africa*, Ngũgĩ acknowledges that his own works of fiction such as *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child*, and *A Grain of Wheat* have advocated for resistance against colonialism and oppression (Ngũgĩ 2010, p. 40).

Through Ngandi, Ngũgĩ has been able to express his support for Pan-Africanist and anti-colonialism ideas which are beyond the understanding of the child narrator in *Dreams in a Time of War*. This is expressed through Ngandi's response to the narrator's inquiry on the authenticity of rumours he had heard that black Americans and South Africans would come to assist Kenyans in their anti-colonial resistance. In his response, Ngandi claims that South Africans and black Americans were sympathetic to the plight of the colonized Kenyans. Ngandi also claims that Bishop Alexander from South Africa visited Kenya between 1935 and 1937 as a guest of KISA and Karĩng'a (African independent schools) and that black Americans had already been involved in the Kenyan fight against colonialism. Further, Ngandi claims that Marcus Garvey's ideas in his journal, *Negro World*, had already reached KCA leaders in the 1920s (Ngũgĩ 2010, p. 120). These ideas have been clearly articulated in Ngũgĩ's polemical and didactic essays.

In his book, *Re-membering Africa*, Ngũgĩ has expressed his pro-Pan-African sentiments which are similar to Ngandi's. In this essay, Ngũgĩ has argued that "Garveyism and Pan-Africanism are the grandest secular visions for reconnecting the dismembered" Africans both in Africa and in the diaspora (Ngũgĩ 2009, p. 25). He further emphasizes that "re-membering the continent and the diaspora" is generally a core thematic concern of Pan-Africanism, which he considers "central to Garvey's vision of black people as active players in the world" (Ngũgĩ 2009, p.26). Ngũgĩ sums up his support for these ideologies passionately when he declares:

> Garveyism and Pan-Africanism, as re-membering visions and practices, have had as their most visible results the gains of black civil rights in America, the independence of the Caribbean territories, the independence of Africa, and the rise of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and, more recently, the African Union. (Ngũgĩ 2009, p.27)

## Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has deliberately manipulated the child narrator's voice in *Dreams in a Time of War*. Though Ngũgĩ has succeeded to persuade the reader by articulating his painful childhood recollections about himself, his family and community in the context of colonialism, the adoption of the adult voice has compromised the integrity of the child narrator. Therefore, Ngũgĩ's strategy to manipulate the child narrator becomes problematic as it undermines the rhetorical integrity of the narrator and the claims he makes in the memoir about the anticolonial struggle in Kenya.

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