

The anthropomorphic dimensions of a narrative text: a case study of Gabriel OKARA's *The Voice*.

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Abstract – A literary work is directly or indirectly always concerned with man, particularly with man in the society. It depicts human being in his environment. It helps to understand his behaviour. It is part of man in the sense that it contributes to the ways used by human beings to explain the kind of life they live in their society. But is not man also part of a narrative text? To what extent does a novel like *The Voice* written by Gabriel Okara contain the characteristics of human being?

A text, broadly speaking, is often said to have a head or introductory part, a body or the developed part, and the feet or how it ends. But *The Voice* has much more than that. By the means of structural analysis, this research paper intends to show the place and the role of the parts of human body mentioned in the narrative and the author's purpose in using an anthropomorphic approach in his language experimentation in the novel.

Key words: literary work, anthropomorphic dimensions, structure, literary project, society.

Résumé – Une œuvre littéraire concerne toujours directement ou indirectement l'homme, particulièrement l'homme dans la société. Il dépeint l'être humain dans son environnement et aide à comprendre son comportement. Il fait partie de l'homme en ce sens qu'il contribue aux moyens utilisés par les hommes pour expliquer le genre de vie qu'ils mènent dans la société. Mais l'homme ne fait-il pas aussi partie du texte narratif? Dans quelle mesure un roman tel que *The Voice* de Gabriel Okara renferme-t-il les caractéristiques d'un être humain ?

Il est souvent dit qu'un texte a, généralement parlant, une tête ou partie introductive, un corps ou partie développée et des pieds désignant comment il finit. Mais le roman *The Voice* a beaucoup plus que cela. Au moyen de l'analyse structurale, cet article a pour objectif de montrer la place et le rôle des parties du corps humain mentionnés dans le récit et le but que vise l'auteur en utilisant une approche anthropomorphique dans son expérimentation de langue dans le roman.

Mots clés: œuvre littéraire, dimensions anthropomorphiques, structure, projet littéraire, société.

1. Introduction

It may be strange to speak of human dimensions of a narrative text. But we cannot deny that a narrative text is a production of a human being. It happens that it also has its parents: a mother who is the writer, and the society of which it is the product as the father. The writer gives birth to it after a certain period of pregnancy which corresponds to the different stages of conception, reflection and other intellectual activities. The birth itself takes place in a house of edition. The novel *The Voice*¹ is therefore the child of Gabriel Okara as the mother, and the Nigerian society as the father. Precisely, it is born a 1970 in eastern Nigeria Ijaw ethnic group although it is reprinted three times (1973, 1975 and 1977). The title of the novel is its name *The Voice*.

Besides, there are many words in relation to human body with its parts which Okara uses in his speech to build phrases and sentences recalling human body and its parts to convey his message to the reader.

The hypothesis of the human dimensions of the narrative in *The Voice* turns around the following questions: first, what are the anthropomorphic elements in the

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¹ Gabriel Okara. *The Voice*. London: Heinemann. 1973

narrative? Second, what is the impact of the anthropomorphic structure on the meaning of the novel? Third, in what consist Okara's literary project and socio-political vision in the novel?

2. The anthropomorphic structure of "the voice"

According to Roland Barthes, "Tout système est une combinaison d'unités et chaque petite unité est déterminée par le rôle qu'elle joue dans la classe des unités à laquelle elle appartient"². To find the different units of a narrative system, it must be cut into small pieces or small units having a meaning and playing a part in its class in the whole system. The eyes, the head, the inside (of a person), the ears, the hands, the back, the mouth, the saliva, the foot, the bile, the breath (of a person) are also small units of the system of human body to which the author gives a role and a meaning in *The Voice*. To understand them, one has to put them in relation to the context of the narrative.

The word eye is used in two different ways in the novel. It refers to human being when it is used in plural and to the sky when it is in singular. "Some of the townsmen said Okolo's eyes were not right"³, means that they can no longer see things in a normal way. "His head is not correct"⁴ means that he is mad. His eyes being not right and his head being not correct have the same cause which is reading too much. There is something wrong in his understanding of the world because his vision of the world is altered by his reading book too much. "He read the book without being aware of passing time until night fell and closed the eye of the sky"⁵. The eyes of the sky is the sky itself in day time, the clarity of the sky disappears with the arrival of the night which is personified as the one who opens and closes the eyes of the sky. The phrase "strong eyes" has two different meanings according to the context. In the sentence "He also remembered how in a cycle of strong eyes and strong faces she stood being accused of taking witchcraft to kill her father and mother"⁶, it means furious persons accusing and blaming Tuere. But in the sentence "Okolo said with looking at him with strong eyes", the phrase "strong eyes" means defying eyes of Okolo in front of Chief Izongo.

Chief Izongo's messengers who want to arrest him "put their heads together for a while and worked towards Okolo."⁷ To put ones' heads together is to consult with the purpose of taking a decision. The heads of the Elders are compared to the ones of puppets when they were listening to Chief Izongo: "Some of the Elders shook their heads, others nodded in agreement and yet others tried to do both, resulting in a confusing of

² Roland Barthes. "Analyse structurale du récit" in *Communication* 8.Paris : Seuil.1981.p.12.Any system is a combination of units and each small unit is determined by the role it plays in the class of units to which it belongs.(My translation)

³ *The Voice*.p.23

⁴ibid. p.23

⁵ ibid. p.26

⁶ ibid. p .31

⁷ibid. p.27

heads bobbing and swinging from side to side like the head of puppets.”⁸ The Elders never contradict Chief Izongo.

The chest is known to be the seat of a human being's courage. When some people ran away out of fear of being touched by Okolo's saliva, the narrator noted: “Some men too who had no chest or shadow in them also ran”⁹. Having no chest means lacking courage. But Okolo is said to have no chest¹⁰ because people want to spoil his name. He cannot defy Chief Izongo if he is not courageous. Talking about Abadi one of the Elders, Chief Izongo said “with a man like him sitting at my right hand side, my chest will be as strong as stone even if the world falls on my head”¹¹. The chest is also the seat of one's pride and confidence.

The word inside is used for what one thinks, therefore, our thought. It is a case of modulation which consists in using a concrete word for an abstract one because Okara is translating his ideas from his native language into English. *The inside of the young girl paddling and driving her paddle into the river was sweet*¹². It is because the sweetness of her inside can be read on her face. There is a correspondence between one's inside and one's state of mood. Okolo said to Chief Izongo: “You have an ugly inside”¹³

The ugliness of Chief Izongo's inside is the state of his conscience which is revealed in his actions and the way he rules his fellow-citizens. The expression “with all one's inside” means with all one's strength. Okolo was in search of “it”¹⁴ with all his inside. He puts all his energy in the search to the point of sacrificing his own life. The people in front of Tuere “ran with all their inside”¹⁵. They ran away from her as if she were a real witch. Many prepositional phrases starting by the preposition with are used in connection with the term inside: “with all one's inside”, “with a strong inside”, “with a steady inside”, “with wrong doing inside”. When Tuere asked Izongo with a strong inside “which man he wanted of her”¹⁶, she speaks with conviction because she does not want to deliver Okolo to him. She adds defiance and determination to the conviction when she said with a steady inside “...the man you want is in my house, come in and take him”¹⁷.

Okolo does not expect Tuere to defend him against Chief Izongo the way she does because when she was accused of witchcraft, he did not help her. He feels ashamed of the affection and helpfulness he receives from her. This makes him “speak with his inside”¹⁸. To speak with one's inside is to think. He thinks about her kindness

⁸ *ibid.* p.42

⁹ *ibid.* p.27

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.23

¹¹ *ibid.* p.45

¹² *The Voice*.p.26

¹³ *ibid.* p.37

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.23

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.32

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.29

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.29

¹⁸ *ibid.* p.31

“with a wrong doing filled inside^{19”}. He said that he did not deserve this nice treatment from her.

“With a wrong-doing inside” means with self-reproach. In this context, his inside smelled bad for the towns-people and for himself for not being fit to do anything on her behalf. The bad smell of his inside means self-accusation and guilty conscience. One’s inside can sometimes mean one’s conscience. It dictates to you what to do. But it may not be in agreement with one’s desire. This is what happened to Okolo when he was in Tuere’s house. *“Okolo wanted to go out but he had two opposing voices speaking in his inside^{20”}*. This hesitation is the result of the opposing voices in his inside. When one’s inside does not agree with one’s desire, there is no action. This shows that conscience has pre-eminence over desire. Okolo is curious to know what is happening outside Tuere’s house but his conscience forbids him to go out because going out will be an act of ingratitude. *“His inside did not agree with him. So he moved back into the gloom of the hut and waited.^{21”}*

The word inside means a container in which our thoughts, our feelings and what people say to us are kept. In trying to dissuade Okolo from his search of “it”, Chief Izongo said: *“Listen, asking the bottom of things in this town will take you no place. Hook this with your little finger. Put it into your inside’s box and lock it up^{22”}*. The inside is referred to as the container. “Asking the bottom of things in this town” is the contained. One takes the place of the other. “Put it into your inside’s box and lock it up” means that Okolo should forget what he is thinking about. But Okolo said that Chief Izongo’s teaching words do not enter his inside²³. Inside functions as a container into which goes what you understand. Some words can enter your ears and may not enter your inside means that you can hear them but you don’t understand them. In addition to one’s ears, some people can act as your ears. They hear for you what you cannot hear. This is the mission of some messengers who spy for Chief Izongo in Amatu. They are also called the ears of Amatu. *“The ears of Amatu are opened^{24”}* to whom one of the messengers refers when he is objecting to Chief Izongo’s rule and said: *“if this the ears of Izongo enter, we will fall from our jobs^{25”}*. President Kongi in Wole Soyinka’s *Kongi’s Harvest* also has extra ears spying on people for him in Isma land. His *Left Ear and Right Ear²⁶*, each one with his members to perform their tasks.

One of the messengers does not care about the Ears of Chief Izongo. Whatever happens he accepts it. *“Any way the world turns, I take it with my hands^{27”}*. No matter the way Chief Izongo rules the town, it makes no difference, provided that he can

¹⁹ *ibid.*.p.31

²⁰ *The Voice*.p.32

²¹ *ibid.*.p.32

²² *ibid.*.p.36

²³ *ibid.*.p.37

²⁴ *ibid.*.p.25

²⁵ *ibid.*.p.25

²⁶ Wole Soyinka. *Kongi’s Harvest* in *Collected Plays* . London: O.U.P..1976.p.60

²⁷ *ibid.*.p.25

live, eat and be happy with his family. To take it with one's hands is to accept whatever may happen, unlike Okolo who insistently wants to know the bottom of things.

When Okolo fell down while he was running, the word hands is used in gradation to show how people are determined to get rid of him and destroy his ideas "*Okolo and the men fell to the ground. Hands clawed at him, a thousand hands, the hands of the world*²⁸", this image of a part for all stands for furious men who are assaulting Okolo in support of Chief Izongo. This is what comforts Chief Izongo to say: "*the whole town is at my back*²⁹" meaning that he is massively supported by people.

The only person openly supporting Okolo is Tuere in whose house he is hiding now. The term "breadth" used by the narrator to describe Tuere when she was blowing the ambers under firewood shows that our breadth is the source of what we do or make. That is why if what we do is good, it makes us feel happy. A flame comes out as the result of Tuere's continuous effort to blow the ambers "*and the face of Tuere was satisfaction, for her breadth and shadow had gone into the flame.*³⁰" She looks at the flame with satisfaction because she is part of it. The flame becomes her object of meditation and even of transcendental meditation "*she remained kneeling before the dancing flame with face intent, looking at the flame, looking at what is behind the flame, the root of the flame*³¹."

While Tuere is in full possession her breadth Okolo's breadth is not in peace. When he was caught by Chief Izongo's men "*his mouth opened slackly and the breath came out without reaching his chest.*³²" Okolo is in the center of Chief Izongo's manipulation. While the people in the street are made to run away from him, Izongo sends his messengers to arrest him. People ran away from Okolo because they think that he has a contagious sickness just as they ran away from Tuere who keeps him in her house: As Tuere approaches them "*they ran the backs of their feet touching the back of their heads*³³, meaning that they ran as fast as they could. The messengers who ran after Okolo to arrest him are referred to as *knowing- nothing footsteps, caring-nothing feet*³⁴, *bad footsteps and blind feet*³⁵. "Knowing nothing and caring-nothing feet" are ignorant people who have no goal to achieve in life. "The bad and the blind footsteps" are the men who work for Chief Izongo fulfilling unconditionally his will. Those, who "*walk with Izongo's feet*³⁶".

²⁸ *The Voice*.p.27

²⁹ *ibid*.p.27

³⁰ *ibid*.p.33

³¹ *ibid*.p.33

³² *ibid*.p.39

³³ *ibid*.p.32

³⁴ *ibid*.p.28

³⁵ *ibid*.p.29

³⁶ *The Voice*.p.41

3. The anthropomorphic impact on the novel's meaning

In Amatu and Sologa, people have locked their insides out of the fear they have in it. That is why their mouth cannot say in public what their eyes see and what their ears hear about Chief Izongo's political regime. They hide this fear in their insides because of the omnipresence among the people of Chief Izongo's messengers.

The anthropomorphic impact on the meaning of the novel is based on the role Okara gives each part of the body and the connection he makes between some parts of human body. As one can see above, there is a logical connection between one's inside, mouth, eyes and ears to control one's speech in a political environment of domination.

It is because Okolo has not locked his inside that he expresses aloud all he has in it but apparently what he says does not enter people's ears and does not go to their insides. For one's action is commanded by what one has in one's inside. "*Bad footsteps coming out of people's insides*³⁷" means people whose footsteps are bad, or people with bad intentions, in this context, people who support Chief Izongo.

Personal expression is the result of what one has in one's heart or inside put in relation with some parts of human body. That is why the speeches uttered by the characters or the narrator take the form of an extended metaphor. When the messengers were about to enter Okolo's house and after one of them asked for silence, the narrator said "*these teaching words their ears entered and their inside entered so they locked every word carefully in their insides as they silently worked towards Okolo's house without their mouths opening.*³⁸"

The words of recommendation uttered by the messengers "These teaching words" come out of his inside (deep from his heart) and pass through his mouth, reach his colleagues' ears (they hear what he said through his voice) and go down to their insides (they understand what he means). Then, they locked every word carefully in their insides (they keep the words for themselves), "in their insides" considered as man's inner box. "Without their mouths' opening", means without speaking. Gabriel Okara uses concrete words, ears, insides and mouth for abstract words. The process followed by this long metaphor, shows the different stages of a speaker's speech. If it is not locked, what comes out of a man's inside becomes his attitude or his action. In Tuere's house "*Shuffling feet turned Okolo's head to the door*³⁹". In reaction to the discussion he is hearing between Tuere and the messengers, he decides to move to the door. His inside (his heart) gives the order to his head (his brain) which in its turn, gives the signal to his feet but the latter shuffle, (The feet hesitate before carrying out the order) because he does not want to disappoint Tuere.

Apart from that, Okolo's inside is open, he has not locked it, particularly when he is about to say what he wants to Chief Izongo, the Elders and the messengers.

³⁷ *ibid.*p.30

³⁸ *ibid.*p.25

³⁹ *The Voice.*p.26

Because of this rebellious attitude he is taken for a reactionary and given all kinds of troubles.

"On and on they pushed and dragged him. Round and round they went with their blind feet. This way they turned and that way they turned like a dog with a piece of bone looking for a corner.⁴⁰" Symbolically, the fly which worries Okolo when his hands were tied with a rope, touches some parts of his body, as indicating the ones which need to be destroyed to keep him silent and inoffensive.

A fly stood on his nose. Okolo turned on his side and continued to sleep. Another stood on his ear. He shook his head. It flew off and stood on the ear. He turned and slept on his back. The fly stood on his eyes (...). The fly settled on his mouth. He tried to move his hand but his hand would not move! (...)
A fly stood on his face he tried to lift his hands but they would not move so he shook his head and the fly flew off (...). He stared at his wrists. A fly hovered and stood on the rope.⁴¹

All the parts touched by the fly, his nose, his ear, his eyes, his face, his mouth are symbolic vital human parts that if destroyed would make Okolo become handicapped or die. He would not be able to smile or breathe properly with his nose, his hearing would be affected, and he would lose his sight. His mouth would become tasteless and unable to speak. With his ears, his eyes, his mouth destroyed, his face would become repulsive. His hands already tied with a rope would become useless to him. The only thing on which the fly cannot settle is Okolo's inside. Even if he becomes invalid he has already sown in the population what he has in his inside. In fact the word inside in the narrative has often gone hand in hand with the pronoun "it" as the following:

But this time he would the masses ask and not Izongo and his Elders. If the masses have not got "it", he will create "it" in their insides. He will plant "it", make it grow in spite of Izongo's destroying words. He will uproot the fear in their inside, kill the fear in their inside and plant "it"⁴²

It stands for a good quality of life, moral and spiritual values and social justice. This neutral pronoun represents the ideal which any ruler in Africa must struggle to achieve, as it embodies anything good that a people need to live well and progress.

Rightly, Eustace Palmer says: *"The novel is of course dominated by Okolo's search for "it". What is "it"? "It" is that indefinable something which gives integrity, honesty, spiritual values, fate in God and men and a sense of purpose⁴³."* What Okolo wants is to have "it" inside the political authorities and the population of Amatu. If the political authorities have such good qualities in their inside, they are likely to govern well and if the population have got it in theirs, they will live in stability and peace. Okolo's concern for his fellow-citizens embodies his sincerity and patriotism but in Amatu, Chief Izongo and the Elders do not care about moral values.

In his court, Chief Izongo has established a dictatorial regime. He is helped by a college of Elders with whom he manipulates his fellow-citizens. The Elders'

⁴⁰ *ibid.*p.39

⁴¹*ibid.* pp. 39-40

⁴² *The Voice*.p.90

⁴³ Eustace Palmer. *An Introduction to the African Novel* .London: Heinemann.1973.p.158.

speeches, deeds and behaviours are all in support of the Chief. They hide the truth from their people and take all men or women that do not believe them as enemies. That is why Okolo exposes them to the face of his compatriots showing what they have in their insides. Okolo and Chief Izongo are two poles of antagonism in the narrative, two opposing forces. Chief Izongo is characteristic of post independence African dictators who maintain the people in submission but enjoy many privileges in their political system. Tuere observed: *When you question, they fear a tornado is going to blow down the beautiful houses they have built without political foundations*⁴⁴. To convey his message Okara uses particular literary devices taken from his mother tongue and based on parts of human body to disclose his socio-political vision.

4. Okara's literary project and socio-political vision

It is a reality that Okara has consciously mixed his native language and English in *The Voice*. Almost on every page there are evidences of syntaxes, comparisons, metaphors, repetitions and personification a great part of which are in relation with the linguistic universe of his native language. His language experiment contains syntactic and semantic dimensions. At the syntactic level we notice a transformation of the English pattern which result in an inversion of the verb and the present participle, or the rejection of these at the end of the sentence and the repetition of the same word as if we are reading one of his poems. When Okolo finds himself shut up in a dark room, the narrative goes on as follows: *"When Okolo came to know himself, he was lying on a floor, on a cold cold floor lying. He opened his eyes to see but nothing he saw, nothing he saw. For the darkness was evil darkness and the outside night was black black night."*⁴⁵ This passage can be restored as follows:

"When Okolo recovers his consciousness, he was lying on a very cold floor. He opened his eyes to look around, but he saw nothing, for the darkness in the room was fearful and the night was very dark."

Okara makes this transformation to create poetic rhythm in the sentences but also to be closer to African oral tradition as one can see it in African story telling. Arthur Ravenscroft said that *The Voice* is *very much a poetic novel*⁴⁶. In fact, the rhythm of the sentence above recalls Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*⁴⁷

If Okara makes a syntactic transformation in some sentences, he makes a mental transformation at semantic level in others. *"How Okolo entered her house I saw with this my two eyes"*⁴⁸. This sentence means: I saw Okolo when he entered, precisely the person who is speaking in the crowd saw him when he entered Tuere's house. Obviously, Okara thinks in his native language and expresses his ideas in English. As

⁴⁴ *The voice*.p.89

⁴⁵ *ibid*.p.76

⁴⁶ Arthur Ravenscroft. "Introduction to *The Voice*" in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*. London: Heinemann.1973.

p.4

⁴⁷ www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173253 University of Massachusetts Press. Amazon.com

⁴⁸ *The Voice*.p.30

a consequence, there is a transformation in the pattern of English language. Semantically, the meaning of the sentence at the superficial level corresponds to the one in the deeper level when the English pattern is restored. This is partly due to the fact that Okara gives importance to the parts of human body in his speech. Elsewhere, talking about Okolo, the narrator says: “‘I cannot stop’, Okolo with whisper whisper spoke⁴⁹”. At the superficial level, we notice a repetition of the word whisper and a rejection of the verb to the end of the sentence. When we restore the sentence according to the English pattern, we can say: “‘I cannot stop’, Okolo said whispering.” The transliterated sentence and the English patterned one have the same meaning.

At the semantic level, Okara gives particular importance to the parts of human body. He takes them as units of a system which he combines to show the roles they can play in the understanding of a narrative. The most used of them is the word “inside” which refers to what one has in one’s heart or conscience. As a noun, it is modified by adjectives and phrases and also plays the role of a noun in a sentence. In the following passages:

“I see in my inside that your spoken words are true and straight. But you see it in your inside that we have no power to do anything. These happening things make my inside bitter than yours (...) so turn this over in your inside and do so that you will have a sweet inside like us;”⁵⁰

In these words of Okolo to Chief Izongo in front of the Elders: “*Our insides are soft like water even if you say our inside are filled with stone*”⁵¹, the word “insides” is subject modified by a predicate adjective.

The purpose of Okolo’s search through his questioning is to sow the grain of social justice in the insides, consequently in the heart and the head of Chief Izongo and the Elders by changing their bad and hard insides into good and soft insides, and plant a grain of political awareness in the insides of the people of Amatu: “*If the masses haven’t got it he will create it in their insides. He will plant it, make it grow in spite of Izongo’s destroying words. He will uproot the fear in their inside, kill the fear in their inside and plant it.*”⁵²

This anthropomorphic literary approach is part of Okara’s language experiment. That hybrid language, According to Ebi Yeibo, belongs to the group of “Gradualists” those who “*advocate a re-Africanization of the English language, to authentically convey Africa’s literary sensibilities*”⁵³. His literary project in this language experiment consists in showing that form can be African, language European and content universal.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*p.34

⁵⁰ *The Voice*.pp.48-49

⁵¹ *ibid.*p.84

⁵²*ibid.*p.90

⁵³ Ebi Yeibo. Nativization of English in African literary Texts. A Lexico-Semantic Study of Transliteration in Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice* in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.Vol.1.N° 12. Special issue:202-208. September 2011.p. 202

Okolo moves from illusion to disillusionment and finally extinction. He dies in the river. He is not understood by his community he wants to save. He has followed the footprints of the first African intellectuals who travelled to Europe and came back to put their knowledge at the service of their fellow-citizens. They returned to their countries with great ambitions. Some of them succeed in contributing to the development but some others failed. Okolo observes a direct way to communicate with the people in Amatu by putting to them questions about the quality of life they are living in, under the dictatorship of Chief Izongo. Through *The Voice* Okara shows that the role of a writer in the society is to teach, to guide their society and arouse the consciousness of their compatriots with the purpose of liberating them from the shackles of domination. Through his questioning he wants to show his fellow-citizens the realities of the political contradiction they are living in.

Okolo is determined to combat alone the inequalities and the injustice prevailing in the society. His vision of life is not shared by anyone except Tuere who echoes the message of social justice of Okolo. Okolo and Tuere are two characters playing the same role- which implies that they share the same kind of inside. Okara uses in his novel joint gender heroism as pointed out by Nelson O. Fashina when he said: "*They (Okolo and Tuere) are joint hero and heroine*"⁵⁴ They have counted on their own efforts and to shake Chief Izongo's regime but they fail in improving the living conditions of their community.

Okolo is not a mad man as Chief Izongo and the Elders would like their community to take him. All his existence lies on his hope. But without the collaboration of people you want to save, it is difficult to succeed. Ocran in *Fragment* supports this idea when he addresses Baako saying: "*It's senseless to get sick because you can't help them get what they want... they are not interested in your hopes, have you thought of that?*"⁵⁵

Okolo wants to use his questioning as a sacred-fire to enlighten people's mind in his community. He wants to awaken their consciousness to a system which makes them victims and not actors of their own destiny. He is a progressist. He knows that man's progress on earth is conditioned by his courage and determination to fight against injustice. The people Okolo intends to save, those to whom he wants to give a sacred light are similar to the people chained in the cave in Plato's myth⁵⁶ evoked in *The Beautiful Ones Are not yet Born*. When these people got rid of their chains and were invited to come out of the darkness for the daily light outside, their sight was unable to support the light outside because their sight was accustomed to darkness in which they have stayed for a long time.

The irony about Okolo is that the ones he wants to save are the very persons who mock at him. Therefore, he finds himself under the weight of his compatriots'

⁵⁴ Nelson Fashina. "Of what Sex is the Text? A new reading of gender characterization as a trope and joint heroism in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*" in *African Study Monographs*:71-87. June 2009.p. 85.

⁵⁵ Ayi kwei Armah. *Fragments*. London: Heinemann.(1974)2002.p.174

⁵⁶ Armah. *The Beautiful Ones Are not yet Born*. London: Heinemann.(1969) 2000.pp.93-94

passivity and the one of Chief Izongo's political tyranny. He is unjustly satisfied and his noble ambition stifled.

In spite of his strong determination, Okolo has been unable to carry out his socio-political vision, his project of a democratic society. This project is hindered by an unfavorable environment. His task of contributing to the rescue of the people in his community is an incomplete symphony. But he is strongly convinced that what his town needs is a society in which human rights are respected and people live without fear in their insides. Actually, Chief Izongo's political regime is a perversion of democratic ideals.

During a meeting, Abadi his first councilor addresses the other Elders in the following words: *"So let us with one voice answer the question that our leader has put before us a short while ago. We are in a democracy and everyone has the right to express any opinion. But we have to think about what our leader has done for us."*⁵⁷ Both Chief Izongo and the Elders are ruling for selfish interests. Izongo has all the people under his control. The narrator said rightly that Okolo's fellow-citizens were looking at him with Izongo's eyes, walking with Izongo's feet and had their insides, his "inside"⁵⁸. Besides no one among them must not contradict what he suggests, "our answer must be one". Chief Izongo political regime pretends to be democratic in speech but it is totalitarian in deeds. In that respect, Arthur Ravenscroft is right to say that *The Voice* is an extended parable: *It is clearly a political parable that applies equally to the political state of the Federation of Nigeria in early 1960s (before the first military coup of 1966) as to any political situation in any country where government is incompetent and corrupt*⁵⁹.

5. Conclusion

A narrative text has many dimensions: The didactic dimension, the entertainment dimension and the esthetical dimension. The didactic dimension is concerned with what the narrative teaches to the reader in terms of knowledge, experience of life and moral values. The entertainment dimension is reading for one's pleasure. The esthetical dimension points out its artistic value. In the case of *The Voice*, it the esthetical dimension includes the anthropomorphic dimension.

As shown in this study, the voice contains many humanlike narrative elements which help to understand its message. This anthropomorphic approach is coupled with an evident translingualism which gives to the novel its originality. The novel itself is entitled *The Voice* referring to human being and meaning Okolo in Ijaw language. Okara uses his mother tongue not only for the title of the novel but also to name his main character who speaks on behalf of his fellow-citizen who cannot speak because they fear Chief Izongo's tyrannical regime.

⁵⁷*The Voice*.p.45

⁵⁸ *ibid*.p.41

⁵⁹ Arthur Ravenscroft. "Introduction to *The Voice*" p.10

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