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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

NGUGI WA THIONG'O AND THIRD WORLD POSTCOLONIALISM

THESIS PRESENTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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## ABSTRACT

### NGUGI WA THIONG'O AND THIRD WORLD POSTCOLONIALISM

This study investigates the ambivalent traits of third world postcolonialism. Third world postcolonialism appears as an antithesis against the logical fallacy of the binary oppositions performed by the contemporary first world postcolonial theory and practice. The division between the first and the third world postcolonial aesthetics is due to their different interpretations and practices of the term 'postcolonial,' respectively.

As an analysing method, this research links Ngugi's novels and dramas to third world postcolonialism in order to show how Ngugi works within this paradigm, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. Ngugi's initial novels were written in typical western style, following the western canon. As a result of this, Ngugi shows an inability to reconcile Africa and the West. In his later works, Ngugi begins to explore his own voice. He interrogates coloniality through an African voice and he concerns himself with postcolonial ways of decolonization.

This work is divided into five main sections. The first deals with theoretical background of postcolonialism. The second deals with Ngugi's earliest novels: *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*. The third deals with his later two novels: *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. The fourth section looks at Ngugi's postcolonial dramas: *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want*. The last section deals with Ngugi's latest works, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* which offer new ways of postcolonial writing in the third world.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIALISM AND ITS RELATION TO THE THIRD WORLD

Many literary theories are engaged in examining the colonial dilemma within contemporary society. Postcolonial theory is the most effective aesthetic attempt to theorise and interrogate the ideological value of the colonial problematic founded on the biased reciprocity of dominant and dominated. That said, it should be noted that various other theories such as Postmodernism, New Historicism, Deconstructionism, Poststructuralism, and Cultural Materialism also deal with colonial or neo-colonial impositions. These theories share many aspects of the postcolonial theoretical approach, but a distinct difference in terms of practical function remains. While postcolonialism is politically diacritical and acute, the other theories remain, to a large part, rhetoric-oriented. Of course, postcolonialism depends partly on rhetoric rebellion, but, in the true sense, it possesses a profound intimacy with 'reality' as something rectifiable through practical intervention. In order to understand exactly the historical value of postcolonialism as a literary theory, differentiated from the other theories, it is necessary to systematically scrutinize the entire process whereby postcoloniality is legitimised into postcolonialism as an interdisciplinary discourse.

## THE AMBIVALENT MEANING OF THE TERM 'POSTCOLONIAL'

The term 'postcolonial' poses problems of definition. Linda Hutcheon, in "Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition: Complexities Abounding," describes it as having a dual or ambivalent meaning. In her argument, the prefix 'post' reflects two overlapping interpretations which embrace and exclude each other at the same time: 'neo-' or 'extended' colonialism and 'de-' colonization. As a double-binded term, she argues that it makes little sense to attempt to divide the two meanings of postcolonialism artificially in order to emphasize the differences in practical strategies (Hutcheon 1995: 10). Hutcheon is not alone in pointing out the binary duplicity of the term 'postcolonial.' Anne McClintock joins the debate in order to delineate the pitfalls of the term, warning against the danger of shifting the binary frame from the axis of power to the axis of time:

If 'post-colonial' theory has sought to challenge the grand march of western historicism with its entourage of binaries (self-other, metropolis - colony, center-periphery, etc), the term 'post-colonialism' nonetheless re-orientes the globe once more around a single, binary axis of power (colonizer/colonized – itself inadequate nuanced, as in the case of women) to the binary axis of time, an axis less productive of political nuance since it does not distinguish between the beneficiaries of colonialism ( the ex-colonism). and the casualties of colonialism (the ex-colonized). The 'post colonial scene' occurs in an entranced suspension of history, as if the definitive historical events have preceded us, and are not now in the making.

(McClintock 1994: 2-3)

Masao Miyoshi, too, notes the generic homogeneity of the origin of the term and the consequent inevitable ambiguity in practising decolonization. He insists that the 'post-colonial' deterioration, in the conceptual sense of the word, is "a result of double processes of colonization and decolonization,

which were inextricably intermeshed” (Miyoshi 1993: 728). The conceptual conflict within the term ‘postcolonial,’ he concludes, is related to the differing representational tactics harnessed by the first and the third words as they respectively filter strategic meanings through it. Actually, the term ‘postcolonial’ has distinguishable usages selectively preferred by the camps of the first and the third words. One may look at the definition of the ‘postcolonial’ given by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their co-operative vanguard work, *The Empire Writes Back*:

We use the term ‘post-colonial,’ however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is continued.

(Ashcroft et al 1989: 2)

Ashcroft *et al* defined the term ‘postcolonial’ from a perspective of continuity, thus implying that the ‘postcolonial’ cannot be separated from the colonial past. In contrast to this first word position, Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, the so-called ‘troika- critics,’ in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, present the real value of the term ‘postcolonial’ as lying, for them, in a decolonization of the colonised past. This would entail a rejuvenation and synthesization of precolonial tradition which remains untouched by colonialism:

If decolonization is the aim, such synthesis must be within the parameters of the African tradition rather than outside it. It should expand and renew the tradition through new syntheses and breakthroughs rather than leave it unchanged and in moribund stasis. In order to achieve such synthesis, experimentation is crucial. The kind of experimentation

called for may be described as traditionalist, that is to say, experimentation for the purpose of modernizing and revitalizing the tradition.

(Chinweizu et al 1980: 239)

Thus, Chinweizu *et al* has introduced an alternative new way of looking at the term 'postcolonial' than that offered by the first world critics. Their understanding of postcolonialism stresses the importance of discontinuity from the colonial past thereby making artificial division between the dual meanings of the term impossible.

#### **CONFLICT BETWEEN FIRST AND THIRD WORLD POSTCOLONIAL PRACTICES**

The ambivalence of the term 'postcolonial,' as discussed above, unavoidably leads one into the different political scenarios depicting the first world and the third world, in accordance with where postcolonial practice evolved. At first glance, the distinctive feature of the postcolonial exercise between those two worlds does not seem to be easily grasped. They appear the same, but there is a subtle unbridgeable chasm between them which becomes evident once one penetrates the deep structure of postcolonial ideology. Of course, there are some intermediary hybridized postcolonial theories, which search for a universal theory which transcends polarized outlooks constituting the mainstream postcolonial theory of our times. This theory originates from third world scholars resident in the first world, or vice-versa. Unfortunately, their emphasis tends to fall on an escalation of human rights rather than seeking essential liberation from colonial legacy. Accordingly, the work of

postcolonialism today is to solve the dilemma of binary opposition established by these two camps.

Postcolonialism aims at decolonization not only from economic, political and social, but also from cultural subordination. Thus, postcolonialism, in the strict sense of the word, is a set of subversive discourses for 'the Other,' i.e. the third world; a world which has been marginalized, alienated, excluded and inferiorized through the intentional machination of the first world. The postcolonial subject in the third world is tracing back the colonial logic inscribed by the first world in order not only to digress from the angle where the colonial distortions started, but also to rewrite the memory of the past what Edward Said has termed the desire for "rescription" (Said 199:331).

Postcolonialism, in this sense, cannot help but reflect, to a large degree, the conscientious desire of the 'third world'. However, it is a reality that the postcolonial discourse of today is enormously dominated by the first world. The danger lies not so much in the first world domination of the processes of production or reproduction, as in the centre-oriented inclination of postcolonialism. This danger lies in its desire to form a critical distance between third world postcolonialism and the perception of postcolonialism accepted by the first world according to its own needs.

First world postcolonialism, directly or indirectly invalidates the decolonising power of third world postcolonialism, emerging from the poetics of transgression, through filters like 'filiation' and 'affiliation.'

Said, in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, demonstrates how the empire filiates and affiliates the resisting volition of the third world. He believes

that the taming of the third world in order for it to be subsumed under the domineering design of the first world is related to the globalisation of capital.

Global capitalism fetishizes the positive characteristics of third world postcolonialism so as to petrify undisciplined revolutionary qualities in them. In that sense, the postcolonial inertia in the first world, in the critical sense of the word, is tied to late capitalism, Arif Dirlik, in “The postcolonial Aura : Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism”, also draws attention to the connection between postcoloniality and structural transformation due to global capitalism:

I argue, first, that there is a parallel between the ascendancy in cultural criticism of the idea of postcoloniality and an emergent consciousness of global capitalism in the 1980s and, second, that the appeals of the critical themes in postcolonial criticism have much to do with their resonance with the conceptual needs presented by transformations in global relationships caused by changes within the capitalist world economy.

*(Dirlik 1994:331)*

At the same time, Dirlik distinguishes the term postcolonialism from postcoloniality. He believes that the former should fulfil the function of a third world counter-discourse against the capitalist reasoning of the first world while the latter follows the late capitalist logic of commercialisation or reification. What he emphasizes is the obligatory necessity of postcolonialism as a third world theory as well as the pretended coincidence of postcoloniality as a first world theory. He suggests that a commercialised or reified postcolonialism cannot function as a sound critical tool of decolonization whilst working for the extension of a capitalist way of desiring.

However, third world postcolonialism, if executed without reflection, does not automatically guarantee the omnipresent ideal of decolonisation . The postcolonial practice of decolonization performed by the ‘troika critics’ provides a good example. They argue that the one and only way to obtain flawless decolonization is to go back to the particular precolonial tradition in order to re-evaluate it as the origin of postcolonial practice in its purified form. Their refutation of universalism is related to their attempt to reinforce the postcolonial value of regionalism:

It should therefore not surprise us that Africa’s colonial and neo-colonial poets, for instance, being overtly devoted to their European and American audiences and mentors, trim their sails to the modernist squalls from the West. Simplicity of diction is therefore devalued, artificially difficult diction is esteemed African themes that would make sense in an African cultural matrix are eschewed. The African writer and critic should understand that what makes a good work of art is in large measure defined by the central expectations and concerns of a given culture. They should therefore work from the standpoints of the African community, not the Euro-American, not that of some abstract *Civilisation de l’universel*.

(Chinweizu et al 1980:242)

The troika critics, of course, posit the potential of syncretism in mapping out new foundations for an African modernity. But the syncretism they applaud is not one which seeks “a healthy and distinguishable synthesis” with foreign cultures, but one which demands “valuable continuities with precolonial culture” (Chinweizu et al 1980:239). Thus, their decolonising politics are deeply experimental, for they have to reinvent the past according to their design . Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright, alludes to this idea of the troika critics, mocking them as “Chichidodo,” a mythical bird which blames its stinking smell on excrement, but continues to feed itself on the worms in

this very excrement. Said reinterpretes this same confrontation between the troika critics and Soyinka by using the other oppoding terms of conflict, that is, classical imperialism versus native cultures:

Between classical nineteenth-century imperialism and what it gave rise to in resistant native cultures, there is thus both a stubborn confrontation and a crossing over in discussion, borrowing back and forth, debate. Many of the most interesting post-colonial writers bear their past within them – as potentially revised visions of the past tending towards a new future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from empire.

*(Said 1993:34-35)*

While the debate between the troika critics and Soyinka is now dated by twenty years, African postcolonial debates have not looked for alternatives which offer clearer guidelines towards decolonisation in the field of literature. Like those involved in the Negritude debate of previous years, they become stumped by the agony of attempting to harmonize the cacophony of postcolonialism, nationalism and traditionalism .

## **POSTCOLONIALISM, NATIONALISM AND TRADITIONALISM**

The basic idea of postcolonialism as a literacy theory emerges from the inability of the first world theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writings, which express their specific regional visions on 'nation'. The first world theories themselves emerge from particular cultural traditions, which are masked by false notions of 'the universal'. Theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal feature of language, epistemologies and value systems of the first

world in describing its own 'nation' are all radically questioned by the practices of postcolonial regional writings. Postcolonial literary proceeds from the need to address this different practice on imagining and 'narrating the nation.' Homi Bhabha has pointed to a close relationship between narrative and nation:

Nation, like narrative, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation- or-narration might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west.

(Bhabha 1990:1)

Bhabha's focus is on how writing, represented by narrative, comes to participate in nation-building. Being first struck by a particular ambivalence inherent in the term 'nation' – "the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it" (Bhabha 1990:1)- he later shifted his interest to term 'nationness' – how it is composed and the process by which it comes to separate "the heimlich pleasures of the hearth" of the self and "the unheimlich terror of the space or race of the other" (Bhabha 1990:2). He has noted a process of connection whereby narrative comes to be intimately involved in constructing 'nation' and distinguishing the self from the Other. The troika critics also show a deep concern for 'narrating the nation.' Their concern is reflected in the defence of the value of Negritude. Their high appraisal of the value of the Negritude movement is based on the realization of the importance of a nationalist consciousness. This consciousness remains, for them, possibly the only means to fight against European cultural nationalism. They claim that in Negritude,

there is its African nationalist consciousness which revolts against European cultural imperialism. As we argued earlier, an active African nationalist consciousness is indispensable to the task of African liberation. For its stand and contributions in this department, African nationalism is indebted to negritude. To its champions we offer our salute!

The troika critics, from a postcolonial point of view, read immeasurable usefulness into Negritude's nationalism. Locality, they believe, is the only gauge to be trusted for escaping from the Western influence. As is to be expected, Soyinka departs from the troika critics' reading of Negritude, which he denounces as being solipsistic "tigritude". Famously, he states that "the tiger does not have to proclaim his tigritude". Soyinka insists on the fact that Negritude is not sufficient to explain contemporary Africa, let alone to decolonise the colonial mentality. He argues that Negritude, on the surface, seems to deconstruct the logic of colonial binarism, whilst it actually repeats the same logic:

Negritude, having laid its cornerstone on a European intellectual tradition, however bravely it tried to reverse its concepts (leaving its tenets untouched), was a founding deserving to be drawn into, nay, even considered a case for benign adoption by European ideological interests.

The troika critics still regard the temporal effectiveness of "tigritude" to be underestimated in evaluating the essence of Negritude aesthetics. They call attention to its functional flexibility, which could be vital in forging a counter-culture based on tradition as collective consciousness:

What Soyinka and his tigritude pack conveniently chose to forget is that it takes an active collective consciousness for even a group of real tigers to know when they must roar together, announcing their tigritude in unmistakably terms and thereby scaring off

hunters. Even tigers must know when to put themselves in fighting mood and pounce together to prevent their being ambushed and shot down. There are indeed situations when silent and indifferent self-acceptance, even by fierce tigers and other powerful beasts, is not enough, times and circumstances when such an attitude plays into the hands of those who would destroy them.

(Chinweizu et al 1980:207)

In “Neo-Tarzanism. The poetics of Pseudo-Tradition”, Soyinka labels the ideology of traditionalism defended by the troika critics as “Neo-Tarzanism”. He critiques this approach for its “categorical mis-statements on African traditional reality”. Soyinka insists that such a petrified tradition is nothing more than “the traditional Hollywood image of pop-eyed African in the jungle” (Soyinka 1976b:42). Therefore, Soyinka, in the long run, confesses:

My African world is a little more intricate and embraces precision machinery, oil rigs, hydro-electricity, my typewriter, railway trains (not iron snakes!), machine guns, bronze sculpture, etc., plus an ontological relationship with the universe including the above listed pumpkins and iron bells. This may result in a subtle complication in the “narration, reflection and resolution” of these phenomena but emphatically denies the deliberate complicating of them.

(Soyinka 1976b:38)

Soyinka’s attempt to distance himself from immanent traditionalism or chauvinistic nationalism is greatly influenced by his postcolonial belief that tradition, whatever it is, cannot be pure. Postcolonial purification for him is possible only in epistemological terms, but not in the real world. He also argues that it is fundamentally impossible to single out and eradicate the heterogenous elements of colonialism from the real history of the colonized. Therefore, he encourages doing away with any guilt conscience in syncretising the modern and the traditional. His argument is that time has changed sufficiently to enable human beings to live in a hybridised society

without suffering internal contradiction. Consider one of the typical scenes of postcolonial pluralism, religiously metaphorized in Soyinka's eyes:

I have stated my preference: let us expel alien religions altogether in all forms. Until that is done, and for a century or so afterwards, it is futile to expect that a Roman Catholic, practising, believing or even merely exploring will not, because he is black, suffuse his poetry with symbols of his faith. Nor is it criminal that he finds parallels to such symbols in his own methodology and traditional religion even without consciously syncretising them. Yoruba society is full of individuals who worship the Anglican God on Sundays, sacrifice to Sango every feastday, consult Ifa before any new project and dance with the Cherubims and Seraphims every evening.

(Soyinka 1976b:38).

The troika critics attack Soyinka's criticism on "Neo-Tarzanism" and his infatuation with euromodernism, insisting that these are no more than subconscious reflections of his own 'inferiority complex' concerning Africa, and that his "tarzanist Africa" overflows with the European imagery. The troika critics refer to euromodernist critics such as Okigbo, Clark, Echeruo Wonodi and Soyinka as heroes infected by "Hopkinsian infelicities". As a result, "they deliberately produced such modernist obscurantism as atrocious punctuation, word order ambiguities, syntactic jugglery with suppression of auxiliary verbs and articles, the spacious and contorted cadences of sprung rhythm, the heavy use of alliterations and assonances within a line, and the clichéd use of double –and triple –barred neologisms" (Chinweizu et al 1980:173). The troika critics conclude that proper traditionalism can find no place in this cultivation of obscurantism.

## POSTCOLONIALISM AND MARXISM

In spite of these passionate debates outlined above - ranging from those of negritude, tigrity, Neo-tarzanism, euromodernism and Hopkins-Disease - which pivot around postcolonialism, nationalism and traditionalism, it is hard to say that something persuasive has been found which elucidates the postcolonial dilemma of contemporary Africa. Contrary to the general expectation, one must conclude that these debates were ultimately unproductive. The following lines by George M. Gugelberger in *Marxism and African Literature*, support this sentiment:

The more recent debate between the Troika critics (Chinweizu group) and Wole Soyinka aptly shows that a wrong authenticity based on the ethnic imperative must lead to another formalist dead end. Both Soyinka and the Troika critics work with wrong notions of tradition and with the absence of sound class analysis. None of them has looked at the Marxist tradition.

(Gugelberger 1985:13)

As Gugelberger indicates, if we use a more universal concept like 'class' which goes beyond provincial terms such as tradition and nation though we need more to discuss about the extent to 'class' actually is universal-the debates mentioned above are destined to be fruitless. A further factor emphasising the inconsistency of those debates is the monolithic structure of their oppositions. The multifaceted diversity of the contemporary postcolonial third world cannot be understood through a simplistic structure of binary oppositions, such as colonial/postcolonial, national/transnational and traditional/modern. It would be better to look through those two

juxtaposing items of the binary opposition simultaneously, rather than to consider them independently. Seen from a postcolonial point of view, the momentum of binary antagonism can be interpreted only through the medium of 'overdetermination'.

As shown in Gugelberger's monograph, Marxist theory in particular has many uses and much appeal for postcolonial societies like Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia. Furthermore it has a bearing on postcolonial theory, with its stress on the political construction of cultural events, as well as on nationalism and traditionalism. But Marxist theory has been limited, until recently, by its own unconscious Eurocentricity in its dealings with these societies. This unconscious Eurocentrism is revealed clearly in the works of Marx himself, specifically when he develops his ideas on, for example, the 'Asiatic mode of production.' This was dealt with sporadically in *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* and *German Ideology*, with the conclusion that it was a barbarous form of production due to the "despotism and stagnation" of Asian societies. This is supported in a letter sent to Engels on 14, June, 1853:

These idyllic republics, of which only the village boundaries are jealously guarded against neighbouring village, continue to exist in well-nigh perfect form in the North-Western parts of India only recently occupied by the English. No more solid basis for Asiatic despotism and stagnation is, I think, conceivable. And however, much the English may have Irelandised the country, the breaking up of the archetypal forms was the *conditio sine qua* for Europeanization.

(Marx and Engels 1983: 347)

Marx's Eurocentric 'orientalism' is not limited to the private form of a letter, but appears also in the public form of articles published in the *New York Daily Tribune* under the titles of "The British Rule in India" and "The

Revolution in China and in Europe". In "The Future Results of British Rule in India" (*Tribune* 22 July, 1853), Marx argues that British rule in India has to fulfil a double mission, one destructive, the other generating the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia in order to make a class struggle possible.

Marx's metropolitanism stems genetically from his class reductionism. Every marginalized movement from nationalism in the third world and black consciousness movements in Africa, America and the Caribbean to feminists movements in the West, is reduced to 'class'. Hence feminists and black nationalists often complain that the concepts of Marxist class theory are 'gender-blind' and 'race blind' (Callinicos 1987:177). From a Marxist point of view, 'gender,' 'nation,' and 'race' are relative and peripheral concepts and should be transcended by more essential and universal ones – like 'class,' 'base and superstructure', productive force, relation of production and mode of production and so on – in order to achieve international co-ordination for the total liberation from capitalist society.

Marxism is class conscious, anti-metaphysical and, in some part, clearly teleological. As shown in *German Ideology*, the real life process for Marx clearly has priority and 'gender,' 'race' and 'nation' are secondary. Literature and philosophy are secondary, too for Marx, the truth of art is synonymous with the self-awareness of the human species. Truly, for Marx, it is hard to imagine a total liberation without such grand narratives, which is not surprising considering that "total liberation," itself, is one of the grand narratives. Such grand narratives may not be effective in postcolonial societies without modification. Yet, postcolonial societies require an

appropriation of Marxism, partly transformed according to the cadence of cosmological change, in order to develop their theorising along more 'scientific' lines.

There are signs that, recently, Marxist anthropological theory is developing a greater awareness of the need for sensitive adaptation in arguing that class category applicable to all societies. The work of Louis Althusser is crucial here, providing, as it does in its development of Marx's theory of 'mode of production', a more flexible account of the relationships ("articulation" is Althusser's term) between the several interlinked structures making up any specific 'mode of production' in a particular society. Following Althusser, M Godelier became the first Marxist anthropologist who noted the unilinear views of history are untenable, and in fact were never held by Marx himself. The need for these modern revisions stems primarily from the dominance in earlier Marxist anthropology of a radically simplified version of Engels' theory of pre-capitalist societies in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. These simplified relations were developed under Stalin and imposed by him and the Comintern as official policy for most European Communist Parties (Ashcroft et al 1989: 173-174). Modified Marxist anthropological theory, initiated by Godelier and followed by P.P. Rey and E Terray, is critically important in that "with this kind of analysis the key to Marxist social theory, does apply to pre-capitalist societies and indeed, reveals with great exactness their character" (Bloch 1983:164).

Alex Callinicos too, though he admitted some fault of Marxist class theory, tries nonetheless not to reject it but reinforces its explanatory power by arguing that class is not antagonistic to 'nation', 'gender' and 'race':

Agent's class position derives from their place in production relations, not their gender or supposed race. But of itself this does not provide grounds for rejecting Marxism, since its chief theoretical claim is precisely to explain power-relations and forms of conflict such as those denoted by the terms 'nation', 'gender', 'race; in terms of the forces and relations of production. The mere existence of national, sexual racial oppression does not refute historical materialism, but rather constitutes its explanandum.

(Callinicos 1987:177)

Even in the field of literature and philosophy we can find traces of changed notions of Marx and Engels. Though Marx and Engels treated art as secondary, they raised questions about what constitutes the staying power of certain works of art and why they continue to afford us aesthetic pleasure. A reference from *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* hints at the possibility that the level of formal achievement is not easily accounted for by classical Marxist methodology (Gugelberger 1985:5). This all suggests that Marx and Engels began to see art from a comparatively independent aesthetic principle, which did not necessarily need to be reduced to base. We can see this reflectional confession in Engels' letter to Mehring after Marx's death:

.....there is only one point lacking, which however, Marx and I always fail to stress enough in our writings and in regard to which we are all equally guilty. That is to say, we all laid, and were bound to lay, the main emphasis, in the first place on the derivation of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of actions arising through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But in so doing we neglected the formal side - the ways and means by which these notions, etc, come about - for the sake of content.

(Baxandall and Morawski 1973:99)

Strictly speaking, Marx and Engels are hard to exempt from blame for founding a dogmatic aesthetic on art. This becomes clear when one examines the Sickingen debate with Ferdinand Lasalle, conducted in the spring of 1859. In their epistolic exchange, Marx and Engels claimed that Lasalle selected an unrepresentative Sickingen for the protagonist in his work instead of the progressive and representative Thomas Munzer. At the same time, they objected to the use of characters as mouthpieces of ideas, which they viewed as tendentious. Based on these debates, Engels later defines certain concepts such as realism, typology, and selection of characters representative of progressive force, which became central to Georg Lukacs theory of realism. However, the events one has to interrogate far more vigorously are the later debates between V. Lenin and Zhdanov, Georg Lukacs and Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno, and the troika critics and Soyinka in the African case to mention just a few. These debates in themselves pose no difficulties. The problem lies in the manner in which they become dogmatised and frozen, consequently forcing us to choose only one point of view.

Nonetheless, a classical Marxism, when applied to the third world, still has a powerful influence on the interpretation of contemporary postcoloniality. Many third world postcolonial critics argue that the postindependent third world is not postcolonial, in the strict sense, but is rather a neo-colonial space. Hence postcolonial Africa's dependency on classical Marxist theory for decolonisation, even though this theory partly reveals Eurocentric dogmatism. Franz Fanon, for example, appears as a

charismatic third world postcolonial theoretician. He places emphasis on reappropriating Marxism into the third world context. Gugelberger supports this approach, claiming that “third world literature must come to terms with its inherent Fanonian nature”, and argues that “for third world literature as for third world criticism there is only one definition: to belong to the Third world, is therefore to accept an identity with the wretched of the earth spoken for by Frantz Fanon, to determine to end all exploitation and oppression” (Gugelberger 1985:xiii).

## POSTCOLONIALISM AND RACE

A crucial element that the first world postcolonial theory has failed to articulate is the concept of “race”. “Race”, in the first world postcolonial theory, is nothing more than one of the multiple forms of abstracted relative nations. But “race” in the third world is deeply embedded in postcolonial practice. Therefore the future of postcolonialism is dependent upon a successful incorporation of “race” into decolonizing practice.

Henry Louis Gates Jr, in *Criticism in the Jungle*, explores the term “race” as a figure arguing that race is not a transcendent signified (i.e. fixed in meaning) (Gates 1984: 7). Through the claim that “figuration is the nigger’s occupation,” he traces back the historical origin of “black” as figure. “Black people”, he argues, “have always been masters of the figurative: saying one thing to mean something quite other has been basic to black survival in the western culture” (Gates 1984: 6). The black “signification” of rhetorical trope internationally play with words to suspend

the fixed meaning as strategy of survival. In “The Signifying Monkey,” Gates introduced the typology of figures of black discourse:

The black tradition has its own subdivisions of signifying, which we could readily identify with the typology of figures received from classical and medieval rhetoric ... In black discourse ‘signifying’ means modes of figuration itself. When one signifies ... one ‘trope-a-dope’. The black rhetorical tropes subsumed under signifying would include ‘marking’ ‘loud-taking,’ ‘specifying,’ ‘testifying,’ ‘calling out’ (of one’s name), ‘sounding’, ‘rapping’ and ‘playing the dozens’

(Gates 1984: 286)

What Gates wishes to show through the analysis of figuration and signification is a cryptic relation between writing and ‘race’. This is similar to what Bhabha achieved in his analysis of narrative and ‘nation.’ Gates, at the same time, notes how writing comes to “inscribe” racial differences in order to define self from the “other”. In *“Race” Writing and Difference*, he analyses the ways in which writing relates to race, how attitudes towards racial differences generate and structure literary texts by arguing that ‘critical methods can effectively disclose the traces of ethnic difference and the languages we employ to define those supposed differences not only reinforce each other but tend to create and maintain each other’ (Gates 1986: 15). Tzvetan Todorov goes a step further than Gates, who noted an inevitable coincidental reciprocity between ‘race’, writing and difference. He argues that ‘race’ does not exist and presents the procedure whereby ‘race’ in the biological sense of the word, undergoes a transitional processes of cultural “reinscription” to become another term: ‘racism’. He thus places the term ‘race’ in quotation marks in order to signal his belief that it is an invention, not an essence:

...whereas racism is a well-attested racial phenomenon, "race" itself does not exist! ... For contemporary biology, the concept of "race" is therefore useless. This fact has no influence, however, on racist behaviour: to justify their contempt or aggressiveness, racists invoke not scientific analysis but the most superficial and striking of physical characteristics (which, unlike 'races', do exist) – namely, differences in skin colour, pilosity, and body structure.

(Todorov 1986: 370-371)

There are two mediums through which biological 'race' shifts to cultural 'racism'. The first is through writing, as mentioned above. Writing came to function as a "reasonable" signifier for truth in eighteenth century Europe. This resulted in a distortion of the "Other" as the western world labelled as unreasonable continents that lacked a literary tradition. Writing sometimes constitutes a process that turns physical differences into metaphysical differences (Gates 1986:15). The second medium is the body politic. The body politic works primarily on physical tropes like "skin colour," "pilosity," and "body structure". The body politic delivers a special priority to the "self" by excluding the "other" according to a division on distinguishing species relegating those of other skin colours, ancestries or genetic makings to the category of heterogeneous 'other'. Abdul JanMohamed, in "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The function of Racial difference in colonialist literature", deconstructs the Manichean ideology of body politic, warning that its allegory contribute dangerously towards an extension of imperialist mentality.

This economy (the economy of Manichean allegories), in turn, is based on a transformation of racial difference into moral and even metaphysical difference. Though the phenomenological origins of this metonymic transformation may lie in the "neutral"

perception of physical difference (skin colour, physical features and such), its allegorical extensions come to dominate every facet of imperialist mentality.

(JanMohamed 1986: 80)

Fanon introduces an interesting analysis on the body politic with specific reference to the 'genital complex'. He compares the castration of both Jews and blacks by whites questioning corporeal persecution against blacks and religious castration in the case of Jews. He argues that this is related to white's Negrophobia, which is a psychological disease, located 'on an instinctual and biological level' (Fanon 1967: 160). More interestingly, he relates this "Negrophobia" to "masochism". In his analysis of comic books like *Brother Rabbit*, *Deep are the Roots* and *Strange Fruit*, "the Negro makes stories in which it becomes possible for him to work off his aggression: the white man's unconscious justifies this aggression and gives it worth by turning it on himself, thus reproducing the classic schema of masochism" (Fanon 1967: 176). For the majority of white men, in Fanonist analysis, the black represents the sexual instinct in its raw state. The black is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions. White women, via a process of induction, invariably view blacks as the keepers of the impalpable gate that opens into the realm of orgies, bacchanals, and delirious sexual sensations (Fanon 1967: 177). But Fanon consistently asserts that all these beliefs;

Rest on the level of the imagined, in any case on that of paralogism. The white man who ascribes a malefic influence to the black is regressing on the intellectual level, since, as we have shown, his perception is based on a mental age of eight years (the comic books). Is there not a concurrent regression to and fixation at pregenital levels of sexual development? Self-castration? (The Negro is taken as a terrifying penis.)

(Fanon 1967: 177)

A white narcissistic masochism, working at the level of the “imaginary”, is psychologically plausible and it occurs alongside the fetishization of the ‘other’. JanMohamed insists that this process of fetishization ‘operates by substituting natural or genetic categories for those that are socially or ideologically determined’ (JanMohamed 1986: 84). Furthermore, JanMohamed believes that colonialist literature perpetuates this process.

Accordingly, post colonialism in the third world needs to appropriate theories of “race” and cultural “racism” in order to interrogate the authenticity of its rule and transcend it. One needs, however, to be cautious in deconstructing the signifying principle of “race” in order not to repeat the same mistake in selecting the logic of reorganisation. This means that the third world should avoid an imitative replica of the logic that has been abused by the first world. Post-colonialism is amorphous, with or without “race”. Post-colonialism today has a double desire: one is to be decolonised completely from the shackles of “race”. From an axiological point of view, post-colonialism embraces both a universal oriented value and a particular-oriented value.

## **NGINGI AND THIRD WORLD POST-COLONIALISM**

Ngungi wa Thiong’o is one of the most representative writers of the third world. A Kenyan exile and east Africa’s greatest novelist and essayist, he is the author of the nineteen works of fiction, non-fiction, drama and children’s literature. He is the most widely discussed and foremost African writer

today, dealing with post-colonial problems in Africa today. Not surprisingly, he attracts diverse interest, not all of it desirable. He has been detained and currently lives in exile to escape persecution from the Kenyan government. The massive accomplishment of Ngungi's work and the equally massive breadth and depth of its critical appreciation are rare, though not unprecedented in the history of literature.

Ngungi, I would argue, deserves the appellation of third world post-colonial writer. His third world post-colonialism is very empirical, moving the centre of decolonisation from the particular, (e.g. the body, to the abstract, the mind rather than vice versa. He fails to transcend in the sense that this third world postcolonial practise is technically secularised.) Ngungi's third world post-colonialism is based in a world of intentional transgression for the purposes of decolonisation. His post-colonial world, in that sense, is situated on the tension of binary opposition, imposing a unitary value in one direction. This is a consequence of Ngungi's understanding that contemporary Africa is not a postcolonial space, but a neo-colonial space, in which his intentional binarism is strategically required. This makes Ngungi a typical third world postcolonial writer whose writings are full of political experiment aimed towards total decolonisation. Accordingly, Ngungi's postcolonial pluralism, on the surface, is plural only in the technical and experimental sense of the word.

Ngungi's third world post-colonialism must be understood as a temporal and spontaneous experiment until the time when neo-colonial Africa is transformed into a real postcolonial world. His experiment in writing will not cease until the third world becomes an equal dialogic partner with the

first world in searching for an ideal alternative to decolonisation. In that sense, Ngungi's postcolonial experiment simultaneously displays weak and strong points in decolonising the third world. The strength of his approach lies in his appeal to the collective political unconscious of the third world. The weakness can be identified as the future to break the vicious master-slave dialectic. He is not alone in this conundrum. Contemporary postcolonial critics, specifically those from the first world suffer from the same dilemma. This will be explored further in following chapters.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### POST COLONIAL INTERROGATION IN COLONIAL TIMES:

#### *WEEP NOT, CHILD AND THE RIVER BETWEEN*

#### INTRODUCTION

In *Weep Not child* and *The River Between*, Ngungi wa Thiong'o introduces a very interesting perspective on post-colonialism. In these works he examines coloniality from a first world postcolonial perspective. The diversity Ngungi displays in his interrogation of coloniality follows the prerequisites set out by first world post-colonialism. First world post-colonialism often prioritises super-structural ways of interrogation, to the subordination of base-oriented analysis. In other words, an approach that criticizes and interrogates the colonial society primarily as a cultural entity is regarded as a more appropriate and effective decolonising practice than the one that focuses primarily on economic and political concerns.

The real value of Ngungi's interrogation of coloniality can, however, paradoxically enough, be found in his future to realise the limitations of the superstructural approach. This chapter aims to analyse Ngungi's postcolonial interrogation on coloniality through the binary tensions between land/education, tribe or tribalism/nation or modernity, intellects/masses,

race/economy and base superstructure which emphasises his first world approach for decolonisation.

## NGUGI AND FIRST WORLD ASPIRATIONS

Ngungu's adoption of the first world approach to coloniality can be seen in these early narratives which infuse colonial education with hope and ambition. Thus, in *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*, we see Ngungu's conviction that education, in the long run, can provide a tool for liberation. Through the mouth of his character, Chege, in *The River Between*, Ngungu delineates the value of education in the colonial setting, going so far as to suggest that education could replace armed struggle as the primary tool for liberation:

Chege did not see it as a contradiction that he, the embodiment of the true Gikuyu, should have sent his son to the very missionary centre whose existence he had always opposed. But what did it matter? He had warned the people. They had refused to take up arms. It might have been too late now to take up arms. Luckily there were ways of beating the white man. For the prophecy still held good. In its fulfilment lay the hopes of the people. He had learnt a lesson and he taught it to his son. It is good to be wise in the affairs of the white man.

(Ngungu 1965: 38)

The quote suggests that Chege finds colonialism to have progressed to such an extent that the armed struggle has become too risky. It exacts too high a payment as the white man hold more military power than the Gikuyu. Thus he turns from direct confrontation to the possibility of indirect confrontation through education. He thinks that what is primarily needed for his people is

“an instrument of enlightenment and advancement” through colonial education. (Ngungi 1965: 119). Chege argues that white education, if well used, can be a tool for long-term liberation. Hence he orders his son to go to the mission place. For “ you could not cut the butterflies with a panga. You could not spear them until you learnt and new their ways of movement” (Ngungi 1965: 20).

Ngotho, in *Weep Not, Child*, shares this belief in the power of education and instils it in his son, Njogore:

Njongore listened to his father. He instinctively new that an indefinable demand was being made on him even though he was young. He new that for him education would be the fulfilment of a wider and more significant vision-a vision that embraced the demand made on him, not only by his father, but also by his mother, his brothers and even the village. He saw himself destined for something big, and this made his heart glow.

(Ngungi 1964: 39)

Nevertheless, Chege and Ngotho are not unconditional admirers of white education. They append the following warnings to their encouragements. Chege says, “Do not follow his (the white man’s) vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites” (Ngungi 1965: 20). On the other hand Ngotho warns “you must learn to escape the conditions under which we live. It is a hard way. It is not much that a man can do without a piece of land” (Ngungi 1964: 39). Therefore, their interest in western education reflects their desire for the appropriation if it in order to adapt it according to the needs of their people. They intuitively know that, to the colonized, the appropriation of the colonizer’s power and knowledge, albeit in a diluted form, is crucial to the process of decolonisation.

## APPROPRIATION OF POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

Power and knowledge are interconnected. In the colonial setting, the western school plays a vital role as a colonial institution that systematically distorts the history of the colonized. Ngungi, therefore, does not accept it unreservedly but highlights how education in the classical colonial era affected the self-determination of the colonised.

In the era of classical colonialism, this mental control was affected through the confined walls of the colonial school. But generally there was a systematic assaults on people's languages, literature, dances, names, history, skin colour, religions, indeed their every tool of self-definition. In their place were imposed the languages, literatures, religions, names, histories of the colonising nations and classes.

(Ngungi 1993: 51)

Such colonial education effectively induces brainwashing and leads to the colonized accepting the invented truth that "he had no history" and "the black man did not exist, had slept in the dark continent until the Livingstones and the Stanelys woke him into history through a mixture of piety and violence, the bible and the gun" (Ngungi 1972a: 41). The distortion of the history of the colonised has a long tradition. As Edward Said indicated in *Orientalism*, it is linked to the desire to separate "the same" from "the other". Explaining why the Orient, which was "an integral part of European material civilisation and culture", became transformed into "[Europe's] contrasting image, idea, personality, experience," Said proposes "the myth of Eurocentrism" as an answer (Said 1978: 2). He argues that this "myth of

Eurocentrism” introduced the idea of Orient as Europe’s “deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (Said 1978: 1).

Said asserts that the invention of the “other” is an act performed by an imperial elite for two purposes. Firstly, to give greater authority to their own culture and, simultaneously, to justify the colonisation of the ‘other’. As an example, he refers to Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena*, in which Bernal speculates that Greek culture, far from being pure, was formed out of syncretic mix with that of the Egyptians (Said 1993: 15-16). The purity of Greek culture, according to Bernal was invented and manipulated by the imperial elite in order to serve their own objectives. Here we observe the critical connection between truth and power as the powers assert the truth according to their own needs.

This connection between power and truth was critically observed by Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. In the *Genealogy of morals*, Nietzsche insists that the European myth of logocentrism, based on ‘truth’, ‘reason’, ‘presence’, and ‘science’, is all fiction and is controlled by a power that operates behind the scenes. He explains that the European philosophy could not effectively interrogate the fictitious ‘truth’ because of the widely held belief of nineteenth-century European narrative that truth was absolute:

Turn in this context to the most ancient and the most modern philosophers: they all fail to realise the extent of the need of a justification on the part of the will for truth- here is a gap in every philosophy – what is it caused by? Because up to the present ascetic ideal dominated philosophy, because truth was fixed as being, as God, as the supreme court of appeal, because truth was not allowed to be a problem. Do you understand this “allowed”? From the minute that the belief in the God of the ascetic ideal is repudiated, there exists a new problem: the problem of the value of the truth.

(Nietzsche 1910: 197-198)

Michel Foucault, who was greatly influenced by Nietzsche, also draws attention to the links between power and truth. Foucault states, in *Power/Knowledge*, that “truth is not the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves”. Rather he insists that “truth is a thing of his world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constrain”, which induces regular effects of power (Foucault 1997: 131)

#### **IDENTITY AND TRADITION AS A FILTERING SYSTEM**

It is significant that two of Ngungi’s characters, Chenge and Ngotho, who were both deeply invested in the land Giyuku tradition, simultaneously emphasize ‘appropriation’ of the secret of colonial power education. This colonial power – education – must, however, be filtered through the social context of the colonised in order to allow for the true appropriation if it. Ngungi uses tradition as a filter to ‘filiate’ and affiliate the power and knowledge structure of the colonizers, but a conflictual tension remains between indigenous and the foreign. Arguing from the Caribbean context, C. L. R. James, in *The Black Jacobins*, warns that a complete acceptance of foreign culture (i.e. without appropriating it through the filter of the local context) results in a perfect imitation of the colonizer’s values. The situation James draws upon is one which the local culture has been destroyed, leaving the inhabitants without any protective buffer when they encounter the colonizer’s culture.

The West Indies has never been traditional colonial territory with clearly distinguished economic and political relations between two different cultures. Native culture there was one. The aboriginal Amerindian civilization had been destroyed. Every succeeding year, therefore, saw the labouring population, slave or free, incorporating into itself more and more of the language, customs, aims, and outlook of its masters.

(James 1963: 405)

It is important to note that James was a major influence in Ngungi's thinking. In *Moving the Centre*, Ngungi says that if he could make every black person read one book on the history of black people in the west, that would have to be C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (Ngungi 1993: 142). Ngungi explores this act of appropriation – filtering western education through the Giyuku value system – in his analyses of circumcision in *The River Between*, presenting circumcision as one of the best typologies of traditional filtering systems. Chege seeks his tribal identity by diluting colonial values into his own beliefs on local traditional rites and practices. Muthoni, on the other hand wants to find a sexual identity as a real tribal woman in a community plagued by division between Christian/Western values and local Giyuku values. She explains her feelings to her sister, Nyambura, as follows:

'Look please, I – I want to be a woman. I want to be a real woman, knowing all the ways of life of the hills and ridges'

'But father, remember him'

'Why! Are we fools?' She shook Nyambura. 'Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes, the white man's God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills, that you and I know.'

(Ngugi 1965: 26)

Here we see Muthoni trying to integrate both the colonizer's value systems and those of the Gikuyu. On the one hand, she, like her parents, has embraced the white man's faith, namely Christianity. On the other hand, she admits that the white man's God does not quite satisfy her. While Christianity regards female circumcision as anathema, for Muthoni only circumcision described as the traditional rite of passage where she learns the ways of the tribe can provide with identity after which she yearns: the identity of a Gikuyu woman. Ultimately, she is unable to integrate these and, tragically, falls between the two conflicting values.

Zavalloni, quoted in W.J.J. Schipper *et al*, introduces an interesting analysis on the creation of 'personal identity.' He states that "personal identity develops by way of personal interaction with the sociocultural environment." Personal identity, he proceeds to argue, is constructed on the bases of two sets of data: "first-order data" such as nationality, sex, religion, occupation and so on – and "second-order data" internalized images, collective memories and traditions handed down from one generation to the next. He adds that the latter is more important than the former in deciding "personal identity" (Schipper et al 1990: 21-22).

Muthoni's search for identity, as can be seen in the passage quoted above, is dominated by the "second-order data." In that sense, her decision to be circumcised is not a religious treason, nor heroic transgression, but a reflection of her normal desire to remain as a Gikuyu woman:

'No one will understand. I say I am a Christian and my father and mother have followed the new faith. I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe. How can I possibly remain as I am now? I knew that my father would not let me and so I came.' Her voice seemed to change. Yet she was speaking in the same tone. Waiyaki, however, felt as if she had forgotten him, as if she was telling her story to the darkness. 'I want to be a woman. Father and mother are circumcised. But why are they stopping me, why do they deny me this? How could I be outside the tribe, when all the girls born with me at the same time have left me?'

(Ngugi 1965: 43-44)

These words clearly indicate the social function of circumcision as an ideological code of symbolic unity. The following statements play the same role: "circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of the social structure, and something that gave meaning to a man's life" (Ngugi 1965: 68). This does not mean that a tradition such as circumcision, which Ngugi uses for ideological reasons, is necessarily good or pure in itself. Ngugi, thus, shifts the blame onto the Joshua group who also seeks a religious purity in relation to Christianity. The belief that an important religion, which fails to consider people's traditional roots, is useless is expressed by Waiyaki:

For Waiyaki knew that not all the ways of the white man were bad. Even his religion was not essentially bad. Some good, some truth shone through it. But the religion, the faith, needed washing, cleaning away all the dirt, leaving only the eternal. And that eternal that was truth had to be reconciled to the traditions of people. A people's traditions could not be swept away overnight. That way lay disintegration. Such a tribe would have no roots, for a people's roots were in their traditions going back to the past, the very beginning, Gikuyu and Mumbi. A religion that took no count of people's way of life, a religion that did not recognise sports of beauty and truths in their way of life, was useless. It would not satisfy. It would not be a living experience, a source of life and vitality. It would

only main a maim a man's soul, making him fanatically cling to whatever promised security, otherwise he would be lost. Perhaps that was what was wrong with Joshua. He had clothed himself with a religion decorated and smeared with everything white. He renounced his past and cut himself away from those life-giving traditions of the tribe.

(Ngugi 1965: 141)

Waiyaki expresses a desire to reconcile the religion of the colonizer with the traditions of the colonised. He does not wish to dismiss either but is willing to acknowledge the benefits and truth of each. He, thus, acknowledges that some good and some truth shone through the "white man's religion". But he realizes, also, the importance of not abandoning one's roots. For, the life-giving traditions of the tribe are what cement the social unity. It may be that Waiyaki is echoing Ngungi's own desire for reconciliation between these two antagonistic oppositions. If so, Ngungi appears to be advocating and searching for a synthesis between the two. This desire can be seen in the following quotation, where Waiyaki addresses the elders in *The River Between*:

"I too am concerned with the purity of the tribe. I am also concerned with the growth and development of the ridges. We cannot do this through hatred. We must be united, Christians and non-Christians, Makuyu or Kamenyo. For salvation of the hills lies in our hands."

(Ngugi 1965: 127-128)

Structurally, Waiyaki's speech is interesting. He first acknowledges the elder's concerns and emphasises that he shares these concerns before expanding upon their common desire to avoid war and bloodshed. Once having set the ground work in place, the solution he presents of achieving

unity between the oppressed parties follows as a logical conclusion towards the attainment of a common goal: salvation of the hills.

But Ngungi perhaps realizes that Waiyaki's tactic of keeping an equidistance from both parties, and of aspiring towards syncretism and reconciliation, is too romantic. Waiyaki's failure to harmonize the two sides at the end of the novel, and the personal peril and destruction which has led him to, is proof of this point. As Wole Ogundele argues, perhaps the failure of Waiyaki's "efforts at reconciling the Christian and the traditional communities, at this early stage in the encounter, is a historical one" (Ogundele 1995:120). Moreover, it seems that Ngungi does not know how to evade this vicious circle. Waiyaki's failure to alienate himself from this either-or situation may be because of his lack of recognition that the reactions of both the Kabonyi group and the Joshua group are related to colonialism. This argument is supported by Abdull JanMohamed who, in *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*, compares Ngungi's antinomous emotivism on African traditions with Achebe's objective examination:

The point is that Ngungi's interpretation tends to romanticize the relations between the two cultures. This kind of idealization implies an inability, or at least an unsuccessful effort, to extricate oneself from the effective aspects of the negative influence, from the resentment caused by colonial denigration. It is ironic that Achebe, who deliberately and systematically examines the complexities of negative influence, has successfully disengaged himself from the affective quagmire of this dialectic, while Ngungi, who feels that African writers are too preoccupied with their past, seems to have been initially unable to do so.

(JanMohamed 1983:186)

It is true that Ngungi seems to be cautious in his efforts to celebrate equilibrium between these two tensions, not to be naively inclined in any one direction. Nevertheless, in reality his idealization does show some predilection for the past. Waiyaki's response to the repetitive visit of Muthoni's image to his thinking as a pivotal force to motivate his action may illustrate this. For Waiyaki, Muthoni is a kind of incarnation or an alter-ego, psychologically speaking, who bravely portrays herself as a respectable canon of reconciliation:

Muthoni had tried. Hers was a search for salvation for herself. She had the courage to attempt to reconciliation of the many forces that wanted to control her. She had realised her need, the need to have a wholesome and beautiful life that enriched you and made you grow. His father, too, had tried to reconcile the two ways, not in himself, but through his son. Waiyaki had realised many things. Circumcision of women was not important as a physical operation. It was what it did inside a person. It could not be stopped overnight. Patience and, above all, education, were needed

(Ngungi 1965: 142)

In spite of the lesson learned from Muthoni, who has created a physical basis for reconciliation in her attempt to combine Christianity and tribal womanhood, Waiyaki still believes that in the long term only super-structural education can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.

### **SUPERSTRUCTURE AND THE LONG REVOLUTION**

G.D. Killam proposes that "the dream of education" is a weakness. Even after "Njogore's acquisition of western education is the mean to a better future – of acquiring the understanding of the white man and thus achieving what he has achieved, of re-acquiring the land. But little is made of this" (Killam 1980: 49) Killam's criticism could not be summarized as follows: Njoroje did not fully understand the meaning of "land".

Killam highlights a further weakness of this work, namely the "creation of Njoroge" as a dreamer:

The creation of Njoroge is the weakest part of the book. Njoroge, we are told, 'had always been a dreamer, a visionary who consoled himself faced by the difficulties of the moment by a look at a better day to come.' This represents a weakness in the character and, by implication, in his creator. Often throughout the book he retreats into vague phrases, a measure of his inability to control, at the age he is, his destiny. Often throughout the novel he is powerless to act and does not want to contemplate the possible consequences of certain hard facts that have to be faced. Ngugi gives Njoroge more to do than a youth of his age can do and more to understand than a youth with his limited intellect can cope with.

(Killam 1980: 48)

Killam's criticisms need to be examined more closely. If these weaknesses are considered from other perspectives such as that of postcolonialism, new interpretations become possible. I believe that Ngugi paradoxically achieves success in his characterisation of Njoroge by taking advantage of these two 'faults' (that he is a dreamer and somewhat of a coward). Firstly, it sounds plausible that Ngugi's "dream of education" may seem very naive in a colonial situation where liberation struggles concentrated on armed struggle, that of the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army for example. However, the fact that Ngugi introduces and highlights another type of superstructural struggle such as the cultural struggle, based on the colonial education system, makes one realize that his postcolonial imagination has its origins in colonialism itself. Raymond Williams, in *The Long Revolution*, argued that it is effective to cultivate "a structure of feeling" by means of cultural education, with the intention of creating a long-term revolution. Without such "a structure of feeling," communally shared by a people, it is

difficult to create a counter-hegemony. For Ngugi himself education means such a process of creating "a structure of feeling" as a counter-hegemony. Furthermore, Ngugi is not rejecting any hope of a land-based liberation. This can easily be illustrated by Ngugi's statements, via his characters such as Ngotho, Boro and even Mr. Howlands, on the land issue. In this sense, then, Ngugi may be regarded as a postcolonial writer in that he interrogates coloniality and colonial logic based on a manichean opposition between self and other, colonizer and colonized by effectively avoiding the trap of propagating and endorsing such a dualistic and oppositional discursive system.

Secondly, concerning Njoroge's so-called cowardice, one could argue that Ngugi is again successfully dodging the colonial binary system in order to escape from its logic. Njoroge's cowardice or indecisiveness with regard to making decisions, if reinterpreted, could be understood as an attitude caused by a cosmological confusion, created by a colonial environment. The colonial world is trapped between two competing sets of values, the traditional value and the colonizer's. This conflict places the native in a double bind, which is well-expressed by JanMohamed in the following extract:

Even the very option to emulate the European puts the native in a double bind: if he chooses conservatively and remains loyal to his indigenous culture, then he opts to stay in a calcified society whose developmental momentum has been checked by colonization. If, however, the colonized person chooses assimilation, then he is trapped in a form of historical catalepsy because colonial education severs him from his own past and replaces it with the study of the colonizer's past. Thus deprived of his own culture and prevented from participating in that of the colonizer, the native loses his sense of historical direction and soon his initiative as well.

(JanMohamed 1983: 5)

Njoroge's cowardice, I argue, should be understood in this context. I suggest, therefore, that Njoroge is not a representative character of a particular kind of youth who "represents a weakness in the character and, by implication, in the creator" but represents instead a commonly recognisable youth whom we could easily encounter in the real world, especially in the colonial world. Moreover we should understand his powerlessness in relation to his age. Killam does so, but fails to fully grasp the significance of the point. Njoroge is an immature juvenile, physically and intellectually, and is therefore not entirely in "control of his destiny." How could a youth like Njoroge, who received a missionary education with its accompanying hopes and expectations, face the antinomial reality of colonial society without displaying hesitation in action? Clearly, he embodies the native, described so aptly in the above passage by JanMohamed. As an example, consider an aspect of colonial education which influenced Njoroge not to "act" hastily against the colonial government:

There was a lot of shouting in the room. Then one boy whispered: 'Teacher. Hush!' There was silence in the room. The teacher came in. He was always on time. Njoroge was often surprised by these missionaries' apparent devotion to their work. One might have thought that teaching was to them life and death. Yet they were white men. They never talked of colour; they never talked down to Africans; and they could work closely, joke, and laugh with their black colleagues who came from different tribes. Njoroge at times wished the whole country was like this. This seemed a little paradise, a paradise where children from all walks of life and of different religious faiths could work together without any consciousness.

(Ngugi 1964: 115)

This is a fascinating passage that raises several important issues. First

of these is the palpable sense of authority that surrounds the teacher figure: 'a respectful hush falls over the room when he enters.' Secondly, Njoroge is shown to be impressed by these missionaries' apparent devotion to their work, their belief in the value of education and their punctuality and steadfast endeavour. These are all clearly portrayed as positive qualities. Yet the phrase, 'one might have thought teaching was to them life and death,' does suggest that these qualities, if taken to the extreme, become negative. The third point that this passage raises is that, despite the fact that the teachers are white men, they appear to be standing outside of racial or racist awareness. Here, in the school, we find a well-integrated society where white teachers easily accept and interact with their African colleagues and scholars. The effect created is truly that of a paradise. But this effect is immediately undermined by the qualifier, 'seemed.' The final words, 'without any consciousness,' serve to puncture and deflate this idealised picture. The implication that we are left with is that the children, through their participation in this world, have lost their consciousness, have lost awareness of who they really are. They have, in other words, lost their personal, individual as well as their tribal and cultural identity through immersion in this environment (Sicherman 1995: 46).

Returning to Killam's argument, one wonders what the phrase "powerless to act" means when he claims that "throughout the novel he[Njoroge] is powerless to act." Killam's a priori conception of 'act' is problematic. It suggests that Killam's 'act' is predetermined in a concrete way. It is a physical struggle. But if we can extend the

meaning of 'act' in the colonial sense to that of postcolonial discourse then, in my opinion, Njoroge is still struggling, in the cultural sense of the word.

#### DOUBLE-BINDED COLONIAL SUBJECT

Bhabha, in "Signs Taken for Wonders," proposes an interesting explanation of how the double-binded colonial subject is able to utilize the ambivalence of 'mimicry' as a strategic tactic to undermine colonial society. He states that 'mimicry' has two meanings: 'resemblance' and 'menace.' Classically, 'mimesis' implies a subject's perfect imitation of an object (whether it be another person, or an activity or behaviour). Bhabha's 'mimicry,' however, represents a partly imitating and partly menacing approach. By unifying these ambivalent 'acts,' the colonial subject simultaneously imitates and threatens the colonizer (Bhabha 1994: 112). Bhabha, in "Of Mimicry and Man," interprets the philosophical function of 'mimicry' as a mode of colonial discourse as follows:

The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.

(Bhabha 1994: 86)

A second essay of Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonder," finds a deconstructive power in 'mimicry,' based on its indeterminacy which ultimately leads to a hybridized identity. He reveals how hybridity operates as a subversive discourse in composing colonial identity. He states that "hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It

displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination." He adds that hybridity "unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identification in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power" (Bhabha 1994: 112). However, Bhabha's hybridity has no such perspective of depth or truth to provide: "it is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures in a dialectical play." Furthermore, it "does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself: it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid" (Bhabha 1994: 113-114).

It may be possible to recognize and reinterpret Njoroge's weakness as being the result of a hybridized split of 'self' and its 'doubling' in the colonial environment. His 'action' or inability to act could also be extended to the level of struggling against the colonial power. Thus it may be argued that Ngugi succeeds in describing a split colonial subject who interrogates the hybridity of colonial society from the postcolonial perspective.

#### LAND AND DECOLONIZATION

In comparison with his later novels, for example *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, one observes that in his first two novels Ngugi places too much emphasis on superstructural approaches such as education for liberation. But it is also important to note that he consistently shows an interest in the 'base-related movement' such as those centered around the land. This suggests that Ngugi has tried to interrogate coloniality organically, by imagining every possible means of

decolonization and approaching the topic from many angles. He is, in other words, dialectically synthesizing base-related and superstructure-related possibilities.

In his collection of essays, *Homecoming*, Ngugi refutes a general idea widely held by African intellectuals, artists and politicians, that "cultural liberation is an essential condition for political liberation." He states that "it is wrong to think of culture as prior to politics. Political and economic liberation are the essential condition for cultural liberation, for the true release of a people's creative spirit and imagination" (Ngugi 1972a: 11). Ngugi has thus inverted the commonly held causal logic that cultural liberation precedes economic liberation. He goes one step further in order to redefine the meaning of culture in the following terms: "A meaningful culture is the one born out of the present hopes and especially the hopes of an impoverished peasantry, and that of the growing body of urban workers" (Ngugi 1972a: 12). These words may be directed at naive African thinkers such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, who believes that culture is the only means for liberation in the colonial setting.

Needless to say, Ngugi realizes the importance of economic and political liberation in the colonial setting as a means of decolonization for the colonizer and colonized. It can be argued that his concern about the 'land' issue is a kind of indirect expression of his interest in economic and political liberation. Kiarie's wrath against his forefathers, in *Weep Not, Child*, could be understood as Ngugi's recognition of the value of land:

Kiarie spoke first, in a low, sad voice and recounted history. All the land belonged to the people - black people. They had been given it by God. For every race had their country. The Indians had India. Europeans had Europe. And Africans had Africa, the land of the black people. (*Applause*) Who did not know that all the soil in this part of the country had been given to Gikuyu and Mumbi and their posterity? (*More applause*) He told them how the land had been taken away, through the Bible and the sword. 'Yes, that's how your land was taken away. The Bible paved the way for the sword.' For this, he blamed the foolish generosity of their forefathers who pitied the stranger and welcomed him with open arms into their fold.

(Ngugi 1964: 57)

Like those offered by the other effective speakers in this novel, Kiarie's speech is carefully structured and rhetorically powerful. He moves step by step, presenting his case in a clear and logical fashion. Beginning with a commonly held assumption, that the land is a gift from god, he refers to a natural order of each to its own. In his delineation of this order he relies on sweeping generalisations that evoke a pan-African vision. The implication being that it is in accordance with the natural scheme of things, and the will of god, that the Gikuyu should have their own land, Kiarie uses rhetorical devices to good effect. Who did not know, he questions rhetorically, that all the soil in this part of the country had been given to Gikuyu and Mumbi and their posterity? This suggests a self-evident truth to the audience and enforces the group value system. But it is not only the Gikuyu and Africans who display a deep devotion to African land; so too do the white settlers, as depicted by Ngugi. The following passage illustrates Mr. Howlands' almost spiritual investment in the land (and he is certainly not named inadvertently):

Mr Howlands lost all faith - even the few shreds that had begun to return.

He would again have destroyed himself, but again his god, land, came to the rescue. He turned all his efforts and energy into it. He seemed to worship the soil. At times he went on for days with nothing but a few cups of tea. His one pleasure was in contemplating and planning the land to which he had now given all his life.

(Ngugi 1964: 31)

Mr Howlands' desires concerning land are strong, like those of Ngotho, his indigenous farm worker who "touched the soil, almost fondling" it, and who "tended the young tea plants as if they were his own" (Ngugi 1964: 30). Mr Howlands likes Ngotho because of the latter's love of the land. At the same time, Mr Howlands feels a "certain amount of victory" over Ngotho and the land itself, because he tamed the "unoccupied wilderness," discarded by the indigenous inhabitants (Ngugi 1964: 31). On the contrary to the position propounded by Howlands, we can note that the land actually forms an integral part of the psychic identity of the native and is far from discarded or unoccupied. David Spurr, in *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, shows how the rhetoric of the "unoccupied wilderness," used by colonialists such as Mr Howlands, was utilized in the service of colonial discourse. As an example of such rhetoric, he introduces Darwin's description of "Patagonia," the wilderness:

They are characterized only by negative possessions; without habitations, without water, without trees, without mountains ... Why then, and the case is not peculiar to myself, have these arid wastes taken so firm possession of the memory? ... I can scarcely analyze these feelings: but it must be partly owing to the free scope given to the imagination.

(Spurr 1993: 94)

Spurr explains how Darwin's space of absence is more connected with

modern tropes and how it comes to be filled with the presence of distortions concerning the colonized landscape. Spurr adds that "Darwin's image of a vast nothingness in Patagonia serves his official purpose, which one might call the colonization of the natural world by scientific knowledge" (Spurr 1993: 94). Another critic, Christopher Miller, argues that the strategic meanings of "the biggest, the most blank" or "blank space on the earth," described in *Heart of Darkness*, proposes a similar vision:

By means of this displacement of the referent, Africa is no longer bound in time and space, but becomes the figure of darkness and nothingness. This figure serves at least two functions: it transfers historical and geographical space onto metaphysical ground while, working from the other side, it transforms nothingness into the substantial unity of time and space embodied in narrative form. Conrad's achievement is precisely this "congealing of nothingness into a figure."

(Miller 1985: 176)

Both colonizer and colonized share a common interest in land, an interest based on their realization that appropriation of the land as a productive force may be the best way to negate or to recover the colonial identity. Fanon has argued that, for a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most concrete, is first and foremost the land. People want to control their soil, their land, the fruits of their labour-power acting on nature, to control their history made by their collective struggle with their natural and social environment. That is why the anti-colonial process is primarily an economic and political struggle and in essence it is incompatible with the economic structure of capitalism (Ngugi 1981b: 26).

Amilcar Cabral, in "National Liberation and Culture," outlines the importance of socio-economic struggle in terms of land as follows:

The principal characteristics, common to every kind of imperialist domination, is the negation of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violently usurping the free operation of the process of development of the productive forces. Now, in any given society, the level of development of the productive forces and the system for social utilization of these forces (the ownership system) determine the mode of production. In our opinion, the mode of production whose contradictions are manifested with more or less intensity through the class struggle, is the principal factor in the history of any human group, the level of the productive forces being the true and permanent driving power of history.

(Cabral 1973: 41-42)

It seems that Ngugi's understanding of land, in *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* is not particularly mature, compared to his later novels such as *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. This may be due to his inability to differentiate the land from the landscape. Ngugi's naivety in distinguishing the land from the landscape may be related to his heroic characterization in the first two novels. Waiyaki is the best example here. Waiyaki comes from the dominant class and it is difficult for him to understand the physicality of the land. As a hero and a saviour of people, he is encouraged to think differently. This makes him into a romantic figure, lonely and somewhat aloof from people's lives. Albert Gerard, in *Context of African Literature*, notes that the heroic protagonist and his symbolic link with the African landscape are two distinctive aspects which make *The River Between* peculiar in relation to the other Anglophone African novels (Gerard 1990: 100).

Ngugi's way of interpreting the land and landscape is very important. It is his understanding of them that decides the line of struggle. There

are two dimensions of struggle surrounding the land and the landscape in his first two novels. One represents the hard line epitomized by Boro and Kiarie in *Weep Not, Child* and Kabonyi in *The River Between*. They assert that recovery of the physical means of production of land and landscape by any means, including violence, is the only way to obtain liberation. The other is the liberal line such as that represented by Ngotho and Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child* and Chege and Waiyaki in *The River Between*. They believe that an appropriation of the ideological and symbolic meaning of land and landscape, though it might not appear so effective, would ultimately lead to a bloodless rehabilitation and decolonization of themselves.

Fortunately, the two schizophrenic visions about land and landscape which we find in the beginning of the two novels seem to be reconciled by the end, although such reconciliation takes the form of speculative reflection, rather than perfectly overcoming the heroic class consciousness of the protagonists in the two novels. Waiyaki recognizes that education is not the only path to liberation in *The River Between*:

'Look here, Kinuthia,' Waiyaki said after a long silence. 'Do something for me. Tomorrow I must speak to the people just before the sunset. Call a meeting at Honia river on the initiation ground. It is flat there. Get some people to help you spread the news. On every hill. I'll fight it out with Kabonyi in the open. For, Kinuthia, I cannot run away. New thoughts are coming into my mind. Things I might have done and said. Oh, there are so many things I did not know. I had not seen that the new awareness wanted expression at a political level. Education for an oppressed people is not all. But I must think. I must be alone.'

(Ngugi 1965: 138-139)

According to classical criticisms of Ngugi's works, his weakness in

*The River Between* can be attributed to Waiyaki's realization that other means of liberation are necessary; although no alternative to education is offered by the novels themselves. Even so, in my opinion, Ngugi does not entirely dismiss all superstructural methods of struggle, leaving scope for a wider range of possibilities. He also consistently queries whether an interrogation of colonial society based on violence is really effective. Waiyaki's failure in persuading his people of the necessity for and power of education at the end of the novel is puzzling and could be interpreted as a failure of postcolonial man, living in a colonial society. That is why Ngugi allows Waiyaki, even after his great awakening, to reaffirm his belief in education, as illustrated by the following passage:

Yes. The Kiama was right. People wanted action now. The stirrings in the hills were an awakening to the shame and humiliation of their condition. Their isolation had been violated. But what action was needed? What had he to do now? How could he organize people into a political organization when they were so torn with strife and disunity? Now he knew what he would preach if he ever got another chance: education for unity. Unity for political freedom. For a time this vision made his heart glow with expectation and new hope. He quickened his descent, wishing to come to the people and communicate this new vision. Education, Unity, Political Freedom.

(Ngugi 1965: 143)

Waiyaki begins by acknowledging that the people wanted action now. In the rest of the passage he tries to identify precisely what action would be the most appropriate under the circumstances. He concludes that education would be the most effective and appropriate; not just any education, but one which is directed in such a way that it will build unity among the many Gikuyu groupings. All of these groupings, it is suggested, need to become aware of the communality of their shared

experience as colonized. The ultimate aim of the unifying education is posited as being a common goal for all: political freedom.

But as we see in Waiyaki's circular return to the dream of a liberating education, characters such as Waiyaki as well as Njoroge do not show any development in action, even though they appear to be rounded characters who should be able to grow through their life experiences. Perhaps here we witness Ngugi's critique of the native intelligentsia, who received a colonial education.

#### COLONIAL EDUCATION AND INORGANIC INTELLIGENTSIA

In most of Ngugi's novels, native intelligentsia is described in similar ways. Typically, these characters are very transgressive in thinking but retroactive in action. By means of these static characters, Ngugi wants to show that knowledge enclosed in the brain, specifically a brain tamed by colonial education, will be used for the maintenance of the status-quo. Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child* is a typical intelligent native youth whose learning is not used for his action, but for his self-composure:

He knew the tree well. He had been there a number of times for the voice had often spoken to him many times after his father's death. The only thing that had restrained him was the hope that he might find an anchor in Mwhaki ... He had prepared the rope.

'Njoroge!'

He stopped. He laughed to himself hysterically. The rope hung from a tree and was still in his hands. He heard again the voice, full of anxiety.

'Njoroge!'

This time the voice was clear. And he trembled when he recognized its owner. His mother was looking for him. For a time he stood irresolute. Then courage failed him ...

But as they came near home and what had happened to him came to mind, the voice again came and spoke accusing him: *You are a coward. You have*

*always been a coward. Why didn't you do it?*

And loudly he said, 'Why didn't I do it?'

The voice said: *Because you are a coward.*

'Yes,' he whispered to himself. 'I am a coward.'

And he ran home and opened the door for his two mothers.

(Ngugi 1964: 135-136)

As a result of his ultimate failure in appropriating the white man's education to his people, Njoroge decides to kill himself. But even at the last moment of his decision to kill himself, his colonized brain does not allow him to put his thinking into action. With a little hesitation he regains his composure to run to his home and open the door for his two mothers. Kinuthia, too, in *The River Between*, presents a good example of a complicated learned man:

Kinuthia still retained his strong political views and was one of the people who believed in 'Action Now.' That was why in a way he admired Kabonyi and his Kiama. These too believed in action against the white man. But the Great Teacher's vision of a highly learned people carried him along. How could he resist the power of that vision, unrolled before him in Waiyaki's slow but powerful voice?

(Ngugi 1965: 117)

Ngugi's apparent antipathy towards the native intelligentsia may be related to his belief that learned men do not try to understand the people's aesthetics. Rather, they try to separate themselves from the daily experiences of people, accordingly composing a transcendental and peculiar dominant ideology of their own, which results in a deep chasm between intellectual and ordinary people. They finally disconnect from the people, becoming alienated and solipsistic. Fanon has pointed out this innate trend of native elites in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

[The elite] are creatures of the colonial regimes, and leaders of the western political parties; and also, for the most part, because they do not direct their propaganda towards the rural masses ... They do not go out to find the mass of the people. They do not put their theoretical knowledge to the service of the people; they only erect a framework around the people which follows an *a priori* schedule.

(Fanon 1963: 89)

As Fanon expresses it, the theoretical knowledge of the elite is worthless if it does not relate to the real lives of the colonized and function to alleviate their suffering. Ngugi's attitude to the intellectual is also related to his postcolonial method of interrogating coloniality. Ngugi expects third world intellectuals, who live in different geo-political arenas from those in the first world, to contribute dynamically to establishing new visions of tomorrow by uniting the cosmologies of the workers and the intellectuals as well as their experiences and aesthetics, as Antonio Gramsci's organic intellectuals are successfully doing. Fanon, too, though he partly criticized the generic fallacy of the native elite, did not deny the key role of elitism in the revolutionary process. He states that the intellectual and political elite must exist and unite to give leadership to the masses. In Fanon's view, as much as the masses need to be led into political activism as an uncompromising revolutionary force, they also need to be educated towards a proper political and cultural awareness. For, he believed that collectivism alone can only lead to a vicious circle. In *Moving the Center*, Ngugi describes the ideal type of intellectual worker in the third world as one who can draw a picture of the world in harmony with the needs of the forces of human destruction; or in harmony with the forces of resistance for human survival, creativity and renewal. He adds that intellectuals can represent the universe and its

workings in such a way as to instil fear, despondence and self-doubt in the oppressed while legitimising the world of the oppressor nations and classes as the norm. They can also create representations that instil clarity, strength and hope in the exploited and the oppressed, inspiring them to realise their visions of a new tomorrow (Ngugi 1993: 54). It is clear that Njoroge and Waiyaki, as the organic intellectuals of the third world, fit these criteria.

#### VIOLENCE AND INTERROGATION

Ngugi's abhorrence of the inorganic intelligentsia results in his shift to the other extreme, namely an acceptance of the use of violence, in a limited scope, as a tool for liberation, although it does not seem as if he shows a mature understanding of this in his first two novels. He seems to believe that violence is sometimes necessary to restore justice in the colonial setting. Hence his claim that "violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal, and diminishes man" (Ngugi 1972a: 28). Despite this, Ngugi does not advocate violence based on revenge, which, to him, does not contribute to freedom. This is illustrated in the following dialogue between Boro and his lieutenant in *Weep Not, Child*:

Boro had always told himself that the real reason for his flight to the forest was a desire to fight for freedom. But this fervour had soon worn off. His mission became a mission of revenge. This was the only thing that could now give him fire and boldness. If he killed a single white man, he was exacting a vengeance for a brother killed.

'And Freedom?' the lieutenant continued.

'An illusion. What Freedom is there for you and me?'

'Why then do we fight?'

'To kill. Unless you kill, you'll be killed. So you go on killing and destroying. It's a law of nature. The white man too fights and kills with gas, bombs, and everything.'

'But don't you think there's something wrong in fighting and killing unless you're doing so for a great cause like ours?'

'What great cause is ours?'

'Why, Freedom and the return of our lost heritage.'

'Maybe there's something in that. But for me Freedom is meaningless unless it can bring back a brother I lost. Because it can't do that, the only thing left to me is to fight, to kill and rejoice at any who falls under my sword. But enough. Chief Jacobo must die.'

(Ngugi 1964: 102-103)

A noble mission to liberate his people has degenerated into a revengeful violence. Moreover, it introduces a self-perpetrating spiral of violence for its own sake. This is violence that is not performed for a good or just cause, but simply for itself. Boro's vengeful violence is not seen as entirely reasonable in the eyes of his lieutenant. Through the eyes of Mr. Howlands is it seen as something quite "mad":

Boro's voice was flat. No colour of hatred, anger or triumph. No sympathy.

'Nothing.'

'Nothing. Now you say nothing. But when you took our ancestral lands—'

'This is my land.' Mr Howlands said this as a man would say, This is my woman.

'Your land!' Then, you white dog, you'll die on your land.'

Mr Howlands thought him mad. Fear overwhelmed him and he tried to cling to life with all his might. But before he could reach Boro, the gun went off. Boro had learnt to be a good marksman during the Second World War. The white man's trunk stood defiant for a few seconds. Then it fell down.

(Ngugi 1964: 128-129)

Ngugi's philosophy on violence seems to be influenced by that of Fanon who articulated his revolutionary theory from his experiences of the Algerian struggle as a psychiatrist, although Ngugi, in his first two novels at least, is much less radical than Fanon. Fanon argued that the

colonial victim can only free himself from oppression by a socialist revolution and that the revolution must be achieved by violence. For Fanon, the instrument of the revolution will not, as in the case of traditional Marxist thinking, be the urban proletariat, but the poor peasants, the wretched of the earth. There is both a psychological and political basis for this philosophy as encapsulated in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The medical experiences conveyed in *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks* led Ngugi to adopt Fanon's view that the victim of colonialist violence could win back his manhood and his emotional wholeness only by using violence himself.

#### RACE AND BODY POLITIC

Understanding violence in the colonial context is very important in interrogating coloniality from a postcolonial point of view, for one's attitude to violence decides the direction of one's action thereafter. And through thinking about violence, one can indirectly sketch one's way of interrogation concerning colonial society. Returning to Ngugi, we note that, unlike Fanon, his analysis of violence seems to focus on 'race'; the violence which is inscribed on the colonized body. He believes that an understanding of the function of 'race' is crucial if we are to explain the real motive of the colonizer's distortion of the image of the colonized. This is well represented in Ngugi's first two novels. Firstly, one can look at his understanding of the physical tactics of the body politics used by Mr Howlands in *Weep Not, Child*:

If Mau Mau claimed the only thing he believed in, they would see! Did they want to drive him back to England, the forgotten land! They were mistaken. Who were black men and Mau Mau anyway, he asked for the thousandth time? Mere savages! A nice word - savages. Previously he had not thought of them as savages or otherwise, simply because he had not thought of them at all, except as a part of the farm - the way one thought of donkeys or horses in his farm except that in the case of donkeys and horses one had to think of their food and a place for them to sleep.

(Ngugi 1964: 77)

Here we see Mr. Howlands inscribing the epistemic violence of labelling into the racially marked body. The black men become metonymically linked to savages and farm animals through the body politic of racial differentiation. Secondly, one can view Ngugi's reasoning in terms of how he interrogates the sublimation of the body politic, which transfers into the metaphysical sphere. This is reflected in a form of cultural chauvinism by Livingstone, the head of the Mission, in *The River Between*. Livingstone, unlike other missionaries, is the man who "was determined to learn the customs of the natives and not repeat the mistakes of the missionaries of the earlier generation who had caused tribal warfare and civil strife because they could not appreciate the importance of tribal customs" (Ngugi 1965: 56). But even such a liberal humanist ultimately does not go beyond his preconception of the body politic operating at a metaphysical level:

In this spirit he had attended some of the dances on the eve of circumcision. But he was horrified beyond measure. The songs he heard and the actions he saw convinced him beyond any doubt that these people were immoral through and through. He was thoroughly nauseated and he never went to such another dance. Circumcision had to be rooted out if there was to be any hope of salvation for these people. Livingstone was a man of moderation and advocated gradual methods of eradicating the custom.

(Ngugi 1965: 56)

Even though the last sentence points to a moderate, gradual colonization, typical of the liberal humanist approach, the final outcome will be identical to that achieved by force and outright displays of power: the customs of the native will be rooted out. As can be seen above, Ngugi seems satisfied with his attempt to base an interpretation of the body politic on that of a 'race' confrontation, whether it remained in the physical world or the metaphysical world.

Ngugi's contribution with regard to body politic can be found in his acute insights concerning another side of that ideology: the serious side-effects that arise from it among both blacks and whites. Ngugi, in other words, began to realize the danger of reality in which the function of the body politic created by whites becomes equally applicable when utilized by blacks against each other. This results in a situation in which the colonized begin to see themselves through the filtered version of the body politic invented by the colonizer, without recognizing their entrapment in the colonizer's symbolic economy. This phenomenon is illustrated in the following passage from *Weep Not, Child*:

At the barber's shop was a large crowd of people. The barber who had sat next to Ngotho was retelling the whole incident. This was a few days after the affair.

'The old man is brave.'

'He is that, to be sure.'

'Was he badly hurt?'

'No, except that much blood came out.'

'Why did he do it? His action caused the death of two men.'

'Ah, who could not have done as he did! I sat next to him, and I would have done the same thing. It would have been all right if it had been a white man, but a black man - like you and me! It shows that we black people will never be united. There must always be a traitor in our midst.'

'That's true, that's true!' several voices agreed.

(Ngugi 1964: 60)

Black people themselves are deploring the fact that "we black people will never be united" and "there must always be a traitor in our midst." Moreover, they come to the conclusion that "some Europeans are better than Africans" and "a white man is a white man. But a black man trying to be a white man is bad and harsh" (Ngugi 1964: 21). Williams interprets this extract with the following critique:

[F]irstly, it makes betrayal almost an inescapable existential fact for black people, rather than the historical result of the presence of colonialism and the divisive effect of its unequally distributed rewards and privileges. Secondly, not unlike the black people treat their own worse than whites do attitude, it places the blame on black people. Thirdly, it ignores the fact that the grounds for considering someone a traitor may be dangerously mutable.

(Williams 1998: 47)

### TRIBALISM AND NATION

The deprecation of blacks by blacks is successfully inscribed by the colonizer's body politics as tribalism. Tribalism is a very effective ideology created by the colonizer, always a minority group, in order to control and dominate the colonized majority by means of divide and rule policy. Ngugi, in *Decolonizing the Mind*, argues that the study of the African realities has for too long been seen through the lens of tribalism. On this model, knowledge about Africa is disseminated in the following format: whatever happens in Kenya, Uganda, Malawi is because of tension between *Tribe A* and *Tribe B*; whatever crisis erupts in Zaire, Nigeria, Liberia, Zambia is because of the traditional enmity between *Tribe C* and *Tribe D*. This misleading stock interpretation of the African

realities has been popularised by the western media, which tries to deflect attention away from imperialism as the root cause of the many problems besetting the continent (Ngugi 1986: 1).

As far as tribalism is concerned, Ngugi shows a fairly advanced attitude. To him, tribalism is propaganda, fictionalized by imperialists to camouflage their desire to control economic profits. Hence Ngugi's claim that "'tribe' is a special creation of the colonial regime." Going even further, Ngugi sunders the link between tribe and primordial, timeless and unchanging Africa in order to link it, explicitly, with access to resources: "there are only two tribes left in Africa: the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'" (Ngugi 1972: xvii). The use of tribal ideology in the attempt to turn all Africa into have-nots is shown in the following extracts from *Weep Not, Child*:

Mr Howlands despised Jacobo because he was a savage. But he would use him. The very ability to set these people fighting amongst themselves instead of fighting with the white men gave him an amused satisfaction.

(Ngugi 1964: 77)

The only thing that concerns Mr Howlands, after creating an atmosphere of tribal conflict, is the possible decrease of the labour force, as he states quite cynically. Beyond this concern, he delights in the role he has played in encouraging a tribal conflict that could lead to the decimation of whole villages (not to mention the scars left to plague Africa in the wake of Empire):

Mr Howlands felt a certain gratifying pleasure. The machine he had set in motion was working. The blacks were destroying the blacks. They would destroy themselves to the end. What did it matter with him if the blacks in

the forest destroyed a whole village? What indeed did it matter except for the fact that labour would diminish? Let them destroy themselves. Let them fight against each other. The few who remained would be satisfied with the land the white man had preserved for them.

(Ngugi 1964: 97)

Furthermore, Ngugi knows very well that tribalism enters into conflict with nationalism in the colonial or postcolonial arena. In the colonial or postcolonial atmosphere, national unity among tribal groups beyond any partial interests is urgently needed. Thus tribalism, which enshrines value in one particular tribe to the expense of others, is regarded as something that should be evaded.

However, tribalism is not necessarily antagonistic to nationalism when one considers it from the postcolonial point of view. The binary opposition between tribe and nation is an ideology created and maintained by the colonialists in the colonial times and perpetuated by what V. S. Naipaul has called the mimic men, men who devoted themselves to imitating their colonizer both physically and metaphysically in postindependence times. Tribe and nation, as Chinua Achebe pointed out, are just different forms of political organizations. If it is possible to create a new political unit from a tribe that can be appropriately harmonized within the African political context of postcoloniality, this would be ideal (Achebe from Morell 1975: 51-52). Ngugi's final recognition of the value of the tribe, as opposed to the tribalism introduced by colonialism, is very important from a postcolonial point of view. Ngugi, through his use of the term 'tribe,' is able to interrogate the implications of universality and particularity and search for an alternative that will harmonize those two polar views.

## CONCLUSION

As shown in the discussion above, Ngugi's first two novels, *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*, when compared to his later novels, are filled with the desire to find a countermeasure by which he can propose an ideal type of decolonization. In these two books, it seems that he attempted to avoid interrogating coloniality through the cliched binaries of centre/periphery, base/superstructure and universal/local. For, in this phase, Ngugi believed that there is no future in unresolved and unproblematized binary opposition. Therefore, whether he succeeds or not in offering an alternative to these binary structures, his attempt to evade their hopeless logic deserves commendation. His first two novels are structured according to binarities, allowing one to see through the oppositional structures of antagonism between land and education, tradition and modernity, tribe and nation, intellectuals and masses, "race" and economy, truth and fiction, and base and superstructure. Considering the fact that these binary structures are institutionally formulated and organized in the colonial setting by the dialogic imagination between colonizer and colonized, one can easily imagine the difficulties of extricating oneself from this vicious circle. In these first two novels Ngugi explores the possibility of breaking out of this circular structure of binary opposition by paradoxically encapsulating himself within this binary condition. It is this feature that makes his first two novels postcolonial works based on the colonial setting in that they clearly interrogate the issue and logic of coloniality. These two novels of Ngugi, compared to his later novels and plays, introduce a very

multi-dimensional perspective concerning postcolonial interrogation, though it is ultimately unsuccessful when considered in relation to his latter works. The failure arises out of his inability to understand the peculiarity of the (post)colonial third world, which is not compatible with a first world perspective. In his search for an ideal method of decolonization, Ngugi seems to depend too heavily on the superstructural levels of interrogating coloniality. He does, however, finally come to recognise that the first world postcolonial approach to coloniality is futile, unless the third world is equipped with its own particular approach to decolonization. This will be explored further in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### POSTCOLONIAL AESTHETIC EXPERIMENTS IN THE NOVEL:

#### *A GRAIN OF WHEAT AND PETALS OF BLOOD*

##### INTRODUCTION

In chapter two we saw that Ngugi's first two novels, *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*, were written largely in the standard narrative model of the Western canon. *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, in contrast, offers a far more Africanized writing style. Ngugi's experimental vision is, therefore, totally unrelated to avant-garde experimentation for experimentation's sake. Rather, his interest in experimentation arises out of his particularized interrogation of coloniality, neo-coloniality and postcoloniality through an Africanized style. Thus, in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi develops a model of an Africanized writing practice through aesthetic experiment. This practice might be termed self-conscious writing based on self-reflexive language. Ngugi interrogates the paradoxical status of post-independent Africa through his self-conscious examination of poliphony, language games, tension between politics and aesthetics, metahistorical interpretation on history, travel narrative, the body-politic, stereotypes and so on. The important point is that Ngugi's self-conscious writing is an indirect reflection of his concern for postcolonial decolonization.

## THE AFRICAN NOVEL AND DECANONIZATION

Charles R. Larson, in *The Emergence of African Fiction*, has noted that there are four different features in African novels: they lack dialogue; they rely on a different conception of plot; they frequently resort to a didactic ending; and, display a different conception of time. Taking into account these four 'typical' differences between African and European novels, he concludes that the differences of the African novel "can be attributed to cultural backgrounds." He adds that "in spite of the lack of several typical unities which are generally considered to hold the Western novel together, that is, to give it its structural background, the African writer has created new unities which give his fiction form and pattern" (Larson 1971: 18-20).

Ngugi's writing fits neatly into this framework as it satisfies Larson's two points. *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, as well as *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, are generally reputed to be based on a specific African cultural background, which naturally leads to an Africanized form of fiction. Ngugi's emphasis on the Africanized form of fiction is closely related to his conception of cultural decolonization through the writing practice. In the colonial period, African culture was denigrated and judged solely by western cultural standards. There was thus a tendency to suppress aspects of African culture that could not be reconciled with western culture.

For Ngugi, then, a truly decolonized and liberated African culture should radically break away from the domination of western standards. Ngugi's self-conscious novel-writing emerges from this background and

reflects an indirect exercise of his postcolonial aesthetic experiment. In *Moving the Center*, he points out the importance of basing one's cultural practice (in this case, novel-writing) on one's particular cultural background. For him, "culture carries the values, ethical, moral and aesthetic by which people conceptualise or see themselves and their place in history and the universe" (Ngugi 1993: 77). These values are the basis of a society's consciousness and outlook.

Thus, for Ngugi, novel-writing is an act of recovering a sense of belonging and self-identity that was lost or repressed under colonial conquest. All writing, whatever it is, cannot help being influenced by a writer's subjective values and standards. Therefore, the contemporary practice of judging African literature by western standards is not only invalid, it also potentially undermines an objective evaluation of the postcolonial aesthetic experiment of African writing. This state of affairs results out of the presupposition that there is only one absolute writing standard and that, of course, is the western standard. Consequently, African literature held in high regard by western critics tends to be that which most approximates western literature. Ngugi's idea of moving the center is related to his own decanonization of the Eurocentric prescription of standard writing.

Ngugi's decanonization comes to fruition in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. *A Grain of Wheat* displays an exemplary model of postcolonial transgressive narrative technique. As Larson states in his evaluation of Ngugi's narrative technique:

*A Grain of Wheat* is also one of the best examples of the African situational novel. Unlike Ngugi's two earlier books which mirrored the turmoil through one or two characters, *A Grain of Wheat* has no central character. Instead, there are six characters who play almost equally important parts in the checkboard development of the story itself, and at least another six whose parts are indispensable to the action and narrative thread of the story. If there is any main character in the novel, it is the village of Thabai itself - the communal consciousness.

(Larson 1971: 139)

According to Larson, Ngugi's collective narrative is invented to embrace a communal consciousness and enacts a shift away from the individual hero narrative that typifies the western canon. James Olney, in *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature*, terms this communal consciousness that Ngugi creates in his writing fictionalized ethnography, or the dramatized autobiography of a people. This, for him, is most clearly represented in the shift from an omniscient point of view to a first-person plural point of view in the description of the Uhuru celebration in *A Grain of Wheat*, as if to suggest that that event was a corporate, community affair to be presented in fiction as the experience of the entire group. (Olney 1973: 43-44). This shift is very important in understanding Ngugi's self-conscious writing. Ngugi actually abolishes the second person pronoun, 'you,' which he used so effectively in his first two novels, and replaces it with 'we,' to emphasize the communal experience. This desire to emphasize the communal experience is, however, not an entirely new development in Ngugi's writing but something he has been groping towards since the earlier novels. Note then, that the second person pronoun that characterises the earlier works is also a device to implicate the reader in the communal experience of

the story. For, in essence, "the second person is the communal element entering into the situation, the unseen witness who understands everything, records everything, the communal center of balance" (Larson 1971: 125). This stylistic convention in Ngugi is well represented in *Weep Not, Child*:

There was only one road that ran right across the land. It was long and broad and shone with black tar, and when you travelled along it on hot days you saw little lakes ahead of you. But when you went near, the lakes vanished, to appear again a little farther ahead. Some people called them the devil's waters because they deceived you and made you more thirsty if your throat was already dry.

(Ngugi 1964: 5)

As Larson pointed out above, the second person narrative is also effective in order to draw in a communal experience. But it achieves this less strikingly than the 'we' narrative. In the 'we' narrative, all distance between the speaker and the listener has been abolished, while an aesthetic distance remains in the 'you' narrative. Hence Ngugi's ultimate choice of the 'we' narrative in his later novels. The shift from the one mode to the other can be seen in the latter parts of *A Grain of Wheat*: "most of us from Tabai first saw him at the New Rungei Market the day the heavy rain fell. You remember the Wednesday, just before independence? We saw the man walk in the rain" (Ngugi 1967: 155). Strictly speaking, however, the dispersed focalization of Ngugi's narrative technique is not unique to him alone. As Ngugi himself once noted, Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence also made use of it. He explains the influence of Joseph Conrad on his writing as follows:

... I had seen how the author [Conrad] had used a variety of narrative voices at different times and places in the same novel with tantalising effect. With Conrad the same event could be looked at by the person at different times and places; and each of these multiple voices could shed new light on the event by supplying more information, more evidence, or by relating other episodes that preceded or followed the event under spotlight ... But the shifting points of view in time and space; the multiplicity of narrative voices; the narrative-within-a-narration; the delayed information that helps the revision of a previous judgement so that only at the end with the full assemblage of evidence, information and points of view, can the reader make full judgement - these techniques had impressed me.

(Ngugi 1986: 76)

Furthermore, Ngugi states that it was from Lawrence that he learned to enter "into the soul of the people and not only of the people but even of the land, of the countryside, of things like plants, of the atmosphere." And he goes on to say: "When I am reading D. H. Lawrence, I feel the spirituality of things very near to me as if I am touching the very spirit of things" (Killam 1980: 16). On account of these two writers' influence on Ngugi's narrative technique, his fiction, such as *A Grain of Wheat*, is sometimes misread as "appeal[ing] to a more Westernized reading audience." For "Ngugi's characters here are presented in more conventional Western patterns." It means that Ngugi's characters are no longer "simply mouthing the author's ideas, instead they are voicing their passions and their innermost thoughts" (Larson 1971: 158-159).

In my reading, I find Larson himself to be too "Eurocentric." Firstly, his analysis is reductionist: he reduces Ngugi's narrative successes to those of a western standard. Ngugi's collective narrative is, I would argue, very different from those of Conrad or Lawrence. For Ngugi's narrative is very ambivalent, that is, self-conscious, but political. This is, for him, a particular postcolonial experiment in decolonization appropriate

to the postcolonial African reality. Secondly, Larson lacks understanding of the particularity of the African collective narrative. African collective narrative does not show any mechanical division between an individual and a community; it dialectically unites a person's existential desire and a community's essential being. As Ezekiel Mphahlele, in "The African Critic Today: Toward a Definition," argues: "African reality takes in both the individual and the collective sensibility and vision." (Mphahlele from Baker, Jr. 1976: 16). In the same way, an author of African narrative is not an isolated creator. He or she needs the co-operation of his or her community members all the time. Orature is one of the typical examples of such co-operative work between an author and a group. Achebe, responding to a question on the role of the audience during oral resitations, offers the following scenario:

It is not said; it is sung, and it is based on a dirge which in my village, if somebody died prematurely, a young man or a young woman, his age group will go around the village singing. A main singer and a chorus. That is what I mean. And in this poem I would be the main singer and there would be the chorus replying. Some of the things I would sing would be in the form of a question: "who are we looking for?" And the audience would reply: "We are looking for Christopher Okigbo; if he has gone to the market let him come back; if he has gone to the stream let him return."

(Achebe from Morell 1975: 28)

Larson's misjudgement, I think, is related to his misunderstanding of Ngugi's self-conscious writing, which is based on self-reflexive language and engaged with postcolonial decolonization. Contrary to what Larson indicates above, Ngugi's experimental postcolonial writing is, to me, very successful since he appropriately applies his experiment to the

postcolonial African reality and succeeds in interrogating it in his own way. Of course, one cannot deny that Ngugi's narrative was influenced by Lawrence and Conrad. We can see proof of this in the narrative form used in *A Grain of Wheat*. The stories within stories in a series of flashbacks, for example, are a product of Conrad's influence. Furthermore, it is not coincidence that some critics argue that there are similarities of theme, narrative technique and irony between Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* and Conrad's *Nostromo*, *Under Western Eyes*, and *Lord Jim*.

#### POLIPHONY AND SELF-REFLEXIVE LANGUAGE

In an interview given at about the time of the publication of *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi acknowledges once again his debt to the neo-romanticism of Lawrence and the questioning attitude of Conrad. But, he indicates clearly that he did not follow Lawrence or Conrad's model of writing slavishly or unconditionally. Rather, he feels more drawn towards Leo Tolstoy and Emile Zola: "if I was to start writing all over again, I would write like Zola" (Ngugi from Killam 1980: 17-18). Ngugi may have appropriated certain novelistic techniques from Conrad but simultaneously offers a powerful critique of Conrad's "ambivalence towards imperialism," which "supplied him with the setting and subject matter of his novels" and "could never let him go beyond the balancing acts of liberal humanism" (Ngugi 1986: 76). Thus, the difference between Ngugi's narratives and those of Lawrence and Conrad resides in his self-consciously reflecting ordinary people's way of narrating, which

comes from actual social practice rather than the imagination. Thus, the techniques that appear Conradian are actually drawn from close observation of his own social milieu and are, therefore, particularly African:

Now my own observation of how people ordinarily narrated events to one another had also shown me that they quite happily accepted interventions, digressions, narrative within a narrative and dramatic illustrations without losing the main narrative thread. The story-within-a-story was part and parcel of the conversational norms of the peasantry. The linear/biographical unfolding of a story was more removed from actual social practice than the narrative of Conrad and Lamming.

(Ngugi 1986: 76)

JanMohamed calls this kind of self-conscious narrative exemplified in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* polyphonic narrative. He states that Ngugi, by contrasting and interweaving various movements of people, writes a polyphonic novel where in the experience of social regeneration, communal coherence, and vitality lies not in the awareness of any single character, but in the interaction between various individuals and in the reader's experience of this interaction (JanMohamed 1983: 210). Here, we experience the full significance of Ngugi's 'we' narrative, discussed earlier. The term "polyphony," which is appropriate to an analysis of Ngugi's works, originates from Mikhail Bakhtin. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin asserts that a discourse orchestrates voices on many levels: authorial speech, the speech of narrators, inserted genres, and the speech of characters. Each voice permits a multiplicity of social voices whose diffuse movement, dialogism and dispersion into rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, defines the novel in its richest

aspect, endowing it with the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel (Bakhtin 1981: 263). Ngugi's text, in this sense, is an excellent example of the polyphonic novel.

The polyphonic trait in Ngugi's novels as part a self-conscious novel writing technique is well illustrated in both *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. Polyphony, or multiple voices, can be heard positively and negatively at the same time, not only at the level of group narrative, but also at the level of one character's split ego. Positively, when these voices speak in harmony, we witness a growing sense of unity that stands in crucial contrast to the division shown in *Weep Not, Child*. But the proliferation of characters in the later novels also hints at the diversity of interests within the group. Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat* provides the best example of fragmented and multiple ego comprising one man. Mugo suffers from a double-binded conscience, which oozes from his schizophrenia:

'You cannot - run away. Sit down - Ha! I will do it to you-' He was shaking and his words came out in violent jerks.

'Imagine all your life you cannot sleep - so many fingers touching your flesh - eyes watching you - in dark places - in corners - in the streets - in the fields - sleeping, waking, no rest - ah! Those eyes - cannot you for a minute, one minute, leave a man alone - I mean - let a man eat, drink, work - all of you-Kihika-Gikonyo-the old woman-that general - who sent you here tonight? Who? Aah! Those eyes again - we shall see who is stronger - now -'

(Ngugi 1967: 185-186)

Taking advantage of a linguistic technique, Ngugi attempts to capture the internal mental processes of a man haunted by guilt. The jerky, broken rhythms of this voice reflect not only the way Mugo thought and

spoke on this occasion, but also the crushing guilt that had dogged him since the betrayal of Kihika. This is a self-conscious language that effectively enforces a distance between signifier and signified. Ngugi clinically displays the truth that a historical movement, whatever it is, can alienate some individuals' lives. This is shown through Mugo's mental derangement. Mugo is not an exceptional man in a society undergoing an important historical change. Rather he is a typical man who does not want to be involved in any historical chaos, preferring a quiet and reclusive existence. Existentially, he is a man whose existence precedes his being. But Ngugi expertly shows impossibility of separating self from the world. Attempting to avoid being drawn into political action, Mugo, ironically, kills a political person, Kihika, and consequently suffers from a guilty conscience:

'I wanted to live my life. I never wanted to be involved in anything. Then he came into my life, here, a night like this, and pulled me into the stream. So I killed him.'

'Who? What are you talking about?'

'Ha! ha! ha!' he laughed unnaturally. 'Who murdered your brother?'

'Kihika?'

'Yes.'

'The whiteman.'

'No! I strangled him - I strangled him-'

'It is not true - Wake up, Mugo - Kihika was hanged - listen and stop shaking so - I saw his body hang from a tree.'

'I did it! I did it! Ha! ha! ha! That is what you wanted to know. And I'll do it again - to you - tonight.'

(Ngugi 1967: 184-185)

It is evident that Ngugi is experimenting with his self-conscious writing skill through Mugo's split ego. What Ngugi seems to show through this schizophrenic polyphony is a reality in which various

tensions are actually existing among the masses who look at a specific historical event from diverse perspectives. Ngugi wants to extend this vision to postcolonial African society to explain how it came to be founded on the various sacrifices made by the people at large. Mugo is one of the individuals forced to be sacrificed by the anonymous collective power of society. His self-reflexive speech intimates Ngugi's desire to portray the ideal revolution of any society as one that will not repress the individual's existential need. It should be based on it. So Mugo's split discourse is critical of contemporary postcolonial African reality on the one hand, while, on the other, providing a paradoxical warning concerning the present method of decolonization. Interestingly, General R., the committed freedom fighter *par excellence* reveals in his speech a voice as fractured and tortured as Mugo's: "we do not want another war . . . no more blood in my . . . in these our hands" (Ngugi 1967: 192). Ngugi is not so naive as to believe that a subject's or a group's identity is impeccably holistic, knowing no inconsistency.

#### LANGUAGE GAMES AND POLITICS

*A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood* are full of language games. Ngugi's aim for language games is radically different from those of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. Where Derrida emphasizes an unbridgeable tension, which exists as a 'trace,' purely for the purpose of play, Ngugi's self-conscious language games are more politically designed. For Ngugi, writing means an experiment of synthesizing heterogeneous visions into a communicable unity by understandable

reasoning based on democratic dialogue and debate. An example of this is to be found in the political-oriented debate in *Petals of Blood*. This is a language game on the term 'FANTA,' which takes place between Munira and Karega:

Munira and Karega walked into the shop almost as soon as Wanja and Abdulla had left. They were both rapt in different thoughts about a past they could not understand. Joseph stood ready.

'It's all right, Joseph. Just two bottles of Tusker,' said Munira.

'I don't drink,' Karega said. 'Let me have Fanta, please.'

'Do you know what Fanta means? Foolish Africans Never Take Alcohol. You see I am an avid reader of advertisements. Occasionally I even try my mind at a few slogans.'

'The trouble with slogans or any saying without a real foundation is that it can be used for anything. Phrases like democracy, the Free World, for instance, are used to mean their opposite. It depends of course on who is saying it where, when and to whom. Take your slogan. It could also mean that Fit Africans Never Take Alcohol. We are both right. But we are both wrong because Fanta is simply an American soft drink sold in Ilmorg.'

(Ngugi 1977: 58-59)

This language game seems to be related to Ngugi's agnostic philosophy and his self-conscious writing. Ngugi believes that man is not a being which can easily be defined or understood. This agnosticism is not a tool to restrict the scope of human understanding, but one that will maximize it. Gikonyo's recognition of the impossibility of judging human nature provides one good example:

For the last three days he thought of Mugo and the confession. Could he, Gikonyo, gather such courage to tell people about the steps on the pavement? At night he went over his life and his experiences in the seven detention camps. What precisely had all these years brought him? At every thought, he was pricked with guilt. Courage had failed him, he had confessed the oath in spite of vows to the contrary. What difference was there between him and Karanja or Mugo or those who

had openly betrayed people and worked with the whiteman to save themselves? Mugo had the courage to face his guilt and lose everything.

(Ngugi 1967: 245)

Gikonyo's understanding of agnostic human nature is finally extended to an acceptance of Mumbi:

Every morning Mumbi and Wangari brought him food. At first he tried not to speak to Mumbi; he even found it painful to look at her. But after Mugo's confession, he found himself trying to puzzle out Mumbi's thoughts and feelings. What lay hidden behind her face? What did she think of Mugo and the confession? He increasingly longed to speak to her about Mugo and then about his own life in detention. What would she say about the steps that haunted him? Another thought also crept into his mind. He had never seen himself as father to Mumbi's children. Now it crossed his mind: what would his child by Mumbi look like?

(Ngugi 1967: 245)

Gikonyo is not the only character who experiences an extended understanding of human beings. Mumbi, too, experiences such extension in her statement that: "remember that few people in that meeting are fit to lift a stone against that man. Not unless I - we-too - in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at" (Ngugi 1967: 234). Wambui goes a step further by saying that: "There was nothing to save. Hear me? Nobody could have saved him because there was nothing to save" (Ngugi 1967: 242). It is significant that it is Gikonyo and Mumbi who arrive at this extended understanding. As many critics have noted, these two can be read as the mythical founders of a new dispensation in Kenya, the modern parents of the nation who will stand for the future as Gikuyu and Mumbi stood for the past. By trying to see what lies hidden behind the face and urging that hearts be opened for the world to

look at, they offer a radical challenge to the world of surfaces and misunderstandings that characterize the neo-colonial order.

Self-conscious writing is also, for Ngugi, a means to understand human nature. This influences his philosophy of writing, but he does place limitations of ability of writing to grasp the essence of human beings. His partial discrediting of writing as a tool for understanding truth is related to his recognition of a generic trait of language. Language, due to its inherent ambiguities, cannot correspond to a truth as it ultimately fails to latch on to, or grasp, the world. As he states it in an interview with Jane Wilkinson:

In fact it was when I started writing a novel in [the] Gikuyu language that I came to realize the importance of certain words I used to read in T. S. Eliot, I think *The Four Quartets*, I can't really remember, where he says something about words not being able to stay in one place. You handle this word and you find it'll slip through your fingers: words slide and crack and do all sorts of funny things.

(Ngugi from Wilkinson 1990: 127)

It might be easy, on the basis of these words, to regard Ngugi as a postmodern writer who is enjoying the endless play between the word and its meaning. But Ngugi's preoccupation with the word has something to do with his attempt to reconcile the distance between the signifier and the signified, rather than a delight in a slippage *per se*. In that sense, Ngugi is far from being a postmodern writer. He is, instead, a model of a third world writer who never ceases experimenting in writing in order to attain the ideal decolonization. As he himself asserts: "the challenge for the writer is so to write that when a reader comes to read at least he can move in the direction intended - or probably

intended - by the writer" (Ngugi from Wilkinson 1990: 127). Ngugi's language game, therefore, is aimed towards political purposes. But, these do not exhaust his work, which does leave some space for the language game itself, resulting in a writing that is aesthetic and political at the same time.

Ngugi's postcolonial experiment in the form of this language game is concretely related to a postcolonial African experience. For Ngugi, postcolonial Africa is a place where there is no definite division between good and evil, true and false, or real and fictitious. That is due to the failure of true independence and revolution. Postcolonial Africa betrayed the expectations, hopes and desires of the masses. The language of decolonization is one that slips over the reality of neo-colonial Africa, hence Ngugi's use of language that maintains an ironic distance from the very object it describes. This slippage between signifier and signified becomes a potent image of the neo-colonial world as it reveals the yawning gap between frustrated people and ignorant governments. The following quote from *A Grain of Wheat* explicitly comments on the neo-colonial condition:

It was the same Jackson who now stood before him, mocking him, 'We are still here. We whom you called traitors and collaborators will never die!' And suddenly General R. recalled Lt Koina's recent misgivings. Koina talked of seeing the ghosts of the colonial past still haunting Independent Kenya. And it was true that those now marching in the streets of Nairobi were not the soldiers of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army but of the King's African Rifles, the very colonial forces who had been doing on the battlefield what Jackson was doing in churches. Kigonde's face was now transformed into that of Karanja and all the other traitors in all the communities in Kenya. The sensation of imminent betrayal was so strong that General R. trembled

in his moment of triumph.

(Ngugi 1967: 220-221)

The betrayal indicated here is one that occurs when the black mask of neo-colonial government slips over the face of white colonial power. Needless to say, the disillusionment of African masses with postcolonial government is related to the corruption of the new political elites, the Naipaulian mimic men, or "black white man" who simply imitate the colonizer's thinking. Again, we see the influence of C.L.R. James on Ngugi's thinking. As Patrick Williams notes, an insight of James that held particular relevance for Ngugi was the way in which new and apparently radical or progressive governments could be more than happy to continue the reactionary and oppressive politics of their predecessors (Williams 1998: 8). Neo-colonial rulers, in order to maintain and entrench their power, perpetuate the unchanged structure of colonial society. They repress democracy, ensuring that the people do not have much leeway in criticising, organising, and even simply expressing a different viewpoint. This kind of neo-colonial persecution is, no doubt, linked to the minority class character of the national leadership. Fanon states the following regarding the bourgeoisie of newly independent countries:

The national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace. In its wilful narcissism, the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country ... The university and merchant classes which make up the most enlightened section of the new state are in fact characterized by the smallness of their number and their being concentrated in the capital and the type of activities in which they are engaged: business,

agriculture and the liberal professions.

(Fanon 1963: 119-120)

Ngugi claims the African bourgeoisie that inherited the flag from the departing colonial powers was created within the cultural womb of imperialism. This bourgeoisie inherited the mentality, outlook and opinions of the bourgeoisie in the colonising countries such that their attitudes towards their own societies, history and languages, tends to be refracted through the foreign European gaze (Ngugi 1993: 84-85). Ngugi's repugnance towards this bourgeois class makes his language self-consciously "intended," though he does not give up his tense word game between expectation and disappointment. We can witness this sarcastic word play through the scene where students, in *Petals of Blood*, are waiting for their new schoolmaster to arrive. To their disappointment, they find themselves faced with "a black replica" of Fraudsham, the former white schoolmaster:

'We were proud and thrilled and saw ourselves anew. We vowed that should we get an African headmaster we would give him the utmost obedience; we would work even harder, so as not to shame him and ourselves. No more prefects. We would elect our own leaders. We called ourselves African Populist and we wanted a populist headmaster

...

'Chui arrived. Deathly, sepulchral silence. He climbed the steps ... up ... up ... to the foyer. Our eyes were glued to the scene before us. He had khaki shorts and shirt and a sun helmet: a black replica of Fraudsham. We waited for words that would somehow still the doubt and the fear. He spoke and announced a set of rules. He thanked the teachers for the high standards and world-wide reputation of the school. It was his desire, nay his fervent prayer, that all the teachers should stay, knowing that he had not come to wreck but to build on what was already there: there would be no hasty programme of Africanisation, reckless speed invariably being the undoing of so many a fine school.

(Ngugi 1977: 171)

Bearing in mind Ngugi's subtle debt to Conrad, we can see in the deathly silence that marks Chui's arrival an implicit reminder of Conrad's colonizing centre: Brussels, the white sepulchral city. The distortion of history and the flattening out of conflict becomes apparent in the post-independence world of *Petals of Blood* as the freedom battle becomes reduced to a struggle for monetary gain with ironically shared interests and strategies to those espoused by Conrad's city of death.

#### TENSION BETWEEN POLITICS AND AESTHETICS

Ngugi's self-conscious writing is connected to his postcolonial aesthetic experiment, which interrogates postcolonial African reality. Postcolonial African reality is made up of a confused mixture of fact and facticity. In such a society, where it is hard to distinguish fact from facticity, Ngugi's politics of writing cannot help being split between politics and rhetoric. These two aspects of his self-conscious writing dialectically compensate for the weakness of each aspect when taken in isolation. Those critics who focus exclusively on Ngugi's political use of language, regard him as a critical realist or a socialist realist. He does, admittedly, heed some of these generic expectations, but certainly not exhaustively. It is commonly held that language used in critical, or socialist, realism is hyper-real and does not enjoy any play between tenor and vehicle but always shows a perfect correspondence between the speaker and what is said. Thus, social realist art is expected to be content-orientated: form should submit completely to content and the text should not engage in any formal experiment.

However, what really matters in an African context is not a classic and sometimes Eurocentric confrontation between form and content, but a writer's perspective. For the perspective, Lukacs says, determines "the course and content; it draws together the threads of narration; it enables the artist to choose between the important and the superficial, the crucial and the episodic. The more lucid the perspective - the more economic and striking the selection" (Lukacs 1963: 34). Unlike most concepts in literature, critical realism has not elicited many controversial or antagonistically contradictory definitions and interpretations. Frolov's *Dictionary of Philosophy* supplies the origin, essence and implications of critical realism as follows:

[Realism] achieved its final form by the mid-19th century in the art of critical realism. The pathos of the works of critical realism (Stendhal, Balzac, Gogol, Tolstoy) unmasked the evils of feudal and bourgeois societies, played an important part in shaping the ideas of man's social and spiritual emancipation, and helped to cultivate democratic social ideas. Critical realism is alive at present in the works of many progressive writers and artists in capitalist countries and is opposed to modern bourgeois formalist and naturalist art.

(Frolov from Udentia 1993: 4)

Critical realism in the African context, as shown above, is very appealing. Africa, from the colonial past to postcolonial present, is a world that throws up intense and infinite social and political contradictions between the mass of ordinary people and the institutionalized corruption and moral decadence of the imperialist nations and their new neo-colonial dependencies. This context makes many writers situational and revolutionary at the same time. To be simultaneously a situational writer and a revolutionary allows writers to

enjoy a tension between conscience and reality, which ultimately results in self-conscious writing. Ngugi is himself in this position, though in many cases he consciously chooses a more revolutionary status. But, strictly speaking, in Ngugi's case, a choice between being situational or revolutionary is meaningless. His writing suggests that, for him, experimentation is of the utmost importance.

For Ngugi, the very act of writing, in the African context, means "a testimony of the creative capacity of the African and the first tottering but still important steps by the 'educated' elite towards self-definition and the acceptance of the environment from which they had been alienated by western, Eurocentric imperialist education" (Ngugi 1981b: 29). Here Ngugi, significantly, indicates that writing in Africa is the work of the 'educated' elite. That is why he acknowledges the value of 'critical realism,' though he expects it to develop to revolutionary writing. Udentia, in *Revolutionary Aesthetics and The African Literary Process*, actually praises Ngugi as one of the best revolutionary writers in Africa. Comparing him to Immanuel Ngara, Chidi Amuta or liberal humanists like Kole Omotoso, Ochia Ofeimuna and Niyi Osundare, he concludes by affording Ngugi's the highest evaluation as his work is not only "rooted in the philosophy of dialectics with all its advancements and acceptable extensions" but also "based on the merging of the law-governed and the accidental, and objective reality and the subjectivism of the mediating agent, with the all-necessary balance achieved between the socio-historical and the aesthetic, the idea-content and the store house of formalist devices" (Udentia 1993: xiii).

Although I generally support Udentá's judgement of Ngugi's works, I would argue that he has over-emphasized the class-oriented criticism. He seems to propose that class evaluation is the criterion by which the success or failure of a work should be decided. His criticism of critical realism is also based on the same vision:

Critical realism, properly understood then, is the sheer, merciless and comprehensive criticism of existing reality from a position where the artist negates the essential values of that world order or socio-economic formation. There is always a thorough analysis of society, especially the base (social being: economic foundation) and super structural categories (politics, ethics, legal system, etc.). The class struggle is depicted, though in a distorted, undialectical manner. The relations of production and alienation of labour are given attention.

(Udentá 1993: 4)

Udentá's class-oriented criticism, because of its lack of flexibility, easily loses sight of the value of Ngugi's 'intended' experiment of self-conscious writing based on the deliberate ambiguity or ambivalent attitude in using rhetorical devices, such as symbols and metaphors. Killam states that "Ngugi, by the interplay of his various characters, the contradictions between their self-image and their actual deeds, underlines many ironies and proposes several possible perspectives." Thus, he emphasizes that Ngugi's "ambivalent attitude, this deliberate ambiguity in the symbols and metaphors, saves most of his works (except a few of the plays) from being more political statements" (Killam 1984: 50).

Actually, the strength of Ngugi's writing comes from his play on the self-conscious tension between politics and aesthetics. So, while *Petals of Blood* is written with a class-orientated vision, and thus highly praised by Udentá as the best revolutionary novel, the same work is harshly

criticized by Florence Stratton for the very same reason. Stratton, quoting Robert Young's critique of orthodox Marxism, indirectly criticizes what she perceives to be Ngugi's authoritarianism:

The straightforward oppositional structure of capital and class does not necessarily work any more: if we think in terms of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, then rather than the working class being the obvious universal subject-victim, many others are also oppressed: particularly women, black people, and all other so-called ethnic and minority groups. Any single individual may belong to several of these, but the forms of oppression, as of resistance or change, may not only overlap but may also differ or even conflict.

(Young from Stratton 1994: 160)

But, along with Udentia, Stratton's evaluation is limited to the political point of view. Jurgen Martini is yet another critic who attempts to reduce Ngugi's writing to this level of understanding as he takes issue with the utopian impulse of *Petals of Blood*. He argues that "Ngugi's novel is both realistic and utopian - the novel gives an important analysis of the reality in a developing capitalist country, but confronts this reality with a utopian wish for a better society." Thus, he insists that whenever Ngugi introduces this utopian feature into the novel his "writing becomes sentimental and downright bad" (Martini from Lindfors 1991: 81).

These criticisms share a common shortcoming. They all fail to analyse Ngugi's works from a simultaneous political and rhetorical point of view. This is a serious limitation, for Ngugi, I propose, is a writer who pursues a synthetic unity of these two aspects in his writing. Therefore, while a classic approach to Ngugi as a critical, or socialist, realist has the advantage of being able to evaluate his political verisimilitude in

dealing with colonial and postcolonial themes, it often fails to draw out his speciality as a self-conscious experimentalist of language whose main concern is to explore the tension between the fact of reality and facticity of fiction. This turn towards self-conscious writing does not, as I've been stressing, indicate an abandonment of political issues as Ngugi's experimentalism is developed out of his understanding of history.

#### HISTORICAL FACT AND METAHISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

In *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, Ime Ikiddeh elaborates fully on the historical background against which Ngugi's novels are written and documents much of the detail that finds its way into Ngugi's work. Ikiddeh takes a position midway between two predominating reactions to the historical content in Ngugi's work. One position is that epitomized by W. H. Jordan who regards the presence of historical elements in novels as unartistic and objectionable intervention. The other is represented by critics such as S. N. Ngubiah, who "complains that the writer is not always faithful to widely accepted historical 'fact'" (Killam 1980: 9). Ngugi, in an interview, responds to this ambivalence around historicity as follows:

History is very important in any people, how we look at our past is very important in determining how we look at and how we evaluate the present. A distorted view of the people's past can very easily distort our views and evaluations of the present as well as the evaluation of our present potentials and the future possibilities as a people. Our history up to now has been distorted by the cultural needs of Imperialism, that is, it was in the interest of the imperialists to distort Kenya[n] history with the view of showing that Kenya[n] people have not struggled with nature and with other men to change their natural environment and create a positive social environment....

Now, I feel that Kenya[n] writers, intellectuals, historians, political scientists must be able to show us Kenya's past which correctly evaluates Kenya[n] people's achievement in the past, in the present and at the same time, pointing out their creative potential in the future.

(Ngugi from Killam 1980: 10)

The historicity with which Ngugi is attempting to fill his narratives is one that has to be partly re-constructed. Thus, for Ngugi, distinction between the fact of history and the facticity of the novel is not meaningful, because they are both objects of his self-conscious language and have meaning only when constructed in discourse. The fact of history, thus, becomes relative to Ngugi and his access to the past is ultimately no more than discourse piled upon discourse, document upon document, interpretation upon interpretation. The reason why we need to note Ngugi's experimental writing as an effective attempt to understand history self-consciously is because of his recognition that history itself is nothing but a vacuum, that requires human agency as interpreter. In that sense, writing a novel and writing history is the same work; hence the prominence of autobiographical writing in Africa. James Onley explains the Gikuyu understanding of autobiography: "For a Gikuyu, the writing of biography is virtually indistinguishable from writing autobiography because Gikuyu life in the present is virtually indistinguishable from Gikuyu life twenty-five years ago or one hundred years ago or five hundred years ago" (Onley 1973: 28).

Lewis Nkosi, too, in "Fiction by Black South Africans," points out a very particular function of autobiographical writing in the African context. He states that "certainly the picture of the Sophiatown ghetto in Bloke Modisane's book *Blame Me on History*, or passages in Ezekiel

Mphahlele's autobiographical essay *Down Second Avenue* are far superior to anything these writers have attempted in creative fiction" (Nkosi from Beier 1967: 213). The autobiographical writing of facts, to African writers, is no different from the writing of fictional facticity. Ngugi is unexceptional in this regard. He introduces a trend in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, arguing that some critics compare his novel *Petals of Blood* to his real life:

Many critics have pointed out the parallels between my own arrest and detention and similar but fictional events in the opening and closing chapters of my novel *Petals of Blood*. It opens with the arrest of a progressive worker - he is deceived into believing that he is wanted at the police station for a few questions - and it closes with his eventual detention on suspicion of being a communist at heart.

(Ngugi 1981a: 128)

The role of agency, in understanding history, is crucial. History cannot evade being represented by and representative of human agency. It is, as Hayden White has shown, impossible and misleading to consider history as belonging to a different order to literature:

Historical documents are not less opaque than the texts studied by the literary critic ... In fact, the opaqueness of the world figured in historical documents is, if anything, increased by the production of historical narratives. Each new historical work only adds to the number of possible texts that have to be interpreted if a full and accurate picture of a given historical milieu is to be faithfully drawn. The relationship between the past to be analyzed and historical works produced by analysis of the documents is paradoxical; the more we know about the past, the more difficult it is to generalize about it.

(White from Weixlmann and Fontenot 1986: 87-88)

The understanding of history, as it is shown above, requires self-conscious work. Such self-consciousness about the epistemological

operations of historians enables the metahistorian to investigate the presuppositions that inform the efforts to solve historical problems. It can be equally helpful to the literary historian. The idea underlying metahistory that historical representation must be understood in terms of its own system rather than by its congruence with the real world has its counterpart in the recognition by literary critics that fiction creates its own objects. The reality of a novel, poem, even autobiography, exists in a specificity and coherence that are products of the imagination. Ngugi's novels are the very products of this historical imagination. His novels combine historical fact and metahistorical interpretations without distinguishing between the two.

Therefore, an investigation aimed at discovering the historical accuracy of Ngugi's literary work is meaningless, except as an observation of documentary intent, because it disregards the linguistic character of the text in which Ngugi is intentionally enjoying an experimental aesthetic inversion between history and fiction. This postcolonial writing experiment is attained by Ngugi's metahistorical interpretation of a historical event. Thus, the role of interpretation becomes the key to understanding history. This is well represented in *Petals of Blood* in the debate between Munira and Karega in terms of their teaching philosophy:

'You see. What they need to know are facts. Simple facts. Information, just so they can pass their CPE. Yes, information, not interpretation. Later when they go High School, and I am sure these gentlemen will bear me out in this, they can start learning the more complicated stuff. By that time they will have learnt how to think and can start interpreting. I say let's teach them facts, facts, and not propaganda about blackness, African peoples, all that, because that is politics, and they know the tribe they belong to. That's a fact - not

propaganda.'

'I do not agree with that approach,' Karega started and I could see that he was having difficulties. 'I cannot accept that there is a stage in our growth as human beings when all we need are so-called facts and information. Man is a thinking being from the time he is born to the time he dies. He looks, he hears, he touches, he smells, he tastes and he sifts all these impressions in his mind to arrive at a certain outlook in his direct experience of life. Are these pure facts?'

(Ngugi 1977: 245-246)

Here Ngugi indicates the impossibility of cleansing historical discourse of interpretation as the key presentation of facts is an act of interpretation in itself. Ngugi's discrediting of fact as objective truth and his emphasis on an active participation in the process of interpreting history through writing is a direct consequence of his disenchantment with secular history writing in Kenya. Ngugi even reacts to post-independence practises of writing history. As the post-independence colonized try to fill the Fanonian void that has been created by colonialism (which distorts and destroys the past of the native), they mis-remember their past. Thus, for Ngugi, rewriting the history of the colonized is directly related to a dialectic between metahistorical interpretation and historical fact.

#### **TRAVEL NARRATIVE**

When Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks 'can the subaltern speak?,' her answer is a unanimous 'No.' This is based on her argument that subalterns, such as the colonized in the colonial society or women in the patriarchal society, cannot have their own voices as they are represented by the voice of power. Spivak arrives at this conclusion via the following reasoning:

*Representing*: proxy and portrait, as I said, these are two ways of representing. Now, the thing to remember is that in the act of representing politically, you actually represent yourself and your constituency as working class, or the black minority, the rainbow coalition, or yet the military-industrial complex and so on. That is representation in the sense of *Darstellung*. So that you do not ever "simply" *vertreten* anyone, in fact, not just politically in the sense of true parliamentary forms, but even in political practices outside of parliamentary forms.

(Spivak 1990: 108)

What Spivak argues here is that "representation" has two functions: class function (*Darstellung*) and individual function (*vertreten*). The subaltern group is represented only by class function (*Darstellung*), which, according to Spivak, cannot genuinely represent the multiple aspects of individual consciousness of the subalterns. The historical destruction of the Kenyan people's voice is a major focus of *Petals of Blood*:

For there are many questions about our history which remain unanswered. Our present day historians, following on similar theories yarned out by defenders of imperialism, insist we only arrived here yesterday. Where went all the Kenyan people who used to trade with China, India, Arabia long long before Vasco da Gama came to the scene and on the strength of gunpowder ushered in an era of blood and terror and instability - an era that climaxed in the reign of imperialism over Kenya? But even then these adventures of Portuguese mercantilism were forced to build Fort Jesus, showing that Kenyan people had always been ready to resist foreign control and exploitation. The story of this heroic resistance: who will sing it? Their struggles to defend their land, their wealth, their lives: who'll tell of it? What of their earlier achievements in production that had annually attracted visitors from ancient China and India?

(Ngugi 1977: 67)

Ngugi shows that the silence of subalterns like the Kenyan people is a result of the colonizer's intentional distortion of them through writing. One of the central written genres that contributed to the distortion of

subalterns is the travel narrative. The travel narrative is composed of subjective impressions on the value, culture, tradition and institution of the Other. They are subjective in that the viewer's eyes cannot help but read the object that they want to capture by a priori value judgement based on their own values. Janet Giltrow, in "Speaking Out: Travel and Structure in Herman Melville's Early Narratives," defines the characteristics of travel narrative as follows:

In travel narrative, nothing goes without saying. Every aspect of life in the alien place must be reckoned in order to give the reader a complete idea of the writer's whereabouts during his absence. The beliefs, costume, diet, shelter, domestic organization, and political structure of the foreign community are exhaustively remarked, and implicitly or explicitly compared to what the writer has known at home. Indeed, the more comprehensive the exposition and the more extensive the comparisons, the more forceful is the travel narrator's expression of the foreignness of his adventure.

(Giltrow 1980: 20)

Travel narrative exacerbates the distortion of the image of the subaltern as the observer's metafictional imagination enforces the demolition of the division between fact and fiction. In that sense, travel narratives show some of the derivative attributes of the novel from the beginning. It corresponds to the novel form as follows: it has a long prose composition with a protagonist as a traveler and a plot as his or her itinerary. The travelogues persistently constitute their novelistic qualities by introducing expository digression, excursus, and compilation. Thus, disconcertingly, factual information and implausible adventures shamelessly consort with one another in the same text.

In the imperial period that characterised the proliferation of adventure

travel narratives, the home-bound readership was only too willing to believe each and every story travelers told about what they had seen. There was little interest in verifying these accounts as the reader found the undeniable fact that the writers had physically entered these exotic locales and were relating what they had seen with their own two eyes sufficient in itself. If, in the course of their travels, they had not actually seen something but had heard it from hearsay, then having been in the vicinity was considered adequate. Perhaps the main reason that travelers met with such easy credibility was that the people at home shared their views, their language and their culture, whereas the people they were describing were different (Schipper et al 1990: 12-13). This quasi-scientific description of the Other by travel narrative was rendered effective by the rhetorical characteristics of narrative itself.

Narrative is a technical device of telling by which a group who shares the same denominator of its signifier can enjoy the esoteric secret of its discourse. A prominent example of one who used this device only to distort the Other is Hegel. As an observer in Persia and India, in *The Philosophy of History*, he states that the European in Persia "finds himself still somewhat at home, and meets with European disposition, human virtues and human passions." Whereas, "as soon as he crosses the Indus (i.e. India), he encounters the most repellent characteristics, pervading every single feature of society" (Hegel 1956: 133). Hegel's preference of Persia to India is related to his cartographic imagination, that is, Persia than India, due to its relatively closer distance to Europe, could become a nicer place.

Ngugi, too, introduces a section of travel narrative in *A Grain of Wheat*, using the scribbled notes of Thompson, the District Officer, who was compiling a memoir with the telling title of *Prospero in Africa*:

After dinner, he had written the words in his diary - no, not a diary but a mass of notes he scribbled at various times and places in his career, hoping to incorporate them into a coherent philosophy in *Prospero in Africa*. These were the notes that were now in front of Thompson: he went through them, lingering over the entries that struck his mind.

*Nyeri is full of mountains, hills and deep valleys covered with impenetrable forests. These primordial trees have always awed primitive minds. The darkness and mystery of the forest, have led him (the primitive man) to magic and ritual...*

*Dr Albert Schweitzer says 'The Negro is a child, and with children, nothing can be done without the use of authority.' I've now worked in Nyeri, Githima, Kisumu, Ngong. I agree.*

*In dealing with the African you are often compelled to do the unexpected. A man came into my office yesterday. He told me about a wanted terrorist leader. From the beginning, I was convinced the man was lying, was really acting, perhaps to trap me or hide his own part in the movement. He seemed to be laughing at me. Remember the African is a born actor, that's why he finds it so easy to lie. Suddenly I spat into his face. I don't know why, but I did it.*

(Ngugi 1967: 55-56)

There are two things to note in Thompson's intermittent scribbling that are very commonplace in travel narrative. The first is the fact that Thompson's note is scribbled in the form of diary. The diary is a private form of writing in which a subjective impression of an object is recorded. The diary, therefore, generally displays one's subjectivity and the ways in which one's subjectivity is constructed. Travel narrative is deeply related to the form of the diary or the journal. Much of the colonial literature written in the first half of the nineteenth century is no exception to this. These are generally based on "travel narrative which

comes from diaries, journals and reports from the colonies, often written by the wives of British administrators or of early settlers" (King 1980: 4-5). The emphasis on diary-writing (and Thompson's incessant letter writing) reveals the extent to which public and political decisions are based on the psychological rationalizations of thwarted personal ambition and fears.

Often the histories of exploration are more interesting than the creative writing. This is no doubt on account of the diary's or journal's rhetorical differences from literature. The classical rhetoric of journalism is distinguished from fiction by the conventional expectation of its grounding in a historical actuality. Its relation to this actuality is understood to be primarily metonymic and historically referential rather than metaphoric and self-referential. Nonfiction writing in general often combines this metonymic quality with an absence of formal closure, so that it opens directly onto the fractures and contradictions of colonialist epistemology (Spurr 1993: 2). The metonymic and historically referential rhetoric of journalism is well shown in *Petals of Blood* in the scene where one of the national dailies is reporting the murder of Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria:

... He sat up and stared at banner headlines on the fourth page. Murder in Ilmorog. Foul play suspected. Political motivation? The headline, as it turned out, was more dramatic than the story which followed. The news aspects of the incident would of course have been exhausted by the national dailies, especially the more sensational Daily Mouthpiece, Munira reflected, and hence the speculation without evidence. So that was the source of policeman's theories ... The feature column was more interesting. The writer, after giving brief life histories of Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria, described them as three well-known nationalist fighters for political, educational, and above all, economic freedom for Africans.

(Ngugi 1977: 194-195)

As shown above, journalism follows more systematic orders of discourse, adapting them to particular events and translating them into a language of popular appeal. Journalistic language is a kind of palimpsest. The rhetorical mode of this must be understood as more than merely literary or philosophical. It is a set of tropes "that comes into play with the establishment and maintenance of colonial authority, or, as sometimes happens, those that register the loss of such authority" (Spurr 1993: 3). The symptom of this is undoubtedly visible in the following scene of *Petals of Blood*. Another daily newspaper reports the content of a press conference given by Nderi wa Riera, one of the Members of Parliament as follows:

'Speaking over a wide range of subjects, the MP called for a total and permanent ban on strikes. Strikes generated an atmosphere of tension which could only lead to instability and periodic violence. Strikes should be regarded as deliberate anti-national acts of economic sabotage.

'Calling on Trade Union leaders to be unselfish, he asked them to refrain from demanding higher and higher wages without proper regard for the lower income groups or the jobless, who would be the sole beneficiaries of more equitable reallocation of what would have gone into unregulated wage increases. It was time that Trade Unions were told in no uncertain terms that they could no longer hold the country to ransom.'

(Ngugi 1977: 194)

Here, the palimpsestic rhetoric of journalism is used as a tool for controlling the counter-discourse of labour power to maintain a status quo. The politics of journalistic rhetoric has to do with the derivative characteristics of a reporter's gaze. Generally speaking, reporting begins with looking. Visual observation is the essence of the reporter's function as witness. But the gaze upon which the journalist so faithfully relies for

knowledge allows him exclusive and inclusive privileges at the same time. Such privilege of inspection, examination, and vision, by its very nature, makes a viewer biased in observing the object. Thus, what Ngugi shows through the inclusion of the diary or journal form (i.e. *Prospero in Africa*) is the process through which such subjective impression comes to be viewed as something objective and absolute. Through this metafictional meditation on this form of writing, Ngugi is able to reveal its fictitious basis.

The second thing we need to note in Thompson's diary towards *Prospero in Africa* is the relation of the body politic to travel narrative. As usual, the final field of visual penetration for the colonial 'pseudo-traveler' like Thompson is the human body. In classic colonial discourse, the body of the native, and its skin pigment in particular, becomes as much the object of examination, commentary, and valorization as the landscape. Under the colonizer's gaze, the native's body becomes the unchangeable sign by which the native is represented and this body is repeatedly encoded as primitive. Thus the body and its pigment, rather than language or intangible culture, becomes the essential defining characteristic of the native. If we look at Thompson's writing, it is obvious that he is a man preoccupied with a colour prejudice towards the body of the native. His a priori prejudice against the native is not scientifically founded but is inherited from his predecessors and petrified through its continuous repetitive use.

Thompson uses terms like "primitive," "primordial," "darkness," "Negro," "child," and "magic," which create a chain of associations between

"black" and "barbarous" or "black native" and "immature child." These associative links are not his own. They are historical constructions, as tangibly revealed in Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. Hegel states that "the Negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality - all that we call feeling - if we would comprehend him: there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character" (Hegel 1956: 121).

Archeologically tracing the origin of the valorized term "black" so as to discover how it came to be filled with negative connotations, Ngugi concludes that "phrases like black market, black sheep, blackmail, blacklist, black everything" are "white racist lies" (Ngugi 1981b: 14). These "white racist lies" is the very thing he wants to decolonize through his self-conscious writing and his postcolonial practice. Ngugi's harsh criticism of Karen Blixen is part of this decolonization process. He aims to re-evaluate the African image through a self-conscious examination of Blixen who, according to Ngugi, writes in the racist tradition. A Danish aristocrat, Blixen came to Kenya and acquired a farm from which vantage point she was able to enjoy the presence of wild animals and naked rugged nature (Ngugi 1981b: 17). In *Out of Africa*, she allegorically links African natives with animals or uncivilized barbarians:

As for me, from my first week in Africa, I had felt a great affection for the natives. It was a strong feeling that embraced all ages and both sexes. The discovery of the dark races was to me a magnificent enlargement of all my world. If a person with an inborn sympathy for

animals had grown up in a milieu where there were no animals, and had come into contact with animals late in life; or if a person with an instinctive taste for woods and forest had entered a forest for the first time at the age of twenty; or if someone with an ear for music had happened to hear music for the first time when he was already grown up; their cases might have been similar to mine.

(Blixen 1937: 18-19)

Blixen continues describing the native and his animalistic cosmology:

The Natives were Africa in flesh and blood. The tall extinct volcano of Longonot that rises above the Rift Valley, the broad Mimosa trees along the rivers, the Elephant and the Giraffe, were not more truly Africa than the Natives were, - small figures in an immense scenery. All were different expressions of one idea, variations upon the same theme. It was not a congenial upheaving of heterogeneous atoms, as in the case of the oak-leaf and the acorn and the object made from oak.

(Blixen 1937: 22)

Ngugi criticizes Blixen for hierarchically ordering her cosmos into a "great chain of being" with God at the top followed by the white aristocracy, ordinary whites, domestic animals, wild animals who are all in "direct contact" with God. Africans do not figure anywhere in the cosmic picture except as parts of wood and stones, different only because they occasionally exhibit animal impulses (Ngugi 1981b: 18-19). In *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, Ngugi adds that to settlers like Blixen, "dogs ranked infinitely higher than Kenyans; and Kenyans were either children (to be paternalistically loved but not appreciated, like dogs) or mindless scoundrels (to be whipped or killed)" (Ngugi 1981a: 33). A scene in *A Grain of Wheat* encapsulates this attitude:

Like many other Europeans in Kenya, Thompson had a thing about pets, especially dogs. A year ago he had taken Margery to Nairobi to see *Annie Get Your Gun* staged at the National Theatre by the City Players.

He had never been to that theatre before - for nothing really ever happened there - he always went to the Donovan Maule Theatre Club. The road from Githima to Nairobi passed through the countryside. It was very dark. Suddenly the headlights caught a dog about to cross the road. Thompson could have braked, slowed down or horned. He had enough time and distance. But he held on the wheel. He did not want to kill the dog and yet he knew he was going to drive into it. He was glued to the seat - fearing the inevitable. Suddenly there was a scream. Thompson's energy came back. He braked to a stop and opened the door and went out, taking a pocket torch. He went back a few yards; there was no dog anywhere. He looked on either side of the road but saw no sign of the dog - not even a trail of blood. Yet he had heard the thud and the scream. Back in the car, he found Margery quietly weeping. And to his surprise, he too was shaking and could not comfort her. 'Perhaps it's under the car,' she said. He went out again and carefully peered under the car. There was nothing. He drove away sadly; it was as if he had murdered a man.

(Ngugi 1967: 43-44)

This sentimentality stands in sharp contrast to his brutal treatment of Africans, when he was the officer in charge of detention camps at Rira, where eleven detainees were beaten to death in a hunger strike. As Thomson's name was bandied about in the House of Commons and in the world press, he feels a humiliation. But his humiliation bears no reference to the loss of human life for which he was ultimately responsible.

However, the full force of Ngugi's critique is directed not so much at Blixen or Thompson in *A Grain of Wheat*, whose work clearly textualizes a degradation of the African body and soul, as at the work of Joseph Conrad, Joyce Cary, and William Blake, who are reputed to write objective and humanitarian works on the Other. These writers treat the African world sympathetically either to appeal to the European liberal conscience or to interpret Africa for the Africans. Ngugi believes that such liberalism is dangerous, for it has always been the sugary ideology

that coats the bitter pill of imperialism. Liberalism fosters the illusion in the exploited of the possibilities of peaceful settlement and painless escape from imperialist violence, which masquerades as law and order. More than anything, liberalism blurs all antagonistic class contradictions and all the contradictions between imperialist domination and the struggle for national liberation, seeing in the revolutionary violence of the former, the degradation of humanity (Ngugi 1981b: 20).

#### LIBERAL HUMANISTS AND STEREOTYPES OF "THE OTHER"

Ngugi proposes Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* as an example of the danger lurking within this humanitarianism: "here the good African exemplifies the Christian virtue of spineless humility and a longing to be loved by the enemy which of course is an element of self-hatred and negative self-definition" (Ngugi 1981b: 20). This obviously leads to weakening the resistance of the oppressed classes. Imaginative literature, therefore, becomes a useful medium of mental conditioning, making the oppressed believe that the root cause of their problem, and hence its solution, lies deep in their spiritual condition and sinful souls.

Liberal humanists, though they greatly sympathize with the native, could not eventually go beyond the sympathy itself. It proves how strongly the native's image of his body, created by theories and ethnologies, is constructed. Most of the nineteenth century theorists of race and ethnology worked purely from their armchairs, apparently accepting as valid any incident reported in the field accounts of

Europeans in Africa (Milbury-Steen 1980: 8). Such presumption was only matched by that of some of the missionaries and adventurers themselves who, in seeing an event but understanding little if anything of its cultural context, still felt qualified to interpret and generalise from it. Consequently, such writers as David Livingstone, Henry M. Stanley and Mary Kingsley, excited the British popular imagination and reinforced biased opinions of Africans and Africa. The story of "homo caudatus" (tail-man) is one of the best examples of this:

There is, for example, the notion of the homo caudatus, human but with a tail, a creature that has appeared at numerous spots and on numerous occasions in western history. The homo caudatus or 'tail-man' is a creature one would actually prefer to view as not belonging to the human race at all, difficult though it might be to deny the resemblance. The product of distant expeditions and European imperialism is often also associated with cannibalism and uninhibited lust, negative qualities generally attributed to barbarians. The homo caudatus represents the Other as an inferior species.

(Schipper et al 1990: 13)

Even today there would still seem to be a need for a negative representation of the distorted Other. The noble savage and the uncivilized barbarian are still very present in people's minds, though usually without a tail. Disguised in a wide range of subtle metamorphoses, this kind of 'normative theory,' presenting people from other cultures as somehow deviating from the natural order, still crops up in all kinds of texts, from exotic, colonial and 'ordinary' novels to comic books, advertisements and literary criticism. Fanon believes that this "caudatus thinking" is related to "collective catharsis" (Fanon 1967: 145). In every society and collectivity, a channel or outlet through which

the forces accumulated in the form of aggression can be released must exist. Therefore, Fanon concludes that even though in the films or comics the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage are always symbolized by Negroes or Indians, "since there is always identification with the victor, the little Negro, quite as easily as the little White boy, becomes an explorer, an adventurer, a missionary 'who faces the danger of being eaten by the wicked Negroes'" (Fanon 1967: 146).

Ngugi locates this psychological identification with the victor among the side-effect of cultural imperialism:

Every time we go to the movies we are confronted with the way the imperialist bourgeoisie sees the world; we are faced, so to speak, with the ideological justification of their ways to themselves and to us. Thus we never see ourselves reflected on the screen; we never react to or respond to ourselves and to our environment on the screen. Worse, we often applaud the superhuman feats of racist heroes of imperialism - a James Bond or an American cowboy wiping out a whole crowd of Third World people: Africans, Chinese, Mexicans, or the native Americans - the so-called Red Indians.

(Ngugi 1981b: 37)

These are typical examples in which the great impact of deviant "homo caudatus thinking" is shown. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Thompson, a colonial character, decides to come to Africa because of his predecessors' (Rudyard Kipling and Lord Lugard) rootless influence, which was tightly caught up with this 'caudatus image.' The influence of Kipling and Lugard on Thompson is highly significant. They both created distorted but popularized images of Africans in their writings. Kipling's one stanza poem "White Man's Burden" is the most obvious in this regard:

Take up the White Man's Burden-  
Send forth the best ye breed-  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild-  
You new caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.

(Kipling 1943: 323)

It is evident that Kipling did not go beyond a classic stereotyping of the Other. Lord Lugard is no different. In *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, he describes 'individuals of Bantu stock' in Nigeria using familiar stereotypes: "in character and temperament the typical African of this race-type is a happy, thriftless, excitable person, lacking in self-control, discipline, and foresight...." (Lugard 1965: 69).

Thompson's fixation with stereotyped Africans in both the physical and the spiritual sphere makes the reality of Africa's independence and his inevitable return to his country almost impossible for him to accept. With just one day left before his departure, he still believes that "this is not the journey's end," "we are not yet beaten," and "Africa cannot, cannot do without Europe" (Ngugi 1967: 166).

Stereotypes, however, do not move in a unitary direction from colonizer to the colonized. They are reciprocal, in that colonizer and colonized use them to reflect, fixate and reproduce each other in a familiar image. Thus the colonized also consume the stereotyped image of the colonizer. Milbury-Steen, in *European and African Stereotypes in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, classifies the forms in which whites have been stereotyped by the colonized. She speaks of the orature of the past 150 years as a resource in which to examine the attitudes of blacks

towards whites that have most shaped their image in contemporary novels (Milbury-Steen 1980: 97). There we can discover a mixture of admiration and resentment in the African view of the European that results from colonialism, because, to the colonized, the colonizer serves as a model as well as an oppressor. Maake, analysing the South African political scenario in the beginning of 1990's, confirms that the ambivalent role of the colonizer is the cause of political tragedy; "in Shakespearean tragedies, and perhaps in our own present tragedies, the protagonist cannot be clearly defined as the tragic hero with certain tragic qualities of character.... In our political tragedy the hero carries characteristics of villainy, and the villain bears qualities of nobility" (Maake 1992: 5). That is why it was possible for the black students in Siriana to weep with Fraudsham after his moving quotation from Shakespeare in *Petals of Blood*:

... And he read us a letter he had sent to the Governor appealing for clemency, ending with a very moving quotation from Shakespeare.

The quality of mercy is not strain'd;  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

We left the assembly with guilty, downcast eyes. A few of us wept. Can you believe it? We wept with Fraudsham. But still there were doubts, and I did not understand the whole thing. How could I? The education we got had not prepared me to understand those things: it was meant to obscure racism and other forms of oppression. It was meant to make us accept our inferiority so as to accept their superiority and their rule over us.

(Ngugi 1977: 164-165)

When it comes to stereotyping the other, Ngugi is certainly not exceptional himself, specifically when he describes white women. W.J.

Howard, in particular, has argued that Ngugi's portrayal of Margery in *A Grain of Wheat* exploits stereotypical images of white femaleness (Howard from Wright ed. 1973: 118). Margery is described as a white woman, bored by staying in the house alone, idly invites Karanja into the house and offers him coffee only to engage in an exoticizing exploration of his sexuality, by asking him how many wives he has. Margery almost appears as chronic complainer who makes life difficult for both her black servants and her white husband. Her insistence upon inspecting and rejecting the work done by her domestics is viewed as an authoritarian compensation for the boredom and frustration she experiences in the colony. She spends most of her time in gossiping, reading or writing letters. Adultery serves her as another way of dealing with the tedium of life:

Often she was in a mood of ruthless self-analysis. She would take a fresh look at her relationship with her husband. It could not be denied that John had a hold over her, that it was to him that she really belonged. Was this the sole meaning of marriage? At such moments, wading through the nightmare of guilt and desire to confess, to clean her breast, was very strong. She hated Dr Van Dyke. But the more she hated him, the more she knew his power over her: she wanted his body, the wild plunge into darkness unknown, an orgy of revulsion, desperation and attraction. Jealousy and fear of what he was doing behind her back ate into her rest and peace.

(Ngugi 1967: 52)

Thus, clashes between two cultures seldom end in the complete annihilation of the "weaker" by the "stronger." While colonial or neo-colonial society embodies a rejection of the colonizer by the colonized and vice versa, this opposition is accompanied by an equally profound dependency, particularly on the part of the colonialist or

neo-colonialist. This figure sees the native as the quintessence of evil and therefore avoids all contact due to fear of contamination, yet he is at the same time absolutely dependent upon the colonized people not only for his privileged social and material status, but also for his sense of moral superiority. This dependency ultimately works to construct his very identity. The colonized, too, are simultaneously attracted and repelled by the colonialist. The ambivalence of the native is the result of his admiration of European power and his hatred for the system that subjugates and insults him (in this respect, see particularly the relationship between Karanja and his colonial master, John Thompson). This major colonial contradiction is caused by rejection and dependency on the part of the colonizer and by attraction and hatred on the part of the colonized.

#### CONCLUSION

What Ngugi really tries to show through his self-conscious examination of poliphony, language games, tension between politics and aesthetics, metahistorical interpretation on history, travel narratives, the body politic and stereotypes is the fact that the whites who created the Other's image could also be victimised. Taking advantage of this paradox, Ngugi successfully interrogates the colonial certainty of correspondence between truth and belief. Ngugi understands postcolonial Africa as being this paradoxical space for both the former colonizer and the former colonized. That is why he adopts the same paradoxical politics of reading and writing.

Ngugi evidently is a master at exploiting this paradoxical space between fact and facticity. His self-conscious reading and writing composes a dialogic space between the creator and the created, as well as between the visible and the invisible, and is deeply embedded in his thinking on postcolonial ways of decolonization. He does not believe that the object for decolonization in postcolonial Africa is visible enough to fight against as postcolonial Africa, he argues, is a world where a virtual reality is more real than true reality itself. Hence the third world writer's ambivalent position in the neo-colonial world: "a writer inhabits two places at the same time: the land of facts and that of fiction. But in a neo-colonial situation fiction seems to be more real than the absurdity of the factual world of a dictator" (Ngugi 1993: 157).

Actually, Ngugi's self-consciousness is that of a third world writer. He makes his language intentionally self-reflexive, though he uses it differently from that of typical metafictionalist or postmodernist writers. Ngugi's self-conscious or self-reflexive language is, to use a Brechtian term, an "alienation effect." He purposely creates a distance between language and reality, and he fills it with political self-consciousness in order to re-examine the spontaneous meaning attached to it, and to re-organize the order of things by his conscientious interpretation of reality. In that sense, Ngugi's self-conscious and self-reflexive language is political, and it makes him a third world postcolonial writer who uses his language for political pleasure.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE POSTCOLONIAL AESTHETIC EXPERIMENTS IN DRAMA: *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI* AND *I WILL MARRY WHEN I WANT*

#### INTRODUCTION

Drama, due to its comparatively open and synthetic generic characteristics that render it inherently experimental, is more easily appropriated into a local context than other art forms. Africa has a rich pre-colonial history of cultural assets filled with dramatic components. However, as Africa was colonized, a particular form of African drama was repressed and replaced due to the colonizer's belief that Africa's anti-Aristotelian theatre could be subversive to their rule. The role of the postcolonial African playwright is to revive this tradition of African theatre for cultural decolonization of postcolonial African reality. Ngugi is one of the foremost postcolonial African playwrights to experiment in this regard in his co-operative works, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want*.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN THEATRE

It is generally believed that African theatre is still not distinguishable from such subgenres as ritual, magic, epic or supernatural performance. This belief shows two preconceptions: one, that African theatre is still too functional to be scientific; and two, that African theatre is

anti-Aristotelian in its nature. These two are closely related to each other. While western drama has largely lost touch with its ritualistic roots, Martin Banham and Clive Wake, in *African Theatre Today*, argue that the defining trait of contemporary African theatre is as follows:

The nature of the contemporary theatre in Africa can only be fully understood in the context of its historical roots. The modern playwrights of Africa, the concert parties, and the operas have much of their origin in the ritual dramas of the past. The professional actors of the present day are maintaining a tradition of professional players that is ancient and widespread.

(Banham *et al* 1976: 1)

Banham and Wake explain that even contemporaneous African theatre is still tied to its historical root, the ritual. Furthermore, they insist that "African theatre is likely to contain and bring together diverse elements of entertainment and communication, including dance, music, mime, masquerade, and song" (Banham *et al* 1976: 3). Their definition of African theatre, though they suggest some positive points, seems to be basically founded on the belief that African theatre is not yet separated from the archetypal form of ritual for its functional aspects:

... African theatre is 'functional,' in the sense that it serves a purpose within communities and cultures that is much greater than simply that of entertainment or diversion. The roots of African theatre in ritual, seasonal rhythms, religion and communication are roots common to world theatre, but whereas it may be argued that European theatre, for instance, is at so great a distance from its functional roots as to be almost unaware of them, African theatre remains directly and immediately related to them.

(Banham *et al* 1976: 1)

For the western critic, African drama defies generic expectations, particularly those based on the Aristotelian model. There are many

clichéd critical standards by which African theatre is devalued from an aesthetic point of view. Those critical standards are, of course, all European standards. One of them frequently witnessed is the typical comment that African theatre has no tragedy. Anthony Graham-White states that "traditional African drama falls into two groups: satiric comedies and historical re-enactments" (Graham-White 1974: 42). Robert Pageard, too, speaks of "an ancient and anti-tragic education" in traditional African societies as follows:

If one defines the tragic sense as the possession of a sorrowful consciousness of human destiny on the part of the individual, one may doubt the existence of tragic art in the traditional society. The whole of social life itself is a dramatic representation, but it aims at the restoration of the past, the glorification of the myth when it exists, the return to a certain original perfection; this explains the supremacy of the ancestors and the inanity of individual reflection.

(Pageard from Graham-White 1974: 43)

Historically, European drama has placed far more emphasis on tragedy than on comedy or any other genre. Tragedy has come to be regarded as the sublime genre, which leads spectators to a moment of catharsis. The catharsis is achieved through 'pity' and 'fear,' when spectators empathize and identify themselves with the protagonists. Protagonists generally represent the good, while the antagonists represent the bad. Spectators feel sublimation or desublimation through the movement of the protagonists in the play. This is a classic theory of Aristotelian tragedy. In Aristotelian theatre, binary oppositions between good and evil, right and wrong, master and slave, and protagonist and antagonist are inevitable. In other words, these binary oppositions are the quintessential

conditions on which tragedy is founded.

This aesthetic theory of tragedy, however, is hard to apply to the African context. In Africa, tragedy does not emerge from such binary oppositions, which force us to distinguish between good and bad. Rather, it springs from the confrontation between two equally justifiable powers such as the old and the new, and the community and the individual. This African-type of confrontation between good and bad easily avoids any value judgement and is well illustrated by a dialogue between Obi Wali and the white Chairman in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*:

"You say you're a great admirer of Graham Greene. What do you think of *The Heart of the Matter*?"

"The only sensible novel any European has written on West Africa and one of the best novels I have read." Obi paused, and then added almost as an afterthought: "Only it was nearly ruined by the happy ending."

The Chairman sat up in his chair.

"Happy ending? Are you sure it's *The Heart of the Matter* you're thinking about? The European police officer commits suicide."

"Perhaps happy ending is too strong, but there is no other way I can put it. The police officer is torn between his love of a woman and his love of God, and he commits suicide. It's much too simple. Tragedy isn't like that at all. I remember an old man in my village, a Christian convert, who suffered one calamity after another. He said life was like a bowl of wormwood which one sips a little at a time in a world without end. He understood the nature of tragedy."

"You think that suicide ruins a tragedy," said the Chairman.

"Yes. Real tragedy is never resolved. It goes on hopelessly forever. Conventional tragedy is too easy. The hero dies and we feel a purging of the emotions. A real tragedy takes place in a corner, in an untidy spot, to quote W. H. Auden. The rest of the world is unaware of it."

(Achebe 1960: 35-36)

In this sense, the African theory of tragedy is closest to Hegel's definition of the genre. For Hegel, tragedy, as opposed to melodrama, does not consist in the conflict between good and evil. Melodramatic

conflict, if resolved in favor of the principle of virtue, leaves the audience edified, and if in favor of vice, depressed or outraged. But in neither case does it provoke the emotions peculiar to a genuinely tragic conflict. True tragedy, however, according to Hegel, requires a collision between two moral principles or "ethical substantives," both of which command the respect of an audience. In short, tragedy consists of the irresolvable conflict between two incompatible moral "goods" or ethical systems (Moses 1995: 10). Therefore, to criticize African theatre for its lack of aesthetic tragedy is an ontological error.

Thus, African theatre is anti-Aristotelian in its very nature. Whether a theatrical work is Aristotelian or not cannot be a standard of value by which a qualitative trait of any theatre is being measured. Aristotelian theatre is a model canonized by European theatre traditions from classical Greece. It is well known that Aristotle, in *Poetics*, suggested 'three unities' as composing elements of ancient drama, which could be differentiated from ritual or epic. These unities are 'unity of place,' 'unity of time,' and 'unity of action.' African theatre does not, however, operate on these three unities. Banham and Wake, again, describe the characteristics of anti-Aristotelian African theatre as follows:

The most important point to make is that African theatre has developed without major restrictions placed upon it by physical limitations, or time barriers, such as traditionally prescribe the form and length of much European and American theatre. There is no reason at all why an African play should consider itself as something that has to be contained within two or three hours. It need not necessarily have an Aristotelian shape to provide beginning, middle and end, for it may be part of a continuous festival or otherwise relate to a time scale of far greater magnitude.

(Banham *et al* 1976: 3)

Here, Banham and Wake positively evaluate African theatre in its difference from European, Aristotelian theatre. Their analysis thus debunks the belief that the European tradition of a 'well-made play' is the one and only standard against which any drama should be judged, as they show the necessity to revisit one's aesthetic preconceptions from a historical point of view. Drama has its origins in human struggles with nature and other human beings. This makes every local drama particular and universal at the same time, as every human being has their own way of struggling against nature and others. African drama reflects its own history of struggle. Ngugi comments on the historical traits of Kenyan drama as follows:

Drama in precolonial Kenya was not, then, an isolated event: it was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community. It was an activity among other activities, often drawing its energy from those other activities. It was also entertainment in the sense of involved enjoyment; it was moral instruction; and it was also a strict matter of life and death and communal survival. This drama was not performed in special buildings set aside for the purpose. It could take place anywhere - wherever there was an 'empty space,' to borrow the phrase from Peter Brook. 'The empty space,' among the people, was part of that tradition.

(Ngugi 1986: 37)

It is important to note that, for Ngugi, African drama does not exist only for functional, ritualistic purpose. Crucial to performance is the aspect of entertainment. Further, as Banham and Wake have already suggested, African drama is not 'performed in special buildings set aside for the purpose.' Thus we see, once again, African theatre breaking the rule of Aristotle's 'three unities,' that is, 'unity of time, place, and action.' We can therefore conclude that, historically, African theatre does

not adhere to Aristotelian dramatic convention.

It is this fundamental divergence from Aristotelian dramatic convention that makes drama such a useful genre for Ngugi as, in it, he is freed from the restrictions of form and content that the Aristotelian model enforces. The message of African drama, which "could take days, weeks, or months," operates on an entirely different ontology. As an example of this, Ngugi proposes the *Ithuika* ceremony, which takes place every twenty-five years or so to mark the handing over of power from one generation to another among the Agikuyu of Kenya. He says "the Ituika was celebrated by feasting, dancing and singing over a six-month period. The laws and regulations of the new government were embodied in the words, phrases and rhythmic movements of the new songs and dances" (Ngugi 1986: 37). This type of African theatre will never be encapsulated in the European form of drama. Banham and Wake, too, are not ignorant of the spatial peculiarity of African theatre:

Much that is most interesting in contemporary African theatre is performed in simple courtyards or on platform stages operating in the round (for instance the travelling theatres of the Universities of Ibadan or Makerere) or in purpose built theatres such as the Ghana Drama Studio in Accra where attempts have been made to remove the inhibitions of European theatrical forms, and to provide a range of performing areas more suited to the style of African theatre. African audiences are participating audiences - vocally and physically. To constrain this response is to kill the drama.

(Banham *et al* 1976: 4)

This characteristic has been disseminated through the African diaspora such that Edward Brathwaite recognizes the presence of anti-Aristotelian theatre in the Caribbean. He argues, in "The Love Axe:

Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974," that "yard theatre" could be a theatrical alternative for decolonization from the colonizer's authoritarian artistic dominance:

Yard was revolutionary in that everything about it not simply rejected/ignored the notions of traditional/colonial Euro-American theatre, it provided a viable and creative alternative. There was no house, no building. The theatre was as its name said: a yard: in a yard: 12 Princess Alice Drive, August Town, Mona: transferred from time to time to other (people's) yards. There was therefore no "fixity;" no "audience," for one thing in the traditional sense: no gate, no entrance fee, no foyer, no box office, no boxes....

(Brathwaite from Baker 1976: 30)

#### NGUGI AND AFRICAN THEATRE

Ngugi is an experimental playwright in the sense that he incorporates the pre-colonial models of African theatre and transfers them to the context of contemporary postcolonial theatre. Ngugi's intentional desire to emphasize the pre-colonial form of African theatre arises out of his belief that Aristotelian theatre was used as a colonial ideological apparatus to control the natives' culture and mentality. Pre-colonial forms of African theatre, due to its collective base, have the potential to unleash unimaginable subversive power in the native people. Naturally, this is perceived as a threat by the colonizer. This subversion relies on a close link between form and content. Ngugi states that "formal elements are the external manifestation of the real dramatic content which is the idea - tension, the dialectical tension in the idea. If this marries with an appropriate form then it becomes explosive" (Ngugi 1993: 126). Achebe also emphasizes the importance of intermeshing form and content: "I

have a problem drawing a line between form and content. I don't think you can alter the content without altering the form" (Achebe in Egejuru 1980: 106).

Ngugi's concern over the importance of form leads him to stress the value of pre-colonial forms of African theatre. He believes that pre-colonial forms of African theatre have an immense political effect for decolonization in colonial or postcolonial societies. Further, he thinks that this political effect was acknowledged by the British colonizers. Hence their eagerness to build imperial-looking theatres like 'The British Kenya National Theatre,' under instruction from the Colonial Office, to foster a pro-imperial Kenyan colonial elite. Ngugi's criticism concerning 'The Kenya Drama Festival,' which was also created by the British colonizer, confirms his belief that the colonizer's support for an expansion of Aristotelian forms of theatre in the colony was an attempt to gain indirect control over the collective-will of the native. Ngugi quotes Richard Frost who, concerned with the Kenya Drama Festival, is very forthright about its cultural basis for creating a Kenyan colonial elite:

The Kenya Drama Festival, which has an offshoot in the Schools Drama Festival, was the result of a plan put into operation in 1951. The British Council had to win the goodwill of Europeans and do what it could to help them to keep at a high standard the cultural heritage of Britain. Drama was a cultural activity enjoyed by both actors and audiences and it was also an activity in which Africans and Asians engaged. It was hoped that through the theatre the goodwill of the European community could be gained, European cultural standards could be helped, and, later on, members of the different races could be brought together by participation in a common pursuit which they all enjoyed.

(Frost from Ngugi 1981a: 68)

A further feature that distinguishes African theatre formally from

European or American theatre is the historical presence of song and dance. Song and dance are central in African theatre due to their historical connections with rituals. This ritualistic element is one absorbed into the context of everyday peasant life: "Even daily speech among peasants is interspersed with song. It can be a line or two, a verse, or a whole song. What's important is that song and dance are not just decorations; they are an integral part of that conversation, that drinking session, that ritual, that ceremony" (Ngugi 1986: 45). The most extreme example of linking song and dance with Africa comes, of course, from Leopold Senghor. Senghor argues that the African has an inherently biological sense of "rhythm":

It is the thing that is most perceptible and least material. It is the archetype of the vital element. It is the first condition and the hallmark of Art, as breath is of life: breath, which accelerates or slows, which becomes even or agitated according to the tension in the individual, the degree and the nature of his emotion. This is rhythm in its primordial purity, this is rhythm in the masterpieces of Negro art, especially sculpture.

(Senghor from Fanon 1967: 122-123)

Senghor has, quite correctly, been accused of essentialism for these views. Thus it is important to note that Ngugi's account differs from his in its deeply historicized nature. Ngugi states that a further tradition in African culture which influenced the anti-systematic trait of African theatre is the patriotic national tradition, which has developed in resistance and opposition to imperialist-sanctioned African culture. Under colonialism, he argues, songs, dances, poetry and drama spoke of and reflected people's real needs as they struggled against appalling working

conditions in the settler-occupied farms and factories, or which sang of their hopes as they took up arms against colonial exploitation and political oppression. Whether through sculpture, poetry, songs, or dances, the patriotic arts looked to the past for progressive elements in form but injected them with a new content and form born of the urgent present. Thus the presence of song, dance and rhythm in African theatre does not simply serve decorative or nostalgic purposes. On the contrary, as Ingird Bjorkman points out, Ngugi was critical of those who indulged in nostalgic enthusiasm for things truly Africa (Bjorkman 1989: 1).

#### NGUGI AND EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

As an experimentalist, Ngugi wants to use his theatre as a space for political and aesthetic debate on the postcolonial political reality of Africa. Ngugi believes that postcolonial regimes in Africa are deceiving the masses by charlatanic machination. A combination of aesthetic and political struggle is harnessed to raise the masses' consciousness against these totalitarian regimes. Theatre becomes a powerful weapon in this struggle, as it is traditionally 'subversive' on account of its collective trend. Furthermore, "drama is closer to the dialectics of life than poetry and the fiction" (Ngugi 1986: 54). Fiction in contrast, he suggests, has a limited capacity to reach people at grassroots level:

Definitely not. In fact I don't think the novel is necessarily the best means of reaching the people. I can think of other art forms that are more direct. For instance, the film is the most direct art form that can reach people at grassroot level. But the film is not what an individual writer decides on. You must have money and equipment, and there are other factors that come into it. Filmmaking is a minority occupation

because of the way films are produced. At the level of production, writing is more of a public art form than the film.

(Ngugi in Egejuru 1980: 108-109)

Writing, in the African context, is a minority occupation due to high levels of illiteracy, which results in a reduced reading public. In Kenya, Bjorkman notes, the illiteracy rate is as high as 70 percent (Bjorkman 1989: 2). When faced with direct the question, "since the African reading public is small, don't you feel you are not really reaching the people?", in an interview with Akubueze Egejuru, Ngugi responds that "that's true. It (Writing) is not public art form, it's very elitist in itself. In Africa, to be able to read is still a minority preoccupation" (Ngugi in Egejuru 1980: 53). Film offers a viable alternative until such time is reached, when "books would no longer be a privilege, but a right" (Ngugi in Egejuru 1980: 53). But Ngugi rules it out on the basis of financial factors which impact on the integrity of the artwork. Theatre thus emerges as the most appropriate form for reaching a wide African audience.

#### **A: *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI***

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, jointly written by Ngugi and Micere Mugo, is an historical epic set in the 1950s and focusing on Mau Mau resistance to British imperialism. The play centres around Kimathi's arrest and detention, culminating in his trial at Nyeri. Much of the action is carried through three characters that stand symbolically for the past and future of the Kenyan nation, namely, the peasant woman and the Boy and Girl. While incarcerated, Kimathi is faced with four trials, or temptations. These are symbolically presented as coming from the

liberal colonialist, western business interests, African business, political and religious delegations and finally the physical assault of torture. The play ends with the death sentence being passed on Kimathi. But, as we will see, this is by no means the end of the affair.

The choice of Kimathi as subject matter in an experimental play is strategic for more reasons than his legendary status as a freedom fighter. Kerr reveals that Kimathi is Ngugi's precursor in the realm of Kenyan popular theatre:

[The emergency period in Kenyan anti-colonial struggle] was the period in which paradramatic theatre forms played an important part in arousing African solidarity against British colonialism. The most celebrated example of this was the Gicamu theatre movement which the freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi started as Karuna-ini in Nyeri.

(Kerr, 1995: 242)

Ngugi believes wholeheartedly in the ability of people as class subjects to carry out a postcolonial decolonization as subjects of historical change. His theatre becomes the stage on which this transformation from object to subject of history takes place. In this sense, his theatre can be called 'revolutionary theatre.' Udentia explains the relation between Ngugi's theatre and the revolutionary aesthetic as follows:

The utilization of the dramatic medium as a means of propagating contrasting and irreconcilable ideologies, and the struggles for the control of the conscience of men have been noted by various commentators. Ngugi wa Thiong'o sees drama, especially in its theatrical orientation, as the crucial and most decisive stage in the struggle against cultural neo-colonialism in Africa, and Kenya in particular, and as a weapon of galvanising the broad masses towards radical socio-economic changes. This attests to the predominant position occupied by drama and drama-related issues in his collections of critical essays - *Writers in Politics* and *Barrel of a Pen*.

(Udentia 1993: 25)

Udenta argues that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is remarkable as the first serious step towards the consolidation of the supremacy of the revolutionary aesthetic and cultural thought in the field of theatre. This aesthetic is achieved by breaking away from previous conventional practices and uninhibitedly addressing the broad masses, portraying for them their living struggle, their past hopes, failure and strivings, showing them what they are today and why they are still dehumanized. Udenta, however, proceeds to delineate some of the pitfalls and shortcomings attendant in the revolutionary aesthetic:

But revolutionary aesthetics also has a chequered and beleaguered history. Stalinist rigidification and legislation, the tendentious official involvement, the indecent emphasis on contentual values, the obsession with the positive hero and revolutionary romanticism, the eulogization of mediocre works because of their ideological purity and the lack of room given to experimentation, innovation and creative independence nearly stifled revolutionary aesthetics and partially discredited it as a serious socio-aesthetic phenomenon.

(Udenta 1993: xvi)

Ngugi manages, in my view, to technically dodge the abovementioned dangers. This is achieved through his open and kinetic acceptance of the panoramic visions of ordinary people. Eschewing a fixed form, he embraces a collective and democratic theatre, which Boal has called a 'theatre of the oppressed.' Ngugi states that a collective theatre is produced by a range of factors: a content with which people could identify carried in a form which they could recognise and identify, as well as their participation in its evolution through the research stages, that is by the collection of raw material like details of work conditions in farms and firms (Ngugi 1986: 60). Ngugi's dependence on collective

theatre arises out of his belief in the collective spontaneity of African art. Ngugi confirms that African art is basically based on orature, which consisted of songs, poems, drama, proverbs, riddles, and sayings. Orature is the richest and oldest of heritages. Furthermore, he says, it can be extremely simple or very complex depending on the time, place and the occasion (Ngugi 1986: 18). Ngugi finds in this type of collective theatre the future of his aesthetics. This gave him momentum to turn his interests to Brecht.

Ngugi's use of Brecht, though, is clearly an appropriation rather than slavish derivation. His theatre is, strictly speaking, not open-ended, contrary to its appearance and our expectations. Ngugi does not hesitate in inserting his political idea for decolonization. Technically, this authorial and ideological control is exercised through the mouths of particular characters or in the form of a chorus or even by collective actions like song and dance. Thus, in his steadfast postcolonial desire for decolonization, Ngugi wishes to guide his audiences to an ideal way of decolonization. To this purpose, his theatre frequently displays some didactic 'fallacy.' But his didacticism cannot be called a 'fallacy' in the colonial or postcolonial African context. For Ngugi believes every aesthetic is ultimately functional and has a political unconscious. This is the point at which Ngugi's appropriation of Brechtian theatre becomes Africanized and local.

Ngugi's experimental independence from Brechtian theatre is well shown in the conscious and didactic voice of 'Kimathi,' in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Kimathi consciously reveals the fictitious truth of the

colonizer by repeating and playing with the colonizer's word. Through repetition, Kimathi allows audiences a time to reflect and meditate on the genuine meaning of the word announced by the colonizer. Through reflection and meditation, audiences finally come to realize the real truth of the word. What is important here, however, is not the audiences' spontaneous recognition of the truth but their guided awakening by a heroic or legendary leader:

KIMATHI: By what right dare you, a colonial judge, sit in judgement over me?

JUDGE: (Playing with his glasses, oozing infinite patience):  
Kimathi, I may remind you that we are in a court of law.

KIMATHI: An imperialist court of law.

JUDGE: I may remind you that you are charged with a most serious crime. It carries a death sentence.

KIMATHI: Death ...

JUDGE: Yes, death ...

KIMATHI: To a criminal judge, in a criminal court, set up by criminal law: the law of oppression. I have no words.

(Ngugi 1976: 25)

This time Kimathi consciously reverses a word-order to enjoy a political game with the colonial judge. His political word play leads audiences to discover for themselves the unbridgable distance between the word and the truth, which consequently leads them to new insight:

JUDGE: There is no liberty without law and order.

KIMATHI: There is no order and law without liberty.

Chain my legs,

Chain my hands,

Chain my soul,

And you cry, law and justice?

And the law of the people bids me:

Unchain my hands

Unchain my legs

Unchain my soul!

(Ngugi 1976: 27)

This is a typical example of Brechtian consciousness-raising theatre. Yet, as I have emphasized, it is used here in an Africanized form. Ngugi uses one more scene that displays how people are influenced by Kimathi's teaching in the play. Ngugi's arrangement of dialectical dialogue between one character and another is intended to show consequence of the political debate, and, just as importantly, to extend the dialogue to the audience, such that the play effectively stops being the play and becomes an open-ended space for decolonization, though its sophistication is controlled by the writer himself. This technique to reach beyond the edge of the stage can be seen when "The Woman," after gaining great recognition through Kimathi's conscious struggle against the colonizer, challenges all men and women inside and outside the play to become involved in the struggle:

The trial of our strength.  
Our faith, our hopes, our resolve  
The trial of loyalty  
Our cause.

(Ngugi 1976: 14)

Mugo, co-author of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, confirms the influence of Brechtian theatre on Ngugi and herself, but once again emphasizes their efforts to transform it into the African context. Self-consciously speaking from the position of an experimentalist, she, in an interview with James, explains why *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was created:

James: It (*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*) is a unique play, one that takes us close to the theatre of Brecht and plays like *Mother Courage*. It is a theatre of consciousness-raising and encouragement to struggle. What sort of reactions have you got from people concerning the play?

Mugo: When we wrote the play we were very conscious of our positions as lecturers and writers. We were using drama specifically in order to conscientize our people, to review our history with them and theirs with us to be able to answer the questions, 'Where are we?' and 'Where are we heading?'

(James 1993: 100)

Once again, we see the dialectical relationship between playwright and audience being asserted. As the above interview suggests, for Ngugi and Mugo, writing and performing *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is an attempt to imaginatively reconstruct their history, envisioning the world of the Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants' and workers' struggle before and after constitutional independence. This play is not a reproduction of the farcical 'trial' which occurred at Nyeri. It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement (Ngugi 1976: 4).

Thus the play uses historical material in order to make an urgent intervention in present and future reality. The play works on two different levels. The audience realizes that, in the reality recorded by history books, Dedan Kimathi was executed after being condemned to death at the sham trial in Nyeri. Ngugi and Mugo are not interested in that level of reality. They create a Dedan Kimathi charged with mythical strength, hero who escapes death at the hands of the colonialists through

a kind of spiritual metamorphosis into a revolutionary symbol. The trajectory of the play is from a heroic gathering of that power and commitment in Dedan Kimathi's character to its transfer in the form of spiritual/political solidarity to the Kenyan masses (represented by the Woman, the Boy and the Girl). This power of Dedan Kimathi's spirit (the sense in which he is still alive) is meant to transfer to the audience as a way of igniting them in their struggle against neo-colonialism with the same flame which served in the struggle against over imperialism.

This transference takes place in the climax of the play's ending. While the moment of Kimathi's execution approaches, the Boy and the Girl fulfil their mission to smuggle in a gun. Preceding sentencing, Kimathi is resolute in his defiance against the oppressor:

KIMATHI: But our people will never surrender  
Internal and external foes  
Will be demolished  
And Kenya shall be free!  
[Applause from Africans]

JUDGE: Order in Court!

KIMATHI: [Addressing the people]  
So, go!  
Organise in your homes  
Organise in the mountains  
Know that your only  
Kindred blood is he  
Who is in the struggle  
Denounce those who weaken  
Our struggle  
By creating ethnic divisions  
Uproot from you those  
Who are selling out to imperialism  
Kenyan masses shall be free!

JUDGE: Kimathi, you are sentenced to die by hanging.

You will be hanged by the rope until you are dead.

(Ngugi 1976: 68)

The sentence is greeted by Kimathi's laugh and the triumphant and defiant appearance of the Boy and Girl, holding the gun. As Etherton has argued, the firing of the shot in the courtroom after the sentence of death has been passed on Kimathi symbolizes the continuation of the struggle through the young Boy and the Girl (Etherton 1982: 168). They have become the makers of history. If the Boy and Girl represent the Kenyan masses and their future actions, then an audience of Kenyan peasants would identify with them and see themselves as the inheritors of the struggle.

This shift in focus from Kimathi to the audience is crucial as it works to undermine what Etherton has seen as a latent tendency to create Kimathi as a Christ figure. The classical motifs of the Christian Eucharist are certainly present in the play in the temptation, betrayal, scourging, death and resurrection of Kimathi (Etherton 1982: 175). This critique is mitigated, though, by Etherton's admission that "in creating Kimathi as the people's hero, Mugo and Ngugi also make the people themselves heroic" (Etherton 1982: 168). This can, to some extent, be compared with the inscription of Christ-like characteristics in Kihika of *A Grain of Wheat*, which is subsequently expanded in his declaration that "I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say that you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ" (Ngugi 1967: 83).

Ngugi's theatre, based as it is on a mixed form of fact and fiction, history and imagination, is undoubtedly experimental. As playwright,

Ngugi is participating in the process of rewriting history through the experimental imagination of his theatre. His rewriting of history takes various forms, such as didacticism and accusation against postcolonial corruption and disillusionment. In the soliloquy of 'The Woman' and her scolding of 'Boy,' for example, we can see Ngugi himself didactically interfering in the process of rewriting history:

WOMAN: Ngai! It is the same old story. Everywhere. Mombasa. Nakuru. Kisumu. Eldret. The same old story. Our people... tearing one another... and all because of the crumbs thrown at them by the exploiting foreigners. Our own food eaten and leftovers thrown to us - in our own land, where we should have the whole share. We buy wood from our own forest; sweat on our own soil for the profit of our oppressors. Kimathi's teaching is: unite, or drive out the enemy and control your own riches, enjoy the fruit of your sweat. It is for this that the enemy has captured him. (Boy returns, ravenously eating maandaze.)

BOY: I don't know how to thank you for what you have done today. But... but... If I can do something, anything, you know... like cleaning up your house, your compound, weeding your shamba, even washing your clothes...

WOMAN (angry): You want to change Masters! A black master for a white master! Have you no other horizon? Except to be a slave! If I didn't have better things to do, why, I would properly thrash you.

(Ngugi 1976: 18-20)

This didacticism is not unidirectional, however. While Ngugi and Mugo did rely on authoritative academic sources for some of their material and used the play as a platform from which to express their own politicised viewpoint, their greatest sources were the oral histories gathered from old peasants in Kimathi's own village. As Kerr notes, it was the peasants themselves who provided the central shaping metaphor for *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*: the notion of Kimathi still being alive (Kerr 1995: 125). The play has, though, attracted some criticism in response to

its purported ability to reach out to the popular masses. Etherton has argued that:

... the plays complicated theatricality (which makes any performance of it dependent upon the technical resources of stage lightening, amplified sound, levels and effects), suggests that its intended audiences are not so much the Kenyan masses, as African intellectuals whose political consciousness demands an intellectualized framework in which this consciousness can be culturally situated.

(Etherton 1982: 178)

More damning, perhaps, is the fact that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was performed in English. Ngugi somewhat compensates for this weakness of language choice through the oral function in form and through revolutionary consciousness in content. Nonetheless, the use of English remains an obstacle. According to Kerr, the move from performing plays in the colonial language to performing in African languages is probably the most crucial change in tilting literary drama towards popular theatre expression (Kerr 1995: 126). This crucial change can be found in Ngugi's *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, performed in Gikuyu and translated into English as *I Will Marry When I Want*. Here, Ngugi will finally fulfill Etherton's proviso that "if a play reflects the people as the makers of history, it must also make that history accessible to them as drama. Otherwise it may just as easily deprive the masses of their history altogether" (Etherton 1982: 178).

#### **B. I WILL MARRY WHEN I WANT**

Language choice, as already suggested, is a very grave problem to any African artist in both the aesthetic and political sense. Language in the

African context is closely related to a decolonizing movement, such that language choice in Africa becomes a loaded political choice. Language, for Ngugi, is regarded as a reservoir in which a people's knowledge about their land and their power to dominate their surroundings is encased. If language is dominated, people's physical and mental universe become colonized.

The difficulties that the language question poses to literary creation in Africa are even more evident in the realm of drama. Abiola Irele warns that one's divorce from one's own language creates a most absurd scene when it comes to the field of drama: "in drama, the use of a European language has the effect of making it difficult for an audience, either African or European, to suspend its disbelief sufficiently to make for the deepest kind of response to the dramatic situation. The cleavage between an African 'content' and a European 'form' appears at every stage in African drama of European expression, underscoring unduly the artifice of drama" (Irele 1981: 51).

African people's alienation from their own language is not a technical problem. In other words, this is not a problem that can be solved, by Africans technically mastering a European language. Even given a playwright and an actor with a sophisticated command of European language will not mitigate the situation. Soyinka and J. P. Clark are typical examples of this. Taking Soyinka and Clark into consideration, Martin Esslin, in "Two Nigerian Playwrights," states the following about the difficulties of African playwrights:

But it might be argued, the work of the two playwrights we are here discussing, Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark, should be largely exempt from these considerations; for, after all, they are writing in English. Far from being an advantage, in my opinion, this is a further handicap. Not that these two playwrights are in any way at a disadvantage in using the English language. On the contrary: both are real masters of all its nuances and, indeed, very considerable artists in English. Here again the problem arises from the nature of drama itself. These plays are by Africans about Africans in an African social context. And they are, largely, about Africans who, in reality, speak their own African languages. It is here that the problem lies. We are here presented with African peasants, African fishermen, African labourers expressing themselves in impeccable English.

(Esslin from Beier 1967: 256)

This is why Ngugi strategically discards English as his theatre language, though he still used it when he wrote *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* with Micere Githae Mugo. Ngugi's critique of the use of European language is closely linked to his critique of the privileging of script over orality. Ngugi casts a suspicious eye on the role of 'the written,' which was forcefully emphasized and expanded by the colonizer under the form of culture, including the theatre: "since the new, imposed languages could never completely break the native languages as spoken, their most effective area of domination was the third aspect of languages as communication, the written. The language of the African child's formal education was foreign. The language of the books he read was foreign. The language of his conceptualisation was foreign" (Ngugi 1986: 17). Abdul JanMohamed, too, points out the danger of the introduction of 'literacy' into the oral culture:

Literacy is important not simply from a mechanical viewpoint or because it opens up a new world for members of an oral culture but because, as Jack Goody and Ian Watt have shown, it destroys the important function of "structural amnesia" in oral cultures and makes

available, through documentation, a specifically defined and limited past. Thus literacy displays "mythic" mentality and leads to the development of a historical consciousness which in turn is very important, as we know, for the development of the novel in Europe and in Africa.

(JanMohamed 1983: 9)

Ngugi, thus, argues that 'the written' has alienated the African masses from their own languages and cultures through this legitimate institution. For the written language of an African child's upbringing in the school became divorced from his spoken language at home. And there was often not the slightest relationship between the child's written world, which was also the language of his schooling, and the world of his immediate environment in the family and community (Ngugi 1986: 17). Indeed, one might say that it was the problematic of language choice combined with illiteracy rates that led Ngugi to theatre in the first instance. In theatre the barriers of literacy are instantly abolished as African theatre maintains a synthetic form which collectively digests diverse forms of expressions including oral ones and is therefore not necessarily dependent on script only.

In Ngugi's postcolonial play *I Will Marry When I Want* (*Ngaahika Ndeenda*), originally written in the indigenous Gikuyu language, song and dance appear as part of the structure of the play and the movement of the actors. Song and dance thus become essential components of the dialogue and action to the extent that they emerge as part and parcel of the play. Ngugi himself, in *Decolonizing the Mind*, illustrates this by quoting a long sequence in which a series of songs and dances show the controlling power of some action and movement:

WANGECI: (Also mesmerized by memories of their past youth)

In those days

We used to dance in Kineenii forest.

KIGUUNDA:

A dance would cost only twenty-five cents.

WANGECI:

In those days there was not a single girl from Ndeiya up to Githiiga

Who did not die to dance with you.

KIGUUNDA:

You too would swing your skirt

Till the guitar player was moved to breaking the strings.

And the guitars used to sound tunes

That silenced the entire forest,

Making even the trees listen ...

*The sound of guitars and other instruments as if KIGUUNDA and WANGECI can hear them in the memory. KIGUUNDA and WANGECI start dancing. Then they are joined by the guitar players and players of other instruments and DANCERS. They dance, KIGUUNDA and WANGECI among them.*

*Nyaangwicu let's shake the skirt*

*Nyaangwicu let's shake the skirt*

*Sister shake it and make it yield its precious yields.*

*Sister shake it and make it yield its precious yields ...*

*When this is over, WANGECI says, 'Oh my favourite was Mwomboko.' And KIGUUNDA replies: 'Oh in those days we used to tear the right or left side of trouser legs from the knee downwards. Those were our bell bottoms with which we danced Mwomboko.' Now the guitar players and the accordion players start. The Mwomboko DANCERS enter. KIGUUNDA and WANGECI lead them in the Mwomboko dance. Guitars, iron rings and the accordions are played with vigour and the dancers' feet add embellishment ...*

(Ngugi 1986: 47-48)

For Ngugi, these historic and aesthetic particularities of African theatre are excellent cultural tools for postcolonial identity-searching and decolonization in postcolonial Africa. Ngugi knows very well how to drive these distinctive qualities of African theatre politically in order to interrogate the corrupt postcolonial regimes in Africa. His interrogation,

sometimes, becomes very deconstructive, especially when his concern with African theatre's peculiarity is closely related to its aesthetic aspects. Here emerges Ngugi's experimental spirit in terms of postcolonial African theatre.

This experimental spirit owes much to Brechtian theatre. Ngugi, following his close study of Brechtian theatre, decided to incorporate this model into the African context, arguing that only a Brechtian-type of theatre in Africa could politically consciencize African theatregoers. For Ngugi, theatre is a political arena as it is a place where people debate what is right and wrong and a space where they are able to correct their history. To encourage the potential viewers to actively engage in this process, Ngugi demystifies every hidden process of drama making. Conventional Euro-American drama generally hides the creative process in theatre in order to make the dramatized reality look more real than true reality. Thus the reality achieved in Euro-American theatre is an artificial reality, a reality controlled and created by a hidden hand. This deceptive process leads viewers to believe that the reality on the stage is the true and only reality. Ngugi's theatre, in contrast, intentionally refuses to pretend it is searching for a true reality. The emphasis is rather on consciously showing how that reality is created and constructed. Ngugi's Kamiriithu theatre was created precisely for this function:

The Kamiriithu practice was part of education as a process of demystifying knowledge and hence reality. People could see how the actors evolved from the time they could hardly move their legs or say their lines to a time when they could talk and move about the stage

as if they were born talking those lines or moving on that stage. Some people in fact were recruited into the acting team after they had intervened to show how such and such a character should be portrayed. The audience applauded them into continuing doing the part. Perfection was thus shown to be a process, a historical social process, but it was admired no less. On the contrary they identified with that perfection even more because it was a product of themselves and their collective contribution. It was a heightening of themselves as a community.

(Ngugi 1986: 57)

Ngugi's *I Will Marry When I Want* is a play written and performed through this process. The research on the script, the writing of the outline, the readings and the discussions of the outline, the auditions and rehearsals and the construction of the open-air theatre were all done by the people themselves. The result of all this effort made the theatre a part of a collective festival. As Bjorkman states, "[f]or the first time in modern Kenya's theatre there was a play about the people, for the people and in the people's own language" (Bjorkman 1989: 53). Ngugi himself, in *Barrel of A Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya*, asserts that *I Will Marry When I Want* was created through collective endeavour:

Although the script was drafted by Ngugi wa Miri and I, the peasants and workers added to it, making the end product a far cry from the original draft. Everything was collective, open and public, and it was fascinating to see a unity gradually emerge virtually rubbing out distinctions of age, education, sex and nationality.

(Ngugi 1983: 42)

The importance of establishing a genuine collaborative effort with the community is spelled out by South African dramatist, Zakes Mda:

It is crucial that we wean ourselves from the liberal notion of doing

something for the people. Sustainable development will only happen if we do something with the people. The people must be full participants in their own development. Development is meaningful only if it allows for the empowerment of local communities.

(Mda 1994: 142)

Ngugi's use of theatre as a collective political space is related to the pseudo-political postcolonial African reality in which African people have been deceived. He wanted to make his theatre as an open space for political debate. His experimental use of Brechtian theatre is well represented when he introduces a debate on subjects such as church, marriage, morality and laws, conflicts between tradition and modernity and so on. Through this open debate, he draws both attention and positive participation from anonymous audiences. As a result of this, Ngugi's theatre becomes full of unexpected improvisations or crossovers and breaks a conventional boundary of theatrical form which draws an authoritative line between playwright and reader, and actor and spectator. There are many examples of these in *I Will Marry When I Want*. See, for example, the following:

GICAAMBA:

And how does religion come into it?  
Religion is not the same thing as God.  
All the religions that now sit on us  
Were brought here by the whites.  
Even today the Catholic religion  
Is still called the Roman Catholic Church.  
P. C. E. A. belongs to Scottish protestants.  
The Anglican church belongs to the English.  
The Orthodox belongs to the Greeks.  
The Baptist belongs to the Americans.  
There are many more religions  
Which have been brought here by imperialists from America,  
And which tell us we should give them a tenth of all that we  
produce.

Where does the ten per cent go?  
To America.  
Then they send back to us ten shillings  
Taken from the tenth portion we sent them,  
And they tell us:  
This is American aid to your local churches.  
And we give them a standing ovation.  
When the British imperialists came here in 1895,  
All the missionaries of all the churches  
Held the Bible in the left hand,  
And the gun in the right hand.  
The white man wanted us  
To be drunk with religion  
While he,  
In the meantime,  
Was mapping and grabbing our land,  
And starting factories and businesses  
On our sweat.  
He drove us from our best lands,  
Forcing us to eke a living from plots on road sides  
Like beggars in our own land,  
Some of us dying in his tea and coffee plantations  
Others dying in his factories.  
Had we not woken up  
And sworn a readiness to die  
Fighting against the British imperialists,  
Where would be Kenya today?  
The white man had arranged it all  
To completely soften our hearts  
To completely cripple our minds with religion!  
And they had the audacity to tell us  
That earthly things were useless!

*(Singing)*

*Goats and cows and money  
Are not important.  
What is important  
Is the splendid face of Jesus.*

*I glance here  
I glance here  
And I see a huge bonfire  
In Devil's Hell  
And I ask myself:  
What can I do  
To avoid the Hell's fire?*

But they, on this earth, this very earth,  
They are busy carousing on earthly things, our wealth,  
And you the poor are told:  
Hold fast unto the rosary,  
Enter the church,  
Lift up your eyes unto the heavens.

NJOOKI

GICAAMBA: (*Singing*)

*Believe in God  
And He'll take care of all your problems,  
He will show you all the good things  
And remove all the evils from you  
Through Jesus you'll get your share in heaven.  
Believe in God  
Believe in God  
Believe in God  
And trust in Him.*

(Ngugi 1982: 56-58)

Unambiguous in its description on Christianity as a form of false consciousness which allows the bourgeoisie to feel justified in their wealth and provides promises of remote happiness in the next world for the oppressed in this, the play moves beyond the lurking ideology of messianism implicit in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Followed by improvised singing, the above extract can hardly be called conventional dramatic dialogue. The use of song extends the dialogue to the very audiences gathered before the open theatre to raise sensible questions for them. This is the very experimental theatre of Ngugi which makes even unknown audiences part of the play and consequently wakes them from their ignorance or indifference to the colonial or postcolonial reality of their lives.

In *I Will Marry When I Want*, Ngugi, thus, transforms himself and his role as a writer in order to become a participant in the rewriting of history by representing a dispossessed farmer's anathema against the

postcolonial government:

KIGUUNDA:

It was then  
That the state of Emergency was declared over Kenya.  
Our patriots,  
Men and women of  
Limuru and the whole country,  
Were arrested!  
The Emergency laws became very oppressive.  
Our homes were burnt down.  
We were jailed,  
We were taken to detention camps,  
Some of us were crippled through beatings.  
Others were castrated.  
Our women were raped with bottles.  
Our wives and daughters raped before our eyes!

*(Moved by the bitter memories, KIGUUNDA pauses for a few seconds)*

But through Mau Mau  
Led by Kimaathi and Matheeenge,  
And through the organized unity of the masses  
We beat the whites  
And freedom came ...  
We raised high our national flag.

...

KIGUUNDA:

How the times run!  
How many years have gone  
Since we got independence?  
Ten and over,  
Quite a good number of years!  
And now look at me!

*(KIGUUNDA looks at himself, points to the title-deed and goes near it)*

One and a half acres of land in dry plains.  
Our family land was given to homeguards.  
Today I am just a labourer  
On farms owned by Aham Kioi wa Kanoru.  
My trousers are pure tatters.  
Look at you.  
See what the years of freedom in poverty  
Have done to you!  
Poverty has hauled down your former splendour.  
Poverty has dug trenches on your face,

Your breasts have fallen,  
They have nowhere to hold.  
Now you look like an old basket  
That has lost all shape.

(Ngugi 1982b: 27-29)

Ngugi realizes that the main criterion for creating a genuinely popular theatre is not simply the use of an African language, but the casting of the plays within an ideological framework that reflects the class interests of the African masses and within a dramaturgy which is based on a local indigenous aesthetic. As did *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want*, Ngugi's other play *This Time Tomorrow*, again shows his sincere interest in rewriting history through theatre. Ngugi uses the considerable anger and disillusionment of a 'stranger' against the postcolonial government as a motive for his participation. His anger is directed at the failure of the world to change since independence from white colonialism, and disillusionment at the inability of the people to obtain the rights and the dignity they dream of. The play is anti-colonial inasmuch as it always casts the white colonialist as an exploiter and a rapist, but it is simultaneously critical of the new black elite: "Is this not a black man's government - our government?" a customer cries out in the play (Ngugi 1972b: 193).

## CONCLUSION

It is obvious that Ngugi is experimentally 'using' his theatre for political purposes. The aim is to recover the priority of African people's rights by returning to them a historical legitimacy in the form of an epistemology that admits ordinary people as the real heroes of African

history. Without them, decolonization is impossible. This foregrounding of the agency of ordinary people leads naturally to the use of ordinary people's language as the theatrical language. Ngugi seems to believe that writers as well as playwrights in the African context should have a revolutionary class position, for it is a minority job, as Ngugi himself indicated. This makes him feel responsible towards the underprivileged majority. Ngugi and Mugo, in the preface to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, deplore the lack of historical consciousness of contemporary Kenyan writers or playwrights. Ngugi explains that a history not based on people is apt to become pseudo-history. For this reason, Ngugi tries to draw people's conscious attention to African historical background through his experimental theatre. The radically subversive threat offered by Ngugi's experimental theatre has been clearly indicated through the reactions of the authorities to the play. While the class-conscious *Petals of Blood* and the script of *I Will Marry When I Want* were permitted to be freely disseminated in book form in Kenya, the plays performance was officially prohibited and Ngugi was imprisoned for the role he played in the creation of this theatre.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TOWARDS A NEW POSTCOLONIAL AESTHETIC:

#### *DEVIL ON THE CROSS AND MATIGARI*

##### INTRODUCTION

Ngugi's two latest novels, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, introduce a new dimension of experimental spirit to that displayed in his earlier work. In these two novels, Ngugi seems to have finally settled on his choice of language, theme, and class vision in his literary discourse. This aspect is important for my analysis of his appropriation of first world postmodernism into a contemporary African context. Actually, Ngugi's postmodern writing is not something new, we can see early traces of it in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. But in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, Ngugi's postmodern imagination is clearly visible. This allows Ngugi a formalistic metamorphosis, which is very important in contemporary novel writing, particularly in the African context. In postcolonial Africa, millions lack literacy skills, but the majority of readers are emerging from this group as significant consumers, and will be the decisive factor in popularizing any work of art locally. Hence the requirement for novel writing to be transformed in accordance with majority tastes. From this background, Ngugi's postmodern novels are written in Gikuyu, a local language. Ngugi's postmodernism is very important in two respects. Firstly, the postmodern aesthetic, for the first time in his writing, allows Ngugi to initiate a direct dialogue with the

first world. Secondly, his postmodernism becomes a powerful postcolonial aesthetic tool when hybridized with African reality.

*Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* present a confident attempt regarding the prospect of decolonization. Ngugi's confidence here, I suggest, arises from his completion of a scientific interpretation of postcolonial African society. The conclusion his analysis leads him to is that postcolonial African society is a neo-colonial society. His writing style develops out of this conclusion, leading him to adopt an indigenous language as his writing medium, and to throw his weight on the side of proletarian class, as postcolonial subjects in need of decolonization. His theme, too, is wholly dependent on class struggle and, unlike his earlier works, denies any possibility of super-structural struggle. Yet, all these third world aspects such as class, regionality, decolonization etc. are developed through a first world paradigm: postmodernism. Ngugi's latest two novels, in that sense, deserve to be considered as works in which his intertextual dialogue with the first world looks for an ideal postcolonial aesthetic alternative for decolonization.

#### POSTMODERN APPROPRIATION OF THE ALTHUSSERIAN MODEL

In *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, Ngugi shows contemporary Africa to be not a postcolonial society, but a neo-colonial society. His prognosis of this is not new to his writing, but can already be seen in earlier works such as *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. His earlier prognosis, however, lack the in-depth confidence of the later ones, though this does not mean that the former are qualitatively poorer. For what matters is not whether his confidence is established, but whether

or not it is appropriate.

Ngugi's confidence in his judgement that postcolonialism in Africa is nothing but the disguised face of neo-colonialism has two effects on his last two works. In my opinion, one is positive and the other negative. If the quality of the former works was decided by their value-free experiment, the quality of the later works is completely dependent on their value-fixed judgement. The positive aspect of value-fixed judgement is that it can specify the identity of the former abstract subject, class and language of the decolonizing movement. But there is the danger that such an identity could turn out to be a false one. Thus, to examine the exactitude of Ngugi's interpretation to postcolonial African society is a very important task in order to judge the value of his later works.

First of all, Ngugi's writing style in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* is, as mentioned before, based on his unshakable belief that postcolonial Africa is a neo-colonial society. He describes one of the typical characteristics of postcolonial Kenya by way of a satiric parable of master and slave in *Devil on the Cross*:

When they heard that their lord and master was about to leave, the loyalist slaves and servants rent their clothes and smeared their bodies with ashes, and they knelt down and cried: 'How can you go away and leave us here, mere orphans, when you know full well how we have persecuted the masses and have perpetrated many other crimes in your name? Did you not vow that you would never leave this land? How can you now leave us to the mercy of the nationalist guerrillas?'

And the lord, their master, told them: 'Are you possessed of so little faith? Let not your hearts be troubled, for you must trust in the God I have taught you to know, and you should also trust in me, the interpreter of his Will. I have many ways of fulfilling my wishes in

this land. If that were not so, I would have told you, so that you would have had time to flee or to find ropes to hang yourselves with before you are caught by the patriots. But what I wish to do now is to prepare positions of leadership for you, and to add a little more to the crumbs that you have been gathering from my table. And later I shall return with lots of money and many banks, and I shall also bring you more armoured cars and guns and bombs and aeroplanes, so that I shall be with you and you with me, so that we may love one another always and eat together, I sating myself on choice dishes, and you collecting up the precious remains.'

(Ngugi 1982a: 82-83)

We see, in the above quotation, Ngugi's conviction that neo-colonialism is fundamentally linked to 'finance imperialism' - the last phase of imperialism. Louis Althusser, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, argues that any state has two apparatuses to control its citizens. The first, 'Ideological State Apparatuses,' are intangible cultural and institutional apparatuses - such as school, religion, and the media - by which citizens' voluntary agreement or consensus is guaranteed. The second, 'Repressive State Apparatuses,' are physical, forceful and instrumental apparatuses like the army, police and the justice system by which rebellious citizens could be repressively curbed. Althusser emphasizes that these two state apparatuses secretly cooperate to make citizens obedient to the status quo (Althusser 1971: 136-137). If we follow Althusser's terminology, we find that Ngugi indicates that neo-colonialism is founded not only on Ideological State Apparatuses such as "lots of money and many banks," but also on Repressive State Apparatuses such as "armoured cars and guns and bombs and aeroplanes." Ngugi, thus, sensibly realizes that neo-colonial society is both ideological and repressive. He shows many examples of this in his latest work. One example that illustrates well neo-colonial society's

dependency on ideological interpellation is Mwaura's philosophy of money in *Devil on the Cross*:

'I am telling the truth when I say that I fought for this country's independence with these hands. Am I now supposed to spend the night here, sharing the dark forest with wild beasts?' the woman asked with a heavy heart, as if posing a problem with which she was familiar, but to which she had so far failed to find an answer.

'These days the land rewards not those who clear it but those who come after it has been cleared,' Mwaura told her. 'Independence is not tales about the past but the sound of money in one's pocket. Don't joke with me. Get out or let us hear the sweet sound of coins so that we can continue.'

(Ngugi 1982a: 37)

Mwaura is one of the typical citizens who is persuaded by the Ideological State Apparatuses to think that in postcolonial society, money is more important than a freedom-fighter; "he used to say that there was no universe he would not visit, no river that he would not cross, no mountain that he would not climb, no crime that he would not commit in loyal obedience to the molten god of money" (Ngugi 1982a: 32). In neo-colonial society, every individual like Mwaura is taught to be subservient to the logic of money, and is being ideologically repressed by the invisible state. So the Ideological State Apparatuses are being effectively used to re-organize the neo-colonial society according to the invisible state's intention.

Besides a reliance on Ideological State Apparatuses, neo-colonial society also requires its repressive apparatuses such as the court, the prison and the hospital. This is well illustrated in *Matigari*. Matigari is a returned Mau Mau soldier who has supposedly remained behind in the forests and mountains to keep the fire of freedom burning even after the

granting of independence. Disillusioned with post-independence reality, he arms himself again to fight against the neo-colonial government. In the novel, the court, the prison, and the hospital work as physical places where a person deviating from the dictates of the neo-colonial regime is repressively judged and imprisoned. In *Matigari*, the Minister makes effective use of these apparatuses in order to dismiss Matigari's disobedience as a mere insane activity.

'Mr Minister,' Matigari began. 'I asked you a question, but you never answered me. I shall repeat my question. Where in this country can a person who is girded with a belt of peace find truth and justice?'

The Minister stammered. He seemed unprepared for a repeat of Matigari's question. He turned to the people.

'This man who calls himself Matigari ma Njiruugi should be hanged. Didn't you hear him confess that he was a murderer? But the judges have found him insane. The hooded justice testified how Matigari ma Njiruungi shared his bread and beer in gaol in clear imitation of Christ's Last Supper. And here you heard him ramble on about his years in the forest and mountains, fighting Boy and Williams. All this goes to show that such a person must be out of his mind.'

(Ngugi 1987: 123)

Matigari, dispatched to a mental hospital by the neo-colonial justice system, the Repressive State Apparatus, exchanges his ideas with Kiriro on "the workers ... peasants ... freedom fighters ... revolutionaries ... about all the forces committed to building a new tomorrow for all our children" (Ngugi 1987: 126). By purposely treating Matigari as an insane hero, the Repressive State Apparatus of the justice system delicately functions here as an ideological apparatus as well. Matigari's serious discourses on "the workers," "peasants," "freedom fighters," and "revolutionaries" can now be drawn under the ambit of the insane. This

absurdity creates a postmodern burlesque. Udentia, examining the meaning of absurdity in the African context, concludes that absurdism should be defined as a mutagenic realism, rather than a modernist aesthetic:

Absurdism is a fact of content, not form. The ideology that conditions style is what is vital. Lo Liyong and other writers are satirical, corrective and progressive in their criticism. Their works embody a wholesome realism that is momentarily twisted out of shape by the agonies of dependent capitalist living: the depiction of this stupidity and disorder, as a way of ridiculing them, can never be modernism. Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*, another relatively recent work, is one of the most "absurd," fantastic, distorted, exaggerated and symbolic novels in the continent; yet it stands as one of the greatest achievements of revolutionary art in the continent.

(Udentia 1993: 14)

Udentia believes that the philosophical and ideological implications of avant-garde literature - such as absurdism, modernism, and postmodernism - are not yet features of African writing. He confirms that African writing "has remained realistic right from the beginning, and the development and continuity of realism in Africa is an illustration of the dialectical and essentially progressive nature of reality and experience in the continent" (Udentia 1993: 14). So, postmodernism in Africa is a variety of extended realism based upon the absurd situation of neo-colonial society. The absurdity of this society has been expressed as follows: "the nature of reality in Kenya is in no way unique; it is like most parts of the world, since the dominant character of reality can now be stranger than fiction" (Balogun from Cantalupo 1995: 356). Matigari describes this postmodern reality in a scene as follows:

'This world is upside down,' Matigari suddenly said. 'The robber calls the robbed robber. The murderer calls the murdered murderer, and the wicked calls the righteous evil. The one uprooting evil is accused of planting evil. The seeker of truth and justice ends up in prisons and detention camps. Yes, those who sow good seeds are accused of sowing weeds. As for the sell-outs, they are too busy locking up our patriots in gaols, or sending them into exile to let outsiders come and bask in the comfort wrought by others. Those we have left in the wilderness are not the only ones doing evil. Yes, this world is upside-down. Those to whom it belongs must set it to rights again!'

(Ngugi 1987: 150)

Faced with an upside-down world, *Matigari* could not help but reflect a postmodern condition. As a result of the postmodern burlesque elements present in *Matigari* (e.g. fabulous characterization, the romance structure and mythic heroization), some critics have seen the novel as marking Ngugi's abandonment of realism. It is true that both *Matigari* and *Devil on the Cross* exhibit certain formal elements of postmodernism. F. Odun Balogun, in "Matigari and the Reconceptualization of Realism in the Novel," summarizes the postmodern traits of those two works as follows:

Beginning with *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi's novelistic style is no longer the old but the new realism. Thus, even though Ngugi's famous switch from English to Gikuyu as the language of writing is primarily motivated by the ideological needs of his proletarian constituency, the switch also has the advantage ... of catapulting Ngugi into the position of a postmodernist novelist, whether or not he planned it. The new realism, first experimented with in *Devil on the Cross* and perfected in *Matigari*, is a judicious merging of elements of formal realism with the techniques of oral narrative at all levels of the novel's composition: subject matter, setting, point of view, characterization, plot, and narrative language.

(Balogun from Cantalupo 1995: 357-358)

Balogun interprets Ngugi's postmodern experiment in *Matigari* and *Devil on the Cross* as "new realism" and concludes that the novels offer

"a brilliant postmodernist reconstitution of old realism into the new realism" (Balogun from Cantalupo 1995: 365). Balogun knows that realism presupposes thematic and artistic faithfulness on the part of the writer and the text, to contemporary social reality. Therefore, the analysis of any work for its faithfulness to realism must first begin by ascertaining the nature of the contemporary reality depicted in that work. He thus concludes that *Matigari* is a realistic novel *par excellence*, with a mode that uniquely captures the actual reality of contemporary Kenya (Balogun from Cantalupo 1995: 356). *Matigari* through a postmodern realist aesthetic recognizes that a combination of the "words of truth and justice" of the native's counter Ideological State Apparatus and the "armed power" of the native's counter Repressive State Apparatus, will cause the colonizer to be driven out:

For it has been said that truth and justice are mightier than any armed power. That the enemy who is driven out peacefully, by negotiations, never comes back. Yet where did that kind of thinking land me? First in prison, then in the mental hospital. If it were not for the two of you, where would I be today? Still in prison, or in a mental hospital. Since last night, I have now learned a new lesson - or, rather, learned a new and an old lesson. The enemy can never be driven out by words alone, no matter how sound the argument. Nor can the enemy be driven out by force alone. But words of truth and justice, fully backed by armed power, will certainly drive the enemy out. When right and might are on the same side, what enemy can hold out? In a wilderness dominated by beasts of prey, or in a market run by thieves, robbers and murderers, justice can come only from the armed force of the united oppressed.

(Ngugi 1987: 138-139)

In this respect, Ngugi can be understood as an experimentalist who wishes to graft Euro-postmodernism onto Afro-realism. Writing, for Ngugi, seems to mean an aesthetic and political exercise in

decolonization. His writing, therefore, becomes an ambivalent apparatus for aesthetic and political decolonization. The works lead to an interpreting practice in which postcolonial Africa is a neo-colonial society where Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses are coordinated to alienate the people.

#### POSTMODERN REACTION TO CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

Ngugi's judgement, that postcolonial Africa is actually a neo-colonial society, is deeply related to his interpretation of neo-colonialism as deeply implicated in cultural imperialism. As a matter of fact, neo-colonialism takes advantage of culture as one of the very effective ideological means by which neo-colonial aims can penetrate the hearts of the native without encountering resistance. Culture is regarded as a holistic entity, for it is based on general consensus. In other words, culture reflects the collective mentality of its owners. In *Writers in Politics*, Ngugi defines the meaning of culture as follows:

It is the culture that a people have that embodies their values, those aesthetic and moral qualities that they consider basic and important in their contact and interaction with one another, and with the universe. A culture then embodies a community's structure of values, the basis of their world outlook, and how they see themselves and their place in the universe and in relation to other communities. It is the values that a people have that are the 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.

(Ngugi 1981b: 9)

Thus, if imperialism succeeds in finding a route to the native culture, which it aims to approach, it can acquire the voluntary agreement of the

native to colonial policy. For "cultural imperialism, which during colonialism often affected the population and the country unevenly depending on the colonial policies of the marauding powers and the degree of resistance in each country and in different parts of the country, becomes the major agency of control during neo-colonialism" (Ngugi 1981b: 5). However, what is important to note in cultural imperialism is not its aspiration to dominate the culture itself, but that it ultimately aims for political and economic control of the native through the use of cultural productions such as theatre, film, media, and literature. Thus, cultural imperialism also creates a postmodern comedy in a colonial or neo-colonial setting. Fanon introduces one postmodern comedy produced as a result of cultural imperialism:

The black schoolboys in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about "our ancestors, the Gauls," identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages - an all-white truth. There is identification - that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude. He invests the hero, the white, with all his own aggression - at that age closely linked to sacrificial dedication, a sacrificial dedication permeated with sadism. An eight-year-old child who offers a gift, even to an adult, cannot endure a refusal. Little by little, one can observe in the young Antillean the formation and crystallization of an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white.

(Fanon 1967: 147-148)

Ngugi shows a deep concern with this postmodern comedy created by cultural imperialism. He states that macaroni Westerns and most cowboy films "are based on the myth of a lone band of white men out-numbered by swarms of bloodthirsty Indians. Our cowboy who plays it cool eventually wins." A further example is offered by way of the Tarzan

story: "Tarzan, still going strong in western comic strips, is a 'cowboy' in the African jungle. These myths, perpetuated in fiction by such writers as Robert Ruark, still pervade European and American television screens with nauseating films on Africa, like *Simba*, *Guns of Batasi*, and *Africa Addio*. They are readily accepted and applauded by European audiences" (Ngugi 1981b: 42). Ngugi portrays this issue allegorically in *Devil on the Cross*:

Kimeendiri will also build schools in which the workers' children will be taught that the system of drinking human blood and eating human flesh has always held sway since the world was created and will always hold sway until the end of the world, and that there is nothing people can do to put an end to the system. The children will be allowed to read only those books that glorify the system of drinking human blood and eating human flesh....

Kimeedeeri will also build a hall, where the people will be shown films and will be entertained by concerts and plays, but all these diversions will glorify the deeds, traditions and culture of the drinkers of human blood and the eaters of human flesh. The victims of cannibalism will always be presented as happy and contented people.

(Ngugi 1982a: 188-189)

As shown above, cultural dominance and economic and political dominance are in many cases reciprocal and interact in modern and postmodern imperialism. Without an understanding of this reciprocity between the cultural superstructure and the economic base, it is hard to recognize the total identity of neo-colonialism. In neo-colonial society, culture does not only serve an aesthetic function. Rather, it is deeply related to "hegemony," following Antonio Gramsci's term. Gramsci is a vanguard thinker who transformed the *a priori* concept of culture as something demeaned or denigrated into a productive activity. He argues that cultural politics in the form of imperialism create a hegemonic

system by means of which the reproduction of the existing power relations of the bourgeois society is maintained through consent, not by force. Because it is grounded in consciously interventionist thought, hegemony is able to create the conditions for this reproduction by consent as the result of an ideological representation and an institutional manipulation within different social formations.

In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams defines hegemony as a form of practical consciousness that concerns not only "the articulate upper levels of ideology" but also "a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of our living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world" (Williams 1977: 110). Thus cultural hegemony, when it is connected to economic and political imperialism, creates a ridiculous postmodern situation. Ngugi, too, acknowledges the danger of cultural hegemony in a neo-colonial setting. He understands that culture is not a traditional field, determined only by economic base, but a productive field. This cultural production functions as an exchange value in neo-colonial society. In *Moving the Center*, Ngugi describes this cultural function as exchange value as follows:

The entire economic and political control is effectively facilitated by the cultural factor. In any case, economic and political control inevitably leads to cultural dominance and this in turn deepens that control. The maintenance, management, manipulation, and mobilisation of the entire system of education, language and language use, literature, religion, the media, have always ensured for the oppressor nation power over the transmission of a certain ideology, set of values, outlook, attitudes, feelings etc, and hence power over the whole area of consciousness. This in turn leads to the control of the individual and collective self-image of the dominated nation and classes as well as

their image of the dominating nations and classes.

(Ngugi 1993: 51)

Ngugi calls the destructive power of the cultural strategy of imperialists a "cultural bomb." He states that "the effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves." And he adds that "it makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own" (Ngugi 1986: 3). Ngugi's recognition of the danger of the cultural bomb is well represented by Gatuiria's eloquent statement in *Devil on the Cross*:

Gatuiria cleared his throat again. He looked at Muturi. 'You talk as if you knew I came from the university, and it is true. I am from there. I'm a kind of research student in culture. I'm a junior research fellow in African culture. Our culture ... sorry, I mean, our culture has been dominated by the Western imperialist cultures. That is what we call in English cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism is mother to the slavery of the mind and the body. It is cultural imperialism that gives birth to the mental blindness and deafness that persuades people to allow foreigners to tell them what to do in their own country, to make foreigners the ears and mouths of their national affairs, forgetting the saying: Only he who lives in the wilderness knows what it is like. Hence a foreigner can never become the true guide of another people.

(Ngugi 1982a: 58)

Gatuiria continues to deplore the tragic consequences of cultural imperialism; 'Where are our national languages now? Where are the books written in the alphabets of our national languages? Where is our own literature now? Where is the philosophy of our fathers now?'

(Ngugi 1982a: 59). Ngugi's reflection on the function of cultural imperialism in neo-colonial society leads him to abdicate use of the imperial language, English, as his writing medium. Realizing that language is a vehicle by which the mental universe of its speaker is being structured, he turns to his local language, Gikuyu, in his later novels. Through this awakening, Ngugi, paradoxically, succeeds in finding a decolonizing power in his indigenous language, which had been considered atavistic. His postcolonial writing is a kind of experimental practice by which he demonstrates his attempt to appropriate such an indigenous language into a writing-medium.

#### POSTMODERN DECANONIZATION AND LANGUAGE

Ngugi's choice of an indigenous language is superimposed and has gone through a series of overdetermined processes of interpretation; namely, that postcolonial Africa is a neo-colonial society. As an ideological apparatus, Ngugi considers the metropolitan language to be part of a process of the canonization of neo-colonial values. He believes that language is a conceptual tool in which its speaker's belief, taste, universal vision, and aesthetic value are concretized as canon. It is this conception of language that has led Ngugi to renounce metropolitan language in order to substitute it with an indigenous one. His renunciation of the metropolitan language is deeply related to his postmodern politics of decanonization as a 'non-canonical' third world writer. Ngugi has claimed that he came to deny English as his writing medium because:

The African Prometheus had been sent to wrest fire from the gods, but instead became a captive contented with warming himself at the fireside of the gods. Otherwise he carried the fire in containers that were completely sealed and for which the majority had no key. For whom were they writing?

(Ngugi 1993: 107)

As shown above, Ngugi's disavowal of English and his subsequent use of Gikuyu basically stems from his self-conscious reflection concerning his audience. Ngugi, when he first used English, seemed to be confident of the possibility of delivering his literary message to his readers, specifically to his local readers, though he used a metropolitan language. Later Ngugi renounces this position due to the realisation that "the very people about whom I was writing were never going to read the novel or have it read for them. I had carefully sealed their lives in a linguistic case. Thus whether I was based in Kenya or outside, my opting for English had already marked me as a writer in exile" (Ngugi 1993: 107). Ngugi is certain that English as a metropolitan language "is only a stopgap; it will not be used always. It is not a language that expresses the people's culture" (Ngugi in Egejuru 1980: 54). Furthermore, in contrast to other critics, Ngugi denies the probability that an African English could arise in the near future:

I don't think we have an African English as yet; I think it will be called African English when the language carries certain rhythms of life in Africa. A language must stay a certain length of time to become the language of the people and must be spoken at grass-roots level before it really can have peculiarities that might be called African.

(Ngugi in Egejuru 1980: 54)

Contrary to Ngugi's position, Achebe acknowledges in some part the

effective function of English once appropriated into an African context:

I do not see any signs of sterility anywhere here. What I do see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a world-wide language. So my answer to the question: Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing? is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask: Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker? I should say, I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience.

(Achebe 1975: 61)

Gabriel Okara agrees with the idea that English should be localized into different versions, such as American English, West Indian English, Australian English, Canadian English, New Zealand English and African English, according to the respective cultures. Language, he believes, is like a living organism, which can be changed according to circumstances (Okara from Ngugi 1986: 9). This language debate shows diverse attitudes and positions towards the metropolitan languages. However, there is one commonality between the positions: they all emphasize a decanonized appropriation of foreign languages into their neo-colonial contexts. African writers and critics, therefore, are keenly aware of the decolonizing value of a postmodern type of decanonization in the third world context. Bernth Lindfors, in *Long Drums and Canons: Teaching and Researching African Literature*, goes one step further in defence of the subversive decanonizing value of "non-canonical" dialects of standard English:

The notion that all good Englishmen speak and write alike is of course absurd. There are probably more different dialects of English in use in the British Isles than there are in all the anglophonic areas of Africa put together. For a native speaker to complain about a non-native dialect when his own dialect may depart an equal distance from any arbitrary norm is for the pot to call the kettle black. Dialects will forever be with us and it is no doubt a good thing they will. They enrich rather than impoverish the English Language.

(Lindfors 1995: 15)

Unlike the defenders of postmodern decanonization, Jameson devalues "non-canonical" forms of third world literature written in indigenous languages. He states that nothing is to be gained by passing over in silence the radical difference of non-canonical texts. The third world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce. What is more damaging than that, perhaps, is its tendency to remind the reader of outmoded stages of the first world cultural development and to cause the reader to conclude that "they are still writing novels like Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson" (Jameson 1995: 389). Jameson, in "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital," argues that third world writers cannot produce works such as those by "Proust or Joyce." His reasoning is based on his assumption that the language of third world literature is allegorical. This language of national allegory, he argues, cannot deliver an aesthetic value in the same way as did "Proust or Joyce." Jameson states the following about third world texts as national allegories:

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.

Aijaz Ahmad, in "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness," criticizes Jameson for his uncautious use of rhetoric such as "third world," "national allegories," and "non-canonical." Ahmad states that Jameson's rhetoric, intentionally or not, marginalizes the third world as "otherness." He castigates Jameson's rhetoric for its dependence on the "binary opposition" between "a global American postmodernist culture" and "third world nationalism." He insists that the diverse types of emergent nationalism in the third world cannot be understood through this binary opposition (Ahmad 1992: 97).

It is true that many of the third world writers' texts are related to "national allegories," as Jameson has pointed out. In my opinion, Ngugi's choice of a "non-canonical" language as his writing medium is also related to this issue. But Ngugi's national allegory differs from the others in one important respect: his allegory is temporal. That is, Ngugi is using his indigenous language strategically for temporal decolonization. After total decolonization comes about, Ngugi may use any language for his writing medium, which is why he still hopes that a common language for all human beings will arise, under the condition that a real economic, political, and cultural equality among nations is first guaranteed.

Ngugi states that when such equality and democracy are protected, "there will be no reason for any nation, nationality, or people to fear the emergence of a common language, be it Kiswahili, Chinese, Maori, Spanish, or English, as the language of the world." And he adds that "A

language of the world? A world of language! The two concepts are not mutually exclusive provided there is independence, equality, democracy, and peace among nations" (Ngugi 1993: 40). His ideal vision of equality among languages is expressed metaphorically as follows:

A world of many languages should be like a field of flowers of different colours. There is no flower which becomes more of a flower on account of its colour or its shape. All such flowers express their common 'floralness' in their diverse colours and shapes. In the same way our different languages can, should, and must express our common beings.

(Ngugi 1993: 39)

Ngugi's belief in the possibilities of a common language and equality among languages does not, however, lead him to accept universalism. Ngugi consistently warns of the dangers of universalism, which lurk in its epistemologically exclusivity and its rejection of the particular. For example, universalism has often meant the West generalising its experience of history as the universal experience. What is western becomes universal and what is non-Western becomes local, with the locality being measured by the degree of its distance from the metropolis of the Western world. Ngugi displays one example of this through Gaturia, the westernized student, and his attitude to his local language, in *Devil on the Cross*:

Gaturia spoke Gikuyu like many educated people in Kenya - people who stutter like babies when speaking their national languages but conduct fluent conversations in foreign languages. The only difference was that Gaturia was at least aware that the slavery of language is the slavery of the mind and nothing to be proud of.

(Ngugi 1982a: 56)

But what Ngugi really problematizes is the general process of human cognition, which, according to him, begins with noting and observing the particular and from there establishing the general from the particular. From the general, a regulating principle, or law, emerges which can take the form of the universal (Ngugi 1993: 26). It is for this reason that he demanded the abolition of the English Department as a universal disciplinary institute and the establishment, in its place, of a Department devoted mainly to African Literatures and Languages (in the African context, that is). The new department, he argues, should teach modern African writing in English and French, Afro-American and Caribbean Literature and a selected course in European literary traditions. At the core of such a department would be the study of oral tradition in African literature, which seems atavistic but can at the same time make itself part of the present (Ngugi 1972a: 16). Gunner indicates the importance of oral literature in Post-Apartheid South Africa represented as a form of 'praise poetry': "it is precisely the regenerative power of memory, which is harnessed as one of the key literary features of praise poetry, that enables this [make past present] to happen" (Gunner 1999: 53-54). Similarly, based on a position such as this, Ngugi finally declares a decanonization of the English Department:

The [English] department would thus be recognising the obvious fact: that knowing oneself and one's environment was the correct basis of absorbing the world; that there could never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the centre.

(Ngugi 1993: 9)

Ngugi's demand for the abolition of the English Department has to do

with its violence against a paradigm given the arrogant name of universalism. Ngugi, however, is well aware of the fact that a mechanical opposition between the local and the universal does not solve any problems at all. The universal, as he is well aware, is contained in the particular just as the particular is contained in the universal. The strength of Ngugi's position is that it is as concerned with the sociological implications of the use of the local in terms of the control of production, distribution, and readership as with any formal idea of the language as bearer of culture.

#### **NGUGI'S POSTMODERN APPROPRIATION OF POPULAR LITERATURE**

Ngugi's choice of his indigenous language as writing medium is directly linked to his concern with popular literature in the postcolonial African context. In postcolonial Africa, popular literature is needed for its practical application. Quite a number of African readers, in colonial times, have actually been excluded from books written in metropolitan languages due to ideological and practical reasons. Ideologically metropolitan languages have their own so-called secret auras which make them sacred by keeping a necessary distance from the Africans. The distance is maintained by colonial education, cultural politics and distorted history writing. Practically there are economic reasons. Books published in metropolitan centres are too expensive for the local readers. For this reason, markets like Onitsha have flourished. Popular books such as pamphlet literature, detective stories, love stories and even pornography written in indigenous languages are fairly priced, and in

demand from African readers. At last, this authoritarian canonized threshold which has divided high-brow art from low-brow art has fallen apart. In other words, a postmodern atmosphere has been created in Africa.

Taban lo Liyong has deplored such a lack of mass or popular culture in the East African literary experience, saying that "after reading the fables, biographies, and political works we do not have much else to read for relaxation and enjoyment. Our intellectual leadership has been left to the politicians" (Liyong 1969: 34). The Onitsha market has been organized behind this African postmodern background. An African postmodern society displays many changed aspects concerning the readership, from their literary taste to their reading habits. Heavily politicized or overtly high-brow literary books are avoided. In most cases, local readers simply look for books that provide good entertainment. These changed tastes of readers made the traditional literary historians rethink their own standard of literary value. Emmanuel Obiechina, in *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets*, describes how African readers' taste changed:

But the situation is changing, thanks to the work of literary historians whose standpoint relieves them of much of the prejudices of the ordinary reader. The different segments of society have different tastes, especially in the matter of what each reads. The middle classes determine their own literary interests just as working people seek their own level of literary enjoyment. It is one function of the literary historian to recognize and record and analyse existing cultural tastes without prejudice, establishing the connectedness and underlying unity in the cultural situation.

(Obiechina 1973: 1)

Any literature that appeals to the masses has at least three predictable characteristics: it must be simple in language and technique; brief; and low-priced. Ngugi's last two novels, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, are faithful to only one of these conditions, the first. However, these two books are well qualified as popular novels. This is mainly due to their simplicity in language and technique. Simple language and technique go hand in hand with accessibility. Obiechina states that literary works in the African context should not make too great a demand on the intellectual and emotional resources of the reader, for the habit of long and sustained poring over printed matter belongs to a small privileged minority trained by education and practice. Books aimed at the vast majority must be brief and able to communicate their interest instantly, in minute rather than large doses of experience (Obiechina 1973: 10).

However, it is a somewhat general tendency that certain literary critics criticise a popular or mass novel as a lower form of literature. Some of their basic assumptions and conceptions are that literature for the masses, and the newly literate petty-elite, is "popular" literature. It is trite literature. That is characterized by "mediocrity, and vulgarized specimen of mass culture, the culture of the people." This "popular" literature is consciously produced for entertainment, for sheer pleasure, escape and illusion, and is therefore, not bound to have "intrinsic aesthetic value" (Udenta 1993: 38). Dividing "mass literature" from "popular literature," Udenta blames Obiechina and other critics such as Ime Ikiddeh, Donatus Nwoga, and Elizabeth Knight for the confusion between the two:

But are these true? Is popular literature the same thing as mass literature? Is the popular spirit in literature a function or product of the cheapness of artistic cognition and unimaginative creative intuition? Is there a basic ideo-aesthetic contradiction between mass literature and popular literature? What are the political and class implications of mass literature and popular literature? The clear elucidation of these questions will readily demonstrate that the arguments that mass literature is reducible to popular literature; that the popular spirit in literature is inseparable from "art for the masses" because the masses constitute the single largest social group in all African countries.

(Udenta 1993: 38)

Udenta believes that there are only two types of literature in Africa: popular literature and anti-popular literature. He states that anti-popular literature has no future in Africa, for he knows that popular literature in Africa is not an isolated, accidental phenomenon. It is an integral part of a continuous process of socio-cultural development and the result of a search for a literary culture that approximates the aspirations of revolutionary classes. Therefore, its ideological imperatives and aesthetic features must, of necessity, be concrete and constant, though it does leave room for improvement and addition (Udenta 1993: 48). Popular literature, then, should avoid contrived plots which are full of manipulations, unrealistic coincidences, chance meetings, implausible surprises, uncreative suspenses and improbable resolutions. Other aspects that authors should avoid include trite themes, improbable conflict, the use of dead metaphors and cliched similes (Udenta 1993: 42).

Due to these weaknesses of popular literature, Theodor Adorno, though well aware of its revolutionary power, is critical of the phenomenon of mass culture. He believes it "to be the product of a decay of the humanist cultures of the past." He regards it as a species of alienated spiritual production "heavily characterized by repetition of techniques, an

uncritical and complacent consumerist attitude to reality. It implies submissiveness and subsorption of the mass of the people to the apparatus of domination" (Adorno in Udentia 1993: 40). The reason Adorno rejects the subversive value of popular literature is because of its readiness to be commercialized under late capitalist society. Commercialization or 'reification,' following the Lukacsian term, is, he believes, dangerous, for it petrifies a revolutionary spirit in advanced art. Hence his high regard for Sonberg's 'atonal philosophy' of New Music which was set up with Stravinsky to get rid of the commercial spirit of Husserl's phenomenology.

Adorno's theory of commercialization needs to be heeded even in the postcolonial African context. Postcolonial Africa is a mixed society in which the first world characteristics are also hybridized. Because of this hybridity, postmodern appropriation of popular culture, paradoxically, could fulfill a dynamic role in neo-colonial Africa, though the danger of commercialization still lurks. Benjamin differs from Adorno in his evaluation of popular art. He argues that the age of mechanical reproduction would offer the masses a great opportunity to enjoy the art that was previously inaccessible due to its 'aura,' its unreproducible archetypal originality. Art, before the age of mechanical reproduction, could not be duplicated and mass distributed and, consequently, was owned and appreciated only by the privileged. Thus, an aesthetic equality in which the disenfranchised would be able to enjoy and judge works of art was precluded from the outset before the advent of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 1969: 221). Under such circumstances, the

flowering of popular art could not take place at all. The age of technical reproduction has, however, completely changed the structure of the production and distribution of works of art. The time for popular art, so to speak, has arrived.

When Benjamin's theory on popular culture is kinetically grafted onto that of postmodernism, its dynamism is unimaginable. Obiechina, by transposing Benjamin's insight into the African context, takes note of the positive function of technical progress in postcolonial African art. He claims that modern technical 'progress' transforms tradition-bound attitudes and outlooks into those which 'liberate' individuals and invest them with a certain ubiquitous vitality and assertive autonomy. In the long run, he argues, the history of that progress is the history of the progress of the mass organs of communication - the newspaper, radio, cinema and television - in broadening the vistas of human experience. The restless enthusiasm of the pamphlet authors, and the characters they portray in their pursuit of new experience, bears witness to the effect of the organs of communication in shaking the stability of the traditional psyche and giving it greater mobility. This enthusiasm is expressed through romantic love, the quest for money and economic opportunities, an interest in politics and a desire for pan-African political solidarity (Obiechina 1973: 102).

In this sense, Ngugi's interest in popular literature and its concern with the contemporary mass movement is very timely. Ngugi, however, believes that in the postcolonial African context, the therapeutic function of popular literature is more important than its aesthetic function. Leslie

Fiedler, one of the supporters of postmodern American popular literature, also views popular literature as a form which "always carries on an underground war, out of sight but not out of mind, not out of our deep mind: a war against all the values professed by all conformist defenders of whatever reigning culture; against spirit, against civilization, against self-control, against rationality, against sanity, against law and order" (Fiedler 1978: 207). Ngugi's latest two novels, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* offer readers this kind of subversive psychologically liberating experience and reshape their thoughts and ideas on literature and art. Ngugi's value as a defender of popular literature is particularly well shown in his depiction of female characters, through which he, as a popular artist, displays his postcolonial vision on feminism.

#### NGUGI'S POPULISM AND FEMINISM

Ngugi, as a supporter of popular literature examines many women's problems in neo-colonial society. The issue of prostitution is reflected specifically in later works such as *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*. Ngugi's concern with prostitution in his postcolonial work is not just aimed at entertainment as in popular literature. His literary treatment of prostitution signifies the inhuman living conditions of neo-colonial African society. The motif of the prostitute is in itself a wide subject in African literature. It "embraces all the aspects of the lives of the people in Africa, if not in all neo-colonies: social, political, economic, and, most important for our purposes, cultural" (Senkoro 1982: xii). Prostitution, therefore, represents a postcolonial incarnation in which

the total controversy of neo-colonial society is injected. This is demonstrated through the character of Kareendi, in *Devil on the Cross*, as follows:

'Kareendi now tramps all over Nairobi looking for a job. Armed with her Pitman's skills, she enters one office after another. In one she finds *Mr Boss*, who leans back in his chair for greater comfort. He eyes Kareendi from top to toe. "What do you want? A job? I see. I'm very busy right now. Let's meet at five." Kareendi waits impatiently for the hour to come. She rushes back to the office, panting. Now *Mr Boss* smiles at her, and he offers her a chair, and he asks her what her names are, the one she was given at birth and her acquired English one, and he inquires into the things that are troubling her, and he listens with attentive patience. Then *Mr Boss* taps the desk top with his finger or with a pen, saying, "Ah, Kareendi, jobs are very hard to come by these days. But a girl like you ... it shouldn't be too difficult to find something for you to do. But, Kareendi, a matter like this can't be finalized in the office. Let's go across to the Modern Love Bar and Lodging to discuss the question more fully." But Kareendi recalls the venomous stings of her early years: he who has seen once knows thereafter, and he who has drunk from a calabash can gauge its size. So Kareendi declines all invitations to meetings at hotels designed for love, old-fashioned or modern. The next day she is still combing the city for a job.

(Ngugi 1982: 19)

Ngugi's prostitute, as shown above, indicates that many of the egalitarian ideals and promises of independence in postcolonial society have been trampled down and neglected. For prostitution is a kind of systematic evil created by 'money.' Money makes women suffer from being treated as commodities, or tools of labour, or objects of pleasure. In *Matigari*, too, a woman who is portrayed as nothing more than a commodity appears as follows:

She squeezed herself between Matigari and Muriuki.

'Where have you been living, old man? Have you been living on the

moon or in space perhaps? Or are you just playing hard to get? Let me tell you something. These days it does not matter whether it's your father or your son, whether it's your brother or your sister. The most important thing is money. Even if a boy like this one came to me with money in his pocket, I would give him such delights as he has never dreamt of. Or what do you think, my little hero? The only people I have sworn never to have anything to do with are policemen. Are you a policeman? What is your name?'

(Ngugi 1987: 29)

Some critics dismiss Ngugi's concern with women as being merely an instrument to show his class-oriented vision of the world. In other words, women's problems, for Ngugi, should not be treated as an object in itself, but as problems located at the higher level of recognition. The history of black women being treated as functional object in African literature has a long genealogy. One of the examples is shown in Senghor's poem 'Femme noire.' In presenting Negritude in his poetry, Senghor frequently employs the mother Africa trope, which recurs, though sometimes in a different guise, in contemporary male-authored writing. It represents the embodiment of Africa in the figure of a women. The first stanza of 'Femme noire' begins as follows:

Naked woman, black woman  
Clothed with your colour which is life, with your form which is  
beauty!  
In your shadow I have grown up; the gentleness of your hands was  
laid over my eyes.  
And now, high up on the sun-baked pass, at the heart of summer,  
at the heart of noon, I come upon you, my Promised Land.  
And your beauty strikes me to the heart like the flash of an eagle.  
(Senghor from Stratton 1994: 39)

The poem relies on a trope that is deeply entrenched in the male literary tradition as a kind of sexual imperative. Ngugi, too, uses this

trope in *Devil on the Cross*, a female bildungsroman written by a male author. It tells the story of Wariinga's development as she passes from girlhood into adulthood and recognizes her identity and role in the world. At the Devil's Feast, a competition among modern thieves and robbers to choose the best means of exploiting the masses, Wariinga faces a spiritual crisis. Wariinga was a very weak woman but strong enough to defend herself by using conventional notions of her gender when she was tempted by the Voice in her dream: "I'm a woman. I'm weak. There was nothing that I could do, nowhere that I could go and no one that I could turn to for help" (Ngugi 1982a: 191). After overcoming many trials, Wariinga undergoes a transformation:

Oh, Wariinga, work harder to develop our land!

This Wariinga is not the one we met two years ago. This Wariinga is not the one who used to think that there was nothing she could do except type for others; the one who used to burn her body with *Ambi* and *Snowfire* to change the colour of her skin to please the eyes of others, to satisfy their lust for white skins; the one who used to think that there was only one way of avoiding the pitfalls of life: suicide.

No, this Wariinga is not that other Wariinga.

Today's Wariinga has decided that she'll never again allow herself to be a mere flower, whose purpose is to decorate the doors and windows and tables of other people's lives, waiting to be thrown on to a rubbish heap the moment the splendour of her body withers. The Wariinga of today has decided to be self-reliant all the time, to plunge into the middle of the arena of life's struggles in order to discover her real strength and to realize her true humanity.

(Ngugi 1982a: 216)

Ngugi starts the first line of *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* by praising Wariinga as his inspiration: "*Wariinga ngatha ya wira ... Wariinga heroine of toil ... there she walks haughtily carrying her freedom in her hands*" (Ngugi 1981a: 3). Some pages later, he reveals the

reason why he opens his book with a hymn to women: "Because the women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being" (Ngugi 1981a: 10). However, it seems that despite his evident concern with gender reform, Ngugi's portrayal of Wariinga, in both her original and her transformed character, can be seen to operate in the interest of preserving patriarchal relations, the very relations that confirm Wariinga's status as sexual object, 'a mere flower' in the lives of men. Stratton argues that Ngugi, like Senghor, could not succeed in transcending a patriarchal literary tradition which identifies women as aesthetic objects:

Whether it is Senghor's Negritude or Ngugi's socialism, her function is to embody his vision. And whether she is canonized as a mother or stigmatized as a prostitute, the designation is degrading, for he does the naming and her experience as a woman is trivialized and distorted. Metaphorically she is of the highest importance, practically she is nothing. She has no autonomy, no status as a character, for her person and her story are shaped to meet the requirements of his vision. One of these requirements is that she provide attractive packaging. She is thus constructed as beauty, eroticism, fecundity, the qualities the male Self values most in the female Other. She is the emblem of male desire.

(Stratton 1994: 52).

Therefore, a paradox emerges from Ngugi's commitment to gender issues. Though he recognizes the heterogeneity of subject constitution in postcolonial African society concerned with total decolonization, Ngugi still subordinates gender to class. In that sense Wariinga, though she undergoes a gender reform, from a weak woman to a stronger worker, is merely an "honorary male" in Ngugi's eyes (Stratton 1994: 162). This

reflects Ngugi's ignorance of the particular triple bind (gender, "race" and class) specifically experienced by African women. These three are closely related. If a woman chooses to be dependent on her husband, she should suffer from a patriarchal bind. On the contrary, if she decides to be independent from a patriarchal bind, she cannot avoid being economically marginalized. In addition, the issue of "race" is being directly addressed here. The particularity of this triple bind experienced by ordinary African women lead them to replace the general term 'feminism' with that of 'womanism.' For feminism, they argue, fits only the white women's cognitive frame and consequently, as Spivak states in *In Other Worlds*, is apt to "fall back on a colonialist theory of most efficient information retrieval" (Spivak 1987: 179). In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi's misunderstanding of the triple bind of African women is shown through his description of gender problems, not from a womanist perspective, but from a feminist perspective:

'Let me tell you. When a woman is in her youth, she has beautiful dreams about a future in which she and her husband and her children will dwell forever in domestic peace in a house of their own. There are some who dream of the educational heights they will scale, of the demanding jobs they will take on, of the heroic deeds they will do on behalf of their country, deeds that will inspire later generations to sing their praises thus: "Oh, our mother, a self-made national hero!" At the time a girl is dreaming of a bright future filled with heroic deeds, her breasts have not yet developed. But just wait for them to develop. Wait for her cheeks to bloom. Wait for the likes of Boss Kihara to start whistling at her and offering her lifts in their Mercedes Benzes to the bright lights and night spots of Naivasha and Mombasa. Oh, yes, just wait until she is shown all the alluring wonders of afternoons and nights in expensive hotels in Nairobi, and I can tell you that our maiden will wake up one morning to find that all her dreams are lying shattered on the floor, like broken pieces of clay. There scattered on the sandy floor, lie the fragments of her illusions.

Ngugi's description of African women's disillusionment here seems to emphasize just one side of the triple bind, that is, the economic bind. Frankly, Wariinga's confession cannot be seen to reflect the typicality of African women's experience. It can be applied to any woman in any area. Thus, the African woman's specific problems are not highlighted in this statement. Ngugi as a believer in popular literature has successfully raised gender problems in order to popularize his literature. However, he seems to have failed in recognizing the essential problems facing postcolonial African women living in a society where multifaceted controversies are superimposed.

#### CONCLUSION

Ngugi's latest works, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* are very important in two respects. Firstly, they are conscientious, so much so that they are not comparable to his former works. Of course, his former works are conscientious, too, but they still maintained a traditional novel form. His latest two novels, however, depart significantly from the traditional novel form. In my opinion, Ngugi, in these two works, for the first time in his writing, attempts a very sophisticated experiment to incorporate the novel form into an African style of writing with an intention to find an aesthetic alternative for third world postcolonial writing. One needs to remember that Ngugi uses his mother-tongue Gikuyu for the first time in his latest novels. This leads me to my second point, namely, that these two works are written mainly for an

African readership, though they adopt first world writing techniques in the formal sense of the word. What Ngugi's adoption of the first world writing technique signifies is that he does not want to look to Negritude as a third world postcolonial aesthetic alternative. Rather, he attempts to initiate a dialogue with the first world. He has not, therefore, rejected a universalist attitude to postcolonial problems. Of course, he proposes one prerequisite to be a universalist, that is, as mentioned before, equality among nations, languages, cultures, aesthetic values, and tastes. Thus it needs to be understood that the intended provincialism, shown in his latest works, is a conscientious decision to be an equal dialogic partner with the first world in searching for an ideal postcolonial aesthetic alternative.

The reason why these two aspects are important is because they are deeply related to one's judgement in deciding whether Ngugi's latest work can really be an ideal type of postcolonial writing. These two aspects should be debated with relation to the following questions. Firstly, is Ngugi's judgement that post-independent Africa is a neo-colonial society correct? He refers to independence in contemporary Africa as flag independence, for colonial political, economic, cultural and value systems are still maintained in post-independent society. Ngugi's judgement of this is supported by many others. Hence, we can concur with Ngugi's judgement. Secondly, is Ngugi's writing style as seen in these two works, strategic or essential? Ngugi's recognition of a neo-colonial Africa allows him to choose a writing style that is most appropriate to it. As a third world postcolonial writer Ngugi considers

writing to perform the work of decolonization. Thus, writing, for Ngugi, means an intellectual practice aimed towards total liberation from a colonial or a neo-colonial status quo. That is why his writing is full of an experimental spirit from the beginning, regardless of whether it is novel writing or play writing. Ngugi's experimentalism is fundamentally based on an idea of how he can most effectively deliver the decolonizing message to the rapidly changing contemporary African society. In that sense, his writing is strategic. Experiment itself is his only style, for he believes that neo-colonial Africa is not a fixed unchangable space, but a society which should be transformed into a more understandable and reasonable one for its people.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

Contemporary postcolonial aesthetic theory is ambivalent. In the first world, postcolonialism seems to be viewed as a deviant form of postmodern multiculturalism. It seems to emphasize an equality and particularity among diverse cultures, customs, values, canons, tastes, languages, and literatures. However, the first world postcolonial aesthetic theory takes advantage of its multicultural ideology for the logical justification of late capitalism. In order for the products of the first world to be absorbed into the markets of the third world, without harsh resistance, multicultural pluralism might be needed.

On the other hand, the third world interprets the prevalent aesthetic theory of postcolonialism as that of neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism, here, means an extension of the colonial value system replete with Repressive State Apparatuses - the army, police, and prison, etc. - and Ideological State Apparatuses - schools, hospitals, courts, and the mass media. Neo-colonialism amounts to a more sophisticated imperialism in which voluntary agreement of the colonized to the politics of the neo-colonizer is easily guaranteed. Third world postcolonialism requires the recognition of and warning against this ambivalent neo-colonial strategy.

Ngugi, as a third world postcolonial writer, considers the contemporary postcolonial African reality as neo-colonial. He believes that postcolonial Africa is still suffering from the same problems that beset it in the

colonial era. His writing is, therefore, focused on total decolonization by creating a counter-active strategy to fight against neo-colonialism. As a result of this, writing, for Ngugi, functions as a conscious experimental practice for deconstructive decolonization.

In his first two novels *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*, Ngugi introduces an interesting experimental attempt, interrogating coloniality from the postcolonial perspective of the first world. Ngugi, an educated novelist, offers education, a superstructural element, as an alternative to decolonization. He seems, at this point, to believe that in the colonial setting, an armed struggle is not a sufficient means for liberation. That is why he has joined many first world postcolonialists in proposing a superstructural method of decolonizing. Ngugi's problem here lies in his dependence on first world postcolonial methodology. However, by the end of these two novels, he shows a great awakening as he arrives at the conclusion that first world postcolonial epistemology is very dangerous when applied to the reality of the third world.

Ngugi's second experiment appears in his two best-known novels, *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. Here, Ngugi displays a very delicate model of conscious writing. This conscious writing is an indirect expression of his desire to maintain a distance from the process of decolonization performed by the postcolonial government. He indicates his lack of support for the postcolonial African regime due to its totalitarian style of decolonization as he believes that this is apt to be used for political manipulation by the neo-colonial regimes. Thus he intentionally creates a distance between an individual and mass, patriot

and betrayer, husband and wife and understanding and misunderstanding. This distance is technically controlled by Ngugi's language game. Taking advantage of this unbridgeable political distance, Ngugi shows an ideal type of postcolonial alternative to decolonization, one which is open-minded and which embraces all types of diverse heterogeneity in it.

Believing that theatre is a more portable genre than the novel that can be understood more easily by ordinary people and can extract their decolonizing power, Ngugi turns his attention from the novel to play writing. Theatre is regarded by many as the most appropriate and effective form to be transformed into the postcolonial African context to deliver an Africanized message. In order for the theatre to be applicable to Ngugi's postcolonial design, it should, in the first place, be flexible. Thus, Ngugi discards an Aristotelian form of traditional drama, which is based on the 'three unities,' arguing that the Aristotelian model is eurocentric or first world-oriented. Ngugi, thus, grafts a Brechtian form of epic theatre onto the African form of open theatre. He argues that theatrical techniques, such as the alienating effect used by Brecht for educational purposes, are also politically expedient for contemporary African audiences living in the neo-colonial era. Theatre, for Ngugi, means a didactic space where uneducated African masses can be reincarnated into politically conscientious groups who can judge their own destiny. Educating the African populace is one of the most important functions of Ngugi's theatre; for a naive, uneducated populace is easily manipulated by the neo-colonial colonizer. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want* are created against this

background.

Finally, after experimenting with language, narrative technique, and class vision, Ngugi decides to write a particular form of the Africanized novel, written only to and for African people, through an African language. This does not mean that Ngugi has renounced his belief in universalism. To the contrary, he adopts the first world writing technique, postmodernism, in his latest works, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*. Ngugi's adoption of postmodernism is an expression of his will to have a dialogue with the first world about the future of postcolonial aesthetic alternatives. Based on his final judgement that post-independent Africa is a neo-colonial society, Ngugi's experiment in these latest work becomes more outspokenly brave. At first glance, Ngugi seems to give up novel writing in the aesthetic sense of the word, as his latest novels are not following the classical models. Nevertheless, Ngugi's latest novels, more than any of his other works, reflect far more dynamically the postcolonial wish of African people. In them, Ngugi teaches us one important lesson: that writing in the neo-colonial setting cannot help being an endless unsettled experiment to create an equal dialogic partner with the first world. Until the third world meets the first world equally, face to face, Ngugi will remain as a third world postcolonial writer searching for an ideal model of decolonization from the physical and metaphysical inequalities that exist among languages, cultures and races.

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