

The Old in the New, The New in the Old: Migrant Metaphors, African Literatures and the Digital Turn

James Tar Tsaaior

Department of English, University of the Free State

Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa

E-mail: james TSAAIOR@gmail.com

Being Text of a Keynote Lecture at the 1st International Conference on the theme: "African Literature, the English Language and Contemporary Socio-Political Issues" Organised by the Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus, Nigeria, 17 – 21 April, 2023

Abstract

In this keynote address at this historic and epoch-making international conference on "African Literature, the English Language and Contemporary Socio-Political Issues", I shall engage metaphor as an important literary and linguistic armature for the articulation of local and global realities in time and space. I shall focus primarily on migrant metaphors. These are resilient, widespread and time-tested metaphors which have travelled from past history to present history and also have the potentials of exerting enduring impact on future history. Indeed, time past and time present are both present in time future and metaphors, through their meaning-making protocols, play a vital and significant role in summoning history for the contingencies of the present and the future. I shall demonstrate how through migrant metaphors, the old is present in the new and the new present in the old. In other words, I shall insist that there is an inherence of oral traditional media with its repertory of metaphors in digital media such that we can productively tease out these metaphors to establish the continuum from the old to the new. In this regard, therefore, it is reasonable to argue that oral performance cultures and artistic traditions and the metaphors they embed which were generally associated with pre-industrial or pre-scientific dispensations are alive, and so dynamic, coeval and consistent with digital modernity. Against this backcloth, I argue that the metaphors encoded in oral performance cultures and traditions of the past travel or migrate and assume alternative modes of existence in the present. By so doing, they enact their energies and vitality in digital spaces as they mediate everydayness and articulate global contemporaneity in a variety of ways.

Introduction

Throughout human history, metaphors have always been part of the ideological struggle to control language, claim power and exercise authority. The stranglehold on language, power and authority deploying metaphor has quite often been staged by dominant formations. But this domination has also been intensely contested and undermined by dominated categories. In recent history, there has been a renewed struggle, even desperate scramble, for metaphors. This scramble operates at the grids of race, gender, sexuality, politics, ethnicity, class, caste, national identity and even age/generational difference. More than ever before, the scramble has been galvanized by the invocatory and performative power of metaphors as part of a literary, rhetorical and political strategy to articulate contemporary local and global reality. Indeed, as Shyam Wuppuluri and A. C. Grayling insist, metaphors are strategic and powerful sinews of language as they possess the incredible capacity to create worlds with words (Wuppuluri and Grayling 2022). Even though Wuppuluri and Grayling may not have clearly

acknowledged it, metaphors even achieve more than merely creating worlds with words. They name, rule, dominate and impose their will on these worlds as they inscribe knowledge schemas and secrete meaning archaeologies leveraging on the power of words.

The creation or fabrication of worlds with words which metaphor accomplishes is supremely foundational and symbolically significant. In a historical sense, it diachronically gestures to the originary moment of creation when the primal creative agent brought everything into existence from the void through the summoning of the word to mould the world from airy nothingness. Metaphors, therefore, function as veritable surrogates in the creative process as they infuse language with life, dynamism and vitality. Metaphors as diverse as heaven and earth, land and water, darkness and light, sun, moon and stars, etc. were integral to creation and continue to mediate human consciousness and perception of the known and unknown worlds till today. Beyond their place in the order of creation, they are oppositional binaries which nevertheless complement and render wholesome the entire gamut of creation in the same way metaphor teams with other figures like metonymy, simile, hyperbole, personification, litotes, etc. to patronise and harmonise human language.

It will, therefore, not be extravagant to state that there is a metaphoric turn that structures and governs our world today. The metaphoric turn represents a decided gravitation to the increased dependence on, and appropriation of, metaphor as a critical and powerful resource of language and agent of meaning for humanity's expressive contingencies. It is imperative and definitive of the present digital modern dispensation and also present in diverse discursive fields including literature, art, science, law, philosophy, religion, politics, international diplomacy, media and communication, health, music and culture (Antovic 2022; Brencio 2022; Ludlow 2022; Seskauskiene 2022). For example, the United Nations as a global body routinely summons a corpus of metaphors in its discourses during its general assembly sessions to deliberate on the state of global affairs. These include among others: nation-state, member-state, country, council, general assembly, global North, global South, bloc, government, delegate, representative, citizen, resolution, veto, signatory, accord, quorum, etc. All of these metaphors are emblematic of global power relations, social and cultural hierarchies in international politics and diplomacy. The Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as well as the World Trade Organisation and Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries also enlist metaphors such as economies, money/currency, markets, banks, loans, inflation, taxes, trade, businesses, companies, enterprises, crude/oil, quota, barrel, ships, etc. as bases for the control and regulation of global finance, trade, investment and economies of member-states and, by implication, the lives, hopes, aspirations, frustrations, and fears of people across the world. These metaphors take on a whole life of their own as they define and structure power, politics, economics, social and cultural life and other human existential realities in our world today.

This sense of urgency and immediacy which concretises the metaphoric turn is animated by the timeless currency, freshness and relevance of metaphors as powerful generators and carriers of meaning. Metaphors, therefore, condition political, social and cultural reality and mediate power and authority. This makes metaphors veritable conduits and surrogates for the communication of everydayness as they map and mediate human experience in its multifaceted manifestations. Ted Cohen playfully underscores the reality of the metaphoric turn by observing that "These are good times for the friends of metaphor" and that now "the respectability of metaphor seems to be acknowledged all round" (Cohen 3). Cohen here underscores the sociality of metaphor and its acknowledgement by many who have cultivated its friendship as an important figure of language and communication. But

much more fundamentally, Cohen draws attention to the ubiquity and centrality of metaphor in local and global politics and culture and how respectable it has become as a powerful linguistic unit and ally.

It is little wonder then that this important figure of language has increasingly become more pervasive and ubiquitous and continues to structure and shape individual perceptions, group identities and collective experiences. Humanity, therefore, is more than ever before, living by and with metaphors in a diversity of ways. To George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the constitutive power of metaphors and their infinite range of meanings have made them very central and vital to how humanity lives and orders life (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In their study, *Metaphors We Live By*, they insistently argue that metaphors are highly consequential in a signifying sense and so are important and strategic to human communication. According to Brigitte Nerlich, in the 19th century, words were conceptualised as living organisms; in the 20th century, living organisms were conceptualised as words (Nerlich 2022). It may be interesting to extend Nerlich's elliptical idea by observing that in the digital modern age of the 21st century which celebrates the advancements and vertiginous heights in science and technology, metaphors mean much more as words and living organisms. They can be conceptualised as words and living organisms but also as vectors of self-privileging power in the unrelenting quest for meaning-making, its mastery and manipulation for artistic purposes, cultural causes and ideological interests. This is because metaphors still present themselves as linguistic allies in the continued structuring of human life in relation to knowledge production, circulation and consumption and the ecology of meanings consistent with this endeavour. They possess linguistic and literary properties but also rhetorical value and relevance as they benefit from the archives of history and digital modernity. It will, therefore, seem that the more the historicity of the metaphors and their assured local and global currency, the better their epistemic capital.

Metaphor and Its Roots

Etymologically, metaphor is a derivative from the Latinate root “metaphora” and Old French “metaphore” which denotes the idea to carry over something. In Greek, the term means to transfer. A metaphor, therefore, conveys a sense in which one reality is carried over or transferred to another reality. To Paul Ricouer, a metaphor is the transmission of a linguistic expression into a different context than that which it was expected (Ricouer 2003, 5). A metaphor, as such, is a trope or figure of discourse that is primarily concerned with denomination. It represents the extension of meaning through a tactical deviation from the literal meaning to a figurative one. To Carl Hausman, metaphor is a figure of language that creates new meanings and discovers unforeseen nuances in the world of signification. Hausman's position is hinged on the idea of metaphorical referent which means that what is signified by a metaphor is something singular and determinate (Hausman 1989, 105). However, metaphor contrary to Hausman's submission is capable of producing multiple referents and signifieds. What is intrinsic to metaphor is that there is the statutory element of relationality between the realities or referents. This is only possible because the two realities necessarily share some form of commonality or correspondence even when they are not directly related.

Metaphor's expressiveness finds validity in the fact that it is severely condensed or compressed. This is why metaphors are sometimes referred to as condensed analogies or analogical fusions because the basic principles of analogy are consistent with, and operate in, metaphors. Metaphors are also liberal linguistic agents and so permit the greatest and highest freedom in the use of language (Donoghue 2014). Metaphors are, intriguingly, conspiratorial. This is because they collaborate with the human mind in its expression of

linguistic freedom. They also idealise and celebrate the creative imagination in its playful mobilisation of the resources of language. Metaphors can be conceptual, cognitive, visual and even non-linguistic (Damian 2022, 94).

Migrant Metaphors, Metaphors of Migration

Migrant metaphors are metaphors that travel through time and space using the instrumentality of language, textual bodies and the contingencies of their social and cultural contexts. This means that they are mobile and so not limited, static, or monumentalized in time and space. They can also be referred to as nomadic metaphors and truly reflect the essential nature of metaphor which is the carrying over or transfer of an idea or concept to another one. Migrant metaphors are, therefore, historically particular and culturally specific. In the main, therefore, despite their spatial specificity and temporal particularity, migrant metaphors are a living tissue and so not frozen in time and space. They are territorial but their meanings are fluid, dispersed and negotiated across social and cultural boundaries. Their migratory or travelling patterns are determined by their continued inscription and re-inscription in texts and textualities which assure them of continued social significance and cultural valence.

As linguistic agents whose significations are imposed by their informing cultural contexts, migrant metaphors particularly help to renegotiate and reengage reality in fresh and dynamic dimensions. They are living metaphors which offer creative and novel interpretive possibilities to texts or communicative acts (Prandi and Rossi 2022). They are not dead, soulless or frozen. This implies that metaphors can be dead. Dead metaphors are figures which have suffered the loss of originality of their imagery and meaning through extensive, repetitive and popular use. This is generally due to a semantic shift in language but also importantly because of lack of social and cultural currency. For instance, the idea of a horse or sword as a metaphor for conquest and domination has lost currency such that the classical and medieval image of a knight on horseback in battle-gear brandishing a sword and armour in a war of conquest is no longer that fashionable or in vogue.

This idea is dead and has been replaced by other agents of war and conquest. These include: bombs, missiles, grenades, armoured tanks, warplanes, warships, nuclear warheads, drones, etc. Similarly, in many autochthonous societies including Africa, a horse was a status symbol or an index of royalty and dignity. This metaphor has lost its social value as sports utility vehicles, private jets, private yachts, etc. have become the postmodern items of wealth and status. Indeed, even the materiality of the metaphor of the sword as an index of savagery and weapon of conquest and domination no longer holds much traction in the context of raw display of imperial power. It has been overtaken by the might of the pen, a metaphor consistent with modernity and the civilisation and technology of scribal and print cultures. This validates the aphorism couched in the metonymic pronouncement that the pen is mightier than the sword. However, this does not imply that in other contexts different from the one sketched above, the sword ceases to be a metaphor or trope relevant to contemporary situations. The sword can, for instance, be a metaphor for the word which cuts both ways. The migrant metaphors I engage in this keynote are transhistorical, transnational and transcultural and operate in time and space.

There is, however, a cautionary note regarding migrant metaphors in relation to metaphors dealing with migration. Migrant metaphors are distinctive and dichotomous from and so not analogous to metaphors on/about migration or exile. These are metaphors that possess the character and capacity to travel through time and space, but do not necessarily accompany or negotiate the conditions of exilic agents or subjectivities in search of a home away from home due to the hostility or violence prevalent in a native place. They, therefore,

acquire a spatio-temporal temperament but their spatiality and temporality is determined not by the conspiracy of circumstances to escape as endangered species but by the cultural contexts which warrant their migration and confer them with contingent meanings. They are, therefore, diachronic in their travelling patterns and acquire novel and so distinctive significations as they travel or commute through cartographic and temporal borders and boundaries.

Theoretical Moorings

I have drawn theoretical insights from South African British scholar, Elleke Boehmer on the idea of migrant metaphors. In her 1995 illuminating book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, Boehmer executes a salutary and compelling reading and analysis of textual bodies by postcolonial writers around the world including Margaret Atwood, Peter Carey, J. M. Coetzee, V. S. Naipaul and Wole Soyinka. Her cardinal concern is to demonstrate how these writers have engaged the colonial world and re-imagined colonial metaphors in fresh and new ways in a postcolonial dispensation. My interest further advances and stretches Boehmer's. I am primarily interested not so much in colonial and postcolonial discourses and their ideological procurement of metaphors but in how indigenous African literatures and cultures benefit from metaphors across time and space in their negotiation of social realities as well as the recuperation of cultural histories and identities especially in the age of digital modernity. To enrich and deepen my conceptual and theoretical moorings, I have also drawn from indigenous proverbial knowledge order about termites and how they travel their underground routes as a theoretical formulation to buttress and strengthen my argument. In their life-world as social insects, termites construct complex arteries and elaborate road networks underground through which they live, travel and transact their entomological businesses. The culture of termites therefore offers a valuable commentary on, and insight into, the theoretical rubric regarding migrant metaphors. This is because in their travelling rhythms, these workaholic insects follow their routes as they transit from one point to another in time and space. The important idea here, whether it is about metaphors or termites, converges on roots and routes. Migrant metaphors, like termites, have roots in the past and chart routes to the present and into the future.

The provenance of many of the migrant metaphors I shall engage in this keynote is deeply rooted in the subsoil of indigenous African cultures and cosmologies. They exist in oral media forms such as folktales, fables, riddles, proverbs, epics, legends, myths, sagas, rituals, songs, chants, etc. These metaphors are variegated and include celestial bodies like the sun and the moon, avian creatures like the eagle and the vulture as well as animals like the lion and the tortoise, among others. These metaphors exist primarily in oral cultures and aural contexts where they feature prominently in the performance arts of the societies that give them existence. Their performative character necessitates and ensures that they are participatory and admit immediate audience interventions because of their essential sociality and the cultural solidarity they engender. It is from this oral and aural *habitus* that these metaphors migrate and are appropriated and used in written literature and stored in fixed, frozen forms. Their transition and accommodation within the scribal culture of writing and print technology demonstrates their continued relevance in/to modernity as writers find in them a rich and inexhaustible quarry of tropes and imagery which they process as raw resources and refine for their artistic contingencies.

The insistent migrancy and travelling patterns of these metaphors have earned them a foothold in digital modernity where they also travel to and exist in digital spaces. Interestingly, digital media presents a new technological culture and existential space similar to indigenous oral performance spaces for these metaphors to enact their energies. Thus they

live this new life through the instrumentality of the old. Both the old and new spaces are defined by constitutive features intrinsic to them. These are creativity, spontaneity, interactivity, connectivity, communality, running commentary and immediacy which are the mediating protocols of oral and digital performativity. The performance of a folk narrative, riddle, proverb or song in traditional settings stimulated audience participation to imbue it with life and vitality. In the same way a digital content on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram compels the intervention of an online community to like, dislike, comment, share, resend, retweet, edit, etc. as part of communal participation in the co-generation of content and its circulation and consumption. There is, therefore, the presence of the old in the new and the new in the old as the two media interweave or interpenetrate. Thus leveraging on the written tradition and digital modernity, these migrant metaphors have increasingly negotiated their existence away from their essential oral derivations to other alternative communication modes.

Migrant Metaphors and African Literatures

One of the migrant metaphors that have consistently tickled the literary imagination is the sun. From the originary moment of creation, the sun has been a heavenly body with an unmistakable and distinctive identity. It is a source of illumination and energy. Even though astronomers sometimes insist that the sun is static (or has a differential rotation from the other planet bodies in the solar system) and it is the earth that rotates around the sun, the sun is generally considered a nomad or migrant that daily travels through the vault of heaven as it rises from the east and sets in the west. As an enduring metaphor, the sun has travelled through classical, medieval and modern literature, art, religion and culture. It functioned prominently, as a migrant metaphor, in the politics of coloniality and its arrogant assumptions and imperial self-presencing. The sun does not set on the British Empire is a metaphor of the colonial imagination which sees British empire-building programme around the world through the powerful gaze of its imperial eyes (della Dora 2020). The sun, in this instance, is a metaphorical representation of British colonial conquest and its sense of territoriality and planetary consciousness within the global dynamic of colonial politics and cultural reach. Consistent with the colonial idea that the sun never sets on the British Empire, it is compelling to observe that metaphors function as catalysts in the performance of nationhood through their refraction of nations as persons, bodies or other iconic images. One of the key metaphor complexes in conceptualizing national identity is that of the nation as a body or a person. Metaphors are culture-specific and nation-particular even as they endorse and affirm national discourse relations (Musolff 2022, 419).

There are, however, antinomies and shifting signifying patterns that navigate the metaphor of the sun in radical contradistinction to British colonial knowledge networks. Integral to this representation of the sun are the oppositional binaries of territorial gain and loss, trauma and emotional wholeness as well as freedom and enslavement. As an enduring migrant metaphor which has travelled through time and space, the sun has constituted a major discursive fulcrum in African literatures especially within the dynamic of national narration and the rites and rhythms associated with national formation and reformation. Narratives from Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra*, Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, among others, are faithful and powerful metaphoric representations that perform nationhood and the inherent contradictions that mediate its invention and reinvention. As historical narratives, *Sunset in Biafra*, *Sunset at Dawn* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* negotiate the Nigerian fratricidal civil imbroglio (also called the Biafran War) of 1967 – 1970. They also chronicle the gamut of interstitial issues that had underwritten Nigeria's founding and political independence in October, 1960, from colonial

Britain.

The narratives also stage the conflictual currents that engulfed the First Republic and led to its wreckage in the maiden coup d'état of January 1966 and the surrounding circumstances that precipitated the internecine war. These novelistic accounts constitute a constellation of unending intertextual narratives and political discourses on Nigeria's postcolonial condition using the sun as a metaphor that has migrated from time and space to offer relevant commentary on a nation and its prebendal politics. As such, through the instrumentality of the sun as a migrant metaphor, these novelists have chosen to plough the furrow of political instability and the culture of military putsch in Nigeria as they narrate the nation.

The sun has also been used as a migrant metaphor in cultural contexts that antedate and are tangential to the orbit of coloniality. A relevant instance is African indigenous spi/ritual or ritualistic poetry. In this poetic rite among indigenous Nigerian communities especially the Tiv of central Nigeria, the Sun is a son; the Moon a maiden. In patriarchal societies, the gender particularity assigned to these two astronomical metaphors is culturally symbolic and suggestive of the sexual politics which undergird social structures and relationality. In this recitative and incantatory poetry, the Sun is a metaphor for a young man known for his aggression, virility, visceral energies, and temperamental disposition. This ritual poetry is catalytic and performs an intertextual encounter with written poetry and fertilizes it. For instance, in *Suns of Kush*, a poetic output by the Nigerian Maik Nwosu, there is a playful lexical manipulation of suns as metaphors for sons, a generational representation of the ancestral origins of people of African/Black descent, their plights and predicaments from historical times to the present. The sun, therefore, is a personification and embodiment of the historical contradictions the sons of Kush as *suns* have confronted and endured in the course of their chequered history.

On the other hand, the moon, in this ritual poetic performance, is a metaphor for femininity and has a reputation for temperance, mildness, calmness and fertility which has referential value in the menstrual cycle of the female body. The stars are quite often imagined as the offspring of the spousal union between the Sun and the Moon. Indeed, the moon is a migrant metaphor which creates whole generations of metaphors that succeeds it. Under the collected gaze of the Moon, literary creativity embodied in moon tales (or tales by moonlight) emerges with a convoy of images which underwrites the human existential condition. In Chinua Achebe's historical novel, *Arrow of God*, the priest Ezeulu's fascination with the crescent, the infant moon underscores the symbolic significance and value of Igbo cosmologies and the statutory cultural calendrical celebrations which hold the society in social balance and harmony with the ancestral world. Any distortions in this cultural practice spell telling doom on the community. The moon as a metaphor constitutes the thematic centre of Nigerian/African literary texts, oral and written, some of which include Niyi Osundare's *Moonsongs*, and Isiaka Aliagan's *The Scars of the Moon*. The phases of the moon: crescent, half moon, gibbous and full moon are metaphoric representations of the cyclical life of the human person and the rites of passage they undergo from the womb to the tomb. In African cosmologies, when one cycle ends, another begins in a continuum that never ends.

The fact that the sun, moon and stars are astronomical metaphors that also set gender on the agenda of cultural discourse means that these celestial bodies have anthropomorphic value. Metaphors frame and potentially distort our understanding of human sexuality. One function of metaphors dealing with gender and sexuality is to organize gender relations, including those that are characterized by power hierarchies and asymmetry (Koller 2022, 363). The sun, moon, stars and other heavenly bodies or constellations constitute a corpus of

metaphors which are scientific and technological in nature. But what is important to the aspirations and concerns of this paper is that they have migrated through time and space and now “assist scientists in manipulating and bringing about real material change to the objects of their study” (Reynolds 2022, 2; Reynolds 2018, Kampourakis 2022). However, contrary to Reynold's compelling but also reductive mapping and reading of metaphors with a scientific bias and technological leaning, their relevance stretches beyond the scientific field and can be found in literature, art, media, politics and culture. Indeed, scientific knowledge has intervened in powerful ways to accentuate human understanding of metaphor together with the history of science and the history of language, aesthetics and culture (Cobb 2022). The Sun is refracted in this ritual poetry as a burning hearth or fireplace which inhabits the sky and the Moon as the calm waters of a lake. These two binary elements may appear to be mutually exclusive or diametrically opposed to each other but are complementary and reinforcing. They are ultimately a composite whole. The aggressive energies of the Sun and the adorable temperance of the Moon are necessary personal qualities that individuals, male and female must possess to make them fully functional human agents.

One other migrant metaphor that has been consistently mobilized for the narrativisation of social and political reality is the body. The body as metaphor has been primarily conceptualized as a composite and the prison-house of the soul and the mind but also as a site for sexual identity and gender difference. The female body, for instance, has been traditionally associated with moral decadence or depravity. It is adjudged as a sinful, instinctive and irrational body. Conversely, the male body is considered a metaphor for morality, rationality and reason. In African and many other societies around the world, these metaphors have been orchestrated and reinforced by religious beliefs, social prejudices and cultural practices. As such the body from time constituted an important site on which religious, social mores and cultural significations were inscribed and performed. These metaphoric representations also have consequences on class, status, gender and sexual identities. Indeed, metaphors, including migrant metaphors, frame and weaponise the human body within the dynamic of sexual and gender politics. For instance, masculinist ideological practices which are discriminatory refract the female body as a commodity. Such exclusionary practices politicise the female body as both an ideal of beauty and a diabolical agent.

Narratives and the corpus of metaphors they produce and circulate for consumption have important implications for reading publics, communities and cultures. Such narratives and the metaphors that embed them actively participate in the conditioning and socialization of subjectivities and their attitudes and perceptions through the mental and visual images that they create. In their book, *Visual Metaphors*, Reka Benczes and Veronika Szelid argue that metaphors create vivid images not only mentally but also visually as they perform power, politics, and intervene in our navigation of everyday life and assist our understanding of the physical and social environment and our place in it (Benczes and Szelid 2022). Also in *Metaphor and the Slave Trade in West African Literature*, Laura Murphy establishes how metaphor has been deployed as a resource in the complex and layered negotiation of the obnoxious trade in human chattels in West Africa (Murphy 2012). Representational images of the body in the bag, the body thrown overboard from ships into the raging ocean waves and the human body, particularly the female body, imprisoned and traumatized by a dominant patriarchal culture, are embodied in metaphors which Murphy invokes to demonstrate the power of metaphoric representation in West African literature navigating the calamitous merchandise in human chattels.

Literature and art cannot be reasonably contemplated without their representative

capacity for animal characters and their anthropomorphic value. Metaphors, in this case, migrant metaphors, afford and provoke innovative ways of reimagining the relations between humans, animals and the natural world (Suvadip Sinha and Amit Baishya 2019; Karen Edwards, Derek Ryan and Jane Spencer 2019 and Mario Ortiz-Robles 2016). The eagle, and the vulture, both of them avian metaphors, frame our understanding of social, political and cultural materialities and their meanings. The eagle embodies dignity, royalty, aristocratic rearing; whilst the vulture is synonymous with wretchedness, poverty, meanness and cadaver. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* employs the eagle metaphor to idealise and idolise African womanhood and femininity. Eaglewoman, the family matriarch, embodies the positive accomplishments and celebratory values of African femininity and functions as a complementary vector and force in family cohesion and business success. It is instructive that the novelist deliberately chooses to name the matriarch using the metaphor of the eagle, a compelling and endearing image which conjures female power and feminine mystique. As Rose Sackeyfio insists, such texts accomplish the narrativisation of women and their powerful identities of self and in their local and global journeys to self-discovery (Sackeyfio 2023).

Eagles are remarkably different from vultures, behaviorally and otherwise. By their very nature, vultures appear innocuous, harmless and gentle. They are generally laid back and can be mistaken as friendly creatures. However, their authentic character as voracious carnivores with an almost insatiable dietary appetite for carrion emerges when they are hungry or famished. Their gentleness evaporates into thin air and a ruthless competition for food to gorge themselves of decayed, malodorous flesh changes one's perception of vultures. They swing their beaks with vicious aggression and peck at carcasses with graceless rapidity. In the same way the vulture maps any territory where carrion exists, names it as its authentic space and proceeds to claim it and define it, Europe also found Africa as a land that was waiting to be annexed, raped and plundered for its imperial economic interests.

If metaphors are socially and culturally constructed, then metaphoric constructions should necessarily distill referential meanings which are resonant, legible and literate to such social and cultural contexts. Poetry especially mines the inexhaustible properties of metaphor “and pushes metaphor to the limit” (Rasse 2022). Metaphor is central to poetic compositions and discourses, how they are constructed, received, interpreted and engaged by interpretive communities and reading publics. The Nigerian poet Tanure Ojaide benefits from the vulture as an enduring metaphor to offer scurrilous commentary on the activities of oil cartels that have turned his native Niger Delta into a theatre of misery, poverty, violence and death through oil exploration activities. In his poetry collection, *The Fate of Vultures* is a bilious denunciation of oil conglomerates involved in the mindless despoliation of the Niger Delta landscape through the exploration of oil and the attendant devastation of the environment. Ojaide finds the vulture as a fitting metaphor because of its enduring fatal legacies, history and culture of death wherever it exists since it survives on death.

It is in consonance with this imperative to pillage and plunder that Philip Aghoghovwia in his critical study *Violent Ecotropes: Petroculture in the Niger Delta* insists that oil extraction has occasioned environmental devastation, local militancy and resistance and has transformed violence into a commodity. The Niger Delta with its humungous blessing as an oil-rich landscape has invited the blight and pestilence of oil majors who take turns like vultures to peck at the carrion of a mortally wounded land consigned to ecological death. With apocalyptic angst and Promethean fixity, Aghoghovwia bemoans the fate of his native Delta and calls for environmental remediation after the devastation wrought by the vultures. In their socio-political study, *Where Vultures Feast*, Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglass, also inscribe a murderous and gruesome graffiti on the canvas of the Niger Delta as

a land where vultures congregate for a bacchanal feast on the oil resources violently appropriated from the indigenous people by the Nigerian government as its alien and local collaborators. They denounce Shell and other international oil oligarchies for their predatory instincts in the Niger Delta. Like Aghoghowvia, they also demand for ecological justice following the ruination of the Delta ecosystem by the vultures of big business. Thus in this sordid saga of oil mineral wealth and its exploration and exploitation, oil itself emerges as a metaphor for the paradoxes of life and living where a people who are so rich remain poor; and a land which is so blessed remains so accursed. Indeed, the oil metaphor in the Delta has all the potentials of a migrant metaphor because it was first palm oil during the imperial economy which the colonial vandals expropriated to Europe for their industrial needs. Now the oil metaphor has shifted to crude oil and its products.

Individual poems from poetry collections also deploy the vulture as a metaphor. David Diop, the Guinean poet appropriates the vulture as an exemplary metaphor to articulate the corrosive repercussions which the colonial encounter exerted on African imagination, politics, economies and cultures. Diop's "The Vultures" in *Hammer Blows* engages European colonial exploitation of African mineral wealth and resources for the development of metropolitan capitals. Deploying vivid, picturesque imagery which forcefully drive home the poetic message, Diop demonstrates how the vultures has built "bloodstained monuments" with their sharp talons, pillaged the patrimony and commonwealth of the colonized peoples, dehumanized them and visited destruction on their values. According to the poet, the vultures are on a mission of savagery and death and they are determined to ruthlessly execute their imperial agenda. In Diop's poetry, therefore, the vulture emerges as an unsparing scavenger, pitiless perpetrator of evil, cruel carrier of misfortune and enthusiastic harbinger of fatality.

Joe Ushie, the Nigerian poet also enlists the metaphor of the vulture in his poetic oeuvre. In his commemorative collection significantly titled *Eclipse in Rwanda*, Ushie insightfully navigates the 1994 genocide in Rwanda where nearly a million ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed by their majority Hutu compatriots in an avoidable bloodbath. Local belligerents in the genocide and their foreign collaborators are called vultures. They are veritable birds of prey and prospectors of fortune who have found a theatre of war, flowing blood and decomposing corpses on which they have settled to feast. Nothing else matters to these human vultures besides their project of destruction and death. As the poet indicates, they clumsily perch on twigs waiting to feast on decaying "hewman" flesh. Similarly, the Nigerian dramatist and critic, Ime Ikiddeh's play, *The Vulture's Funeral* is a dramaturgic enactment of the social and political contradictions and their inherent scorching consequences on Nigeria's postcolonial becoming and belonging.

African oral narratives also benefit from the resources of animal characters as metaphors for the human existential condition. The Tortoise, the Spider and the Hare are also metaphors that circulate widely in African oral narratives. Indeed, they are the eponymous characters that enliven the action and deepen the complex dramatic twists in the oral tales. These are the trickster-heroes who are notorious for their cunning, trickery, treachery and stubbornness. Though slight and diminutive in appearance, they almost always trick and hoodwink the bigger animals and creatures like Lion, Tiger, Leopard thereby validating the philosophical ideation which interrogates the perceptions on appearance and reality, and might as right. There is the story of the Tortoise and his immaculate clothes which he put on to conceal his rough shell. Unfortunately, the clothes are rendered bedraggled by a goat belonging to his in-laws. The goat somehow chews them and they became dirty. It is instructive how Tortoise reaches into his seamless bag of cunning in the circumstance to toe the fine line of seeking appropriate redress without offending the sensibilities of his in-laws.

The Tortoise cleverly announces that he is not asking for restitution but that he would also not go home nude. This imposes a moral burden on his in-laws who find another fitting cloth for the Tortoise.

This oral tale is temporally set in an indeterminate historical time as folktales are always compositional products from immemorial times. However, the tale has travelled from its essential oral habitus and found its way on a blog. In the oral tale which is contemporaneous with the landscape of recent Nigerian politics, Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of Labour Party, one of the three dominant parties in the 2023 poll, is the Tortoise. Like the Tortoise holds inalienable claim to his clothes, Obi too would not allow his electoral mandate by the Nigerian electorate to be stolen in the way that of others was stolen in history.

The shifting identity of these tricksters in African literature and culture is also registered online. The character known as Akpos is popular and celebrated for his trickery and humour in cybersphere. Online communities who follow his antics encounter a character that is thrilling and full of mischief as he castigates and satirises the political elite and other social segments of the Nigerian society in the same way the Hare, Tortoise and Spider enact their humour in oral tales. Nigeria's stand-up comedy is also populated by comics who appropriate these creatures as metaphors and slip in their roles in their performances.

Conclusion

In my engagement with metaphors in this paper, I have tried to establish how metaphors are central and strategic to literary and linguistic engineering processes through time and space. To accomplish this, I have particularly focused on migrant metaphors. I have identified migrant metaphors as a species of metaphors that has travelled through time and space to be present in the present and to enact their representational energies in a digital dispensation. In my instantiations, I have summoned African literatures ranging from oral traditional media, scribal cultures and the digital ecosystem to strengthen my argument and position that there has been a travelling pattern by these migrant metaphors which has followed a continuous progression as they are mobilized for the contingencies of oral performances, creative writing and digital communication. This bears eloquent testimony to the inheritance of the old in the new and the new in the old.

Works Cited

- Aghoghovwia, Philip. *Violent Ecotropes: Petroculture in the Niger Delta*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 2022.
- Antovic, Mihailo. "Form, Meaning and Intentionality: The Case of Metaphor in Music" in Wuppuluri, Shyam and Grayling, A. C (eds). *Metaphors and Analogies in Sciences and Humanities: Words and Worlds*. Berlin and New York: Springer, 2022. 319 – 337.
- Benczes, Reka and Szélid, Veronika (eds). *Visual Metaphors*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2022. Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Brencio, Francesca. "From Words to Worlds: How Metaphors and Language Shape Mental Health" in Wuppuluri, Shyam and Grayling, A. C (eds). *Metaphors and Analogies in Sciences and Humanities: Words and Worlds*. Berlin and New York: Springer, 2022. 319 – 337.
- Cobb, Matthew. *The Genetic Age: Our Perilous Quest to Edit Life* 2022.
- Cohen, Ted. "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy" in *Critical Inquiry* Volume 5, Number 1 (Autumn, 1978): 3 – 12.
- Damian, Mihaela Marieta. "Metaphor of *Light* – Perspectives on Conceptual Metaphors" in

- Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Philologica* Volume 14, Number 3 (2022): 92 – 106.
- della Dora, Veronica. *The Mantle of the Earth: Genealogies of a Geographical*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2020.
- Donoghue, Denis. *Metaphor*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Edwards, Karen, Ryan, Derek and Spencer, Jane (eds). *Reading Literary Animals: Medieval to Modern*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Hausman, Carl R. *Metaphor and Art: Interactionism and Reference in the Verbal and Nonverbal Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Kampourakis, Kostas. *Understanding Genes*.
- Koller, Veronika. “Words and Worlds of Desire: The Power of Metaphor in Framing Sexuality” in Wuppuluri, Shyam and Grayling, A. C. *Metaphors and Analogies in Sciences and Humanities: Words and Worlds*. Berlin and New York: Springer, 2022. 363 – 382.
- Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark. *Metaphors We Live By*. Illinois: University of Chicago, 1980.
- Murphy, Laura T. *Metaphor and the Slave Trade in West African Literature*. Ohio University Press, 2012.
- Musolff, Andreas. “Universality and/or Cultural Specificity of Metaphors and Analogies? Nations as Bodies/Persons” in Wuppuluri, Shyam and Grayling, A. C. *Metaphors and Analogies in Sciences and Humanities: Words and Worlds*. Berlin and New York: Springer, 2022. 401 – 419.
- Nerlich, Brigitte. “Metaphors in Times of a Global Pandemic” in Wuppuluri, Shyam and Grayling, A. C. (eds). *Metaphors and Analogies in Sciences and Humanities: Words and Worlds*. Berlin and New York: Springer, 2022. 421 – 446.
- _____. “Understanding Metaphors in the Life Sciences – A Book Review” in Public Understanding of Science Blog April 22, 2022. Accessed on 13 April, 2023. www.blogs.nottingham.ac.uk
- Okonta, Ike and Oronto Douglas. *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta*. London and New York: Verso, 2003.
- Ortiz-Robles, Mario. *Literature and Animal Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Prandi, Michele and Rossi, Micaela (eds). *Researching Mtaphors: Towards a Comprehensive Account*. London and New York: Routledge, 2022.
- Rasse, Carina. *Poetic Metaphors: Creativity and Interpretation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2022.
- Reynolds, Andrew S. *Understanding Metaphors in the Life Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- _____. *The Third Lens: Metaphor and the Creation of Modern Cell Biology*.
- Ricouer, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Sackeyfio, Rose. *African Women Narrating Identity: Local and Global Journeys of the Self*. London and New York: Routledge, 2023.
- Seskauskiene, Iesa. *Metaphor in Legal Discourse*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022.
- Sinha, Suvadip and Baishya, Amit (eds). *Postcolonial Animalities*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Wuppuluri, Shyam and Grayling, A. C. (eds). *Metaphors and Analogies in Sciences and Humanities: Words and Worlds*. Berlin and New York: Springer, 2022