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**ON MOVING THE CENTRE OF NARRATION AND
DISCOURSE:
NGUGI WA THIONG'O' S *PETALS OF BLOOD, DEVIL ON
THE CROSS, AND MATIGARI***

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Degree of Magister in Literature

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

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Signed:

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Abstract

This dissertation is intended chiefly to study Ngugi's literary response to the Western culture of domination, which manifests itself in a set of hegemonic views about the non-Western communities generally, and the African in particular. While forming the ideological basis for the growth of classical European Empires overseas, this culture for him still continues to impose its standards on the global order, and thus on the post-colonial world. In his most proletarian novels, *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, and *Matigari*, Ngugi has a "literary-political" project of "revisiting" the cultural and political authority of the imperial powers. This project is mainly intended to restore his people's freedom of thought and action so as to resist the power of the hegemonic interests of Western-oriented international capitalism.

Ngugi's presently discussed novels, by bringing to the fore a set of heated issues bearing on history, culture, and the nation, reverse colonial binarisms in order to combat the hegemonic interpellations of the neo-colonial regime. In *Petals of Blood*, the idea of history is brought to prominence as Ngugi argues strongly for a radical reinterpretation of Kenya's working people's history. In fact, Karega, evidently the mouthpiece of the writer, stresses that the rewriting of Kenya's history is an important undertaking, but by no means sufficient, to support what he foresees as the class struggle waged by the "wretched of the earth" against the neocolonial regime run by the new "bloodsuckers". Similarly, Ngugi, through such characters as Nyakinyua and Abdulla, argues clearly for the significance of Kenya's "oral history" and the heroic history of Kenyans' resistance to the imperialist "marauders" for today's struggle which, at all events, runs the risk of being overwhelmed by a false conception of Kenya's both precolonial and colonial past that is touted by a corrupt ruling elite.

In his next novel *Devil on the Cross*, however, much emphasis is placed upon the indigenous culture of the population, even though Ngugi is very often thought to prioritise political and economic struggles over cultural retrieval. This novel interestingly shows that we can never diminish the instrumental value of culture as a political weapon against imperialism in its neocolonialist stage. This study makes thus the claim that the indigenous culture of the masses can be used in the very definition of the downtrodden classes, to say nothing about the use of such aspects of folk culture as songs, proverbs, and traditional stories as a means of communication with the audience, of whom the "illiterate" masses form the majority. In addition, DOC displays a concern for certain forms of cultural hegemony exercised by such institutions as the school, the media, and the Church. In this novel, indeed, my contention is that the neocolonial ideology is supported in part by the imposition of the Western cultural

models on the African people. Consequently, Ngugi's disapproval of the white culture is an explicit attack on the whole system of the neocolonial power. But, at the same time, nowhere in his novel is there any explicit call for the return to some pristine pre-colonial culture. In Ngugi's opinion, this atavistic view is not founded at all.

Ngugi's first novel in exile, *Matigari*, solidifies Ngugi's immense project of "de-centring" the Western hegemonic political discourse by expressing the felt need for the regeneration of the post-colonial African nation. Ngugi decries violently the currently established Kenyan nation because of its degenerate state that manifests itself clearly in the falsity of foundations upon which it is based. Matigari, the hero of the narrative, represents the daunting challenge of the establishment of an egalitarian society, and the fact that he ultimately falls back on a military action indicates strongly that the nation cannot be "regenerated" unless an armed rebellion of the masses, similar to the epic Mau Mau insurrection, breaks out once again.

In general, Ngugi's literary -and political- project of redefining the narrative discourse about Africa in the post-independence era has to be envisaged within the theoretical framework of postcolonialism and the political framework of his Marxist-based ideology. Ngugi revisits in his works a number of crucial concepts, which include history, culture, nation, with a very clear objective in mind: the political, economic, and cultural autonomy of the Africans and the non-western people at large. This objective has to be achieved, as indicated, whether explicitly or implicitly in all his "popular" novels, as they have come to be called, by the downtrodden people's resort to armed resistance.

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INTRODUCTION

“The Orientalist discourse merits reproach for the simple reason that it produced false judgements” (Edward Said).

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research work is to study how Ngugi “moves the centre” of narration and discourse about Africa in general and Kenya in particular from the imperial West (or occasionally referred to as the metropolitan centre) to Africa (sometimes pejoratively described as the periphery) and the implications of this endeavour for his political project of total decolonisation from the Western hegemony. More precisely, Ngugi’s vigorous attempt at redefining the centre of narrative discourse will be examined in relation to his post-independence novels, namely, *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, and *Matigari*. But this is not to suggest that Ngugi’s de-centring of the Western imperialist ideology, that is clearly manifest in the colonial narratives such as Joseph Conrad’s well-known *Heart of Darkness* and H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* on the one hand, and the non-fictional works such as the historical documents and anthropological works on the other,¹ was not the main concern of the writer in his earliest works, which, not surprisingly, generate clearly what has come to be labelled “the anti-colonialist discourse”. However, it has to be noted that Ngugi’s belligerent attitude towards formal colonialism and neocolonial capitalism has become more prominent very recently.

Interestingly enough, a lot has recently been written about the Marxist tendencies of Ngugi, which, for some, make him unrepresentative of Afrocentrism because simply Marxism is not an African philosophy. However, this view is not tenable for a good number of other scholars. For instance, Abiola Irele, without primarily having in mind Marxism, aptly writes that “it is not enough to say that Africans need a kind of conceptual autonomy” and adds that “what we really want to know is whether the Western system provides useful ideas.”² After all, and in all fairness, Ngugi is not a diehard Marxist, and his works are not identified with what is often labelled “vulgar Marxism”, which is the extreme form of historical determinism; rather, his “postcolonialist” critique³ of his post-independence community, as will be shown throughout this dissertation, supports clearly his Marxist vision of class warfare against soulless exploitation and shameful oppression.

More generally, Ngugi is harshly critical of the colonial view which sees Africa as the “Other of Western subjectivity”. This “gospel of othering”, firmly rests on the premise that

¹ A detailed study of the Imperialist non-fictional works could be found in V. Y. Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. London: James Currey, 1988.

² Quoted in D. A. Masolo. “African Philosophy and the Postcolonial: Some Misleading Abstractions about ‘Identity’”. Ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, 1997, p. 284.

³ Postcolonialism is a contestation of “colonialism’s [and hence neocolonialism’s] discourses, power structures”. Helen Gilbert & Joanne Tompkins. *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. Routledge, 1996, p. 2.

the Other (especially the Black African) is “humanly deficient by nature.”⁴ According to this “racist” argument, as has been lengthily explained by Edward Said, the Western domination of the so-called “Restern” world “seems natural and necessary.”⁵ Ngugi’s discourse is post-Orientalist par excellence since his fiction is set in firm opposition to the Orientalist discourse, which in the past laid the ground for the colossal programme of imperialism, and still today, by taking a new shape, lies at the heart of the Western hegemonic project of globalisation.

Ngugi’s novels are therefore to be discussed in this research work from the postcolonialist perspective. Postcolonialism, in Alan Lawson’s words, is a “politically historical-analytical movement [which] engages with, resists, and seeks to dismantle the effects of colonialism in the material, historical, cultural, political, pedagogical, discursive, and textual domains.”⁶ Despite his Marxist slant, Ngugi endorses the Afrocentric discourse which, if anything, questions the truth-value of Eurocentric ideological constructions. This dissertation then makes an argument which strongly asserts that Ngugi’s fictional production, especially the latest, is a reproduction of a “reactive discourse” against the dominant hegemonic Western discourses. Thus, his literary output is by and large a displacement of the so-called neocolonial discourse, which is widely supported locally by the ideological apparatuses of the State, to use Athusser’s phrase, that include chiefly the Church, the School and the mass media, and globally, of course, by the capitalist Western powers.

This dissertation rests, then, on the strong premise that Ngugi’s postcolonial novels, namely, *Petals of Blood* (POB), *Devil on the Cross* (DOC), and *Matigari*, are counter-narratives to the Western colonialist writings, even though those novels are principally about post-independence Kenya. This can be explained partly by the fact that the colonial issues are still part of the ongoing debates in the post-colonial epoch and, more importantly, because of the political orientation of the novels. As M’barek Rouwane rightly argues

As long as the Other is still denied the right to belong to the same time, as long as there is a denial of coevalness, as Fabian terms it, of the Other, domination will continue and will always find alibis and subterfuges. As long as the relationship between the powerful (ex)colonisers and the powerless (ex)colonised is maintained through the perpetuation of all structures and forms of inequality: economic, technological, political, military, etc., the debate on colonialism with all its posts will continue and the dismantling process of colonialist discourse, which is based on two psychology elements: the superiority complex and

⁴ James R. Cochrane. “The Epistemic Violence of Racism”. South Africa: The University of Cape Town, 2001, p. 45.

⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

⁶ Chris Tiffin & Allan Lawson. *De-Inscribing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 156.

*inferiority complex will take longer time, more violence and counter-violence to eradicate, erase, and eventually obliterate from memory.*⁷

In Ngugi's novels, for instance, the protagonists in the so-called "prison of neocolonial Kenya run by thieves and robbers"⁸ bring to the fore heated issues related to precolonial and colonial Kenya, which include chiefly legends, precolonial traditions, the meaning of the history of struggle, to name but a few, and it is only when they rid their minds of the so-called "inferiority complex" that they embark on a fierce struggle against their dehumanisation by the despotic post-colonial regime. For example, Wariinga in *DOC* develops into a radical political "thinker" as soon as she overcomes the feeling of self-contempt. Likewise, Karega, the most rebellious character in *POB*, starts his redemptive struggle with an oppressed people's correct perception of the living history of their anti-colonialist resistance. Similarly, Matigari, commonly seen as the national hero of the neocolonial period, justifies his fight against the "vandalising" neocolonial forces by narrating (or re-narrating) the history of the Kenyan land in general and more significantly by narrating the true story of his house and his plantations that were re-vandalised by the new oppressors.

In fact, in this dissertation we shall principally focus on the issue of history and its relevance to the present and the future struggle in our study of *POB*. Karega's revolutionary thought is partly nurtured by an acute awareness of the atrocities committed by the European marauders during the long history of his people's domination by foreign empires and, no less importantly, by "re-assessing" the decolonisation process that has given birth to the current post-colonial condition. Karega, too, is fully conscious, as Benita Parry is later to note, that the "downgrading of the anti-imperialist texts written by national liberation movement [in addition to] the notion of epistemic violence and occluding of the reverse discourses have obliterated the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of another knowledge and producer of alternative tradition."⁹ Moreover, we cannot lose sight of the "mythical" history narrated by Nyakinyua, the representative of "another knowledge" and the producer of "alternative tradition", who tells us about the "mystic" earliest foundation of Ilmorog and how her narration of the "mystical" history can be used as an instrument of combat, especially by Karega, because as Edward Said aptly remarks, by "an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage" and by an affirmation of "the home created

⁷ M'barek Rouwane. "Colonialist Discourse: "Postcolonial" Violent Realities and Practices". Casablanca: Hassan II University, 2001. [http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/Casablanca/rouwane. 1.](http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/Casablanca/rouwane.1)

⁸ Albert G. Pauloni , Anthony Elliott & Anthony Moran. *Navigating Modernity: Postcolonialism, Identity, and International Relations*. University Press of New England, 1998.

⁹ Benita Parry. "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse". *Oxford Literary Review*, No. 9, 1987, p. 35.

by a community of language, culture and customs...it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages.”¹⁰ Thus, both Karega and Nyakinyua dismantle the diasporic thought of many Africans by providing them with a “revisionary” reading of their history, and this proletarian vision (or sometimes labelled the “Calibanian” view) of history restores the native agency and the free will of the black people, an agency that is extremely needed in the present temporality of neocolonised world.

In addition, we cast light on the feverish growth of the decrepit village of Ilmorog in POB into a modern town, which is indeed a repeat of history of formal colonisation of Africa and the subsequent radical change that the African communities have undergone. It must be noted that the novel attacks in particular the ill effects brought by the industrialisation of Ilmorog and hence the novel might also be read as a fierce indictment of “corrupt” colonial modernity, and more precisely, unchecked capitalist modernity as it has deprived the masses of their natural resources. The novel thus portrays how the marginalised inhabitants of Ilmorog fight fiercely against the formidable external forces of corruption and exploitation. In other words, the novel clearly shows what the people have really lost as a result of both colonisation and “neocolonisation” and in so doing it induces them to embark on class struggle to redeem what they have lost.

Closely related to the local history of the people is their local culture, which is indeed given more prominence in DOC. The folk culture of the people, therefore, has not been dismissed by Ngugi as simply irrelevant to the current stage of decolonisation, even though the spokesman of the popular culture of the masses in DOC, Gaturia, is hardly (if never) seen as the best representative of popular revolution, unlike his fiancée Wariinga, the daughter of the peasants and the heroine of the story. We shall see that Gaturia is not the prototype of the organic intellectual (cf. third chapter) because he does not identify himself with the social cause of the emergent proletariat in the post-independence epoch and his awareness of the hegemonic and brutal practices of the conscienceless “Kimeendeeri” class is not translated into action. He, to borrow from Neil Lazarus, does not breathe the smell of the emergent marginal class.¹¹ His art, even if it is patriotic to the point of being revolutionary as it attacks the alien powers of domination in Kenya, is not clearly stimulant to social action as it does not contribute very significantly to critical, social and political consciousness, with which Ngugi’s postcolonial discourse is always associated. Thus, as will be elaborated in due time, this novel

¹⁰ Qtd in James Ogude. *Ngugi’s Novels and African History: Narration the History*. Pluto Press, 1999, p. 5.

¹¹ Neil Lazarus. “(Re)turn to the people: Ngugi wa Thiong’o and the Crisis of Postcolonial Intellectualism”. Ed. Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1995, p 12.

raises a very important issue in postcolonial theory, which is that of people's cultural and racial consciousness by exhibiting "the tension between a dynamic, non-chauvinistic, national and racial consciousness, which grounds itself in labour and mass resistance [epitomised by Wariinga], and the bourgeois and more problematic forms of nationalism and ethnicity [represented by Gatuiria]."¹² We shall then approach this novel by emphasising the important (or the unimportant) role played by Gatuiria.¹³ Ngugi would assert that the present battle for true independence must not be solely restricted to the process of cultural self-apprehension. Undoubtedly, the cultural recuperation is a laudable task because of its assertion of cultural autonomy. But its importance is largely "dependent on who is doing the remembering and why."¹⁴

Despite his incontestable political concern, Ngugi does not lose sight of the issue of African culture in his artistic production. Importantly, such an issue can be related to his overall political theme of decolonisation. Nevertheless, it is surely the case that the principal spokesmen of the author in his different narratives (Karega in POB, Wariinga in DOC, and Matigari in *Matigari*) pay more attention to the political and economic side of today's anti-imperialist war, and this may seem to be in conflict with Ania Loomba's argument that "anticolonial and feminist struggles emphasised culture as a site of conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed."¹⁵ Indeed, for the moment we can resolve this "conflict" by arguing that Ngugi's attack on the rising villainous bourgeois class in his independent country is partly based on his repudiation of the Westernised culture with which it is most often identified. But, it must be stressed that Ngugi is not a diehard essentialist. He sometimes argues against the ill-intentioned use of pre-colonial cultural rituals. In addition, he feels unhappy with some "culturalist" movements, such as the Négritude movement, which in Jean-Marie Makang's view are "dangerous". As explained below:

The danger of culturalism during the colonial era was in overshadowing the demand for national liberation by putting forward the demand for cultural recognition, whereas in postcolonial time it is meant to cover the problem of

¹² Brenda Cooper. *To Lay these Secrets Open: Evaluating African Writing*. South Africa: David Philips Publishers, 1992, p. 52.

¹³ Charles Cantalupo. *The world of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1995, p. 7. "The responsibility of the writer [and hence the intellectual in general] cannot be assessed without addressing the larger and more embracing questions of *national culture* and *political justice*". But, Gatuiria is more concerned with his community's culture than with the primordial issues of social justice, as will be discussed later.

¹⁴ Benita Parry. "Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Twin Cheers for Nativism". Ed. P. Mongia. *Contemporary Post-Colonial Theory*. London: The Hodder Headline Group, 1996, p. 86.

¹⁵ Ania Loomba. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 40-1.

*political oppression and economic injustice perpetuated by autocratic African regimes.*¹⁶

Moreover, Jean-Marie Makang asserts that such revivalist cultural movements are, “under the pretext of their common participation in a national culture,” diverting the African masses and the revolutionary forces from “gaining true social consciousness and from organizing themselves for effective class struggle against their indigenous and foreign oppressors.”¹⁷ Ngugi, as we shall see later, by emphasising literature’s “political instrumentality in the postcolony,”¹⁸ does not use cultural nationalism in his recent works as the sole driving force for the fundamental task of struggling against neocolonialism.

Another issue which is worthy of extended consideration as far as Ngugi’s later novels are concerned is that of orality, and more precisely, its use as means to reinforce the content and the ideology of the novels. Derek Wright notes that in *POB* Ngugi seems to have begun to use “oral literature in a way that maintains its life and vibrancy.”¹⁹ This does not mean that Ngugi’s earliest novels did not make an intertextual recourse to what has come to be termed “orature”. But it appears that his latest works (starting mainly with *DOC*) are firmly rooted in the Gikuyu oral traditions. The oral forms are not used mainly by Ngugi to embellish his novels (and all his other forms of fiction, namely plays); rather, they have a more important function which is that of appealing to an audience of peasants and workers. In the main, his later works, for instance, as Kathleen Greenfield clearly states, “can be seen as attempts to create, in the language and oral traditions familiar to workers and peasants, a fictional modelling of the motives and techniques leading to a revolutionary transformation of Kenyan society.”²⁰ Such oral forms including chiefly proverbs, folk stories and popular songs, it must be emphasised, contribute greatly to the intelligibility of his ideological message.

In fact, as Ato Quayson suggests, “many indigenous symbols are being shifted from the area of sacred application to make room for new usages in the light of changing socio-economic imperatives.”²¹ Ngugi re-inscribes indigenous voices such as the traditional narrator or the “Gicaandi Player” in *DOC* and uses other indigenous means such as folk stories, proverbs, and popular songs in his literary output to establish a firm contact between the literary texts

¹⁶ Jean-Marie Makang. “Of the Good Use of Tradition: Keeping the Cultural Perspective in African Philosophy”. Ed. Eze, op. cit., p. 331.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 331.

¹⁸ Ato Quayson. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, p. 84.

¹⁹ Derek Wright. *Critical Essays on Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. New York: G K Hall, 2000, p. 231.

²⁰ Kathleen Greenfield. “Murdering the Sleep of Dictators: Corruption, Betrayal, and the Call to Revolution in the Work of Ngugi wa Thiong’o”. Ed. Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1995, p 27.

²¹ Ato Quayson, op. cit., p. 92.

and the intended readers. Interestingly, too, Ngugi describes the long-standing oral literature as “a collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history,” and further sees that literature, whether written or oral, creates “a whole conception of ourselves as a people.”²² So his mobilisation of the masses by using orality serves clearly as a mode of decolonisation.

Admittedly, too, Ngugi’s approach to DOC stands clearly in contrast, at the level of form, to the novels that were written before, and for this reason the issue of form will be dealt with at some length in this dissertation in relation to his post-*Petals of Blood* novels. For instance, Ngugi abandoned the complexity of the narrative techniques, which was a defining feature of his first four novels. DOC is, briefly speaking, simpler to read and easier to understand by the peasants and the workers, who are undoubtedly his intended audience. Fundamentally, Ngugi abandoned much of the complexity, which included chiefly the Conradian and Lawrentian techniques of narration such as interior monologues, flashbacks, the psychological probing of the inner lives of the characters. Furthermore, less complex symbolism is used if compared to his earlier novels, notably, *A Grain of Wheat* and *POB*. Last but not least, the characters in his Gikuyu novels, as they are sometimes called, are far less complex to the point of being “stereotyped”, to say nothing about the simplicity of plot and diction. But this is not to suggest that DOC and *Matigari*, which are generally seen as politically subversive, are to be accused of crude propagandism for their overt didacticism. It may not be an overstatement to postulate that the form is somehow sacrificed for the sake of ideological content, but this is not to say, as it was once argued, that “Ngugi’s politics has ruined his art” because of “the structural looseness of the narrative.”²³

Furthermore, a point needs to be made about the use of the indigenous language in Ngugi’s novels that were published after his imprisonment without trial. Ngugi’s firm contention is that the English language is an imperialist tool and hence, as he has indeed argued, it cannot be the form of expression of the anti-imperialist writings. So his radical position seems to be in line with Andre Lorde’s famous dictum that “the Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house.”²⁴ Of course, this view is not shared by all the African writers.

Matigari is the last novel to be discussed in this dissertation. It *has* a simple plot, but such simplicity does not undermine its literary value. This novel, which produces clearly a

²² Ngugi wa Thiong’o. *Decolonizing the Mind*. London: James Currey, 1986, p. 15.

²³ Isidore Okpewho (1979), quoted in F. Odun Balogun. “Matigari: An African Novel as Oral Narrative Performance”. *Oral Tradition*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1995, p. 142.

²⁴ Andre Lorde. “The Master’s Tool Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”. Ed. Reina Lewis & Sara Mills. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003, pp. 25-28.

postcolonial discourse as it purports to “destabilise the power structures”²⁵ of neocolonial Africa, explores the possibility of national “regeneration” in post-colonial Africa which ends the long degenerate condition that has been created by both colonial domination and neocolonial hegemony. The regeneration of the nation does not mean the regeneration of the precolonial culture but simply the re-establishment of a truly democratic and just nation, and this is to be achieved by resorting to the similar military means that were used in the formal liberation struggle, which is symbolically indicated in the narrative by Matigari’s decision to wage a war against the villainous neocolonial regime to right the social wrongs by taking up the very firearms with which he fought his colonial enemies in the previously won epic war.

This novel can too be considered a utopian narrative since, as it will be discussed later, “the urge for utopia is based on a desire for a better life.”²⁶ In fact, the last chapter is based on the assumption that the regeneration of the nation is enormously motivated by commitment to, and an understanding of, the present historical realities.²⁷ And Matigari’s movement from mere idealism to redemptive action by his final attempt to re-arm himself should form the substance of our discussion in that chapter.

In broad terms, this dissertation tries to relate Ngugi’s postcolonialist discourses in his latest novels (before *Wizard of the Crow*) to the socialist notion of class struggle. Even though Brenda Cooper states, commenting particularly on *DOC*, that for Ngugi the present black struggle cannot be possible outside the social context,²⁸ we shall see that Ngugi tries in his novels to link such ideas as history and popular culture to what he believes to be the redemptive struggle of the downtrodden popular masses. In other words, we can safely assume that the growing importance of the popular, the oral, and the marginalised, the blatant challenge of “conservative historiography”, to use Patrick Williams’ term, and the radical redefinition of the post-colonial African nation in Ngugi’s recent resistance literature indicate explicitly his endorsement of the “postcolonialist” views in his undoubtedly proletarian novels. All in all, Ngugi’s relocation of the centre of narration and discourse about Kenya’s history, culture, and the post-independence Kenyan nation, which is set in fact in clear opposition to the colonial and neocolonial assumptions, to use Ogude’s phrase, “carries the audience along in the struggle for the new nation.”²⁹

²⁵ Helen Gilbert & Joanne Tompkins. *Postcolonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. Routledge, 1996, p. 16.

²⁶ A. M. Khamis Said. “Classism in Shaaban Robert’s Utopian Novel: *Kusadikika*”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer 2001, p. 63.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁸ Brenda Cooper, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁹ James Ogude. *Ngugi’s Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. Pluto Press, 1999, p. 106.

I. Ngugi's Displacement of the Western Hegemonic Discourse

“...to counter the continuously ruinous effect of the legacy of colonialism, it is imperative that neocolonial subjects develop an anti-neocolonial discourse to critically interrogate and contextually situate historical and political events that have shaped their neocolonial lived experiences. Further, they ought to use such a discourse to critically analyze and question the neocolonial social, cultural, educational, and political milieu that impacts them, rather than being passive spectators of this milieu” (Orelus 2007: xii).

I. Ngugi's Displacement of the Western Hegemonic Discourse

Introduction

In this chapter an attempt is made to cast light on Ngugi's "decolonisation" project which manifests itself clearly in his conspicuous contestation of the colonial views about Africa on the one hand and the rejection of the neo-colonial ruling class certainties on the other. This project, which will be subsequently discussed in relation to his latest novels, can rightly be placed within the general framework of postcolonialism. This is indeed congruent with the apt remark made by one African critic that "every great work by an African writer or artist will bear witness against racism and imperialism of the West."³⁰ Following in the footsteps of many other African writers, as Even Mwangi aptly puts it, "Ngugi has attempted to give voice to communities that have been disarticulated by colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa."³¹ He, like many of his contemporaries, rejects completely the monologues³² of the Western (racist) ideologues and hence he attempts largely in his various narratives to "write against, decentre the colonial discourse" and thus serves as a "prelude to evoking an alternative space of representation."³³ But, more often than not, his narratives are analysed according to the Marxist ideology of overthrowing the system of "you eat or you are eaten", and this echoes his well-known dictum that "every writer is a writer in politics."³⁴

This chapter is subdivided into two sections. The first section deals with the racist and the arrogant attitudes of the European ideologues, travelogues, and social anthropologists, and, in short, it explores the Orientalist discourse of the Europeans, as defined by Edward Said and the epistemic violence as explained by V.Y. Mudimbe. Meanwhile, it examines the reaction of the African writers and black intellectuals to the Western hegemonic thought. The next section deals with Ngugi's critical and literary "postcolonialist" (or post-Orientalist) project in particular. It then investigates Ngugi's discourse of liberation which calls for people's struggle against the objective structures of imperial domination and neocolonial dependency.

³⁰ Belinda Elizabeth Jack. *Negritude and Literary Criticism: The History and Theory of Negro-African Literature in French*. New York: Library Congress, 1996, p. 96.

³¹ Even Mwangi. "Gender, Unreliable Oral Narration, and the Untranslated Preface in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*". *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 38, No. 4, Winter 2007, p. 30.

³² It might be appropriate to refer her to Bakhtin's "dialogic imagination" because, for him, "the concept of difference [for example, between the Western world and the non-western world] depends not on a dialectical 'either/or' but a dialogic 'both/and'...By means of this reasoning, signifiers and signifieds, subjects and objects maintain their difference but are nevertheless able to communicate with one another". Patricia Waugh & Lynne Pearce (eds.). *Reading Dialogics*: New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1994, p. 10.

³³ Simon Gikandi. *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language, Ideology and Fiction*. London: Heinemann, 1991, p. 4.

³⁴ Ngugi, W. T. *Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann, 1981, p. 10.

1- The Western Hegemonic Thought: From Matters “of Course” to Matters “of Discourse”

Edward Said argues in his ground-breaking book *Orientalism* that European imperialism was premised on a set of ideas, concepts and paradigms, which form what he labels the Orientalist discourse.³⁵ This discourse is mainly based upon the ontological and epistemological difference between the “unequal” halves of the world: the Occident and the Orient, or more generally, the West and the Rest. In his view, Orientalism is a system of statements³⁶ about the Orient that “normalises” or “naturalises” the hegemonic project of Western Imperialism. In his other most important book about western imperialism *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said asserts further that the intellectual or cultural production of the West was in the service of the growing global domination of the Western empires. He indeed writes that

*The enterprise of Empire depends upon the idea of having an empire, as Conrad so powerfully seems to have realized, and all kinds of preparations are made for within a culture: then in turn imperialism acquires a kind of coherence, a set of experiences, and a presence of a ruler and ruled alike within the culture.*³⁷

It has to be noted too that Said’s ideas are markedly influenced by Michel Foucault’s theory of power, which rests on the belief that knowledge is a means of power and domination.³⁸ That is to say, as Foucault points out, there exists a relationship between the will to truth and the will to dominate, or the will to power. He states, for instance, in his seminal work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that knowledge is a “discursive formation” that is manipulated to accomplish some political goals (either creating or supporting the institutions of power).

As Achebe puts it, according to the Western eye, Black Africa provides a perfect foil to civilised Europe.³⁹ Thus, because of the “colonial” distinction between the Western powers, the bearers and the diffusers of the high culture, and non-western communities, that are assumed to have low cultures or even no cultures,⁴⁰ the Europeans “had a self-declared mission of leading the non-white races along the road to civilisation.”⁴¹ So in the name of civilising the benighted natives the colonisation of “uncivilised” lands was undertaken by the European powers.

³⁵ Edward Said. *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*. London: Pantheon Books, 1978.

³⁶ Employing Michel Foucault’s definition, Edward Said says discourse is “the system of statements within which the world can be known” (Ibid , p. 65).

³⁷ Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1993, p. 11.

³⁸ Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Paris: Gallimard, 1962.

³⁹ Chinua Achebe. *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. New York: Doubleday, 1988, p. 3.

⁴⁰ E. S. Shaffer. *Comparative Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, preface.

⁴¹ Viera Pawlokova-Vilhanova. “The African Personality or the Dilemma of the Other and the Self in the Philosophy of W. Blyden”. *Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1998, p. 164.

V. Y Mudimbe, too, in his well-known book *The Invention of Africa*⁴² argues that Africa has been deplorably objectified by the Western ideology. He indeed pleads for the re-invention of the “idea of Africa” through the creation of what he calls “a new discourse on Africa.”⁴³ This new discourse must be Afrocentric in the way that “it heals the rift between the subject and the object”⁴⁴ and this can be attained by re-locating the African people as subjects and hence dispelling completely the notion of Africans as objects in the Western discourse of domination. He then warns against what is known as the “epistemic violence”, to use Spivak’s famous term, of the Western discourse. He concedes thus that the non-Western world has been created by the Western world and it is no more than a cultural or literary artefact. He acutely criticises what has come to be known as “the novel of Africa” (to use Michael Echeruo’s term).⁴⁵ For example, the much-cited imperial work of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* reveals quite clearly some of the fantasies and exotic images created by the Westerners about what they pejoratively call “the Dark Continent.” Africa, for Joseph Conrad, is the “heart of darkness”; it is the land of savagery, barbarism, and cannibalism. The “joke knowledge”, to use Naipaul’s term,⁴⁶ promoted by colonial discourse about Africa, is based on the ontological negation of the “Other” (which is reduced to *tabula rasa* or “a blank space” or a space without historical or even human significance). It makes a binary distinction between the “European Self and the Colonial Other.”⁴⁷ This reinforces the classificatory discourse of alterity (Africa as being the Other in the Western subjectivity). The dogmatic, eternalised and fixed ideas about the “colonial other” give birth to a one-way communication between the “jingo-imperialists” and the so-called “subject race.”

As a consequence, many African literary giants assert the urgent need to positivise this negative image of Africa normalised by the “colonial library”. The central problem, as N. Dabaningi Sithole declares quite succinctly, is that “the first time he [the black man] ever came into contact with the white man the African was overwhelmed, overawed, puzzled,

⁴² V. Y Mudimbe. *the Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. London: James Currey, 1988.

⁴³ V. Y. Mudimbe. *The Idea of Africa*. London: James Currey, 1994, p. 177. “The tragedy-because there exists one-is that we have in Africa internalised the signs invented for our conquest. We talk of our being, of our existence, of our freedom with terms produced for our reification. Surely, we have at least the decency of transforming the negative poles into positive ones (barbarity and savagery traditional paganism, ancestral religion and the fetishes, an artistic form). This modification of vocabulary exorcises the past and opens virgin future. With this terminological rebellion we can enunciate a new reality”.

⁴⁴ Abdirahman Hussein. *Edward Said: Criticism and Society*. London: British Library Cataloguing, 2002, p. 30.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination*. Oxford: oxford University Press, 2001, p. 13.

⁴⁶ John Marx. “Postcolonial Literature and the Western Literary Canon”. Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, p. 92 .

⁴⁷ Simon Gikandi. “Poststructuralism and Postcolonial Discourse”. Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, pp. 97-119.

perplexed, mystified, and dazzled.”⁴⁸ That is why Sithole dispels totally the idea that “blackness had come to be synonymous with inability, foolishness, and backwardness.”⁴⁹ Therefore, as he later puts it, “the white myth began to show more cracks” as a large body of work by African writers has immensely contributed to “the de-mythicisation of the white man in Africa.”⁵⁰

Since Ngugi is our main concern in this study, more focus in the following section will be laid on his contribution to the African general project of the de-structuring the white man’s hegemony in the non-western world in general and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular.

2- Ngugi’s Critical Project of “Politicising” the Displacement of the Western Hegemonic Discourse

Ngugi’s works, it must be emphasised, can be described as postcolonial writings basically because they “help to repudiate the [Western imperial] canon” and second because they “revise canonical texts and concepts.”⁵¹ Consequently, Ngugi strongly believes that the time is now ripe for “the subaltern to firmly stand and speak in their authentic voice about their own lived experience.”⁵² Even today, in the so-called age of globalisation, some cultural stereotypical “artificial” images are still being created (or recreated) in the Western cultural production (for example, in cinema industry) because of the preservation of the West of its global hegemony in the postcolonial world.⁵³ Also, Ngugi’s recent interest in cultural self-representation, besides his obvious political subversive discourse, strengthens our belief in his postcolonialist approach to literary writings. He has lately become an ardent advocate of the mental decolonisation of the African people. In fact, his radical position towards the issue of language in African literature is the best indication of his refusal of the Western value-systems and cultures carried by the language of the metropolitan powers, even though he does not strongly call for “the return to the source”, to borrow from Cabral. So, despite his growing interest in the reconsideration of his people’s indigenous culture, Ngugi’s postcolonial writings are not primordially an explicit search for some precolonial African cultural purity. In fact, cultural retrieval, for him, is not a precondition for the masses’ liberation.

⁴⁸ N. Dabaningi Sithole. “The Cracked Myth”. 1958. Ed. Lucian W. Pyre & Sidney Verba. *Political Culture and Political Development*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 290.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

⁵¹ John Marx. “Postcolonial Literature and the Western Literary Canon”. Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, p. 83.

⁵² Pierre W. Orelus. *Education under Occupation: the Heavy Price of Living in a Neocolonized and Globalized World*. Massachusetts: Sense Publishers, 2007, p. xiii.

⁵³ Ruth Mayer. *Artificial Africas: Colonial Images in the Times of Globalization*. University Press of New England, 2002. Ruth Mayer argues that the “old world of European power politics” is not substantially different from the postcolonial world order in its reduction of Africa to the margin of the world. (p. 292).

More fundamentally, Ngugi has taken great pains to define the process of development that the African countries must undergo. He knows, as Armah is later to write, that colonialism is a “post conquest European strategy for keeping Africans usably underdeveloped and dependent.”⁵⁴ His post-A *Grain of Wheat* novels, for example, “reflect the mood of disillusionment that has invaded African minds as the hopes and expectations inspired by the general euphoria of political independence, taken as the signal for a new and positive phase of African development, began to fade.”⁵⁵ Ngugi’s novels that are studied in this dissertation, like those of Achebe, namely *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, bear the implication that “the African world—rather than follow the trajectories suggested by earlier narratives of liberation, has been turned upside down.”⁵⁶ For example, Ngugi’s *Matigari* shows how the euphoric claims of Matigari, the ex-Mau-Mau fighter, have been shattered by a post-colonial world that is totally upside down.

Ngugi’s novels can then be read from the Afrocentric perspective which, in Al-Amin Mazrui’s view, is to be identified with five elements that can be outlined as follows:

*Firstly, Africa as being **subject** rather than **object**. Secondly, and related to it, Africa as being **active** rather than **passive**. Thirdly, Africa as being **cause** rather than **effect**. Fourthly, Africa as being **center** rather than **periphery**. And finally, Africa as being **maker of history** rather than **incident of history**.⁵⁷*

We can summarise all these elements by saying that crucial to the Afrocentric point of view is the idea of African people’s agency and self-willed resistance to the alien forces. Ngugi’s Afrocentric slant, whose obvious manifestation is his virulent attack upon the false judgements, the distorted images and the reductionist myths of the white imperialists’ “arrogant” discourse, is intended chiefly to restore agency to the African people by telling them that they can engage with the process of self-initiated or endogenous development.

In addition to its utilisation of power to dominate the other communities, Europe used education and the written word to clip people’s wings of anti-imperialist resistance. In Patrick Williams’ terms, which are indeed borrowed from Gramsci, to conquer the land and space of other communities, the West used two “hegemonic modes” to invest the mental universe of

⁵⁴ Quoted by Gbemisola Adeoti. “The Re-making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of (Alter) Native Route to Development”. Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University, 2004, p. 2.

http://www.codesria.org/Links/conferences/general_assembly11/papers/adeoti.pdf.

⁵⁵ Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 214.

⁵⁶ Simon Gikandi. *Reading Chinua Achebe*. London: Heinemann, 1991.

⁵⁷ Al-Amin Mazrui. *Africanity Redefined*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002, p. 21. (emphasis in original)

the people, namely evangelisation and the “coercive mode” (i.e. military means).⁵⁸ Ngugi’s art bears thus undoubtedly some sharp criticism of both the objective conditions of the people and the subjective realities or “interpellations” that have been constructed in order to ensure the continuity of the presently lamentable status quo.

In brief, Ngugi rejects the “masculine” discourse of European (and “Europeanised”) writers by, first, raising a wide range of issues in his works, notably, history, myth, culture, and above all African identity or African selfhood, and, second and more importantly, by making such “postcolonialist” issues relevant to today’s combat, which is not only intellectual or political but can take a military form as well, of ousting the Western rule in Africa.

a- History

Since colonialism took power in the name of history, Ngugi’s literary project on the whole denounces clearly the Western version of African history which sometimes rests partly on the rather scientifically unfounded radical distinction between people with a history and people without a history. In fact, many African thinkers still take part in the ongoing debate about the history of Africa because, as Wilson-Tagoe clearly points out, “to have or not to have history is a major anxiety in all areas of contemporary thought in Africa” and, as he further argues, “history was the locus of difference that separated civilized from uncivilized in European perception of Other.”⁵⁹ For Ngugi, history has a significant political dimension, and until now history, as seen from the Western eye, buttresses the political ideology of Western globalisation and neo-imperialism.

Accordingly, Ngugi is vehemently opposed to the repressed communal history of the African people. He resents what Biodun Jeyifo calls “the imperialism of representation which, in historic case, excludes or simply ignores (alter)-native version and constructions ‘from below.’”⁶⁰ So Ngugi’s literary project is, among other things, a displacement of the Western version of African history and the Western constructions of African stories in general. In effect, Ngugi would contend that African history has to be rewritten but from a liberationist point of view because the imperialist historical accounts about Africa deny the agency and the free will of its people. He also deplores the scarcity of books written by Kenyans about Kenya, and regrets that such historical figures as Dedan Kimathi have not received the critical

⁵⁸ Patrick Williams. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 24. Similarly, Elleke Boehmer defines imperialism as “the authority assured by a state over another territory- authority expressed in pageantry and symbolism, as well as in military and economic power”. Elleke Boehmer. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.2.

⁵⁹ Nana Wilson-Tagoe. “Narrative, History, Novel: Intertextuality in the Historical Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah”. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Vol. 12, Vol. 2, December 1999, p. 155.

⁶⁰ Anna Luty. “Weapon to Tool: Paradigm Shift in Literature.” 2004, p. 52.

<http://www.africanstudies.uct.ac.za/postamble/weapon.pdf>.

consideration they really deserve. For example, in his preface to his best-known play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* he writes that

*There was no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic resistance of Kenyan people...a resistance movement whose history goes back to the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries when Kenyans and other East African people first took up arms against European colonial power.... Our historians, our political scientists, and even some of our literary figures, were too busy...trying to document the colonial myths which had it that Kenyan people traditionally wandered aimlessly from one place to another in purposeless warfare; that the people really accommodated themselves to the British forces of occupation.*⁶¹

Similarly, in his *Moving the Centre* he sees that the major theme of the history of Kenya over the four hundred years or so is the history of resistance to any form of foreign domination.⁶² In fact, the problem of distorting history and the political propaganda behind this distortion will be dealt with at some length in the coming chapter.

Still, Ngugi concerns himself with the so-called pre-holocaust past of his community. For instance, his early novel, *The River Between*, is a celebration of pre-colonial Gikuyuland and it shares many similarities with Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.⁶³ Ngugi's literary project is by no means substantially different from such African writers as Achebe and Armah as far as the issue of African history is concerned. For instance, Armah attempts in his major novels, such as *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, to historically reconstruct pre-colonial Ghana,⁶⁴ and arguably Ngugi does almost the same in his *The River Between*. Certainly, Ngugi's literary project then disavows explicitly the Hegelian perception of "history-less" Africa. Ngugi elucidates clearly in all his novels that pre-colonial African past was historically significant, to say the least.

His evocation of history in his art will be elaborated when dealing with his first serious proletarian novel *Petals of Blood*, which is a laudable attempt to use the past as an energising means of mobilising the masses and thereby healing the wounded present conditions.

b- Myth

Closely related to the idea of history in Kenya is the notion of myth whose importance Ngugi does not lose sight of since its reappropriation is an effective means of "writing back to the

⁶¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. "Preface to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*". London: Heinemann, 1976, p. vi.

⁶² Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. *Moving the Centre*. London: James Currey, 1993, p. 97.

⁶³ Charles Larson in his *The Emergence of African Fiction* (1971: 135) calls *The River Between* by James Ngugi "the East African counterpart to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*".

⁶⁴ For more information about Armah's above-cited works see both Ode Ogede. *Ayi Kwei Armah: Radical Iconoclast*. Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000, and Derek Wright. *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah*. Three Continents Press, 1992.

Empire”. Indeed, myth is part and parcel of the blacks’ collective consciousness and shared memory because African thought is frequently described as mythical and is accordingly classified as an antithesis to the European rational thinking.⁶⁵ But we must not always distrust the role of myth (as opposed to ‘history’) in the national thought of the community because, as Michael Kammen assumes, “every nation needs a mythic explanation of its pure creation” even if today, as he further contends, myth has been replaced by what he calls “real” history.⁶⁶

Myth has been defined by Kwasi Yankah as “a sacred narrative that explains the processes that have shaped the world, and due mainly to their sacred status, myths are, despite opposing opinions, considered true and authoritative.”⁶⁷ Another important feature of myth is its communal and collective character and is therefore essential in ensuring the togetherness and cohesion of social groups, notably, African communities. Its communal character secures the existence of the group, reinforces its sense of wholeness and defines clearly its *raison d’être*, as Malinowski once remarked.⁶⁸

Ngugi, while not denying the significance of myth-making in the African post-colonial novels, does not appear to be as ardent as Armah in his, say, *The Healers* as far as the idea of African myth is concerned. His insertion of some well-known Gikuyu myths in his writings should not be taken as an explicit call for a return to a “pristine” traditional past; rather, he uses myths to legitimise a particular version of history.⁶⁹

Ngugi is, too, apparently well aware of the fact (which is similarly observed by Richard Slotkin) that “in small, relatively simple, preliterate societies myth and ideology are scarcely distinguishable aspects of a homogeneous system of values and behaviours.”⁷⁰ The basic problem that Ngugi explores in his novels is that the African myths are fading out as the African societies are undergoing a rapid modernising process. Does this mean that the traditional myths cannot meet the exigencies of modern life? Richard Slotkin interestingly notes that “when myths grow inadequate as keys to interpreting and controlling the changing

⁶⁵ Laurence Coup argues in his study of myth that “myth to Western civilization is opposed to reality, secondly, myth came to signify fantasy [as opposed to the rational thought] of the so-called modernity project”. Laurence Coup. *Myth*. London: Routledge, 1992, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Michael Kammen. *Mystic Chords of Memory: the Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*. New York: Library of Congress, 1988, p. 27.

⁶⁷ Kwasi Yankah. “The Folktale and its extensions”. Ed. F. Abiola Irele & Simon Gikandi, 2004, p. 20.

⁶⁸ Michael Kammen says that “Bronislaw Malinowski, a pioneering anthropologist, once described myth as a story about the past which has the function of justifying the present and thereby contributing to social stability” (op. cit., p. 17).

⁶⁹ This is the role of myth in the modern age as discussed by Levi-Strauss, cited in *ibid.*, p. 17. Similarly, Daniel-Henri Pageaux claims that one of the fundamental functions of myth is to “narrate history”. Daniel-Henri Pageaux. *La littérature générale et comparée*. Paris : Armand Colin, 1994, p. 99. (Translation mine).

⁷⁰ Richard Slotkin. *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890*. New York: Atheneun, 1985, p. 25.

world, systematic ideologies are developed to reestablish the lost coherence between facts and values” and further adds that “ideology is the product of the discontent with a world defined by myth.”⁷¹ Still, Ngugi does not dismiss myth completely in his novels, especially the later ones, because he would argue that myth cannot be ignored as it is part of the African identity.

More recently, many critics have argued for the use of myth in postcolonial writings. For example, Eriks Uskalis points out, with particular reference to Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* and Wole Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*, that “myths encode resistance to the hegemonic drives found in the narratives of the state.”⁷² In fact, Ngugi’s use of myth is part of his general recourse to the folk oral traditions of the masses, which became more prominent in his post- *Petals of Blood* literary career. Since he has recently redefined his intended audience, Ngugi uses myth in order to be more received by the masses who are mostly illiterate since, as JanMohamed postulates, myth, because of its deep connection with popular wisdom, is appealing to the illiterate masses, whereas, history, due to its highly academic status, should be more used when we need to communicate with the literate people.⁷³ Whilst Karega in *POB* uses the scholarly point of view to discuss the historical events, Nyakinyua sees her people’s history from a “lay” or “mythical” perspective.

The discussion of myth and local knowledge should lead us to bring to the fore the debate, often contentious, about culture and its political role, if any, in post-independence Africa; a debate that has been raised in Ngugi’s works in general.

c- Culture and Tradition

As Ngugi puts it, the African writer must write about the history and the culture of his own people with self-pride,⁷⁴ though, as it will be seen later, Ngugi is more involved in the political issues of his country. He is indeed described by some as a writer-activist, to use Biodun Jeyifo’s term.⁷⁵ But this is not to say that he pays lip-service to the process of cultural revolution. In fact, even though Ngugi has quite recently pointed out that the liberation struggle must not be reduced to cultural consciousness, cultural revolution is a *sine qua non* requirement for Africa’s political liberation. Thus, his position towards the “political” role of

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷² Eriks Uskalis. *Contextualizing Myths in Postcolonial Novels: Figures of Dissent and Disruption*. France: University of Liège, 2000, p. 1. He claims too that myths transgress the dominant discourse of the official monologic narratives espoused by the State.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁴ Ngugi, W. T. *Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann, 1981.

⁷⁵ Biodun Jeyifo. *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics, and Postcolonialism*. California: University of California Press, 2004, p. 13.

people's culture in the present challenge of decolonisation is fruitfully aligned with Amilcar Cabral, who interestingly writes that "when we consider various features, we see that the armed liberation struggle is not only a product of culture but also a determinant of culture" and "in this perspective", as he subsequently contends, "it behoves the liberation movement to define clearly the objectives of cultural resistance as an integral and determining part of struggle."⁷⁶ It must also be added that, as many postcolonialist critics have pointed out, the cultural revolution in Africa has very deep political implications since by asserting the cultural identity of the black people more legitimacy is given to their liberationist struggle.

To begin with, Ngugi's work is in line with Levi-Strauss's statement that "there is no people without culture."⁷⁷ For example, Ngugi's first published novel *The River Between* could be viewed as an exploration of the cultural landscape of pre-colonial Kenya dominated by premodern values, their inevitable clash with the Christian culture preached by the missionary school and the colonial system, and the "crushing" and the "bastardisation", to use Kehinde's terms,⁷⁸ of African culture by the European colonial powers during the earliest phase of Kenya's modern social development.

Thus, the issue of African culture in both colonial and post-colonial Africa is usually discussed in relation to the hegemonic project of "modernity", which is marked by the "de-provincialisation" of Europe. Ngugi's discourse is arguably postmodernist since it questions the messianic faith of the modernity project. Postmodernism, as Ato Quayson writes, is a "de-absolutization of reason, of man, of history."⁷⁹ It is, in other words, as Neil Larson puts it, anti-foundational and anti-essentialist.⁸⁰ Very often, indeed, modernity implies "universalism" and tradition entails "localism", and this is in tune with Anthony Giddens' observation that "tradition is resolutely local and thus provides an excellent foil for imagining globalisation."⁸¹ It must be stressed that today's globalisation discourse is a perpetuation of the discourse of modernity that is deeply connected with the growth of the Western empires during the age of Enlightenment.

⁷⁶ Amilcar Cabral. "National Liberation and Culture". Ed. Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman. *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*. Essex: Reason Education Limited, 1994, pp. 53-65.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 95.

⁷⁸ Ayo Kehinde. "Intertextuality and the Contemporary African Novel". *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2003, p. 377.

⁷⁹ Ato Quayson. "Modernism and Postmodernism in African Literature". Ed. Abiola Irele & Simon Gikandi, op. cit., p. 829.

⁸⁰ Neil Larson. *Postmodernism and Imperialism: Theory and Politics in Latin America*. North-eastern University, 1990, p. 4.

⁸¹ Richard Bauman & Charles L. Briggs. *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 256.

It was once believed that modernity had the power “to produce a more enlightened and rational world, one in which freedom and democracy dominated.”⁸² However, Ngugi’s novels, as it will turn out, are deeply concerned with the effects of modernity and industrial capitalism on contemporary societies, especially those of the so-called poor countries. We shall discuss this issue at some length when we analyse the industrialisation of an agrarian area (Ilmorog) in his POB.

But Ngugi’s revalorisation of African culture should not be taken as an espousal of what has come to be called “traditionalism” in African scholarship. This movement is usually defined as “an attempt to preserve the precolonial, indigenous modes of life.”⁸³ Thus, Ngugi is never identified with the movement of “New Tarzanism” (to use Soyinka’s term). Apart from being a firm believer in the plurality of cultures in the world, Ngugi sees that African culture has what could be seen as “the right of difference in equality.”⁸⁴ This can be shown by Ngugi’s attempt at what has come to be called “the levelling tendencies of cultural studies.”⁸⁵ But this is to suggest that he pays lip-service to the traditional lore and customs since he is not, as it will be made very clear in the next chapters, an anti-modernist nativist; rather, he weds his “revivalist” tendencies to his socialist bent,⁸⁶ and this idea will be further discussed at a later stage.

Indeed, Ngugi thematises in most of his novels (if not all of them) the clash between tradition and modernity (or between detraditionalisation and retraditionalisation) since Africans are sometimes “caught between exoticisation and identification.”⁸⁷ However, it could safely be assumed that the conflict between the European and the African patterns of thought is not at the very heart of his works (perhaps to the exception of *The River Between*, as could be contended, in which there is a debate between the orthodox evangelical missionary school and the Gikuyu traditionalists over the controversial issue of “female circumcision”).⁸⁸ Ngugi has no qualms about the concomitance of tradition and modernity, and hence he has a strong belief in the fruitfulness of what has come to be called cultural syncretism. He seems

⁸²Ibid., p. 255.

⁸³ George W. Shepherd. *The Politics of African Nationalism*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, p. 19.

⁸⁴ Homi. K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. xviii.

⁸⁵ Steven Connor. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Benita Parry. “Liberation Theory: Variations on Themes of Marxism and Modernity”. Ed. Lazarus, 2004, op. cit., p. 140.

⁸⁷ Ruth Mayer, op. cit., p. 128.

⁸⁸ In his study of *The River Between*, Patrick Williams writes that this novel’s thematic thrust is the clash between “Christian enlightenment and pagan savagery” which can be interpreted as a conflict between “different attitudes to the tribe (especially in terms of betrayal versus fidelity)” and thus the novel depicts the dilemma between the assimilation into “the Western-oriented modernity and indigenous adherence to tradition” (op. cit., p. 23).

to admit that the “hybridity” of the postcolonial African culture is inevitable, because, as Ashcroft et al. aptly write

Post-colonial culture is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectal relationship between the “grafted” European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology. Such construction and reconstruction only occurs as a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic systems and “peripheral” subversions of them. It is not possible to return or to rediscover an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity, nor is it possible to create national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise.⁸⁹

It is believed that Ngugi has to objection to the emergent hybrid culture in his country during the post-independence era. What he attacks indeed is the assimilationist attitudes that are most often supported by the comprador “sell-outs” who see the foreign culture as the norm and thereby demote the popular culture of the underclass.

Simon Gikandi notes that Ngugi’s wishes in his writings are that “the lost land and the denigrated traditions [will be] restored”, even if, as Gikandi further states, “Ngugi is unique among African writers of his generation in his refusal to invoke a precolonial world as the site of stable culture and identity.”⁹⁰ Gikandi defends this idea by saying that

The reason for his refusal arises, perhaps, from Ngugi’s recognition of how difficult it is to discuss a Gikuyu culture outside the colonial relationships. For this reason, any attempt to read Ngugi’s work in relation to a Gikuyu ontology and aesthetics (the way we read Soyinka in relation to a Yoruba normativity) is bound to fail. And this is not because Ngugi has no interest in this kind of normativity, indeed his works in Gikuyu are marked by a desire to find aesthetic forms that exist outside the bourgeois ideologies inherited from the colonial school.⁹¹

Gikandi, in other words, asserts that Ngugi is not totally disinterested in Gikuyu folklore and traditions; rather, the political problems and the social difficulties of the blacks must be resolved first. One feature of Ngugi’s works is that he does not inconsiderably invoke aspects of the Gikuyu precolonial world in his postcolonial writings. However, this is not to suggest that he turns a blind eye to the destructive effects of the colonial modernity. For example, in *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi criticises modernity on both economic and cultural grounds, as Gikandi interestingly writes:

Ngugi, the Marxist, may not be a champion of the culture that has been produced by the “low productive forces” overseen by Mwathi [the local overseer of the whole area according to the metaphysical beliefs of the traditional Ilmorogians],

⁸⁹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 195-196.

⁹⁰ Simon Gikandi. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. London: James Currey, 2000, p. 14.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

*but clearly the passing of the past, the destruction of Mwathi's place by the wilful machinery of progress, is one of the most painful scenes in the novel and perhaps the most obvious indictment of modernity and modernization.*⁹²

Western modernity, in other words, does not simply constitute a cultural or epistemological threat to the African communities; rather, the Western cultural control of those communities is one part of the more general and fundamental phenomena of global imperialism. In short, the introduction of modernity to Africa by the colonial powers can be regarded as a form of colonisation in itself.

The issue of culture in the African context cannot be discussed in isolation from orality, due to the fact that African culture has for so long been oral. The oral traditions, it has to be noted, as Al-Amin Mazrui aptly remarks, can be seen as a counter-argument to the Western view that Africa had no culture and philosophy.⁹³ Ngugi's latest works have been produced within the framework of oral discourse. The features of orality that have been used in such works, in addition to their usefulness in asserting the particularity of Gikuyu culture, have a social function to fulfil. In fact, orality in Ngugi's works can be best discussed in relation to his involvement in the theatre group. In many plays that he has co-authored, orality has been used as a powerful means of connecting himself with the intended audience. So, as some have argued, "oral performance became not only an alternative literary medium, but also a counter-hegemonic struggle, it positioned the cultural independence of the blacks as its praxis and black political emancipation as its goal" and, if put differently, "oral performance was a literary practice which looked backward in order to look forward."⁹⁴ Oral art, simply put, that has been inserted by Ngugi in his written output performs a social (i. e. political) rather than ritualistic function. And the issue of orality in Ngugi's oeuvre is intimately related to his use of indigenous language and this point is our concern next.

d- Language

No study of the later Ngugi will be comprehensive unless reference is made to his recent best-noted radical position towards the issue of language in African literature. Ngugi has recently become "the champion of African-language literatures"⁹⁵ due to his latest return to his linguistic origins after a brilliant career in English language writings. This indicates, as some have argued, a break with a literary career marked principally by producing "typical"

⁹² Ibid., p 145.

⁹³ Al-Amin Mazrui, 2002, op. cit., p 13.

⁹⁴ M. J. Cloete and R. N Madadzhe. "Bury my Bones But Keep My Words: the Interface Between Oral Tradition and Contemporary African Writing". *Literator*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Aug 2004, p. 42. <http://www.unorth.ac.za>

⁹⁵ Neil Lazarus. "(Re)turn to the people: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Crisis of Postcolonial Intellectualism". Ed. Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1995, p 11.

novels or “Euro-African” novels (as opposed to “African” novels).⁹⁶ His recent attitude towards the language situation in the African literary landscape is reminiscent of Obi Wali’s famous argument that African literature must use African language as its medium of expression. He has also declared recently that he has engaged with the process of promoting the East African languages. In his *Decolonising the Mind*, he announces explicitly his intentions to use Gikuyu in the anti-neocolonialist struggle. Of course, the issue of language has not yet been satisfactorily settled by African authors since “European colonial languages are today part of the linguistic landscape of Africa, with many African writers claiming the right to use them for their artistic expression.”⁹⁷ Ngugi’s “politically charged rejection” of English as a tool of anti-colonialist literary expression is very often contrasted with Achebe’s “moderate” attitude in his “pragmatic acceptance” of the utilisation of the language of the coloniser in the anti-imperialist fiction.⁹⁸ For Achebe, there is nothing wrong in using the English language in the anti-colonialist narratives. He asserts quite forcefully that the English language can “bear the burden” of African experiences. He writes that

*Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone’s else? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it...I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.*⁹⁹

Thus, Ngugi “deterritorialises the colonial language within the post-colonial space” as, in his view, a necessary means of subverting “the implied hierarchy and domination.”¹⁰⁰ However, Achebe in all his novels and Gabriel Okara’s in his singular novel *The Voice*, for example, “reterritorialise the colonial language within the post-colonial space”¹⁰¹ by “indigenising” it. But still the question remains unanswered: does writing in the language of the coloniser not amount to acquiescing in the ultimate dispossession?

Besides, Ngugi’s abdication of English in his writings has been partly motivated by his view of language and its intimate link to culture. He sees that “language carries the cultural universe of the community and in that universe also resides the entire body of values held by

⁹⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains Ngugi’s recent move from “dominant literature” to “subordinated orature” as part of what she sees as Ngugi’s engagement with “class-cultural struggle” whose ultimate aim is producing “cultural-political identity”. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. “How to Read a ‘Cultural Different’ Book”. Ed. Francis Barker et al. 1994, pp. 126- 149.

⁹⁷ Paul Banda. “African European-Language Literature and Writing as Translation”. 1999, pp. 1-2.

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/Literatures/satranslations/Bandia.pdf>.

⁹⁸ J. C. Ball. *Satire and the Post-Colonial Novel*. USA: Taylor & Francis Books, 2003, 82.

⁹⁹ Chinua Achebe. *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975, p. 59.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Banda, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 7

that community.”¹⁰² Accordingly, his major question is: how can one assert one’s identity and culture by using a foreign language? So his return to the expressive medium of his native Gikuyu is one fundamental way of asserting his cultural independence. His quasi-radical position towards the utilisation of English in his fictional output is in line with that of Fanon, who declares that writing in the coloniser’s language reinforces the exotic image of Africa, and with Oyegoke’s more recent and explicit declaration, that “the cultural expression in the colonial language should give way to literature in the indigenous African languages.”¹⁰³

Nevertheless, Ngugi’s position vis-à-vis the language situation is not without short-term limitations because it falls short of catering for the complexity of African contemporary societies. It seems that Ngugi’s use of indigenous formal tools (mainly the native language and the oral traditions) in the African revolutionary literature serves his social aims. In spite of the fact that some critics, as Ann Biersteker points out, “have dismissed Ngugi’s decision to write in Gikuyu as an ‘ethnic’ or ‘tribalistic’ action that contradicts his socialist commitments,” our contention is that Ngugi’s “decisions on issues of language [are] firmly consistent with his progressive commitment because his major objective is to establish dialogues with workers and peasants who mostly lack adequate competence in European languages.”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, we will dwell at some length on this point in the third chapter.

e- Ngugi’s Marxism and anti-imperialist discourse

Ngugi is commonly assumed to be the high “guru” of Marxism in African literature. However, some African researchers have some objections to the utilisation of Marxism in Africa’s liberatory struggle (for instance, Mudimbe). For such researchers, Marxism is a purely Western ideology and thus it has no epistemological roots in the African traditions.¹⁰⁵ Besides the fact that many scholars, such as Julius. K. Nyerere and Thomas Joseph Mboya, have postulated that there had existed a version of Socialism (loosely referred to as “African Socialism”) in the pre-colonial indigenous African communities before “things fell apart,”¹⁰⁶ we shall argue in this dissertation for the applicability of Socialist thought (as it is defined in the West) in the literary context of displacing the Western hegemonic discourse.

¹⁰² Ngugi wa Thiong’o. “Europhonism, Universities, and the Magic Fountain: The Future of African Literature and Scholarship”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 31, 1999, p. 2.

¹⁰³ Quoted in George D. Nyamndi. “Prospective Commitment in African Literature”. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 573.

¹⁰⁴ Ann Biersteker. “Gikuyu Literature: Development from early Christian writings to Ngugi’s late novels”. Ed. F. Abiola Irele & Simon Gikandi, 2004, p. 322.

¹⁰⁵ V. Y Mudimbe. *The Idea of Africa*. London: James Currey, 1994, p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Joseph Mboya. “African Socialism”. 1963. Ed. J. Ayo Langley, 1979, pp. 508-520.

In fact, it is now almost commonplace to believe that there should be no necessary antagonism between socialist thought and postcolonial discourse. After all, Marxism has been raised as a weapon against the oppressive powers of the West. C. Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus, for instance, firmly argue that, despite its indisputable European origin and character, Marxist-based ideology is first and foremost “an anti-imperialist discourse which has had a major impact on anti-colonialist activity outside the West” and hence it is “a mobile discourse that is irreducible to Europe.”¹⁰⁷ They also contend that “what distinguishes a specifically Marxist critique, however, from a more general anticolonialism is the insistence that cultural analysis of the common (and the extraordinary alike) is inseparable from questions of political economy, in and outside the metropole, and that the critique of colonialism, and of social order that has followed formal decolonisation, is as inextricable from the critique of capitalism.”¹⁰⁸ As far as Ngugi’s presently discussed novels are concerned, the distinction between his Marxist discourse (because of his attack on capitalism) and anti-colonialist discourse (as he furiously criticises colonial and neo-colonial systems) is very often if not always blurred. Accordingly, it is by no means paradoxical to use Marxism in attacking the western imperialist thought. After all, one might rightly say that Western capitalism and Western imperialism are two sides of the same coin. Robert Young, too, points out that Marxism has many times been used in the counter-hegemonic writings of Third-World authors and intellectuals. He says that

*Anti- and postcolonial thought has always been engaged in a process of reformulating, translating and transforming Marxism for its own purposes, and this has operated as a critical dynamic tradition within Marxism itself. [...] if postcolonial theory is the cultural product of decolonisation, it is also the historical product of Marxism in the anti-colonial area. For many of the first generation of postcolonial theorists; Marxist theory was so much their starting point, so fundamental to what they were doing, so dominant in contemporary intellectual culture, and it was assumed as a base line to all further work.*¹⁰⁹

Simply put, Robert Young states that Marxist influence on anti-colonial activities and postcolonial thought cannot be disregarded or underestimated. Indeed, many postcolonial critics such as Gugelberger and Onoge have developed a progressive, class-based analysis which reveals how the historical world phenomenon of colonialism and today’s

¹⁰⁷ Bartolovich, C & Neil Lazarus. *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted from Young (2001: 168) in S. Morton. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 93.

neocolonialism have facilitated Western capitalist hegemony in the Third World in general and Africa in particular.

Ngugi's socialist thought, then, manifests itself clearly in his ferocious assault on imperialism, which can be seen as the highest point of capitalism or grand capitalism in short. In his *Detained*, for instance, he says bitterly that "capitalism cannot be run on any basis other than that of theft and robbery and corruption" and goes on as to argue that "capitalism is a system of unabashed theft and robbery."¹¹⁰ The modern system of theft and robbery, as he defines it in *DOC*, dislocates and dispossesses the people. Wangari, a former participant in the War for Uhuru, is expropriated from her land by the bank and robbed of her birthright in Nairobi, where she is treated as if she were a foreigner or vagrant. Worse still, the Africans suffer from a double-oppression: capitalist exploitation and white racism; and this point was stressed by Ngugi before. In his *Homecoming* Ngugi wrote that

*I believe that we as blacks have suffered doubly under colonialism and capitalism, first, as part of the working classes, and then as blacks. By which I mean that a white worker by the very nature of his position was a beneficiary of the colonialist and the racist exploitation of Africa and of black people everywhere.*¹¹¹

The above-quoted passage confirms Ngugi's Marxist slant in his writings. Nonetheless, it must be noted that Ngugi is by no means a pro-Stalinist or diehard Marxist. He uses Marxism insofar as it is conducive to the freeing of the masses from the shackles of grand capitalism and global imperialism. In other words, Ngugi does not apply Marxist principles slavishly; rather, he considers the necessity to take into account the black struggle against racism and white supremacy. He has always a "black dimension", as it were, to his Marxist thought.

As stated previously, Ngugi adapts the Socialist ideologies to serve his literary concerns and this is made very clear in his adoption of the notion of class struggle in his works. His novels are thus produced to galvanize the class consciousness of the black people. He tells his people on more than one occasion that "blackness is not all" in the black struggle. For example, *POB* is a warning of the use of such attractive slogans as "African Personality" and "Black Authenticity" by the corrupt ruling elite in order to conceal the lucrative dealings, social injustices, political rotteness, and economic exploitation of the masses.

Further, Ngugi emphasises in his works the "future" victory of the oppressed people over the white oppressors and their black servants. Indeed, the colonial discourse has failed to lull the resistance of the people. The blacks, in Ngugi's anti-colonialist narratives, are seen as "self-

¹¹⁰ Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. *Detained: A Writer Prison Diary*. London: Heinemann, 1981.

¹¹¹ Ngugi, W. T. *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972, p. xiii.

conscious resisters”. Ngugi’s option for the Marxist-based ideology can further be accounted for in terms of the fact that “Marxism in its mythic form depends heavily on the idea that history is on our [people’s] side” and that “in the long run the oppressed will rise up triumphantly.”¹¹²

Ngugi’s Marxism, therefore, “sets in train, as it were, a poetics of aggression that elaborates a system of “counter-interpellations” (to use Louis Althusser’s term) opposed to the cooptive force of Western imperialism and cultural imposition.”¹¹³ As mentioned previously, Marxism and Postcolonialism should not be seen as mutually exclusive ideological bents; rather, they are related to one another in a number of important ways. The whole dissertation studies Ngugi’s oeuvres from both postcolonial and Marxist perspective, with particular emphasis on the former. The postcolonial theory, then, forms the substance of our next discussion.

f- Ngugi’s Postcolonialism and the Issue of “Alternative” Identity

Edward Said’s seminal work *Orientalism*, which, as argued before, unmasks the connection between the Western racist ideology and the growing global phenomenon of Western imperialism, is most often said to have inaugurated the field of postcolonialism. Postcolonial criticism, by intervening in the western literary tradition which culminated in the grand-narratives of post-Enlightenment period, purports chiefly to present a contested vision of the so-called “Restern” world. That is why postcolonial writings fall within the tradition of postmodernism, which is defined by Ato Quayson as, “a vigorously anti-systemic mode of understanding, with pluralism, borders and multiple perspectives being highlighted as a means of disrupting the centralizing impulse of any system[and in our context the Western imperialist system].”¹¹⁴ Indeed, a great number of literary critics are today attracted to the notion of “*Postcolonial*”. For instance, Arif Dirlik sees that

[Postcolonial] is intended, therefore, to achieve an authentic globalisation of cultural discourses by the extension globally of the intellectual concerns and orientations originating at the central sites of Euro-American cultural criticism and by the introduction into the latter of voices and subjectivities from the margins of earlier political and ideological colonialism that now demand a hearing at those very sites at the center. The goal, indeed, is no less than to abolish all distinctions between center and periphery as well as all other

¹¹² Trevor Lloyd. “Myths of the Indies: Jane Austin and the British Empire”. Ed. Shaffer, 1999, p. 59

¹¹³ Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 69.

¹¹⁴ Ato Quayson. *Postcolonialism : Theory, Practice or Process?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, p. 136. In a full chapter entitled “Postcolonialism and Postmodernism” (pp. 132-156), the author makes a strong connection between Postcolonialism and Postmodernism.

*'binarisms' that are allegedly a legacy of colonial(ist) ways of thinking and to reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency.*¹¹⁵

This lengthy definition of Postcolonialism attests largely to its importance, not to say its necessity, in today's global discourse of decolonisation because it is a serious attempt to include the voices which have hitherto been silenced and muted by the colonial writers who spoke falsely on behalf of the subaltern natives. So in the postcolonialist discourse the conceptual and moral order of the western world is decentred and relativized, a plurality of voices is promoted and hence a global deregulation of the western paradigm may take place. The monologic discourse of western domination has recently been the object of critical scrutiny by the postcolonialist thinkers. Not only are its underlying assumptions questioned but refuted as well by those spokesmen of Post-Orientalist thought.

As said earlier, postcolonialism is admittedly a form of postmodernism. Ngugi indeed attempts to move away from the discourse of master-narratives about Africa to the postcolonial discourse. That is why Ngugi's works are believed to be postmodernist works. There is also a further support to this belief. Postmodernism has as one of its essential characteristics the adherence to the notion of self-reflexivity.¹¹⁶ This means that the Africans need not be the object of representation by others, they can engage with the process of self-representation, and in this way the movement from Eurocentric discourse to Afrocentric discourse could be possible. Since "cultural forms of representation -literary, visual, aural- in high art or the mass media are ideologically grounded, that they cannot avoid the involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses,"¹¹⁷ Ngugi's novels parody those hegemonic representations and thus purport to overturn existing power relationships. Ngugi's novels are by and large counter-narratives to the colonial story about Africa in general on the one hand, and "State narratives" of post-colonial Kenya on the other. Thus, his works question the validity of the "portrait of the colonised" and the "portrait of the decolonised" (to take up the phrases of Albert Memmi) as propagated by the agents of imperialism and neo-imperialism. They, in other words, not only subversively and critically scrutinise the colonial relationship (or the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised), which is indeed the obvious domain of postcolonialist writings, but also re-examine seriously the existing

¹¹⁵ Arif Dirlik. "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism". Ed. Padmini Mongia, 1996, p. 294.

¹¹⁶ Linda Hutcheon. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 2. Similarly, Hans Bertens notes that "postmodernism is the move away from narrative, from representation, and a turn towards self-reflexiveness in the so-called metafiction of the period". Hans Bertens. *The Idea of the Postmodern*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

¹¹⁷ Linda Hutcheon, op. cit., p. 3.

“diseased” relationship between the neo-coloniser and the neo-colonised by “de-naturalising” it first and foremost. Ngugi indeed envisages this relationship from the perspective of the oppressed people and thereby he dispels totally the oppressors’ perception of the neocolonial condition.

Closely related to postcolonial writings is the issue of identity, as H. Adelai Murdoch aptly observes, “the narrative discourse of these novels, then, constitutes the empowerment of the postcolonial subject through the inscription of identity and difference in specific narrative strategies.”¹¹⁸ Even though Simon Gikandi points out that Ngugi’s literary “works are beyond the simple politics of identity that has come to dominate so much postcolonial theory and criticism,”¹¹⁹ the issue of identity is quite central in his fiction in which he resents the fact that the identity of the oppressed is marginalised by the dominant forces and that the downtrodden masses suffer enormously from the lack of rootedness and fragmented consciousness as a result of the long foreign domination. Indeed, his project of defining his community’s identity has been discussed by A. O. Amoko as follows: “ Ngugi’s creative texts, to cite the most prominent examples, were hypercanonized, within the context of “East African Literature”, precisely on account of their perceived instrumentality *in imagining an oppositional Kenyan community*.”¹²⁰ In fact, Ngugi stresses the autonomous nature of the African identity, that is to say, the African subjects, most of whom unfortunately now lack “the very being of the for-Itself”, must not be “interpellated”¹²¹ by the neocolonial state apparatuses which are primarily in the service of the imperial powers.

Indeed, by referring once again to H. Adelai Murdoch, we can assume that there is a deep connection between the identity of the people on the one hand and their agency on the other because, as he clearly says, by restoring the identity of the extremely subordinated or severely marginalised groups, we will be “able to elaborate a new order of resistance and recognition which rewrites the traditional teleologies of the margin into key strategies of identity and liberation.”¹²² Unless the blacks are capable of autonomously defining themselves, they can hardly resist the foreign domination. After all, black consciousness can assist people (though it is by no means sufficient) in developing a politics of resistance to the Western hegemony,

¹¹⁸ H. Adelai Murdoch. “(Dis) placing Marginality: Cultural Resistance and Creole Resistance in Glissant and Maximim”. Ed. Padmini Mongia, op. cit., p. 99.

¹¹⁹ Gikandi, 2000, op. cit., p. xi.

¹²⁰ A. O. Amoko. “The Problem with English Literature: Canonicity, Citizenship, and the Idea of Africa”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 32, No. 4, Winter 2001, p. 38.

¹²¹ “interpellation” is a Marxist term, commonly associated with the French critic Louis Althusser, which crudely means that the subjects (the individuals) are located within an ideological space, and this process is often used by the state to create obedient citizens.

¹²² H. Adelai Murdoch, op. cit., p. 99.

as Ngugi would certainly contend. In other words, Ngugi is firmly opposed to the neocolonial subjectivity which has been created by the ruling-classes' neocolonial ideology (to use a Marxist term) or neocolonial elite's discourse (to use a postcolonialist term).

More significantly, Ngugi deals deliberately with such issues as culture and history as they are instrumental in healing the African identity. He, too, has worked painstakingly in order to restore what has come to be called "the aesthetic identity" of his people by returning to the indigenous sources in his literary production without at the same time being a febrile traditionalist. His return to Gikuyu as a medium of fictional writings is a case in point. He sees that history, tradition and culture are pivotal in his construction of his communal identity of the presently oppressed people. Whereas the imperialists' definition of the African masses' identity is chiefly intended to de-politicise them, Ngugi's redefinition of their identity has as one of its paramount goals the re-politicisation of those destitute people.

The black people, therefore, must move from the stage of being the object of history to that of the subject of history, from the state of being victims of tragic historical factors to the stage of making their own history. To shape the world, to use a Marxist parlance, they have to develop the knowledge of themselves (defining clearly what they are), knowledge of the reality and of the totality of the historical process. Ngugi is then fully aware of "the deep damages caused by the internalisation of the colonial discourse."¹²³ After all, the undertaking of "redefining" black identity has in Ngugi's critical project a profound political dimension because it leads naturally to the assertion of the right of the blacks to self-government and self-determination. His novels try to give what has come to be called "*parole* to the people", who are "confronted with the question of change and choice as they tried to come to terms with the new world of an expanding Western civilization which was in the process of moulding the world in its image,"¹²⁴ and hence they run the risk of losing their distinctive identity. But, it must be emphasised that identity formation in Ngugi's oeuvre has to be discussed in relation to his political aim of unsettling the imperial powers of domination.

Thus, by calling into question and thereby discrediting the colonialist, and more generally the imperialist, views about Africa in general and his country in particular, Ngugi seems to tell his people and all the blacks that they must cease to be dependent on others politically, economically and culturally.

¹²³ Messay Kebede. "African Development and the Primacy of Mental Decolonisation". 2004, p. 110. http://www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/ad1_04/kebede.pdf.

¹²⁴ Viera Pawlikova-Valhanova. "The African Personality or the Dilemma of the Other and the Self in the Philosophy of E. W. Blyden". *Asian and African Studies*, Vol.7, No. 2, 1998, p. 162.

Conclusion

To close this part of the discussion, it could safely be said that Ngugi has taken great pains to disclaim the colonial assumptions about Africa, some of which are still supported by the neocolonial regimes. Ngugi's works, namely the ones that are going to be critically examined in the following chapters, are an eloquent denunciation of Western imperialism (both as an ideology and as a daily reality), which has taken a different shape quite recently. Today, imperialism is at work under the umbrella of "globalisation". Ngugi's anti-globalisation discourse, as will be seen later, reveals itself quite simply in his growing dissatisfaction with the global authority of the Western powers.

Ngugi's novels do not only report on the conditions of post-independence African countries, and Kenya in particular, but also, and perhaps more significantly, how such conditions are perceived by the "wretched of the earth." Thus, it is very hard if not virtually impossible to draw a demarcation line between his "Marxist" ideology (positioning himself as an advocate of the peasants and the workers whose labour is not adequately remunerated by the rabid capitalists) and his postcolonial discourse (by virtue of conspicuously attacking the post-colonial institutions which are, sometimes surprisingly, the product of European colonialism). His anti-neocolonialist attitudes, put differently, can be studied in relation to his socialist thought and also in connection with postcolonialist views.

The following chapters will examine Ngugi's particular literary project of "unthinking Eurocentrism" which reveals itself very distinctly in his views about history, orality and culture, and nation, as we shall see, in his *POB*, *DOC*, and *Matigari* respectively. The coming chapters will also attempt to validate our earlier assumption that Ngugi's postcolonial project cannot be comprehensively analysed unless a link is made between his art and his political standpoint of combating the Western powers of domination.

II. Decolonising History and the Politics of Anti-Neocolonial Liberation in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*

*“There have been two types of history in Kenya: the **real living** history of the masses; and the **approved official** history. Those who run neo-colonialism are mortally afraid of any symbols or reminders of the Kenya peoples’ history of struggle and resistance. and naturally, KLFA (Mau Mau) and Dedan Kimathi, as the highest symbols of that tradition, have received total official neglect or distortion”* (Ngugi wa Thiong’o. *Moving the Centre*. London: James Currey, 1993, p. 98). (Emphasis original).

II. Decolonising History and the Politics of Anti-Neocolonial Liberation in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*

Introduction

The central aim of this chapter is to critically examine how Ngugi undertakes to displace the centre of narration and discourse about Kenyan history in his *Petals of Blood* (POB henceforward). In fact, one has to note that history is of utmost importance in the postcolonial discourse that the novel contentedly generates.¹²⁵ In addition, as Patrick Williams declares, “the question of historical memory, the past and its (potential) problematic repetition are taken up by the novel [i.e. POB].”¹²⁶ Interestingly, it has recently been pointed out that “the use of the past in the novel is certainly far more extensive than in earlier novels -given that almost the entire story is told in flashback- while questions related to the past: how we understand it, the narratives we create of it, and the actions we base on it, form the central concerns of the book.”¹²⁷ This chapter, then, investigates the extent to which “decolonising history” is crucially needed in the age of decolonisation because revisiting history can provide the masses with pedagogical remedies to their collective traumas, and thus it can be seen as the starting point for the people’s politics of anti-neocolonial liberation.

Simon Gikandi in his seminal study of Ngugi’s works believes that Kenya’s history is woven into Ngugi’s narratives, and this is primarily intended to be “corrective to both colonialist and bourgeois- nationalist historiography”¹²⁸ because, as noted before, the binary oppositions upon which the imperialist discourse rests “serve to essentialise difference, and thus confirm historic asymmetries.”¹²⁹ Ngugi bitterly laments, in this novel and elsewhere, the fact that “the history of Africa is always taught as an extension of Europe.”¹³⁰ He instead calls strongly for a “correct” perception of history, and more importantly, a “reading [of] history as teleology, which progressively draws meaning and significance from disordered fragments

¹²⁵ Michel de Certeau claims that righting the wrongs of history is at the centre of postcolonial discourse. Ian Buchanan. “Writing the Wrongs of history: de Certeau and post-colonialism”. *Journal of South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*, No. 33, 1992.

¹²⁶ Patrick Williams. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 79.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹²⁸ Priyamvada Gopal. “Reading Subaltern History”. Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, p. 141.

¹²⁹ Robert Eric Livingston. “Discourses of Empire”. Ed. F. Abiola Irele & Simon Gikandi. *African and Caribbean Literature*. Volume I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 259.

¹³⁰ David Cook & Michael Okenimkpe. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o: an Exploration of his Writings*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983, p. 16.

into intelligible wholes.”¹³¹ In so doing, he objects clearly to the apologists’ rationalisation of formal colonialism and imperialism in its neocolonial clothes.

Indeed, the issue of history is raised in the entire story mainly by representatives of three different generations, Nyakinyua, Abdulla and Karega. Nyakinyua, the representative of the old generation, narrates the “oral history” (or the “mythical” history) of her people. By presenting Kenya’s history in the oral mode and by showing her people what happened to them and what they really lost, she will surely motivate them to regain their “lost kingdom”. Abdulla, the disabled war fighter, too, is also a teller of history and folk stories and a representative of the generation of the freedom combatants. Abdulla “has a special importance in the novel as a link between specific experiences in the past and the present.”¹³² Karega, whose views coincide with those of the author’s as he “mediates the inner reality of the novel and the author’s ontology,”¹³³ is the representative of the young generation. His willingness to understand what really happened to his people in the past should form the substantial part of our discussion. We shall therefore focus more on Karega’s use of history in the contemporary combat for true freedom because he is the most rebellious figure in the whole narrative.

In general, this chapter explores how history has been retold by the bourgeois class so as to depoliticise the masses and clip the wings of their resistance. Then, it will deal with the main character’s struggle of “decolonising” history, because, according to Patrick Williams, this novel’s “treatment of history and historiography has made the latter the subject of bitter disagreement between Ngugi and a number of historians (Kenyan and Western).”¹³⁴ The last part of this chapter will focus on how “alternative” history, to use Spivak’s term, is and can be used by the deprived inhabitants of Ilmorog to restore their collective agency and thereby renew their fierce struggle against their oppressors.

1- Colonising History and the Colonisation of the Geographical Space

Ngugi’s “epic novel”, as it is described by Simon Gikandi, re-examines deeply the interaction between literature and history and on various occasions stresses that “things must be seen from an African perspective”¹³⁵, despite the fact that it is very often considered to be the first

¹³¹ Kanneh Kadiatu. *African Identities: Race, Nation, and Culture in Ethnography, Pan-Africanism, and Black Literatures*. London: British Cataloguing Library, 1998, p. 97.

¹³² David Cook. & Michael Okenimkpe, op. cit., p. 95.

¹³³ Simon Gikandi. *Reading the African Novel*, London, James Currey, 1987, p. 138.

¹³⁴ Patrick Williams, op. cit., p. 79.

¹³⁵ John Marx. “Postcolonial Literature and the Western Literary Canon”. In Neil Lazarus. *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 83.

serious Marxist novel by an African writer on a post-independence African society.¹³⁶ As G. D. Killam aptly notes, in this novel “the history of Kenya is conveyed from pre-colonial times (where records the mythic basis of Kenyan society in ways with which we are familiar from the earlier novels) and especially from the beginnings of European exploitation of Kenya which began in the 1890s.”¹³⁷ Indeed, Ngugi’s evocation of history has to be viewed from a political perspective, as will be seen throughout this chapter.

Ngugi’s novel, thus, does not reduce everything to class issues, despite his explicit sympathies with the underprivileged masses. In effect, Ngugi claims strongly that the African peoples’ struggle should go beyond the stage of black consciousness to that of class consciousness, and this is clarified in Karega’s transformation “from a mere radical nationalist to an ideologized representative of the proletariat.”¹³⁸ As Jean-Pierre Durix aptly observes, “Karega.....after an intellectual Odyssey that takes him from idealisation of a previous generation, through Black Consciousness and Negritude, and liberal legally-based reformism, ends with a Marxist understanding of history and class struggle, and a commitment to trade-union organization.”¹³⁹ But this is not to say that black consciousness does not assist in the formation of class awareness given that the blacks have for so long been exploited economically, rejected culturally and even ontologically. Thus, the argument of this chapter is as follows: Ngugi is not constrained by the concept of class, yet he is markedly interested in class consciousness because, as Roland Barthes¹⁴⁰ notes, the colonised people can be likened to the proletarian class, and that the issue of black consciousness, which can be awakened by references to the imperial holocaust, can contribute to the development of critical social consciousness. In sum, history can involve the black consciousness concept, which in turn leads to, and reinforces, class awareness. Defining clearly the imperial history of Africa helps, simply put, to establish postcolonial class politics.

But the fundamental problem that must be raised here is whose history serves the oppressed people’s present political struggle. Following Abiola Irele, it is worth noting that there are two kinds of history. The first kind is simply a set of events in their singularities. The second is the

¹³⁶ Joseph McLaren. “Ideology and Form: The Critical Reception of *Petals of Blood*”. Ed. Charles Cantalupo, 1995, p. 80. He states that POB “was without doubt, the most hard-hitting novel criticising contemporary Kenyan society written since independence” and adds further that “no writer has yet been able to expose those evils of such a system in as bold as fearless as manner as Ngugi has done in his book”.

¹³⁷ George Douglas Killam. “Ngugi wa Thiong’o”. Ed. G. D. Killam, 1984, p. 135.

¹³⁸ Emmanuel Ngara . *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*. London: Heinemann, 1985.

¹³⁹ Jean-Pierre Durix. “Politics in *Petals of Blood*”. France: University of Bourgogne , 1991, p. 6. (<http://satie.u-bourgogne.fr>)

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Robert Young. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990, p. 5.

narration of those events.¹⁴¹ In this dissertation, the word history is more often than not used with its second meaning because the same historical events can be narrated (or interpreted) differently by different scholars. This echoes the postmodernist view of narration which states that truth is not an independent entity but created by the narrator.¹⁴² Ngugi, thus, painfully attempts to narrate “history from below”; the history of the African peoples’ fierce resistance to the tyrannical colonial systems. As Ngugi repeatedly contends (and it is indeed made very clear in the text), there are two histories: “the official white-washed history peddled by the ruling class, and the real living history of peasants and workers fighting against foreign domination.”¹⁴³ In fact, history is viewed differently by people with conflicting ideological persuasions. Whilst some intellectuals, such as the comprador intelligentsia, side with the imperialist history, others, who are actually committed to the proletarian cause, are vehemently opposed to the Western imperialist historical facts on the one hand, and the imperialists’ interpretations of African history on the other. Therefore, history can be a two-edged weapon, but Ngugi in this novel stresses that history must be a weapon of decolonisation.

Consequently, POB can be considered more as a historiographical novel than as a historical work of art since it is not so much concerned “with a re-presentation of a historical period as with how history can be grasped and written.”¹⁴⁴ To use Linda Hutcheon’s term, this novel could be said to be “a historiographical metafiction” due to the application of the principle of “self-reflexivity” in its presentation of the Kenya’s history.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, Ngugi rejects the outside observers of his country’s history and hence insists that history should be viewed from inside rather than from outside. Ngugi, in this novel, sets himself the arduous task of undoing the historical wrongs to serve mainly the cultural and revolutionary needs of his people and in so doing he offers a kind of blueprint for future mass revolutions.

So crucial to the issue of history in the narrative is the question of historical self-representation, since there has always been a fierce battle of representation raging between the colonialist and anti-colonialist narratives. The novel investigates thoroughly the crisis of

¹⁴¹ F. Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

¹⁴² Brian Richardson. *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*. Ohio: Ohio State University, 2002.
(<http://www.ohiostatepress.org/books/Book%20PDFs/Richardson%20Unnatural.pdf>.)

¹⁴³ Moses Isegawa. “Introduction to *Petals of Blood*”. London: Penguin Books, 2002, p. xii.

¹⁴⁴ Thomson, C. C. *National Imagination and Novel in the Late Twentieth-Century Denmark*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2003, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Linda Hutcheon. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 3. But we have to apply the notion of “historiographical metafiction” in this novel with some care because the whole narrative is not only about rewriting history as the setting of the novel is not historical as, say, Armah’s *the Healers* and *Two Thousand Seasons*.

representation since one version of African history legitimises Western control of Africa while the other sharply condemns it. The bourgeois class in the novel espouses the imperialist view of history, and the proletarian class, whose best representative is Karega, opposes vehemently the jaundiced Eurocentric representation of the history of the colonised people. Further, the following passage, which is worth quoting at length, testifies to the author's concern for the reconsideration of African history in general and Kenya's history in particular:

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 ago 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? (p. 81)

This passage, it must be stated, first and foremost counters the colonial perception of precolonial Kenya which rationalises its conquest by the European powers in the name of, say, civilising and enlightening the benighted natives. No less significantly, this passage too lays the stress on the Kenyan people's fierce resistance to European colonisation and its subsequent control. Thus, despite the ubiquity of the post-independence events of Kenya in the novel, it has a number of glowing passages that are intended to correct the Kenyan people's perception of their history.

The presently discussed novel, therefore, solidifies "Achebe's affirmative declarations on the power of art to rewrite history"¹⁴⁶ and strongly discards the European myopic vision of Kenyan history, and African history in general, which has as its major aim the depoliticisation of those who inhabit the bottom section of the social hierarchy in the wake of colonialism. Ngugi's novel contests the European thought as it "silences the role of the non-European actors" in the making of the modern history.¹⁴⁷ Ngugi asserts in his *Moving the Centre* that the modern world is not solely the product of Western imperialism; it is also the product of the resistance to this monstrous global phenomenon.¹⁴⁸

It has recently been made evident that the Western version of African history is fundamentally in the service of the Western powers or, more precisely, Western imperialism.

¹⁴⁶Simon Gikandi. *Reading Chinua Achebe*. London: James Currey, 1991.

¹⁴⁷Keya Ganguly. "Temporality and Postcolonial Critique". Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, op. cit., p. 169.

¹⁴⁸Ngugi, W. T. *Moving the Centre*, London: James Currey, 1993, p. 4.

Arguably, when a given historical account serves a definite political cause, its objectivity will certainly be put to question. The European definition of African history can no more be seen as an instrument of propaganda.¹⁴⁹ This is in line with Mudimbe's assertion that "theories of colonial expansion and discourses on African primitiveness emphasised a historicity and promoted a particular model of history."¹⁵⁰ Ngugi, thus, resents furiously the biased European view of African history. Quite recently, he said that

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's history with the view of showing that Kenyan people had not struggled with nature and with other men to change their natural environment and create a positive social environment. It was also in the interests of the imperialists to show that the Kenyan people had not resisted foreign domination. It was also in the interests of imperialism to depict missionary and other agents of imperialism in bright colours, and they did all these things using the terms of apparent objectivity.¹⁵¹

Given the fact that the Western discourse has thus deliberately confiscated African history, Ngugi tries somehow to rewrite his people's history in many of his novels, showing on the one hand that the Kenyans had their own specific history, which is characteristically marked by their agency in the improvement of their natural environment and their mode of life, and on the other, that they fiercely resisted foreign hegemony.

The major spokesmen of the colonial or "Orientalist" perception of African history in the novel are without doubt Cambridge Fraudsham, the white headmaster of Siriana, and Raymond Chui, his successor and who turns out to be his black replica. Cambridge Fraudsham is an English director of this prestigious school and hence his arrogant and racist attitudes towards African history and culture do not come to us as a surprise. However, Chui's self-debasing attitudes are worthy of extended consideration. Chui is indeed a turncoat in the story. He was at first a self-assertive black student and a staunch defender of African-centred history, and when he becomes the headmaster of this famous school, he opposes any form of what he calls reckless and "hasty programme of Africanization" (p.206). Besides doubting the "significance" of African history and African literature (which he sees as "nonsense"), he tells the rebellious students, who call themselves "populists" and who form "the black power movement", that teaching African history and literature will ruin the reputation of the school for this is a form of racism and thus it nurtures inexplicable hatred and hostility, on the one hand, and runs counter to the school's "high educational standards", on the other.

¹⁴⁹ Amina Bekkat. *Regards sur les littératures d'Afrique*. Alger: O. P. U., 2006, p. 55.

¹⁵⁰ V. Y. Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. London: James Currey, 1988, p. 20.

¹⁵¹ Ngugi, W. T. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Speaks: Interviews*. Oxford: James Currey, 2006, pp. 87-88.

The political class, too, because of its present collaboration with foreign capitalists, is afraid of what it considers to be the “subversive” history of the Mau Mau freedom war. A case in point is the MP Nderi wa Riera, the absentee representative of Ilmorog constituency who represents indisputably in the story the neocolonial body-politic, and who puts his own personal interests and the interests of other traitors and white foreigners first, and completely abandons the people who had suffered and died for the land and who were indeed the true makers of independence: he considers that arousing the spirit of struggle in the restive people by resurrecting the history of peasants’ anti-colonial violent resistance is dangerous as it could be “misused by the enemies of progress and Economic Prosperity” (p. 222). Progress and prosperity for him are to be promoted by “partnership” with the white people, and hence any “historical” account of the Europeans’ brutality and bloodiness in the colonial wars will create a breach in the growing black/white “friendly” relationships. Further, the Mau Mau warriors are presented by the villainous neocolonial ruling class as “terrorists, violent outsiders refusing Christian and human values for the sake of atavistic regression.”¹⁵² Thus, as James Stephen Robson rightly contends, “Mau Mau nationalism is of little value to the neocolonialist governments of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi” and this movement has been reduced to “primitive tribalism.”¹⁵³ In short, the political class views that retaining the spirit of the Mau Mau history is a hindrance to economic boom and social growth. However, such “progressive terms,” as we shall see later, are nothing more than umbrella terms for the ruthless and brutal exploitation of the masses by the acquisitive bourgeois class.

Further, the history of the national fight for independence is distorted by the ruling class because many of those who had collaborated with the imperialists emerge in the post-Uhuru era as government officials and powerful business barons (Hawkins Kimeria, the former wealthy homeguard and Ezekiel Waweru, the prosperous landowner during the colonial period), and many of the patriots and true heroes like Abdulla are cast aside in this period. The present class society, in other words, is the consequence of the political economy of colonialism and neocolonialism. So the imperial history of Kenya, which is described in the novel as “the centuries of drifting” that had created big social divide between the rich and poor, to which Ngugi is vehemently opposed, did not end with national independence.

¹⁵² André Viola, Jacqueline Bardolph and Denise Coussy. *New Fiction in English from Africa West, East, and South*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998, p. 13.

¹⁵³ James Stephen Robson. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Fight against Colonialism and Neocolonialism: An Exploration of the Theme of Betrayal*. Simon Fraser University: Unpublished Dissertation, December 2007, p. 25.

On the other hand, Karega reminds us many times in the story of the use and the abuse of history, and his rebellion at Siriana is mainly, if not exclusively, due to what he saw as the inadequacies of its education or its “perfect system”. He was indeed angered by the fact that Siriana teachers taught them a distorted view of African people’s history. In fact, the historical views of the imperialists about the colonised territories and their natives form part of what is referred to by Biodun Jeyifo as “the imperialism of representation.”¹⁵⁴ His revulsion at the history (and literature) that he was taught in Siriana is contrasted in the narrative with his eagerness to learn about history from the mouths of the “humble” people, namely, Abdulla, the maimed shopkeeper, and Nyakinyua. For example, he listened carefully to Nyakinyua’s stories of the founding patriarch of Ilmorog during the group’s march to the city, and he wanted to know more about the pre-imperial glorious history of Ilmorog land which is often contrasted with the ills of imperial history. This clearly shows that he is deeply concerned with the glories of the past. After hearing the old woman’s stories, he reconstructs in his imagination the past of his people:

Karega could not sleep. He took a walk in the plains, thinking about the woman’s story. He lived it for a second, he was Ndemi felling trees in the forest, building a nascent industry...but his mind, as if being challenged by the vastness of the space, went beyond Ndemi, beyond Ilmorog. It was to a past he could not know but which he felt he knew: was it hundred years, three hundred years, or was it more? What he had tried to teach the children, what he had tried to work out in Siriana was only a series of logical affirmations and refutations, a set of intellectual convictions. But now the past they had tried to affirm seemed to have a living, glowing ambience in the mouth of woman on this journey to save a village, a community. (p. 150).

Karega’s great interest in knowing more about the pre-colonial period of the community, when its members were the masters of their own lands, cannot be seen as simply a romantic nostalgia for this “glorious past”. Karega has instead a “dynamic”¹⁵⁵ view (as opposed to a romanticised view) of this past, as the past for him need not only be “polished”, but also, and more significantly, must inform a present course of action. It is indeed no coincidence that Ngugi, due to Karega’s tireless search for a “polished” African peasants’ history, makes him the most rebellious character in the novel (in fact he is very often referred to by many critics as an “archetypical non-conformist” and “anti-establishment revolutionary leader”), and even his name in the Gikuyu vernacular means the one who rejects or refuses.

¹⁵⁴ Cited in Brenda Cooper. *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye*. London: Routledge: 1998, p. 20.

¹⁵⁵ Brenda Cooper. *To Lay these Secrets Open: Evaluating African Writing*, South Africa: David Philips Publishers, 1992, p. 52.

Ngugi, then, tries by and large “to restore the African character to his history.”¹⁵⁶ He shows that studying African history is an important tool to better understand the present realities. He sees that giving an African vision of African history is indispensable to “better interpret the present and prepare the future.”¹⁵⁷ This means that there is a deep connection between the past and the present, as the narrator of the novel tells us many times that “to understand the present....you must understand the past” and on one single occasion, we are interestingly told that “he [Karega] vaguely hoped for a vision of the future rooted in a critical awareness of the past...it had seemed to him that history should provide the key to the present, that a study of history should help us to answer certain questions.” (p.237)

However, the past should neither be ignored nor idealised, in Karega’s view, and hence the reclamation of the great past is not his only desired goal. Karega, in effect, sees that historical awareness can be an effective means of raising people’s “situational” consciousness. It is certainly true that people must be taught about their present plight, but teaching them about the past ordeals can sharpen their awareness of their present predicament because of the obvious similarities between the colonial past and the neocolonial present. Ngugi has pointed out recently that “the great African writer should not only embrace the precolonial past, but also include the colonial past and the post-colonial period with a pointer to the future.”¹⁵⁸ This does not mean that the past for him is unimportant but the future is indisputably more important. If nothing else, the study of history, of which the culture of fight of the African peasantry and working-classes forms a part, motivates the subdued sections of Kenyan population to renew their struggles since, as said earlier, there is no big difference between colonial Kenya and neocolonial Kenya.

Being a political agitator, therefore, Karega’s struggle for refining the factual history of the people does not end with his expulsion from Siriana School. Rather, when he acquires a job as an assistant teacher-assistant at Ilmorog primary school, headed by Munira, Karega decides to teach the schoolchildren their real history, a history that is not falsified by the imperialist scholars. For Karega, teaching the living history of the peasants and the workers is primarily a viable means of mobilising the masses, and the reader will not fail to observe Karega’s frequent use of people’ history in his “speechifying”. Karega indeed uses history when he is teaching (which he sees as a means of political propaganda) and when he urges his people to react against the deplorable status quo.

¹⁵⁶ Ngugi, W. T. *Homecoming*. London: Heinemann, 1972, p. 43.

¹⁵⁷ René Richard. “History and Literature: Narration and Time in *Petals of Blood* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o”. 1991. p. 2. <http://commonwealth.univ-paris3/fr/richard.htm#history>

¹⁵⁸ Ngugi, W. T. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o Speaks: Interviews*. Oxford: James Currey, 2006, pp. 87-88.

For Karega, then, a historical reconstruction for his country does not mean in any way a complete return to a pre-colonial historical past; rather, it simply means the end of this oppressive history written with the ink of Western global imperialism. Thus, his ideological perspectives are clearly shaped by a complete rejection of a status quo that has historical antecedents in the Western domination around the globe. His “subversive” resistance to foreign hegemony is informed by, first, his historical consciousness, second, his awareness of a presently ailing condition, and last but not least, his hope for a healthy future. So his anti-imperialist resistance takes different forms i.e. mental and “military”, which are complementary to one another. He then struggles against the inferiority complex generated by centuries of denigration, against the dispersal of populations caused by the long colonial domination, and against the economic structures which fall in line with neo-colonialist designs.

In general, the novel’s contestation of the colonial view of history has to be understood in relation to Ngugi’s political project of dismantling the Western neocolonial enterprise in Africa, built on the motive of assisting in the development of so-called “backward” territories. Thus, this novel gives a “postmodernist” vision of history because, on the one hand, it doubts the “goodness” of the Western project of colonial modernity in Africa and on the other it denies the absoluteness that is a marker of the Western account of History. As Robert Young aptly notes, “postmodernism then becomes certain self-consciousness about a culture’s historical relativity- it results in the loss of the sense of an absoluteness of any Western account of history,”¹⁵⁹ and this idea will be discussed later in relation to Ngugi’s blurred distinction between local history and universal history. The next section will explore the decolonisation of history by the so-called “insurgents”, who use history, among other things, to organise the dispossessed people into protest and struggle against the despotic neocolonial order.

2- Decolonising History and the Reclamation of the Lost “Sovereignty”

There are three main characters who are arguably regarded as the best representatives of the anti-colonialist view of Kenyan history, Karega, Nyakinyua, and Abdulla. But we shall focus more on Nyakinyua and Karega because their historical consciousness is clearly translated into class struggle, whereas Abdulla’s profound historical knowledge by virtue of having been a former forest fighter is not clearly translated into action, as we will see later (but this is not to undermine his significant presence in the novel). Karega believes strongly in the idea that

¹⁵⁹ Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990, pp. 18-19.

“history is never history” but history is “history-for.”¹⁶⁰ Nyakinyua also defends staunchly the indigenous history (or the “oral” history) of her people because of her firm belief in tribal culture, and this is congruent with Prop’s famous statement that to be “cut off from [one’s] popular roots is to be historically condemned.”¹⁶¹ While the former is a village rebel, the latter is the village bard. Therefore, Ngugi combines Marxian ideology (personified by Karega), the Mau Mau spirit of Abdulla with Gikuyu legends and customs in his decolonisation discourse. In Craig Smith’s view, then, Ngugi in this work “juxtaposes both the lost pre-colonial era [whose representative is Nyakinyua] and the postcolonial struggle [led mainly by Karega] alongside the foundational, mythic moment of the colonial period, Mau Mau [whose embodiment is undoubtedly Abdulla].”¹⁶²

Remarkably, through the narrative device which consists of “the stories within the story,” the elder people tell the younger generations the history of their village and group. The elder village “matriarch”, Nyakinyua, the grandmother of Wanja, tells the story of her land to the group of Ilmorog villagers on their great march to the capital city. Thus, the role of “griot” is frequently played by the grandmother of the tribe.¹⁶³ For instance, during this “epic” journey, as the narrator tells us, she “talked to them, keeping up their spirits with stories of the past....Nyakinyua was the spirit that guided and held them together. And she talked as if she had been everywhere....as if the rhythm of the historic rise and fall of Ilmorog flowed in her veins” (p. 149). She reminds them of the “great past, a past when Ilmorog, or all Africa, controlled its own earth” (p. 151). During this trek to “the kingdom of knowledge,” she encourages the weary travellers to endure the physical and mental suffering caused by the drought that they left behind and their hazardous journey to Nairobi by telling them about the courage and the untiring fight of her husband who, in Njugo’s words, “redeemed Ilmorog with his blood” during the war for Uhuru (p. 98). She indeed does not rely solely on the story of her husband’s bravery to lift their spirit, but she also tells them about the achievements of their ancestors before the coming of the imperialist marauders; we have the example of the founding patriarch, Ndemi, who introduced medicine and iron work to Ilmorog land. Thus, it could be viewed that the “village writer”, as she is sometimes described, by narrating the great deeds and past glories, seeks to construct “healing myths of origin, of heroic and homogenous beginnings” and “this mythical recovery of the past,” as it has been recently contended, is “at

¹⁶⁰ Hayden White. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 56.

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Belinda Elizabeth Jack. *Negritude and Literary Criticism: The History and Theory of Negro-African*. New York: Library of Congress, 1996.

¹⁶² Charles Cantalupo. (ed.). *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1999, p. 8.

¹⁶³ René Richard, 1991, op. cit., p. 2

the heart of the decolonizing impulse.”¹⁶⁴ Her story of the pristine traditional splendour of their land enables the people to, as Palmer opines, “rediscover that pristine Ilmorog spirit when their warriors went in pursuit of hostile nations who had stolen their cattle and goats and would not return until they had recovered their stolen wealth.”¹⁶⁵ So the delegation can be compared to those warriors as they firmly decide not to return to their homeland empty-handed.

Ngugi, therefore, does not lose sight of the importance of indigenous history, even though nowhere in the novel is there any mention that the return to the indigenous history is a precondition of emancipation. Ato Quayson believes that the indigenous history should neither be idealised nor ignored. He indeed says that “to overemphasise indigeneity is to lapse into febrile essentialism, while to write solely from the point of view of modernity is to swallow up indigenous perspectives under implicit evolutionary or developmental theoretical modes that end up completely marginalizing the indigenous sense of history and how these might be thought to provide ways of relating to present-day postcolonial concerns.”¹⁶⁶ Even if Karega is speaking from a somewhat “academic” perspective, he is eager to know more about the indigenous history of Ilmorog and Kenya at large. Thus, this novel presents no conflict between the indigenous perspective of history and the more “academic” one.

Further, Ngugi’s work emphasises “the power of the people to tell their stories, their histories from a centre of their own selection.”¹⁶⁷ The elder matriarch is fully aware that this dignified past was perverted by the ideology of colonialism and slavery.¹⁶⁸ Basically, the role of the African writers in the age of decolonisation “consists first and foremost in reviving the past history of his country, which can be found in the oral tradition and in the memories of old people.”¹⁶⁹ So Nyakinyua’s narration of local history is an explicit call made by the writer for what has come to be called “post-Orientalist historiography;”¹⁷⁰ a historiography that rejects the Orientalist discourse of subaltern history. Not only do we have educated Africans opposing the Western hegemonic discourse, there are also non-educated blacks opposing the

¹⁶⁴ Brenda Cooper, 1998, op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁶⁵ Eustace Palmer. “Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood*”. Ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones. *African Literature Today: Retrospect & Prospect*. London: Heinemann, 1979, p.156.

¹⁶⁶ Ato Quayson. *Postcolonialism: Theory Practice or Process*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, p. 49

¹⁶⁷ Shannon Marie Ongaro. *The Historical Power of the Imagination: Ngugi wa Thiong’o and The Production of Place*. Montana State University: Unpublished Dissertation, 2004 p. 8.

¹⁶⁸ Belinda Elizabeth Jack, 1996, p. 31. Isidore Okpewho too claims that the African historians “have put considerable emphasis...on the evidence provided by their oral traditions as proof positive of a past that dates well before the European violation of their cultural integrities” (1983, op. cit., p. 155).

¹⁶⁹ Jean-Pierre Durix. “Politics in *Petals of Blood*”. France, University of Bourgogne, 1991, p. 2.

jpgdurix@satie.u-bourgogne.fr .

¹⁷⁰ Richard King. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and the ‘Mystic East’*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 196.

European colonial conceptions of Africa. Old Nyakinyua is an illiterate old woman, and yet she represents the historicity of her village as we see her from time to time narrating the stories of the past. Ngugi therefore shows persuasively in his work that the whites did not succeed completely in their attempts to repress the history and the collective memory of the black peoples.

Nyakinyua's individual memory, then, is a good representative of the collective memory or cultural memory of the people of her village. She is the upholder of the bygone ideals and tribal beliefs. She is, in other words, at pains to preserve the ethics and the values of the communal life characteristic of premodern Ilmorog. In so doing, she undertakes to rejuvenate her community when it was first threatened by the natural disasters and then when it fell prey to the imperialists, despite her old age and deteriorating health condition. Indeed, the influence of her words on Karega's thought is undeniable, as Gikandi opines, in the way that Karega "imagines himself to be the mythical Ndemi, the founder father of Ilmorog."¹⁷¹ This implies that the revival of Ilmorog must take place within "the aura provided by Ilmorog recovered past."¹⁷²

Karega, too, teaches the schoolchildren the "real" history of his people, a history that he fought for in Siriana, a training ground for the neocolonial elite. So he had already started the debate about "Afrocentric" history when he was in the elite Siriana High School as a student. He, together with other students, had quarrelled first with Cambridge Fraudsham, who was a firm believer and defender of the British Empire, and then with their elected black headmaster Chui, who turned out to be worse than his white predecessor, about the necessity to be taught African history and African literature. However their clamour for the Africanisation of the school syllabus was not accepted and, worse still, caused the expulsion by the school administrative staff of the leaders of the student's strike, including Karega. Now that he is a fiery teacher at Ilmorog primary school, it is a good opportunity for him to share his ideological convictions about his country's history with other people, namely, the next generation. What he does at that school is made very clear in the following passage:

Standing in a classroom in front of those children released something in Karega. It was like continuing with the dialogue he had started with himself at Siriana and which had been interrupted by his expulsion and one year's slavery to watalii. He was concerned that the children knew no world outside Ilmorog: they thought of Kenya as a city or a large village somewhere outside Ilmorog. How could he enlarge their consciousness so that they could see themselves, Ilmorog and Kenya as part of a larger whole, a larger territory containing the history of African

¹⁷¹ Simon Gikandi. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. op. cit, p. 151

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

people and their struggles? In his mind he scanned the whole landscape where African people once trod to leave marks and monuments that were the marvel of the ages, which not even the fatal encounter of black sweat with white imperialism could rub from the memory and recorded deeds of men. (p. 131)

In sum, Karega takes upon himself the arduous pedagogical task of correcting his pupils' perception of the history and the geography of their nation and hence he alerts them to some historical descriptions that undermine the dignity of the blacks, play down the significance of the African peoples' precolonial life, and stigmatise their bloody confrontation with the coloniser. Karega's great pedagogical task, which he sees as necessary in the present nation-building endeavour is, in Messay Kebede's terms, to "free his people's mind from the Eurocentric constructions."¹⁷³ In fact, Karega tells his brilliant pupil Joseph that

The history of Mr. Blackman in three sentences. In the beginning he had the land and the mind and the soul together. On the second day, they took the body away to barter it for silver coins. On the third day, seeing that he was still fighting back, they brought priests and educators to bind his mind and his soul so that these foreigners could more easily take his land and its produce. (p. 238)

Consequently, as a teacher, Karega sets himself the task of decolonising history as it is an important, but by no means sufficient, step in the politics of anti-neo-colonial liberation. In other words, his politics of anti-neocolonial freedom must start rather than end with condemning the colonisation of African history by the imperialist enemies. He feels then compelled to free African history from the imperialist reductive views, and thus Karega uses his perception of history as a stimulus to decolonise both the black peoples' minds and lands; a perception which ultimately frees people from neocolonial hegemony.

While acknowledging that history is not merely a "gallery of dashing heroes" (p. 287), Karega reminds Joseph of Kenya's heroic past, and yet he is firmly opposed to hero-worship because it cannot be a panacea for the ills of the present. So he is fully aware of the danger of "becoming too fascinated by the yesterday of his people and forgetting the present."¹⁷⁴ For Karega, history is not simply tales about the historical heroic figures; it is more importantly lessons that we have to learn from. On various occasions, he points out clearly that the past must inform the present or that the past must be regarded as a living lesson for the present. Karega, while arguing with Munira, calls for a critical analysis of the historical facts. He indeed acknowledges that the oppression of the Africans is indisputably a historical fact (p. 294). But he also stresses that the history of fight and resistance cannot be denied either. What

¹⁷³ Messay Kebede. "African Development and the Primacy of Mental Decolonisation". African Development, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 2004, p. 1. http://www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/ad1_04/kebede.pdf.

¹⁷⁴ Gikandi, 2000, op. cit., p. 224.

is more important for Karega is not only teaching facts of African history but looking critically at “the things that deformed [them] yesterday” and “that they are deforming [them] today” (p. 294). In Karega’s view, then, historical realities are not only facts but also provide didactic materials for the blacks now. In fact, Ngugi is not content with the passive interpretation, so to speak, of history. History must guide one’s political actions. In addition, he strongly contends that the African people must be taught the history of their struggle.

Indeed, Karega is fully aware that much of history writing has been carried by the West in pursuit of its own interests and for this reason he slightly disagrees with his headmaster Munira on which history to teach. Thus, unlike Munira, Karega stresses repeatedly that not only should African history be taught to the schoolchildren but also it ought to be taught from an Afrocentric (as opposed to Eurocentric) perspective.

In fact, the issue of history in the novel is very often discussed in relation to formal teaching and learning. Thus, the novel explores the influence (whether positive or negative) of formal education on the blacks’ conceptions and beliefs.¹⁷⁵ In Ngugi’s view, which is in full agreement with Fanon’s, the mental colonisation is the worst form of colonialism. Karega in the story seems to fight relentlessly against “the mental indoctrination” which he conceives of as the “process of conditioning, subduing or conquering the mind and, therefore, of altering the personality, of which colonial education was guilty.”¹⁷⁶ Karega, simply put, is an opponent to the colonial mentality or mental colonisation, nurtured by both colonial experience and colonial education. Munira is more firmly oriented towards the European-based education, whilst Karega, without being a radical nativist, is more sceptical about its usefulness since he believes that westernised education does epistemic violence to African history and culture and is thus essentially meant to serve the white master’s interest, maintain his rule, and harden his grip on the black mind.

Karega uses, in short, his post, as an unqualified teacher, to teach politics. But, for Munira, the main duty of the teacher is to enrich the knowledge of his pupils, and for this reason Karega gets into a dispute with his headmaster about the content of the teaching programme. Consequently, his pedagogic mission of teaching “politics through history” ends abruptly with his dismissal. But Karega’s political “agitation” continues when he later becomes more involved in class struggle, as he undergoes more humiliating experiences as a result of moving from one menial job to another, wandering from one place to another. In

¹⁷⁵ George Douglas Killam. *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1980. pp. 108-9.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

the end, he becomes a trade-unionist and a leader of the Theng'eta Breweries Workers Union in Ilmorog and once again his political activism is “paralysed” by his imprisonment following the triple murder of Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria in the whorehouse run by the prosperous lady Wanja.

Thus, Karega sees history in “postcolonial terms” that is why he tries hard to acquaint himself with what burgeoning field of “subjective historiography”, which can be defined loosely as writing history that critiques and subverts the Eurocentric view of history. According to Ato Quayson, “subjective historiography, even though seeming to be steadfastly engaging with the past, is actually providing models of agency for the present.”¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, we can state that Karega tries to acquaint himself with what has come to be termed “left-wing historiography” because of his adoption of the “insurgent’s point of view,”¹⁷⁸ as he is opposed to the so-called “un-unhistorical historiography,” which, as it might be defined, pays “no attention to the politics of people.”¹⁷⁹

Abdulla, the one-legged resourceful man, and whose “reward for his efforts is repudiation by his society,”¹⁸⁰ was at first apparently unwilling to tell those who were attending the feast organised by Wanja to celebrate Joseph’s return to school his heroic story and thus disclose the secret behind his amputated leg, and for this reason Karega felt acutely depressed. Even his arrival in the remote region of the country, Ilmorog, was a form of escape from what he saw as the blatant betrayal of the past; he indeed declares, “I wanted to go deep into the country where I would have no reminder of so bitter a betrayal” (255). But his remembrance of Nding’uri, the unsung revolutionary child hero of the Mau Mau war, torments his mind. His resort to motiveless drinking when he loses his shop weakens further our faith in his potential revenge. But his permanent disability can be to some extent an excuse to his belated revenge. However, that he finally decides to kill his “old foe” Kimeria, who is described by Killam as the most repulsive man in the urban group that alters the economic structure of the secluded traditional village, is the best indication that the memory of the past is still alive in his mind despite the terrible experiences that he has recently lived. As Kanneh Kadiatu interestingly points out, “Ngugi presents the historical continuity between past revolutions and new ones” by showing that “the sacrifices of the Mau Mau, still

¹⁷⁷ Ato Quayson. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* Cambridge Polity Press, 2005, p. 48.

¹⁷⁸ Priyamvada Gopal. “Reading Subaltern History”. Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, op. cit., p. 142.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. ,p. 141.

¹⁸⁰ George Douglas Killam. “Ngugi wa Thiong’o”. , 1984, op. cit., p. 135.

lingering in the memory of the land, in Abdulla's personal recollections, have not yet been entirely superseded by the industrial modernity of New Ilmorog."¹⁸¹

Abdulla is then the living vestige of the independence struggle and his amputated leg is an indelible imprint of his sacrifice for the sacred cause of freedom. It may indicate too that more sacrifice is needed in the present struggle. Chidi Amuta argues that, due to the bitter experience that he had in the war and the pains that he felt as a result of his lost leg, he is equipped "to play the role of the ideological guardian to the rest of the Ilmorogians, especially during their epic march to the capital."¹⁸² He tells Karega, the present leader of the social struggle, the true story of his vaguely known brother Nding'uri, who courageously fought and died for the land, and hence, whether intentionally or not, stimulates the revolutionary spirit of Karega. Thus, Karega's "subversive thought" has been partly animated by some tragic historical events. In other words, Karega's view of history and its relation to his growing subversive political ideology confirms what Chidi Amuta calls the most crucial aspect of the thematic insistence of the novel which is that of "its solid predication on a certain anti-imperialist historical consciousness."¹⁸³ Karega is, then, the natural leader of the struggle against the "new" oppressors. But he owes his sharpened awareness to both Nyakinyua and Abdulla as he, indeed, as Cook and Okenimkpe persuasively say, "helps draw from Nyakinyua and from Abdulla the wisdom of the old and the new patriotism to combat the challenge of new injustice."¹⁸⁴ This shows too that the characters of the novel are all subtly connected to their history and their society because "their individual destinies are powerfully affected by group activities, [and this] leads to the foregrounding of collective consciousness as the central interpretive locus of the novel."¹⁸⁵

Thus, Ngugi's thematic focus in this novel does not deny, even if its setting is post-independence Kenya, "the historical fact of colonialism or the ills suffered by many of its subjects."¹⁸⁶ Ngugi uses the memory of Abdulla to revalue the bloody resistance to foreign hegemony during the colonial times because sometimes the Mau Mau fighters are dubbed by the comprador sell-outs as "terrorists." He uses mainly Abdulla (and also Nyakinyua) to

¹⁸¹ Kanneh Kadiatu, 1998, op. cit., p. 98.

¹⁸² Chidi Amuta. *The Theory of African Literature*. London: Zed Books, 1989, p. 146.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 146. He also argues that "A fervent, even passionately nostalgic concern with the history of Kenyan nationalism, whose highest point was the Mau Mau war, has become an axiomatic component of Ngugi's artistic and ideological sensibilities".

¹⁸⁴ Cook & Okenimkpe, op. cit., p. 98.

¹⁸⁵ Kanneh Kadiatu, 1998, op. cit., p. 93

¹⁸⁶ D. A. Masolo. "African Philosophy and Postcolonial: Some Misleading Abstractions about "Identity". Ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze. *Post-Colonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*. Blackwell, 1997, p. 287.

“dismantle” the “portrait of the colonised”, to use Albert Memmi’s term, as expounded by the coloniser.

Even Munira, whose “being without involvement” condemns him as unrepresentative of the communal struggle, seems to be knowledgeable about the recent cruel history of colonial Kenya. For example, he tells Wanja, who happens to be totally disinterested in his stories, about one bloody episode of the colonial past:

I started telling Wanja about Limuru, mixing fact with fiction, and I was surprised that I knew so much about the place, jumping from the Togoni lands stolen by Europeans from the people of Limuru and later becoming the storm-centre of Kenya’s history, to what later was called the massacre at Lari. The factory once again loomed large in my memory. There was once a strike, soon after the big war, and I always remembered the screaming workers as they were beaten to blood by plate-helmeted black policemen led by two gum-chewing white khakied officers. Black on Black. (p. 121)

But it must be emphasised that the purpose of Munira’s telling of the workers’ struggle may be different from Karega’s as Munira wants to attract Wanja’s attention, who seems to be lost in the maelstrom of her harsh life. So we are allowed here to question Munira’s real intentions of telling his “mistress” the bloody struggle of the workers, and hence this clearly shows that what is important is not only telling the living history of the wretched people but also we have to take into consideration the teller of the history, because usually the aim of telling history is predetermined by its teller.

In retelling the story of their groups and their country, Karega, Nyakinyua and Abdulla energise their despondent compatriots who have started to doubt the value of their continued resistance to foreign control. All of them (mainly Karega) consider seriously the relevance of history for the present freedom struggle. Karega, in particular, seems to have developed a kind of rebellious thought that is firmly based on a critical examination of both historical facts and present problems. In this section a link has been made between decolonising history and the downtrodden people’s freedom of thought. The following section, however, will cast more light on how history can be used as an instrument in fighting the neocolonial oppressors who have wrecked the lives of the poor Ilmorogians, and hence making a strong link between history and the oppressed masses’ freedom of action.

3- Alternative History and Local Resistance

Basically, the issue of history is deeply related to Western modernity. As Walter Mignolo points out, there have always been conflicts between what he calls “local histories” and the “geohistorical mapping of Western modernity.”¹⁸⁷ He states that the Western modernity claims to be global and universal and hence it seeks to eradicate the local cultures and overshadow local histories. From the Eurocentric point of view, Africa moved from local history to Universal History as a result of its occupation by the European civilisation. In the novel, for example, we see a comparable situation in which the villagers sought at first help from their government, yet they “were saturated with aids,”¹⁸⁸ and then their village was overwhelmed by pseudo-modernity. This could lead us to discuss the problem of the difference between local history and Universal History. The latter, one could note, has been used in the imperialist discursive project to legitimatise the Europeans’ appropriation of the African lands.

The novel, it must be stated, dissolves the distinction, which prevailed in the Enlightenment philosophy, between local history and Universal history. This novel contests the widely held view by the Enlightenment thinkers that “world history was moving towards the state of self-perfection of the humanity”¹⁸⁹ and hence they thought that “the human race was on the ascending graph of improvement, that history was progressing under its own steam towards a logical goal, and that sooner or later a more or less perfect world-order would be achieved.”¹⁹⁰ In broad terms, a “local history” is the history of a location in need of a set of social and political rules and hence beyond comparison with the history of “enlightened” and “civilised” Europe. The local history/Universal history distinction has indeed taken a different form recently. It has given rise to the theoretical dispute about globalisation, which is the *zeitgeist* of the present time. Globalisation is defined as “a new guise of global coloniality.”¹⁹¹ The conflict between “local” history and “Universal History” is explicitly presented in *POB* through the metamorphosis of Ilmorog from a deserted homestead to a centre that attracts both national and international capital. The novel then dramatises the encounter between the Gikuyu people, the masters of Old Ilmorog, and the local and international capitalists, the masters of New Ilmorog, and this brings to light the collision between “localism” and “globalism.” The Kikuyu people stand for the local forces, pejoratively referred to as

¹⁸⁷ Walter D. Mignolo. *Local Histories/ Global Designs*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. x.

¹⁸⁸ Robson, C. B. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, London: the Macmillan Press. 1979, p. 93.

¹⁸⁹ Hugh Rayment-Pickard. “Posthistory”. Ed. Burns and Rayment-Pickard, op.cit. p. 300.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 300.

¹⁹¹ Walter D. Mignolo. *Local Histories/ Global Designs*, op. cit., p. xii.

“backward” and “anti-modern” forces, while the process of imperial capitalism represents unquestionably the growing global forces of worldwide capitalism. Since the final demise of Old Ilmorog is perceived differently by these two conflicting classes, the rich and the poor, this novel marks the difference between the inside perspective of those who live the hard realities of everyday life in New Ilmorog (also named New Town) and the outside perspective of the agents of the wanton destruction of agrarian Ilmorog. Nevertheless, the modernisation of Ilmorog does not entail that Old Ilmorog moves from the so-called local history unworthy of “narrativisation” even by the local media to that of the “Universal History” as it becomes a thriving centre that attracts the attention of foreigners, tycoons and political leaders. In fact, the abrupt change Ilmorog undergoes is not as peaceful as it was meant to be; rather, it gives rise to a fierce struggle between the local farmers and the city financiers and this struggle is reminiscent of the historical struggle between the coloniser and the colonised. Therefore, the whole novel could be read as a story of conflict between two opposing forces as almost all of its characters represent one side or the other of the conflict. However, greedy capitalists are described by the newspapers in bright colours as “nationalist figures” and whose “joint entrepreneurial genius [is] unmatched even by the famed founders of industrial revolution” (p. 231), which is therefore the best indication of the complicity of the mass media with the acquisitive capitalist class.

Thus, this novel implicitly counters the view that the Westernisation of Africa offers the best model of development.¹⁹² It explicitly shows that the demise of Old Ilmorog does not usher in an era of prosperity for its peasants and the herdsman, and hence it violently denounces the Europeanization of Africa since, as Africa’s modern history has shown us, “the satellization of African societies by the powerful Western metropolises is the real cause of underdevelopment,”¹⁹³ and a remark that is in total agreement with Fernando Coronil’s insightful observation that “development and underdevelopment are the mutually dependent outcome of capitalist accumulation on a world scale” and that “underdevelopment is the product of development” because “the periphery cannot be modernized by *unregulated* capitalism.”¹⁹⁴ This “unhappy attempt at industrialisation,”¹⁹⁵ to use Kwasi Wiredu’s phrase, does not improve the life of the community; instead, Ilmorog’s space is profaned by the

¹⁹² Messay Kebede. “Development and the African Philosophical Debate”. 1999, op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ Fernando Coronil. “Latin American Postcolonial Studies and Global Decolonization”. Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, op. cit. ,p.223.

¹⁹⁵ Kwasi Wiredu. *Philosophy and an African Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 15.

“angels” of “progress” and “development” (to use Anne McClintock’s phrase).¹⁹⁶ Instead of alleviating the despair of the poor residents of Ilmorog, a degenerate condition is created and hence the process of civilising or modernising Ilmorog, briefly speaking, turns out to be a process of demonising it.

Thus, the turning point of the story of Ilmorog is its de-ruralisation, when “devilish forces” come to change completely pastoral Ilmorog and urbanise the mode of life of its residents. This change calls to mind the change of African communities caused by the colonial project from traditional to modern societies. However, as already mentioned, the rapid industrialisation of Ilmorog must not be seen in a positive light because of “the destructive and demoralizing effects of the whole social system that it creates.”¹⁹⁷ For instance, prostitution and other ills of the city life have increased dramatically. Very often, then, Ngugi sharply criticises the modern economic system on “moral” grounds. The moral decay (or “the spiritual drought” as described by Munira) that results from the feverish growth of “Ngugiland” (i.e. Ilmorog) reinforces the novel’s tone of protest. In addition, it ridicules clearly the colonial assumption that the moral law and order were introduced by the white coloniser of Africa.

The modernisation of ancient Ilmorog spoils the peace and harmony of its rural life. The peace of the rural Ilmorog life is underlined in the novel by the author’s elevation of the countryside (an allegorical space for pre-colonial Africa). Moreover, the pauperisation of the people of Ilmorog in their “modern town” is most often contrasted with the richness of the past. The novel seems to contrast two periods of time, one characterised by happiness, economic self-sufficiency and wealth and the other by merciless capitalist labour exploitation, disillusionment and human degradation. Ngugi, thus, while focusing in his narrative on the post-independence insoluble problems and widespread disorder, reminds his readers in many glowing passages of the splendour of the precolonial history of the prosperous Kenyan communities, namely, the Gikuyu and the Masai. For instance, in the following excerpt taken from *POB*, Ngugi narrates the beauty of the Kenyan land and asserts that it had a sacred status in the ancient world’s religious literatures

Even without the moon Ilmorog ridge, as it drops into the plains along which Ilmorog river flows, must form one of the greatest natural beauties in the world. The river is now only a stream. But there was a time when it was probably much bigger and geological speculation has it that its subterranean streams, buried long ago, feed Ondirri marshes at Kikuyu and Manguo in Limuru. Results of the researches on the recent

¹⁹⁶ Anne McClintock. “The angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term Postcolonialism”. Ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme & Margaret Iversen., 1994, pp. 253-266.

¹⁹⁷ David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, op. cit., p. 90.

archaeological findings may well add to the theories of Ogot, Muriuki, Were and Ochieng about the origins and the movement of Kenyan peoples: they may also tell us whether the river is one of those referred to in ancient Hindu and Egyptian sacred literatures or whether the walls that form the ridges are any part of Ptolemy's Lunae Montes or the Chandravata referred to in the Vedas. (p. 80)

Ngugi, moreover, points out in *POB* that precolonial Africa was not a land of undercivilization; rather, it was a complex civilisational entity. Unfortunately, the pre-colonial period has not received the scholarly attention it really deserves by historians, that is why Ngugi tries through his fiction to highlight its importance in understanding the true facts about the African natives.

Ngugi does not seem to refer to precolonial Africa as a homeland of the exotic people. So his novel is an obvious response to what has come to be listed under the rubric of “the literature of exoticism.”¹⁹⁸ He strongly dismisses the idea of exoticism through the quasi-idealistic description of pastoral Ilmorog. In fact, by describing Old Ilmorog in romantic terms, he debunks the imperialist perception that denigrates the local landscapes. Interestingly, Ngugi focuses more on nature when he describes Old Ilmorog. In doing so, does he confirm Hegel's thesis that “Africa is the representative of nature?”¹⁹⁹ Certainly, pre-colonial Africa is less technologically developed than the Western world. But this is not to suggest that technology is the sole measure of development. In other words, the very fact that precolonial Africa was less materially developed does not carry the logical implication that Africa was “behind the historical development of the world.”²⁰⁰ For Ngugi, “modernisation”, as defined in the Western discourse, is not a sign of civilisation or a marker of the historical development of a community. He therefore dispels the view that the European “civilised” existence is superior to the African “traditional” existence. His novel, indeed, shows that both kinds of existence are worth historicising and hence the pre-industrial African existence need not be seen as *ahistorical*. Further, he resolutely attacks “modernity” in part because, to borrow from Lyotard, “modernity...always means Empire and colonialism. Whenever it appears, it does not occur without a shattering of belief, without a discovery of *the lack of reality* - a discovery linked to the invention of other realities.”²⁰¹ As depicted in the novel, those “other realities” that have been created in modernised Ilmorog are harsher than those before. In other words,

¹⁹⁸ Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 15

¹⁹⁹ David Clinton Wills. “Hegel's Europe (Spirit), Hegel's Africa (Nature)”. 2004, p. 2. It must be reminded that Hegel is best known for his view that Africa was outside history.
<http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu/dspace/bitstream/10066/701/1/2004WillsD.pdf>.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

²⁰¹ Quoted in T. Serequeberhan. “The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy”. Ed. Eze, op. cit., p 142. (emphasis added)

modernity can be synonymous with colonisation since it shatters a long-standing old order and creates a new one.

Indeed, POB echoes Jomo Kenyatta's main thesis that precolonial Kenya was politically and socially organised. It clearly indicates that precolonial Kenya had been a well-organised community "before imperialism came and changed the scheme of things" (p. 8). Ngugi says that "[pre-colonial] Ilmorog had its days of glory" (p. 145). He moreover writes that people at that time "danced, sang hymns of praises to its founders" and that "in those days, there were no vultures waiting for carcasses of dead workers" (p. 145). His romantic and sentimental vision of pastoral Ilmorog is often contrasted with the ills and the evils of the city life in Nairobi that were introduced to Ilmorog as a result of its "lethal embrace", to use Killam's phrase, with the city.

It could be argued then that there is a clear fusion between time and space in the narrative. Indeed, the lengthy descriptions of Ilmorog before the coming of the capitalistic forces conjure up an image of a precolonial Africa where nature used to be prevalent (though this must not be taken to mean that there was no culture in that period).²⁰² This generally means that Ngugi evokes history through the use of space or that he spatialises the historical time. The changing spatial characteristics of Ilmorog (or sometimes labelled Ngugiland) call to mind the different historical periods Kenya has undergone.

Before being urbanised and industrialised, Ilmorog was a totally decrepit village, an isolated area or a deserted homestead. It was never visited by the political leaders (except during the electoral campaigns). It was almost a de-inscribed land or *terra incognita*. It is only when the industrialists came to it that it began to be "historicised". This indicates clearly, by analogy, that in the European jaundiced eye, pre-colonial or pre-modern black Africa was "waiting for words and history to envelop it."²⁰³

The inhabitants of pre-industrial Ilmorog were living in a communal harmony. However, some natural disasters such as droughts began to strike their lands. These natural catastrophes foreshadowed the ultimate downfall of the Ilmorogian community. Old Nyakinyua started to feel unhappy with the rural exodus and the migration to the metropolitan centres. She resents the fact that the young people, who in the past used to fight their enemies, fled the area for

²⁰² Claude Levi-Straus made a fundamental distinction between "nature" and "culture" without necessarily implying that the traditional people who were closer to nature are not inferior to modern people who are assumed to have "developed" culture. The traditional people had cultures of their own. Levi-Straus's work is discussed in Alessandro Duranti. *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²⁰³ Andrew Smith. "Migrancy, hybridity, and postcolonial literary studies". Ed. Neil Lazarus. *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. CUP, 2004, p. 243.

“the glittering fleece in the town” (p. 9), which is the symbol of power and authority.²⁰⁴ Nyakinyua compares the present predicament to “the skin diseases and plagues that once in earlier times weakened our people” (p. 9). In fact, the movement to the city is a repeat of history, when during the colonial times people left their families, lands and farms and sought to work in the modern cities.²⁰⁵ The key social basis of the modernist project, as Raymond Williams notes, “lies in the experience of immigration from the provinces [the deprived hinterlands and poor world outside the metropolis] to the metropolis.”²⁰⁶ Ngugi demonstrates that the migration to the city (a microcosm of the metropolitan centre) cannot be the optimal solution, and the tragic story of the beautiful Wanja in the urban centres is a case in point.

Old Ilmorog was threatened by severe drought, it was in fact “poverty- and drought-stricken” and “depopulated” (p. 132). This “drought stands in contrast to the legendary fertility of the landscape.”²⁰⁷ However, Munira describes Ilmorog as “a wasteland”, echoing clearly the colonial discourse which used to label Africa the wasteland. Karega, too, shares Munira’s view that Ilmorog is a wasteland and a deserted homestead, and hence we might wonder why the main characters of the novel fled to what they saw as “a wasteland” or “a forgotten village” to begin anew. Does this imply that the life in the city is worse than that in the remote area of Ilmorog? Does leaving modern centres for the “periphery” in the natural landscapes provide people with a possibility of psychic reconnection? The tragic story of Wanja in the city as a bar girl, indeed, shows us clearly that the people are even more lost in the maelstrom of uncontrolled modernity and unscrupulous capitalism. Corrupt and unchecked modernity, as it is described by some, is also criticised when a small remote traditional village within a twinkle of an eye becomes a modern centre and a domain of multi-national corporations and international capitalism, and this is because modernity for the traditional society means fundamentally “changing its economic structure.” And this takes place “by forcing people off the land into factories, by imposing a new rhythm and discipline of work, by using brutal means or incentives to raise capital.”²⁰⁸ This is what really happens to the Ilmorogian people who lost their “things of blood” and were alienated from their land as a result of the “unholy alliance” of such “important” men as Nderi wa Riera, Reverend Jerrod Brown, the Bank

²⁰⁴ Simon Gikandi. *Reading the African Novel*. London: James Currey, 1987.

²⁰⁵ In the words of Andrew Smith, “migrants become emblematic figures in the postcolonial studies because they represent a removal from “old” foundations and from previous “grounded” ways of thinking about identity”. Andrew Smith. “Migrancy, Hybridity, and Postcolonial Literary Studies”. Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, p. 249.

²⁰⁶ P. Brooker. (ed.). *Modernism/Postmodernism*. London: Longman, 1992, p. 50.

²⁰⁷ Gikandi, 2000, op. cit .,p. 73.

²⁰⁸ Daniel Bell. “Modernism and Capitalism”. Ed. C. Harrison & Paul Wood. *Art and Theory: 1900-2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003, p. 1120.

directors and Theng'eta Breweries owners, who can be rightly described as the “new colonisers” of Ilmorog.

Thus, this novel compares the good ancestral past with the deplorable conditions in the modern era of Ilmorog, even though the natural calamities are not new in Ilmorog. Ngugi writes that “history and legend showed that Ilmorog had always been threatened by the twin cruelties of unprepared-for vagaries of nature and uncontrollable actions of man” (p. 109). The romantic picture of Old Ilmorog is spoilt by the failure of the rain and the unproductive nature of the land. In fact, the “failure of the rain is clearly symbolic of the decolonisation to fall.”²⁰⁹ It is worth noting here that the image of sterility is prevalent in the narrative. At first, we are told that the land is not as fertile and productive as it used to be. Much later, we learn that Wanja cannot procreate because of her unforgivable crime of throwing the child that she bore after her affair with Kimeria. This prevailing sterility in the novel is highly and mournfully symbolic of an overall degenerate state of neocolonial Kenya. Even the present development of Ilmorog into “petals of blood”, as described by Munira, does not put an end to the sterility of the land as a more degenerate condition is created by “the vices of capitalism.”²¹⁰ The central problem of present Ilmorog is that it was seriously threatened by first natural calamities, and after a brief period of prosperity when the Theng'eta drink ceremony is organised by the old woman, a ritual that fell into disuse (and this means a return, however brief, to the communal harmony of the past), a more pathetic situation was created by human cruelties and atrocities.

The metamorphosis of Ilmorog signals and at the same time intensifies the structural dependence of Kenya on the Western imperial powers because it is nothing more than an inclusion of the secluded area of Ilmorog within a “single social space”²¹¹ dominated by a global system of power. This metamorphosis, often seen by the local press as development, simply put, is no more than Ilmorog's “integration within the capitalist world system.”²¹² Capitalism, it should be added, has its roots in the Western economic traditions and for this reason “African historiography has managed to deny the historicity of capitalism in

²⁰⁹ Simon Gikandi, 2000, op. cit., p. 74.

²¹⁰ David Cook. & Michael Okenimkpe, 1983, op. cit., p. 100.

²¹¹ Rosenberg, Justin. “Globalization Theory: A Post Mortem”. *International Politics*, Vol. 42, 2005, p. 4. globalisation, in Rosenberg's view, is homogenising what is otherwise different social spaces.

²¹² Tamara Swanandan. “Anticolonialism, National Liberation, and Postcolonial Nation Foundation”. Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, p. 54.

Africa.”²¹³ Therefore, the transformation of Ilmorog from a peaceful pastoral settlement into a major seat of capitalist investment entails that this area has been “westernised”.

The de-ruralisation of Ilmorog started with the building of the “Trans-Africa Highway” for the sake of facilitating the business of the tycoons. Earlier, the local villagers started complaining about deforestation because “the railway had eaten [their] forests” (p. 14). This is reminiscent of the Enlightenment discourse which is based on the assumption that “the human sovereignty over nature” signals the “historical progress.”²¹⁴ Ironically, the “irreparable” destruction of Ilmorog occurs as a result of this “historical progress.” Simon Gikandi states that Ngugi’s bitter critique of colonialism is best perceived through his elucidation of the rifts and conflicts that colonialism (and neocolonialism) “engenders and through the dramatization of the radical contrast between the beauty of the landscape and what seemed to be *ill-fated history*.”²¹⁵ In other words, the destruction of the beauty of Ilmorog landscape is seen by Gikandi as a sign of the ill-fated history of colonisation because it marks the so-called “triumph of Western modernity” and the falsity of its promise of creating a technological Eden and improving the life of the aboriginal people,²¹⁶ and therefore it is no wonder that the narrator of the novel describes the change that occurs in Ilmorog as an “onslaught” on the local people (p. 333).

Thus, this novel explores profoundly the relentless encroachment of civilisation on a rural area, but without suggesting “some utopian existence before the encroachment of civilisation.”²¹⁷ The industrial tycoons pretended that they were going to bring prosperity to this poverty-stricken area. Sometimes they used millenarian terms to conceal their ill-intentioned activities. For example, the part of New Ilmorog which was occupied by the poor and the unemployed was named New Jerusalem. Ngugi, therefore, shows how the post-independence capitalists still use the words characteristic of the colonial rhetoric in order to justify their actions of grabbing the lands of the peasants and the herdsmen. For example, as the author puts it, during the colonial era “Lord-Freeze-Kilby and his godly wife, a

²¹³ Omafume F. Onoge. “The Crisis of Representation in Modern African Literature”. Ed. Georg M. Gugelberger *Marxism and African Literature*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1987, p. 40.

²¹⁴ Hugh Rayment-Pickard. “Kulturkritik”. Ed. Robert. M. Burns & Hugh Rayment-Pickard, p. 252.

²¹⁵ Simon Gikandi, 2000, op. cit., 72. (emphasis added)

²¹⁶ Ojung Aijuk talks here of the theme of “ecological decadence” when he says that “the author’s preoccupation [is the] decline in physical environment from the state of normality or excellence. This decadence entails the destruction of the splendid landscape that characterizes much of the African physical environment and the well structured and peaceful way in which most Africans have traditionally lived their lives as well as the installation of the devastation and the degenerative atmosphere that are manifest features of most colonial towns an urban centres inherited by their nations upon decolonization”. Cited in James Smith Robson, 1987, op. cit., p. 112.

²¹⁷ Bruce Janz. “Alterity, Dialogue, and African Philosophy”. Ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze. *Post-Colonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 226.

lady...wanted to change Ilmorog's *wilderness* into *Civilized* shapes and forms that would yield a million seedlings" (p. 83, emphasis mine). For those capitalists, in the colonial period as in the neocolonial one, rural Ilmorog is "uncivilised" and hence it needs to be "developed". But "development" for those capitalists means simply becoming wealthier at whatever cost. Hence, selfishness is presented as a concern for the people. So here we may refer to Derek Wright who makes an apt observation that "international capital continues to oppress any peoples in the so-called 'Third World', but from the perspective of the governing classes in those countries, this is development"²¹⁸.

Before discussing the people's refusal of the system that has newly been introduced by force (instead of "democratic means") to their lands and thereby altered completely their economic mode of life, it may be apposite to cast some light on Wanja's unexpected "acceptance" of this very soulless system that causes her victimisation. Indeed, Wanja, for the sake of her survival in a hostile and highly competitive world, takes up different roles throughout the story. At first, she is mercilessly exploited in the capital city of Nairobi; her "wings of life" are clipped by Hawkins Kimeria who impregnates and rejects her brutally. As a result of her complete disappointment with her experience as a bar girl in the city, she seeks refuge in the wasteland. Her second return to the pastoral haven shows clearly the emptiness of the promises of Western modernity, epitomised by city life in Nairobi and many other towns. As the narrator of the novel explicitly indicates, "since she [Wanja] left Ilmorog she had had two humiliating and shameful experiences. She would now break with that past and renew herself in Ilmorog. She seeks to defeat "her past through a flowering of herself" (p. 128). Wanja loses her "self" in the city and tries to regain it in the pastoral haven. Wanja thus seems to "never deny her peasant roots, despite the various experiences she has of the world beyond the village."²¹⁹ Basically, she seeks to cure her barrenness by going to the local sage of the village, the unseen and mysterious Mwathi wa Mugo, and this is a clear indication that Wanja does not turn a blind eye on her tribal past, and hence she exemplifies the fact that the African people have not been completely uprooted from their traditions and folk culture in the fast-changing modern world. Thus, we could further argue that very fact that some aspects of the folk culture survive in the modern African nations is the best indication that people had a history and a culture of their own.

²¹⁸ Derek Wright. *Emerging perspectives on Nuruddin Farah*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002, p. 451.

²¹⁹ G. D. Killam. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: an Exploration of his writing*. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1980, p. 105.

Not surprisingly, Wanja refers to herself as “maimed soul” as she recognises her pathological state. Her “fall from grace” has a formative influence on how she envisions the surrounding realities. She tries to grapple successfully with her problematic situation. However, interestingly, she moves from the state of being a victimised, sullied prostitute to that of an Ilmorog brothel’s madam (and hence enjoying “high-class prostitution”). But such a radical change in her status can only take her one step further from the “right path”. Being ultimately a petty capitalist lady does not indicate that she is a successful woman. Her “victory” is indeed short-lived since it ends with arson. Perhaps the arson is a predictor of the fall of the capitalist system.

Interestingly, Wanja, seemingly exhausted with Karega’s and Munira’s over-concern about the past because for her the past is too tragic to be remembered (the recurrence of fire incidents in her previous experience, for example), sets out to achieve her personal objectives. Towards the end of the story, despite Karega’s repeated attempts to induce her to “take up the spade of national duty and put aside the knife of ‘you eat or you are eaten’, she becomes a self-seeking and money-loving individual by indeed “selling herself the only commodity -she has- for a high price in the mark economy of New Ilmorog.”²²⁰ Irrespective of her frustrating past experiences and failures, she finally accepts the rigid cynical capitalist dictum of “you eat or you are eaten”. G. D. Killam notes thus that “Wanja chooses to exploit rather than being exploited by the moneyed class when New Ilmorog comes into being” and hence she is both “victim and victor.”²²¹ Her prosperity in the abject history of New Ilmorog indicates that she has learned from her money-seeking father, who distrusts completely the utility of anti-colonial struggle since he believes in the insurmountable powers of the western coloniser, and who insists:

The true secret of white man’s power; money. Money moves the world. Money is time. Money is beauty. Money is elegance. Money is power. Why, with money I can even buy the princess of England, the one who recently came here. Money is freedom, with money I can buy freedom for all our people. Instead of this suicidal talk of guns and pistols and oaths of black unity to drive out the white man, we should learn from him how to make money. With money we can bring light into darkness. With money we can get rid of our fears and superstitions. (p. 278)

Surely, Ngugi disagrees completely with Wanja’s father’s point of view. Wanja’s rejection of Karega’s creed of opposition shows that she has to some extent accepted her father’s “view of history” and how to cope with such historical factors as colonisation. When the whole area

²²⁰ Ernest N. Emenyonu. *Goatskin Bags of Wisdom: New perspectives in African Literature*. African World Press, 1999, p. 320.

²²¹ G. D. Killam, 1980, op. cit., p. 104.

falls to the hands of the moneyed class, Wanja observes the “invisible law” of the capitalist world which is fundamentally based on “extreme depersonalisation, and the erection of money as the solvent of all values.”²²² Hence, Wanja has been “prostituted” for the second time by the same system, albeit in a different way now. Thus, Wanja cannot be taken as a model for the freed woman of New Kenya because her actions (and reactions) are not informed by the history of struggle that enables her to change rather than be integrated in the neocolonised capitalist world, even though her final revenge by murdering her persecutor Kimeria could be regarded as a sign of growing dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Karega has a totally different view of how to cope with the new realities. The coming of the “development forces” which left the community in complete disarray marks the beginning of a new struggle for Karega and his disempowered groups.²²³ The confrontation (which is on the verge of becoming bloody) between the acquisitive urban group and the village stalwarts is yet another indication of the people’s continuous history of unabated resistance to foreign domination. Thus in the novel the natives are portrayed as self-conscious resisters and this proves once more that the African indigenous people were not waiting for the colonisation of the Western Empires. For example, the villagers of Ilmorog did not ask the capitalists to modernise their lands. Rather, they were merely seeking relief by virtue of being Kenyan citizens. The novel therefore casts doubts on the messianic solutions of urbanisation and “frictionless” capitalism, to borrow from Bill Gates.

Obviously, the very recourse to violent resistance by the villagers is good evidence of their “native agency” (to use Pratt’s term) that had its roots in the past, and which is discussed thoroughly in relation to “subaltern histories”, and which is often contrasted with the African people’s “spontaneous consent” (to borrow from Gramsci)²²⁴ to the Western economic leadership; a spontaneous consent which has tirelessly been promoted by the Western hegemonic discourse on which, as we have argued, Ngugi launches a ferocious attack. The concepts of “revolutionary agency” and “resistance” bring to the fore the age-old philosophical conundrum over freedom and coercion in history.²²⁵ Karega indeed tries hard to free his community from the sweeping forces that have shaped their lives. Indeed, Ngugi’s

²²² Omafume F. Onoge, 1987, op. cit., p. 38.

²²³ In his debatable work ever written on the “triumph” of US consumer-capitalism, the reputed liberal thinker, Francis Fukuyama declares history dead following the fall of the communist block. Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man*. The USA: Free Press, 1992. For Karega, the triumph of capitalism in Ilmorog does not mean the end of the history of struggle.

²²⁴ Douglass Kellner. “Cultural Marxism and Cultural Studies”. 2002, p. 4.
<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/culturalmarxism.pdf>.

²²⁵ Mohammed Aziz Nodhma Salem. *Dialectic of History and Civilisation*. Alexandria: Publishing University Company, 1996, pp. 112-3.

liberation discourse in this novel can be made very clear in Karega's emphasis on the idea that the Africans must be freed from foreign control and hence from a historical determinism imposed from exteriority, an idea that he has fully grasped from his critical study of the history of his people and their resistance (which includes the heroic story of his brother that he learned from Abdulla). Formulated differently, through Karega's self-willed actions, Ngugi seeks to "relocate human practice within historical determinism, to reconcile the individual with the social, and the idea of agency with that of necessity, or freedom with history."²²⁶ Karega defines his position clearly in relation to the history that is "imposed from outside forces", i.e. the neo-imperialist class.

In fact, the effects of Karega's revolutionary speeches, whose aim is to topple the neocolonial institutions, are clearly felt "at the end of the narrative when the people of Ilmorog are moving away from Munira's gospel of acceptance to the notion of struggle, which the young man [Karega] articulates so well."²²⁷ Karega, in fact, has insisted before that reading history books is an efficient means of tracing "the basis of the master-servant relationship between the rich and poor" (p. 102). Karega is fully conscious that the autocratic bourgeoisie intends to remove the sense of initiative from the lower classes. The major question that haunts his mind, it might be safely assumed, is whether the past achievements of the Kenyan people (for example, their fierce fight in what is commonly known as "the battle of Ilmorog") can be repeated in the present or future. He calls, for example, first and foremost for mass strikes, which are described by the MP as "deliberate anti-national acts of economic sabotage", and which lead also to "[social] tension and [political] instability" (p. 232).

However, the capitalist invasion of rural areas is described by the media as a sign of progress made by three well known nationalist fighters for political, educational, and above all economic freedoms for Africans, Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria. The newspapers claim that "[the capitalists] built Ilmorog from a tiny nineteenth-century village into a modern industrial town that even generations born after Gagarin and Armstrong will be proud to visit" (p. 6). Karega, therefore, warns the wretched peasants and workers against what he sees as the "false consciousness" that is still promoted by the "state narratives" (the media for instance) and that has "its roots in the experiences of marginalization, slavery, colonial oppression, the exploitation of resources, and the division of Africans to serve the desire of the oppressor."²²⁸

²²⁶ Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990, p. 30.

²²⁷ Gikandi, 1987, op. cit., p. 138.

²²⁸ Bruce Janz., 1997, op. cit., p. 226.

However, he fully knows how tough this task of reforming the people's consciousness²²⁹ is, given the long period of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonial domination. Thus Ngugi, through Karega, echoes Raymond Williams's statement that consciousness is "historical" and that "social liberation comes through a change of consciousness."²³⁰

Following "the failure", so to speak, of the epic march to the capital city, Karega's understanding of the lamentable state of affairs becomes sharper than ever before. He has also learned much from the Lawyer, his erstwhile mentor, who, besides saving him and his entire group in that hazardous trek, started sending him books, especially about political science. But Karega wanted to read more about his people's history of struggle, because for him all attempts other than struggle are most likely to be abortive. Even though, as Eustace Palmer points out, both "Karega and the lawyer are the embodiments of Ngugi's moral and social positives in this novel" as "they are the spokesmen for his socialistic solutions,"²³¹ the lawyer, for Karega, is "an uncommitted intellectual" who, because of his high status in society, believes in political and parliamentary reforms, and hence opts out of class struggle.

Like Karega, Old Nyakinyua attempts to mobilise the expropriated population of Ilmorog against what she calls "the black oppressors" (p. 328). Thus, Nyakinyua begins a new struggle, inspired mainly by her husband's brave fight, when she is chased away from her hut and shamba, but it is her granddaughter who finally saves her from being expropriated by the Bank. And this means that because of their alienation from their lands, the peasants turn into "proletarian."²³² In spite of her mighty efforts to organise the peasants into resistance, we cannot say much about Nyakinyua's fight for the re-appropriation of her land because of her serious illness and death.

Munira, conversely, remains a passive observer and because of his "rationalised creed of withdrawal" he hardly involves himself in any "subversive" action²³³ to such an extent that he cannot understand the "rumble of violence [of women who are supposed to have a tender character] behind the sunny rural passivity" (p. 103) when Ilmorog was visited by the KCO henchmen "Fat Stomach" and "Insect" to announce the organisation of tea-drinking ceremony by KCO Party. But when Ilmorog changes radically he becomes more intent on destroying what he sees as a world fraught with human sins ("he finally recognises that the world was

²²⁹ Hugh Rayment-Pickard. "Kulturkritik". Ed. Robert Burns & Hugh Rayment-Pickard, 2002, p. 250.

²³⁰ Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 65.

²³¹ Eustace Palmer. "Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*", op. cit., p 163.

²³² Chidi Amuta. *The Theory of African Literature*. London: Zed Books, 1989, p 144.

²³³ Craig Smith notes that since Munira is ashamed of his past, especially the past of his father, he develops a sense of alienation that paralyses him from seriously participating in Kenya's present and hence "the novel faults him for his quietism", cited in Paul Dorn, op. cit., footnotes.

fundamentally illogical and evil”) (p. 353), and out of esoteric religious fanaticism, sets Wanja’s *Sunshine Lodge* ablaze. However, Craig Smith observes that Munira’s “crime” must not be taken seriously as a revolutionary action and that “revolution [in the novel] remains a hope and a promise [as] the most subversive act undertaken in the present narrative [sic] arises from religious zeal, not class politics.”²³⁴ Just as Wanja has a different way of reacting to the “accidental” transformation of Ilmorog, so does Munira, and in each way, there is no clear sign of any “historical consciousness” that should develop from, first, the stories narrated by Nyakinyua and Abdulla, and second, from the lamentable present state of affairs in Kenya (for instance, the people’s past revolutions have never been based on any form of Christian fundamentalism). That is why, for many critics, Munira is a born loser, a mediocre man carrying confused mysticism, a mentally deranged person, and even a “fragment” rather than a fully rounded character, and so on.

However, Abdulla’s search for “restoration -a little restoration- a shop” (p. 368) becomes more powerfully motivated after his realisation that Kimeria, his betrayer and the betrayer of Nding’uri (the unwept and the unsung revolutionary hero) continues to subjugate him because he is one representative of the inimical capitalistic forces that, instead of alleviating poverty and despair, have divided the inhabitants and marginalised the disadvantaged population. Significantly, for the first time we see Abdulla regret the absence of Karega, in whom he sees the bravery and the sense of challenge of his brother Nding’uri, and whose talk of the past resistance is invigorating, as it is made clear by the narrator: “There was a time of Old Ilmorog –a brief period, true- when Karega, with his talk of the past deeds of the heroes in their four hundred years of resistance to European, had stirred the ashes, and he [Abdulla] felt as if the embers had not been died, that a little flame flickered. Even this died with Karega’s sudden departure from Ilmorog” (p. 368). So we have a further argument from the text that remembering the history of resistance “stirs the ashes” of the present moment’s struggle. Abdulla’s wish to “heal history” must begin with the elimination of the agents of the neocolonialism, which is, for him, another sore period in the history of Kenya, and hence a renewed history of struggle and resistance is urgently called for. But the fire in Wanja’s whorehouse prevents the people who really want to recreate the living history of people’s struggle, namely, Abdulla and Karega from fulfilling their dreams of reacquiring “the former state of self-reliant independence,”²³⁵ as both were arrested by the police inspector.

²³⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 2.

²³⁵ James Stephen Robson, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

Despite everything, the novel ends with some hope for a possibility of overturning the existing power relationships, and this hope can be symbolised by the prodigious achievements of Joseph at Siriana Elite School, his rebellious thoughts there, and Wanja's pregnancy after a long, sometimes hopeless, search for a cure to her "cursed" sterility. So Wanja's debasement is finally redeemed when she becomes pregnant. Joseph, the successful student at Siriana, indeed finally echoes Karega's words that the "studies should be related to the liberation of [the Kenyan] people" (p. 403), and hence his social consciousness has become more acute. Wanja's fallen state has come to an end as she finally bears a child and it is Abdulla who fathers her child, which symbolically indicates that the revolutionary spirit of Mau Mau liberation fight can cure the ills of the tyrannical neocolonial system in the country.²³⁶ Also, we can never lose sight of the workers' determination, despite the arrest of their leader, to renew their fight against their merciless employers by going on strike as already planned.

In sum, the characters with historical consciousness fight fiercely the neocolonisers (namely, Karega, Nyakinyua, Abdulla and the village elders), unlike those with less or no interest in the past of their lands (i. e. Munira and Wanja) who refuse to lead or to be led in a communal struggle as they act individually. Thus, as James Stephen Robson assumes, Ngugi combines in this novel "political didacticism of the living past with the need to promote a revolutionary resistance for the future."²³⁷

Conclusion

Undeniably, Ngugi's attempt to restore Kenya's history in this work should not be construed as an end in itself; rather, it has a political dimension which is that of stirring the disadvantaged Kenyan population to action in order to put an end to the period of "arrested decolonisation." Karega's study of his people's history in particular and the history of the oppressed people throughout the world in general is primarily, if not exclusively, meant to generate the passion of resistance to the soulless and corrupt capitalist imperialism. Simply put, the use of history in this novel allows people to define clearly themselves, understand the totality of their historical experiences and thereby re-assess their positions vis-à-vis the

²³⁶ Ernest N. Emenyonu. *Goatskin Bags of Wisdom: New perspectives in African Literature*. African World Press, 1999, p. 328. "Abdulla stands [in the whole story] as its most noble victim [because of] struggle for independence] and his integrity makes him the logical father to the next generation". In fact, the idea of hope conveyed through the pregnancy of Wanja after her relationship with Abdulla is best discussed by Stratton who writes that "the relationship between Wanja and Abdulla signifies the regeneration of potency in the struggle for freedom from oppression and exploitation in present-day Kenya ...Wanja's pregnancy, preceded by an act of infanticide on the eve of independence and followed by years of barrenness, is the promise of the rebirth of the nation". Quoted in James Ogude, 1999, op. cit., p. 104.

²³⁷ James Stephen Robson., December 2007, op. cit., p. iv.

present-day tyrannical regime in order not to be misled by some politically tailored explanations of their history.

In addition, Ngugi's POB provides us through the allegoric space of Ilmorog with a true understanding of a concrete experience (as perceived by the neocolonised masses) that results from destructive effects of the Western imperialism (euphemistically described by the West as civilisation, and to use a more recent term, globalisation). Indeed, it stresses the fact that the resulting situation is tragic because of "the global expansion and intensification of capitalism."²³⁸ POB indicates thus that the history of colonisation can be repeated as it happens with the peasants and the herders of Ilmorog and in this case a new history of decolonisation must be born again.

It seems thus that Ngugi lays some emphasis on the rehabilitation of the past which he sees as "a necessary step for the restoration of the African self-confidence - a self-confidence which was a prerequisite for fighting colonialism [and neo-colonialism]."²³⁹ Ngugi therefore contends strongly that the history of Africa must be re-narrativised so as to respond to the needs of the people. He tirelessly tries to rewrite his country's history "outside the historically dominant frameworks, first of colonialism and, later, of elite nationalism."²⁴⁰ More importantly, he stresses in POB that there is a deep connection between the retelling of precolonial and colonial history and the contemporary struggle for the complete liberation of the masses. As Peter Nazareth puts it in his critique of POB,

*Like Ayi Kwei Armah in Two Thousand Seasons, Ngugi is attempting to tell the whole story of the whole people, in living time, to restore their knowledge of themselves to themselves so that they can end exploitation. For colonizers steal not only labour and resources, they also steal history. If a people believe they had no history before the coming of the colonizers, they can be exploited more easily.*²⁴¹

Ngugi's POB provides us with good evidence for his "radicalised use of history as a revolutionary weapon."²⁴² In the next chapter, we will shed more light on the issue of culture and orality in post-colonial Kenya and, more particularly, how this issue has been tackled as a revolutionary tool in his first "Gikuyu novel", *Devil on the Cross*.

²³⁸ Laura Chrisman. "Nationalism and Postcolonial Studies". Ed. Neil Lazarus. 2004, p. 183.

²³⁹ Omagume F. Onoge. "The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature". Ed. Georg M. Gulberger, 1987, p. 36-37.

²⁴⁰ Priyamavada Gopal. "Reading Subaltern History". Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, p. 139.

²⁴¹ Peter Nazareth. "The Second Homecoming: Multiple Ngugis in *Petals of Blood*". Ed. Georg M. Gulberger, 1987, pp. 118-129.

²⁴² Patrick Williams. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, op. cit., p. 80.

III. *Devil on the Cross*: Indigenous Culture and the Author's Socialist Perspective of “De-Hegemonising” the Post-Colonial African State

“Ngugi was critical of those who indulged in nostalgic enthusiasm for things truly African. The main concern of the writer was social reality and the future” (Ingrid Bjorkman 1989: 204).

“The value of protean autochthonous cognitive forms in effecting an alternative modernity enters into the discussion of culture’s political role. There was no doubt that the long history of cultural resistance in Mozambique was a precursor to militant anticolonialism; while with the onset of the armed struggle, the new styles of defiance initiated by peasants and workers in song, dance, and carving expressed deep-seated hostility to the alien culture, came to influence the art of professionals, and engendered political defiance...and advocated a restoration of cultural traditions as a means to galvanize united struggle against foreign occupation” (Agostinho Neto 1974: xviii, quoted in Bentia Parry 2004: 141).

III. *Devil on the Cross*: Indigenous Culture and the Author's Socialist Perspective of "De-Hegemonising" the Post-colonial African State

Introduction

This chapter is intended primarily to address a number of questions related to Ngugi's use of indigenous narrative forms and revalorisation of his people's folk culture in his novel *Devil on the Cross* (hereafter abbreviated DOC). It indeed investigates the extent to which the use of oral native literature in this narrative and the cultural self-representation, which the novel claims to promote, solidify Ngugi's poetics and politics of liberation from neocolonial strictures.

Basically, this novel marks a prominent transition in Ngugi's literary career as it is the first novel written in his mother tongue, Gikuyu. Second, this novel is heavily based on Gikuyu oral culture. Last but not least, his overall approach to novel writing shifted radically as he moved away from the complexity²⁴³ -at the level of narrative techniques, characterisation, and diction- which was a marker of his earlier novels, towards simplicity. This move purports to achieve ideological clarity and homogeneity.

As far as the culture theme in the narrative is concerned, one needs to mention first that Ngugi does not seem to belong to the group of African intellectuals who have "valorised and sought to re-inscribe notions of 'pure' precolonial cultures at the centre of liberation struggles."²⁴⁴ However, Terry Eagleton raises a crucial debate about the postcolonial theory and, whether convincingly or not, states that "postcolonial thought is allowed to talk about cultural differences, but not -or not much- about economic exploitation."²⁴⁵ And his statement should not be seen as being in conflict with the overall claim of this chapter that Ngugi's displacement of the discourse about African culture lends strong support to his revolutionary politics of class struggle.

²⁴³ Patrick Williams declares that *Petals of Blood* is the most complex traditional novel and all the subsequent novels are not as complex as their predecessors. Patrick Williams. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 166.

²⁴⁴ Tamara Sivanandan. "Anticolonialism, National Liberation, and Postcolonial Nation Foundation". Ed. Neil Lazarus, 2004, p. 63.

²⁴⁵ Quoted in Ania Loomba. *Colonialism /Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998, p. xiv. Remarkably too, Terry Eagleton asserts clearly elsewhere that "postcolonial is a heavily 'culturalist' critique of global capitalism, more enthused by questions of identity and ethnicity than by considerations of state, class-struggle, the new global division of labour and revolutionary nationalism." Terry Eagleton. *Criticism and Ideology*. 1976, preface. But as we noted, Ngugi's postcolonialist criticism is strengthened by revolutionary politics and the idea of class struggle.

This chapter's focus on culture and orality in the narrative can be seen as mischaracterising Ngugi's later works since, admittedly, the fictive canvas picture of DOC is a rich mixture of life: widespread corruption, soulless exploitation, immortality, wide cynicism, ignorance, extreme poverty, etc. Shall we conclude then that the issue of culture does not constitute the first major theme in this narrative? In effect, the main argument of this part of the dissertation is that Ngugi's use of orality and his assertion of his indigenous culture reinforce his general political ideology of anti-neo-imperialism.

The study of the usefulness of Ngugi's cultural discourse in this novel can be carried out in relation to Gaturia's mighty cultural efforts to compose a national oratorio. However, mass culture, as seen by Cabral, is mainly a culture of struggle and resistance, and yet Gaturia fails to be the most important spokesman of popular revolution. It is therefore worth examining that, contrary to Cabral's belief that "contact with the rich cultural tradition of the peasants may transform the mentality of the 'petty bourgeoisie' and make them play a leading role in the struggle for national liberation,"²⁴⁶ Gaturia's undertaking of cultural recuperation is yet to be perceptible as relevant to the present-day social struggle. Thus, we need to see why Gaturia's retrieval of the populist culture is not politically energizing enough. For his artistic work to merit serious consideration by his people, it is necessary that it bear relevance to marginal people's social milieu.

Centrally, as it will be examined throughout this chapter, the author's handling of the culture issue (including his use of Gikuyu oral forms) lends some support to his socialist ideology, in the sense that African people's cultural self-apprehension is inextricably connected with such thorny issues as "genuine" development, liberation, and total independence.

1- The Significance for the Inflammation of the People's Passions of Resistance of Indigenising (or "Africanising") The Novel Form

The first section of this chapter deals exclusively with Ngugi's "aesthetic ideology", which is defined by Emmanuel Ngara as "the literary convention and stylistic stances adopted by the writer,"²⁴⁷ and its implications, if any, concerning his central political ideology of unsettling the imperial power structures operative in his barely independent country. As mentioned previously, Ngugi's stylistic approach to the novel has clearly changed with the publication of DOC, and this change must have a number of purposes, which are to be analysed below.

²⁴⁶ F. K. Omoregie. "Rodney, Cabral, Ngugi as Guides to African Postcolonial Literature". University of Botswana: English Department, 2004, p. 4. www.usp.nus.ed.sg/post/poldiscourse/Ngugiov.html.

²⁴⁷ Emmanuel Ngara. *Ideology and Form in African Poetry*. London: James Currey, 1990, p. 12.

Fundamentally, this novel is characterised by its “*ethic imperative*” of the search for viable and non-Eurocentric aesthetics.²⁴⁸ Indeed, Ngugi’s opting out of English as the tool of literary expression in his later works is the most salient feature of his changing aesthetic ideology. For Ngugi, indeed, the choice of language represents the central political issue for the African writer²⁴⁹. Ngugi envisages English as an imperialist tool, the rejection of which is one form of rejecting the metropolitan power. He further accuses the African writers who produce what he calls “Afro-Saxon” literature of being “petty-bourgeoisie products of colonial and neocolonial imperialism” because of their perpetuation of what he sees as “cultural and linguistic oppression.”²⁵⁰ As James Derek aptly observes, Ngugi chose his Gikuyu language to be the medium of his fiction writing because he was “writing at a time when vernacular languages [were] challenging the hegemony of the official languages of the former imperial powers.”²⁵¹ Gatuiria, for instance, the proponent of the so-called populist discourse, has always been ashamed of mixing English words with his native Gikuyu in spite of his attempts not to do so (p. 56) ,and further sees that “slavery of language is slavery of the mind and nothing to be proud of” (p. 56). Thus, Gatuiria’s view about language coincides with the authorial view; a view that is staunchly defended in his seminal work *Decolonizing the Mind*, in which he sees that promoting the national languages must be a milestone in the whole process of decolonising the African mind from the imperial thought, as we saw before.

Stated differently, the “non-Anglicised” Ngugi, as he dropped his Christian name James, repudiates the view that his African language is a substratum of English. The English Language, as it is made clear in this novel, is an instrument used by the international capitalists and their local underdogs to assert their power and hegemony. For example, Kihaahu wa Gatheeca, one of the contestants in the cave, appears to be proud of the fact that his children “speak English through their nose, exactly like the people born and brought up in England” (p. 109) and that they speak Gikuyu and Kiswahili “as if they were Italian priests newly arrived from Rome” (p. 110). For Kihaahu wa Gatheeca, then, speaking the “prestigious”, not to say “sacred”, English language fluently is a sign of social nobility in the post-independence African nation.

²⁴⁸ Georg M. Gugelberger. “Marxist Literary Debates and their Continuity in African Literary Criticism”. Ed. Georg M. Gugelberger. *Marxism and African Literature*. Africa World Press, 1987, p. 3.

²⁴⁹ James Derek. “Mugo and the Silence of Oppression”. Ed. Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1995, p. 46.

²⁵⁰ James Stephen Robson. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Fight against Colonialism and Neocolonialism: An Exploration of the Theme of Betrayal*. Unpublished Master of Arts Dissertation, 1987, p. 17.

²⁵¹ James Derek, op. cit., p. 50.

Besides calling into question the belief, held by other African writers such as Chinua Achebe, that the literature of decolonisation in Africa can be produced in the languages of the imperial countries,²⁵² Ngugi's decision to write the original version of *DOC* in his native Gikuyu has clear didactic purposes. Centrally, he tries to reconnect himself with the peasants and the urban workers, or, as he succinctly says, it is part of his attempt to appropriate the novel for the working masses and the peasants with "Kikuyu reading competence," because, while mastering their mother tongue or their "local" language, most of them are incompetent in English even if it has recently been "globalised."

Apart from the native language, the oral traditions, which constitute a great bulk of Africans' cultural heritage, have also been utilised by the writer especially in his latest production. The precolonial African culture was exclusively oral. For this reason Africa is sometimes described as "the oral continent par excellence."²⁵³ In fact, the oral tradition is an integral ingredient of traditional African culture, and it seems that it continues to be as important in the emergent modern culture of the Africans in the historical phase of post-colonialism, which is threatened by the globalisation forces. This confirms Liz Gunner's statement that "in an era of globalisation, orality has not disappeared but has often adapted in its many different forms to become the vehicle for the expression of the fears and hopes of new generations of Africans."²⁵⁴ This can in part explain why Ngugi grafts the oral literary traditions onto his novel. Thus, Ngugi's move from "Euro-African novel" to "African novel" is "not a literary fad" or a means to exoticise African literature, even though, as Supriya Nair notes, Ngugi "alerts us to the possibility of an unreflected return to the oral sources of folklore and to a romanticized notion of the folklore as an authentic source of literary expression or political activism."²⁵⁵ Accordingly, Ngugi's politics of indigenisation in this narrative should not be understood simply as a "kind of spiritual homecoming."

In fact, Ngugi's intertextual recourse to the indigenous traditions solidifies the assumption made by Abiola Irele that "the recourse to certain modes of African thought and expression [is] made to serve as a distinguishing factor that differentiates this literature from the 'mainstream' European traditions to which they are related by languages and consequently by

²⁵² For James Derek, to be "deprived of the African language the African writer is deracinated and decultured" (op. cit., p. 46), and hence, as he would further argue, the search for people's identity cannot take place in foreign languages.

²⁵³ Liz Gunner. "Africa and Orality". Ed. F. Abiola Irele & Simon Gikandi. Gikandi. *Cambridge Companion to African and Caribbean Literature*. Volume 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 11

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁵⁵ Supriya Nair. "Creolization, Orality, and Nation Language in the Caribbean". Ed. Henry Shwarz & Sangeeta Ray. *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 244.

forms.”²⁵⁶ As a result, DOC can be seen to be similar to Achebe’s archetypal novel *Things Fall Apart* in its attempt to assert in some sense the aesthetic autonomy of African literature, and more prominently, to reinforce the politics of self-representation. However, since he is most often associated with political consciousness, Ngugi’s use of orality in DOC cannot be viewed simply as a mere attempt to adapt the African imagination to the new realities, but also, and more crucially, as a form of militancy, social protest and political resistance.

No doubt, Ngugi’s borrowing from the people’s oral cultural forms marks a new way of fiction writing dominated by the so-called “return to the source”. Ngugi in his *Decolonizing the Mind* spells out the need of the Kenyan writers to return to their indigenous sources. As far as this point is concerned, he declares that

*Kenyan writers have no alternative but to return to their roots: return to the sources of their being in the rhythms of life and speech and languages of the Kenyan masses if they are to raise the great challenge of recreating in their poems, plays and novels the epic grandeur of that history.*²⁵⁷

But it seems that there is more than recreating the epic grandeur of the pre-contact communal past when he peppers DOC with plenty of elements derived from the pre-colonial Gikuyu oral culture. Arguably, Ngugi does more than write a truly original and authentic work when he indigenises the novel; his major aim is to popularise the novel for the illiterate masses or to attract the attention of the native readers, whose culture is still “oral” and who are mostly unfamiliar with the literate tradition of the West. The process of moulding and domesticating the African novel by the use of the oral discourse is therefore chiefly intended to achieve ideological explicitness. The “domesticated” novel will be more easily received by the popular masses as it addresses them in particular, and here lies the “social” or “political” role of the novel in the post-independence neocolonised African world. The importance of the popular oral discourse in his latest novels is stressed by him as he explicitly declares that the committed African writer “has no choice but that of aligning himself with the people...their economic, political and cultural struggle for survival...*to rediscover the real language of struggle in the actions and speeches of the people, learn from their great heritage in orature; and above all, learn from their great optimism and faith in the capacity of human beings to remake their world and renew themselves.*”²⁵⁸ .

This being so, we can tentatively assume that orality can be an instrument of combat. Avowedly, just as the written literature may have a vital social function in countries where the

²⁵⁶ Abiola Irele. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. London: Heinemann, 1981, p. 46.

²⁵⁷ Ngugi, W. T. *Decolonizing the Mind*. London: James Currey, 1986, p. 73.

²⁵⁸ Quoted in James Stephen Robson, 2007, op. cit., p. 26. (Emphasis Mine).

rate of literacy is very high, so may oral literature in the countries where the number of illiterate people is very significant. In addition, oral culture was undeniably employed as a form of resistance to the colonial domination, and hence it could be employed at the present moment as a reaction to the neocolonial hegemony. A. Mazrui and L. Mphande argue for the overriding significance of oral Gikuyu rhetorical forms in Ngugi's later writings (post-*Petals of Blood* literary output) when they clearly state that "Ngugi came to discover the wider dimensions of orality and *its utilitarian potential as an instrument of combat* which ultimately led him to accord orality a different kind of treatment altogether with his writings after *Petals of Blood*."²⁵⁹

Any observer of Ngugi's literary development throughout his career may note that the function of the oral cultural expression in his works before DOC is different from and assumedly "less" important than that of his novels from DOC onward. This does not mean that the oral expressions in his novels prior to DOC had little more than an ornamental function -far from it. Rather, this could simply mean that their importance has dramatically increased in his more recent novelistic writings. Indeed, Mazrui and Mphande attest to this fact in the following statement:

*There is a transformation of Ngugi's use of orality in his writings. In the early works [that is those produced before DOC] orality is treated as pristine, static and unchangeable phenomenon, employed within the Western concept of the novel, and necessitating in Fanon's words a "borrowed aesthetics" for its interpretation. In his later works however Ngugi uses orality as a dynamic vibrant reality, and as part of the called response pattern that brings out its collective power. As his own creative development leads him to redefine the audience, Ngugi modifies his use of the most identifiable oral forms by enlivening them to maximise their revolutionary potential.*²⁶⁰

It is worth distinguishing at this moment the static use of the oral indigenous literary forms from the dynamic one. Indeed, there is good reason, albeit with some reservations, to assume that the writer's use of the indigenous oral literature in the pre- *Devil on the Cross* novels was static.

The purpose of the static use of the elements of the oral tradition is to show that the Kenyan people have a literature, however oral, of their own. The dynamic utilisation of oral literature, on the other hand, purports to accord a vital social function to it. This assumption brings us to the last sentence of the quoted passage above. As argued by Mazrui and Mphande, orality has been adapted by the author to achieve some revolutionary purposes. This argument carries the

²⁵⁹ Quoted from Mazrui and Mphande in Derek Wright. (ed.). *Critical Essays on Ngugi*. 2000, emphasis added.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

logical implication that Ngugi has tried to make of oral culture a preliminary step towards the development of revolutionary culture. For instance, many folk stories and songs, among other aspects of the Gikuyu culture, usually associated with cultural meetings of the Gikuyu people in the past, are now being evoked to galvanise the social consciousness of the deprived masses. In addition, one could see that the features of oral tradition that Ngugi employs in his oeuvre “are not merely decorative: they are used to illuminate certain key concepts in the novel or appear at the climactic moments to lend finality to an argument.”²⁶¹ Note for instance that Muturi, a socialist leader in the story, makes an important reference to the *Itwika* cultural festival when he says that “the Iregi generation is still alive and rebellious” (p. 81). It must be pointed out that *Itwika* cultural festival is no more than a cultural meeting previously organised by the Gikuyu people each twenty-five years to celebrate the transfer of power from the old generation to the next one, and the new generation is referred to as the Iregi rebels, and hence Muturi would say that he is determined to transfer power from the presently dominant class to the people. The notion of the Iregi rebels is also evoked in the narrative when Wariinga is described as the “daughter of the Iregi rebels” (p. 222), when she moves from the stage of “pre-political” period of despair and self-denial to the “political stage” of self-assertion and becomes a self-employed mechanic in the meantime.

So this supports the argument that the cultural aspects of the ancestral past of the Gikuyu are used in this narrative to communicate political ideas, which is similarly observed by Even Mwangi who writes that Ngugi sometimes changes “popular cultural expressions such as oral narratives to underline the possibilities of a united struggle against capitalism and foreign domination of African cultures and economies.”²⁶² Similarly, in their displaying of the “power of speech,” to use Mudimbe’s phrase, and its spiritual signification in the African context, Cloete and Madadzhe claim that the oral popular African culture can play a significant political role in the so-called “hegemonised” African postcolonial world.²⁶³

No less importantly, some traditional songs and folk stories have been used to serve the revolutionary goals of the whole narrative. The Mau Mau freedom combatants used folk

²⁶¹ M. J. Cloete and R. N Madadzhe. “Bury my Bones But Keep My Words: the Interface Between Oral Tradition and Contemporary African Writing”. *Literator*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Aug 2004, p. 42.
<http://www.unorth.ac.za>

²⁶² Even Mwangi. “Gender, Unreliable Oral narrator, and the Untranslated Preface in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 38, No. 4, Winter 2007, p. 30.

²⁶³ Also, James Ogude makes the following observation: Ngugi “uses oral tradition to characterise a form that is best understood as a functional discourse which can legitimate or subvert the existing power structures of society. Thus, for Ngugi, oral tradition is not something quiescent, but an expression of a dynamic culture embedded in the past and present experiences of a community. It is inextricably bound to popular culture.” James Ogude. 1999, op. cit., p. 93.

songs to rally the people against the British colonial rule. The songs are still used by the oppressed people in the post-independence era. A close reading of the novel suggests that “songs have become a medium in their own right without any need for explanation or justification (without any preamble or preparation). The singers (Muturi and Wangari) have become a kind of *Brechtian Chorus* allowing us to stand back and contemplate the issues, as satire will also do in its different way.”²⁶⁴ Thus, popular songs in the narrative are utilised fundamentally to fulfil social and educational purposes and are used by the main characters for their psychological well-being, among other reasons.

Quite importantly, a lot has recently been said about the avowed relationship between Ngugi’s use of oral forms and traditional narrative techniques and his ideological intentions and didactic purposes. For instance, Abiola Irele aptly observes that “Ngugi has attempted in *Devil on the Cross* a direct representation of the oral mode in the written medium; the ideological intention of the novel has determined its allegorical and didactic character in the manner of the traditional folktale or moral fable, hence his deliberate recourse to the narrative conventions associated with that genre.”²⁶⁵ It has also been recently argued that the implied audience of Ngugi’s post-*Petals of Blood* novels is “aural” and hence those novels are not chiefly meant to be read because his intended audience is very familiar with the oral discourse upon which the whole narratives are based.²⁶⁶

For Ngugi, indeed, orality has twin goals in this narrative: on the one hand, it asserts the native culture of the people (it then has the function of “literature of témoignage”, in Kenneth Harrow’s term), and on the other, and perhaps more crucially, it is a form of social protest (characteristic of “literature of revolt”, to use Harrow’s term once again²⁶⁷) because it is a form that can easily be understood by his intended audience.

This novel is also noted, as far as the aesthetic ideology of the writer is concerned, for its apparent use of biblical imagery and references, and the title of the novel is the clear indication of this observation. In fact, as Muchugu Kuru interestingly notes, the Bible and oral culture “are not strange bedfellows” because, quoting Paul Soukup, “the Bible emerged from oral cultures whose narratives and sayings were written down as that new technology became

²⁶⁴ Cook & Okenimkpe, op. cit., p. 128. Emphasis added. Bertold Brecht is best noted for his use of songs to comment on a set of political, economic and cultural issues in his Socialist plays.

²⁶⁵ F. Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 12.

²⁶⁶ Muchugu Kuru. “Oral Features in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*. *The Nairobi Journal of Literature*, March 2005, pp. 31-40.

²⁶⁷ Kenneth W. Harrow. *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of Tradition*. London: James Currey, 1994, p. x.

available.”²⁶⁸ Moreover, as Cook and Okenimkpe aptly state, Ngugi feels the need to employ in this novel biblical symbols because biblical mythology forms “the most complex mythology generally known to his own and other East African societies.”²⁶⁹ Like the Gikuyu oral culture, biblical mythology serves as a means of making the political message of the novel more comprehensible to the masses. Muturi, the best representative of the socialist movement in the story –a movement which is usually said to be firmly rooted in the Western philosophy of Marxism- uses a very strong religious language in his description and social analysis of the deplorable status quo. He, for instance, relies heavily on such biblical terms as Heaven and Hell in his speechifying. Furthermore, he sees that the lower working classes are people with good hearts and the rich capitalists people with evil hearts (p. 53). Basically, he views class struggle as an instance of the eternal battle between good and evil. In this respect, Cook and Okenimkpe aptly contend that “Ngugi finds a common ground between socialist, humanist ethics and Christian ethics.”²⁷⁰

Significantly, Ngugi masterfully blends elements from European Christianity with characteristics of Gikuyu oral traditions by his staging of scenes such as the Devil’s Feast. Fundamentally, the image of the Devil embodies evil in the biblical narrative and simultaneously echoes the people’s belief in witchcraft in Gikuyu mythology. Moreover, the Devil is an image that stands for “neocolonialism as a new form of witchcraft that makes it possible for a country’s life-blood to be pumped away by foreigners through their local surrogates, namely the corrupt elite in the post-colonial one-party democracy.”²⁷¹ Thus, it is sometimes virtually impossible to draw a dividing line between Biblical mythology and Gikuyu mythology as the folk culture of the peasants and workers in the post-independence epoch is to a large extent a blend of both.

a) The Griot Narrator/ The Gicaandi Player

Crucial to the “literarisation” of the native aesthetics in this narrative is the use of a traditional artist as the principal narrator of the story. Right from the outset, Ngugi announces that he is the “Prophet of justice and the *Gicaandi* Player” (p. 7). Ngugi elsewhere defines “Gicaandi” as “a complex form of poetry among the Gikuyu people.”²⁷² Accordingly, DOC is noted for its use of forms that are very familiar to the intended worker/peasant readership. The Gicaandi

²⁶⁸ Muchugu Kuru, op. cit., p. 33.

²⁶⁹ Cook & Okenimkpe, op. cit., p. 130.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

²⁷¹ M. J. Cloete and R. N Madadzhe. “Bury my Bones But Keep My Words: the Interface Between Oral Tradition and Contemporary African Writing.” *Literator*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Aug 2004, p. 36. <http://www.unorth.ac.za>

²⁷² Ngugi wa Thiong’o. *Talking with African Writers: Interviews by Jane Wilkinson*. London: James Currey, 1990, p. 136.

player, in the traditional Gikuyu customs, is the poet and the singer likened to a prophet because he addresses their daily issues such as the land, morality and social goodness. For the author, the Gicaandi Player functions like a prophet in his society as he warns them against the Devil who “would lead [the people] into the blindness of the heart and the deafness of the mind” (p. 7). Sometimes, the Gicaandi player is detached from daily life, i.e. not directly involved in the quotidian social struggle. But Ngugi in one of his interviews states that “being detached in order to see better is not the same as pessimism.”²⁷³ The use of the “griot” narrator (or the “oral person” as Kuru names it) thus reinforces the power of the oral tradition in the whole narrative and affirms his own statement that the African writer “would use anything and everything [he] had ever learnt about the craft of the fiction; allegory, parable, satire, narrative description, reminiscence, flashback, interior black, stream of consciousness, dialogue, drama- provided it came naturally in the development of character, theme and story.”²⁷⁴ This simply implies that what matters most for Ngugi is the political message of opposition and how it can be successfully conveyed to his intended readers.

The Gicaandi player is the principal narrator, and thus this clearly shows that the role of Gicaandi poet cannot be underestimated in contemporary Kenya. He can perform a vital function as he used to do in the past. In addition, using the Gicaandi performer as the frame narrator of the story indigenises the novel genre because it makes it look more an old folk story than a novel that has developed in the West.

However, Even Mwangi firmly contends that the “Gicaandi” player is an unreliable teller of the story as he writes that “contrary to most readings of the novel, the ‘Gicaandi’ oral artist who frames the story is unreliable, and the text provokes the reader to see his presentation as incomplete and contradictory.”²⁷⁵ He backs his position by arguing that the whole novel is mainly about the various experiences of the female character, Jacinta Wariinga, and her struggle against the capitalist forces of New Kenya, and yet the Gicaandi poet is a male artist. James Phelan and Peter Robinowiz also argue that the tansgendered representation, as they call it, is not reliable in case of talking about feminist or sexual issues.²⁷⁶ But such arguments are to be questioned because, as one could say, there is nothing wrong or misleading in using a male narrator to tell the story whose protagonist is female. Secondly, without denying the

²⁷³ Ngugi wa Thiong’o. “An Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong’o”. Ed. Michael Alexander Pozo. St. John University, May 2004. <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/discourseov.html>.

²⁷⁴ Ngugi, wa Thiong’o. *Detained: A Writer Prison Diary*. London: Heinemann, 1981, p. 8.

²⁷⁵ Even Mwangi. “Gender, Unreliable Oral Narration, and the Untranslated Preface in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 38, N^o. 4, Spring 2007, p. 28.

²⁷⁶ James Phelan & Peter J. Rabinowiz. *Theory and Interpretation of Narrative*. Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006, p. 4.

feminist leanings of this novel, the feminist and sexual issues are not the most important concerns of the writer in this novel.

Even Mwangi states further that the role of the Gicaandi artist as the frame narrator of the different salient events diminishes (if not finally disappears) as the story progresses. Wariinga then begins to assume the role of the principal narrator of the story. In this vein, he writes that

As the story progresses, the 'Gicaandi Player' withdraws from the narrative and the characters start focalising the events as they experience them. Consequently, Wariinga becomes the heart of the narration either as the narrator or as part of a critical audience of other characters' narratives. Experiences are told from her perspective, and her voice loosely tagged to the 'Gicaandi Player'.²⁷⁷

Irrespective of whether the Gicaandi performer is reliable or not, his role is very important because he tells us a story that is “disgraceful” and “shameful” (p. 7). Ngugi’s introduction of the griot traditional narrator in this work is not intended primarily to increase the reliability of his narration, but just to make us aware of the fact that the role of the traditional storytellers did not cease to be important in the modern age. The function of “the oral poets and raconteurs,” it could further be argued, and as clearly shown in the novel, is to give “the voice to the voiceless, speech to the silenced and hope to the desperate.”²⁷⁸ He, in other words, shows that the Gicaandi poet can play a role similar to that of the precolonial (and colonial) past. Furthermore, the use of the traditional Gicaandi artist as the teller of the story gives this story a moralising tone. The whole story thus functions as a moral fable and the capitalists are in fact more often than not criticised on purely moral grounds. For this reason, the story is said to expose shame and disgrace. Therefore, the use of the traditional artist has the main purpose of restoring the moral integrity and the cultural autonomy of the Africans in the present temporality of decolonisation.

Ngugi is thus to be “praised for graphically reconnecting the written word with the oral, and insists that the binary split between them in modern literary tradition misrepresents the intimacy between the oral and the scribal,”²⁷⁹ and hence the resulting novel testifies unquestionably to the author’s skilful combination of the traditional aesthetics and “borrowed aesthetics” (and indeed both can be used in his poetics and politics of decolonisation). This novel is, then, all too simply, a hybrid product: a blend of the Western literary genre and African popular culture. This accounts for the fact that it has been sometimes described as an

²⁷⁷ Even Mwangi, op. cit., p. 36.

²⁷⁸ M. J. Cloete and R. N Madadzhe, op. cit., p. 43.

²⁷⁹ Abiola Irele, 2001, op. cit., p. 244.

“unusual work”²⁸⁰. This can remind us too of Bakhtin’s controversial remark that he once made about the novel that it has no strict formal stylization and that it is still open to further development. Therefore, it could safely be assumed that Ngugi has adapted the novel genre to fit a purely African context. But completely decolonising the novel form is nearly impossible because, as Jacqueline Bardolph notes, the novel is a form of art linked entirely to a certain phase of the occidental culture and the most difficult to be decolonised.²⁸¹ The “best” thing Ngugi can do in his “Africanization” of the novel is the use of oral tradition in it, which can be regarded as a marker of his literary and hence political project of decolonisation. Moving the centre of narration and discourse from Europe to Africa does not necessarily mean a total rejection of the European forms by the African writers in their response to the European discourse of domination but, for Ngugi, attacking the political implications of the Eurocentric discourse using whatever forms available is what matters most.

b) Stylistic Simplification

The aesthetic ideology of Ngugi in this novel is saliently marked by his tendency towards simplicity in style. *DOC*, it must be stressed, is overtly a didactic work. For the propagandist purpose of educating the Kenyan masses (the peasants and the workers in particular) concerning the evils of neocolonial capitalism, direct references are made to the imperialists as in the following passage:

You, lord, and master, member of the white race, I have discovered your tricks. I have also discovered your real name, Imperialist, that is your real name, and you are a cruel master: why? Because you reap where you have never sown. You grab things over which you have never shed any sweat. (pp. 84-5)

Notice that the above excerpt criticises imperialism very straightforwardly, that is, there is no resort to complex symbolism (such as in *Petals of Blood*) and sophisticated language. Ngugi’s recourse to less complex language and style is clearly meant to ensure ideological clarity or explicitness in “the discourse of the novel,” to quote Bakhtin.

Moreover, Ngugi spares no pain in exposing the “real” evil intentions of the neo-imperialists, whose actors openly exhibit their shameless wiles and tricks and who deny publicly any benevolent intention. Before all, the novel labels them thieves and robbers. Thus, Ngugi wants to make his message as clear as possible to the masses. Capitalism is described simply as unabashed modern corruption, theft and robbery. What is usually defined,

²⁸⁰ The label “unusual work” in the African literary context refers usually to the work that it is neither totally traditional nor purely western in form, and such “unusual forms” assert the literary independence, so to speak, of modern African writings.

²⁸¹ Quoted in Manuel, Bengoéchéa, Delphine Chaune, Claire Riffard & Katrina Spiropoulou. *Discours et écritures dans les sociétés en mutation*. L’Harmattan, 2007, p. 23.

especially in the neoliberal ideology, which gave another boost to capitalism in the late seventies, as the unrestricted market logic freed from any governmental constraints,²⁸² which is a “euphemised” Western discourse of domination, is simply seen by the author as the “Uhuru of theft” and the “freedom to rob”. In other words, Ngugi tries in this novel to simplify to the peasants and the workers the whole enterprise of global capitalism led by the monstrous Western powers that held and still hold sway of the politico-economic set-up in the post-Uhuru epoch. Thus, because of its fairly clear criticism of the social and political situation of neocolonial Kenya, this novel can be regarded as a “political pamphlet.”

What is also remarkable about the novel is that it has a very simple and linear plot and therefore it is not as complex as *POB* or *A Grain of Wheat*. The latter works are marked for their complex plots and the complicated use of the narrative techniques. *DOC*, on the other hand, does not claim to have such artistic complexity. Consequently, it could be safely stated that Ngugi privileges content over form in *DOC*. But this conclusion does not reflect truly Ngugi’s intentions by writing this “prison novel”, as it is sometimes labelled. Although Ngugi points out that the content is of utmost importance because it “forces [the people] to take sides” and that it “is the arbiter of form,”²⁸³ the novel’s form cannot be lost sight of as it brings to light the political intentions of the author. The focus on meaning or content in the novel does not mean neglecting its form, because simplifying the latter, according to Eileen Julien, is primarily meant to teach the people the writer’s political ideology, and as far as this point is concerned she writes that

Devil on the Cross proposes different approaches to the novel...Ngugi refers to his novel as a parable because **he intends it as a simple story to illustrate a lesson.** More precisely, *Devil* is a fable of economic and political greed. Its thieves are not the animal characters that readers usually associate with the tradition of fable but one-dimensional beings...*Devil* is a fantastic narrative that continually blurs the line between the real and the surreal.²⁸⁴

More significantly, *DOC* establishes a strong connection between the art and the intended audience. Ngugi announced clearly in the early eighties that he needed to redefine his audience and that *DOC*, as we see now, is a clear example of such redefinition. First, it was originally written in Gikuyu, the language of the poor classes. Second, it uses aspects of the oral cultural traditions with which they are very familiar. Last but not least, it is not a very

²⁸² For a full analysis of the neoliberal ideologies (contentedly based on the unfettered role of the markets) see Joseph Shglitz. *Globalization and its Discontents*. London: The Penguin Group, 2002.

²⁸³ Ngugi, wa Thiong’o. *Decolonizing the Mind*. London: James Currey, 1986, p. 78.

²⁸⁴ Eileen Julien, quoted in Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1995, p. 202. (emphasis added)

complex story. All these steps that Ngugi has lately taken have one general aim which is “developing and politicising a mass audience.”²⁸⁵

It might now be appropriate to shed light, however briefly, on DOC’s use of images, which were once fashionably used by the colonial discourse proponents in their racist works of misrepresenting the “Other”, that attack in some direct manner the agents of the neo-imperialist system.²⁸⁶ The process of countering the imperialist discourse, then, can be carried out by using the very literary tropes that were once used by the Eurocentric writers in their support of their derogatory attitudes towards the non-European races generally and the black race particularly. For instance, in this novel, the ruthless capitalists are seen as “vampires” and “suckers of human blood” and they are too described as cannibals. This echoes Brecht’s use of “cannibalism as a metaphor for the commodification of human beings under capitalism.”²⁸⁷ This runs counter to the dominant Western colonial discourse that sees the African natives as man eaters. Also, the white tourists are viewed as being rapists (which is too set in opposition to the colonialist view of blacks as very low people with strong animal drives). To take another example, DOC refers to white imperialism as the Devil. This could be understood as part of the reverse discourse because crucial to Eurocentrism is the image of the Other as negative and “diabolized”.

In this section, we have explained how Ngugi’s aesthetic ideology in this narrative (its form) helps us define him as a “propagandist”, all too simply. The coming section of this chapter will explore the significance of cultural self-representation for Ngugi’s discourse of decolonisation, which most often claims to be over-determined by political economy.

2- Cultural Self-Appraisal: Between Essentialist and Socialist Perspectives

What follows is the examination of the extent to which the repudiation of the “Afro-English” culture can be at the forefront of the anti-neocolonial struggle. It thus attempts to stress that there is no necessary acute opposition between “back-to-the-source” discourse, which is an indispensable part of his people’s cultural identity formation, and the evident socialist ideologies of the writer in his DOC. This “return-to-the source” ideology is best discussed in relation to Wariinga’s boyfriend’s laudable attempt at a rehabilitation of oral ancestral culture. Indeed, his “overemphasis on [African native] culture”²⁸⁸ is undoubtedly a sharp critique of

²⁸⁵ Gareth Griffins. *African Literature in English: East and West*. London: Longman, 2000, p. 127.

²⁸⁶ Clara A. B. Joseph. “Nation Because of Differences”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Fall 2001, pp. 57-70. She argues that the anti-colonialist writings can use the signifiers commonly used in the colonialist intellectual production but with a different signifieds or different referents.

²⁸⁷ Keith Booker. *The African Novel in English*. London: James Currey, 1998, p. 178.

²⁸⁸ Brenda Cooper, 1992, op. cit., p. 56.

how Western cultural imperialism continues to “exoticise” African culture. Due mainly to his lack of aggressive militancy, Gatuiria can hardly be classified as a real anti-neocolonialist figure, as will be discussed subsequently.

Gatuiria’s politics of cultural self-representation is based on his firm conviction that the folk cultural traditions should form the basis for the creation of the post-independence nation, and this view is expressed through the voice of the old man from the Bahati village in Nakuru, who clearly said that

Literature is a nation’s treasure! Literature is the honey of the nation’s soul, preserved for her children to taste forever, a little at a time! Gikuyu said that he who has put something aside never goes hungry. Gikuyu also said “A nation that has cast away its literature is a nation that has sold its soul and has been left to mere shell. (p. 62)

The old man was indeed the mentor of Gatuiria because his desire to compose “truly national music for Kenya” (p. 60) became very clear after his meeting with him. Following the words of this local sage, Gatuiria seeks then a kind of spiritual homecoming since he undertakes a curative pilgrimage into his society’s past. Unlike Munira, then, Gatuiria does not seek salvation in Christianity in the postcolonial Christianized world of Kenya.

So Gatuiria raises a very contentious debate in post-independent Kenya about culture, and its relation to the rising Westernised global culture. It has indeed been pointed out that “the central problem of today’s global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation.”²⁸⁹ Certainly, Gatuiria is vehemently opposed to the sweeping and threatening process of Western cultural homogenisation. Thus, from a purely cultural perspective, Gatuiria’s populist ideology, as it were, is identified with the overall anti-globalisation discourse that the entire novel purports to generate. Thus, Gatuiria’s idea of national liberation struggle is identified with what Neil Larson sees as “the re-essentialisation or even the de-europeanisation of national space and imaginary.”²⁹⁰

The aim of Gatuiria’s arduous task of composing national music is to narrate the story of one’s nation, as he puts it persuasively. In addition, his self-appointed cultural task counters clearly the colonial beliefs of history-less and cultureless precoloniality and imperial practices because, as Fanon proclaims, colonialism “turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.”²⁹¹ Therefore, it is no coincidence that Ngugi uses a

²⁸⁹ Aijun Appadurai. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”. Ed. Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisma, 1994, p. 328.

²⁹⁰ Neil Larson. “Imperialism, Colonialism, Postcolonialism” Ed. Henry Schwarz & Sangeeta Ray, 2000, p. 34.

²⁹¹ Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, p. 210.

“native poet”, Gatuiria, in his DOC to try and heal the wounded cultural identity of his community.

Ngugi’s critical project in his post-*A Grain of Wheat* writing is mainly to “provincialise” the West, to use Dipesh Chakrabarty’s term, by “relativising” the universality of its thought.²⁹² This echoes Patrick Williams’ view that Ngugi’s assessment of universality is negative,²⁹³ because the idea of Universality of the Western culture reinforces the idea of Africa as the “Other”, and it has indeed recently rationalised the monopoly of global capitalism. Gatuiria indeed defines Western imperialism from a purely cultural point of view. In his sharp criticism of the growing phenomenon of cultural imperialism, he tells the other passengers during the overnight journey in Robin Mwaura’s *matatu* that

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 the mouths of their national affairs, forgetting the saying: Only he who lives in the wilderness knows what is like. Hence a foreigner can never become the true guide of another people.

(p. 58)

Similarly, Gatuiria, while attacking relentlessly Western cultural imperialism, does not appear to fall into the trap of another kind of cultural imperialism, as defined by Ngugi wa Thiong’o elsewhere since he argues that “it is important that we understand that cultural imperialism in its era of neo-colonialism is a more dangerous cancer because it takes new subtle forms and can hide even under the cloak of militant African nationalism, the cry for dead authentic cultural symbolism and other native racist self assertive banners.”²⁹⁴ In short, Gatuiria is not a fanatic fundamentalist, even though he is an African nationalist as he refuses to look upon his people’s past as a shameful episode, as much Western thought has depicted it. He seeks, therefore, to glorify African history and culture as being great in itself, and second to none.

It must be argued that Gatuiria has what has to be known as “nativist nostalgia”, which can be best shown in his bitter lamentation of the gradual loss of his people’s native languages and native cultural traditions. For instance, he mournfully says to his listeners in the overnight journey: “Where are our national languages now? Where are the books written in the alphabets of our national languages? Where is our literature now? Where is the wisdom and knowledge of our fathers? Where is the philosophy of our fathers now? The centres of wisdom that used to guard the entrance to our homestead have been destroyed; the fires have

²⁹²Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

²⁹³ Patrick Williams. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 167.

²⁹⁴ Ngugi, wa Thiong’o. *Writers in Politics* London: Heinemann, 1981, p. 25.

been allowed to die” (p. 58). It is indeed worth noting that he is the only one in the *matatu* who raises seriously the issue of culture and tradition in newly independent Kenya, the major debate before his talk has been mainly about the deteriorating socio-economic condition of the people and its major causes.

The issue that Gatuiria raises here leads us to the discussion of the conflict between the so-called “residual” traditional culture and the “emergent” modern culture, and this in turn brings to the fore what has come to be known in the postcolonial theory as “the hybridised postcolonial culture.” Interestingly, hybridity is defined by Bill Ashcroft et al. as “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation.” In fact, culture in the postcolonial African context is, according to this definition, hybrid, and hence one might wonder here whether hybridity is a positive sign (a marker of the dynamic development of African culture) or a negative sign (a marker of cultural impurity). Understandably, David Theo Goldberg asks the following important question: “is hybridity transgressive because it runs counter to the claim to the virtues of racial purity, of racial aptness and the imperative of racialized divides?”²⁹⁵ But one can hardly object to cultural hybridity because of the complexity of modern life in post-colonial Africa, to say nothing about the obvious fact that no culture has ever been found to be “pure”. Ngugi indeed upholds a syncretic view of postcolonial African culture that privileges the harmonisation of two alterities: Western modernity and autochthonous African culture. His “hybrid” novel, as we saw before (a blend of European forms and African indigenous forms) may attest to his view. He then calls for what has come to be called “arrested modernity”²⁹⁶ as he sees that the folk culture must not therefore be totally lost in the midst of the global modern changes.

Still during the overnight journey from the city to the country (which might be seen as the reverse process of Ilmorog’s group’s march in POB from the country to the city), Gatuiria narrates three old folk stories that he has learned from the old sage, who is one of the custodians of traditional culture in the recently freed Kenyan nation and his surrogate mediator to the ancestral wisdom, in his attempt to give importance to the almost lost folk culture. However, what should be observed here is that in these folk stories the ruthless exploiters of the sweat of the people are either ogres or evil spirits, and hence the sharp-witted listener can quickly make a comparison between those old fables and the post-colonial condition of his country. This idea is also hinted at by the local sage, who tells Gatuiria that

²⁹⁵ David Theo Goldberg. “Heterogeneity and Hybridity: Colonial legacy, Postcolonial Heresy”. Ed. Henry Schwarz & Sangeeta Ray. *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 72.

²⁹⁶ Dieter Rienmenschneider & Frank Schulze-Engler. *African Literature in the Eighties*. London: Routledge, 1993, p. 21.

“all stories are old. All stories are new. All stories belong to tomorrow. And stories are not about ogres or about animals or about men. All stories are about human beings” (p. 62). The words of the sage entail that the stories about ogres or animals must have relevance to men’s lives. This means that such stories could serve the class struggle that is preached by Muturi through the use of Christian doctrines. His “quasi-folk narrative” shows clearly that we can find relevance between the folk stories and the present-day living situation. Simply put, the popular oral stories are not totally irrelevant to modern Kenyans. Interestingly, then, the storytelling is prevalent in the narrative since every one of the passengers tells the story of his personal life. The novel can be regarded to be premised on the Yoruba adage that “all that we do today is narrative tomorrow” and thus, the words of the old sage provide us with the overriding poetics of the novel; the traditional stories can be useful in the modern period.²⁹⁷

a- Folk Culture as a Political Weapon of Freedom

Devil on the Cross shows thus that Ngugi subscribes completely to the view that “the idea of discursive monopoly should give way to self-determination and cultural dialogue.”²⁹⁸ Nonetheless, as is now commonly assumed, “decolonisation involves not only political sovereignty but also economic independence and cultural recovery.”²⁹⁹ While Muturi, Wangari and Wariinga try hard to regain their economic independence, Gatuiria is mostly concerned with cultural recuperation. Because most of the main characters have social concerns, it could be argued that Ngugi gives more importance to political and economic freedom than cultural liberation in his latest novels.³⁰⁰ But we still need to know the extent to which Ngugi’s repudiation of the rising “westernised” bourgeois culture in his independent country can be a political weapon in itself. In other words, what is the political role of folk culture? Can the cultural work of Gatuiria be politicised? Can it move from the literature of “témoignage” to the “literature of revolt” (to use Harrow’s distinction)? However, we could now safely assume that the novel rests solidly upon the assumption that the pursuit of cultural decolonisation must not take precedence over the fight for true political and economic freedoms.

²⁹⁷ Adeleke Adeeko. *Proverbs, Textuality, and Navitism*. Florida: Florida University Press, 1998, p. 100.

²⁹⁸ Robert Eric Livingston. “Discourses of Empire”. Ed. Abiola Irele & Simon Gikandi. *Cambridge Companion to African and Caribbean Literature*. Volume I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 259-260.

²⁹⁹ Si Abderrahmane Arab. *Politics and the Novel in Africa*. Algiers: OUP, 1982, p. 7

³⁰⁰ R.J. Jenkins. “Aid and Borrowed Tongues: Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*”. *The Columbian Journal of Literary Criticism*, pp. 7-36. <http://www.columbia.edu/english/cjlc>. Indeed, R. J. Jenkins contends that the most important concern of the writer is the economic domination of Africa by the Western capital and hence the political oppression, as he calls it, is the second major theme of the novel. Consequently, cultural domination must be the third major theme in this view.

Isidore Okpewho, in fact, argues that, because of his clear socialist slant, Ngugi “is in a good position to see that the meaningful forward march of a people may be impaired by a too-concentrated attention on stages of their growth that they have left well behind.”³⁰¹ Thus, the issue of culture must not be pressed too far in Ngugi’s fiction works, because the cultural past, it thus must be emphasised, to use S. A. Arab’s words, “cannot be a panacea for the ills of the present.”³⁰² But this is not to say that the issue of culture is not of paramount significance in Ngugi’s latest fictional production. At least, African culture has “been instrumental in arousing pride of race and nationalistic feelings through the exaltation of the mythical forebears and the extolling of tradition.”³⁰³ But culture must not be all in the present freedom struggle, and this is the worst mistake of Gaturia, as we shall see later. Ngugi, time and again, claims quite succinctly that cultural liberation must be the accompaniment of political and economic independence, and for this reason we can tentatively assume that Gaturia’s spiritual journey can stop at the comment of a form of escapism, not that there is anything wrong in Gaturia’s mammoth task of retrieving his ancestral culture.

Gaturia’s ideas are similar to Nkrumah’s position towards his native culture, as made clear below:

*Nkrumah, along with many other Africans, felt the need to go beyond political or economic freedom, to achieve as well an independence from the ethical and aesthetical standards of the West, to affirm age-old indigenous traditions, customs, and values in a modern world. It was a natural impulse, a desire to be rid from alien, colonial ways with their foreign educational, linguistic, artistic, and philosophical measurement, a desire to introduce an authentic African idiom into the mainstream of contemporary world civilisation.*³⁰⁴

Gaturia, thus, has clearly a “backward-looking view of independence,” which may stand in contrast to the writer’s “forward-looking” vision of independence. For the author, in other words, independence is not simply saving the African cultural past from the perversions committed by Western “arrogant” thought, but more crucially freeing the African people from Western power and domination, and this can perhaps explain why in his next novel, *Matigari*, the issue of native culture is not given the lion’s share, as will be discussed in due course.

That viewed, one can rightly argue that Gaturia’s role in the whole narrative is largely apolitical. He is not a socially committed figure in the story because his exclusive interest is the cultural revival of the folk Gikuyu music. He does not appear to be directly and politically

³⁰¹ Isidore Okpewho. *Myth in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 156.

³⁰² Si Abderrahmane Arab, op. cit., p. 73.

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁰⁴ July Robert Williams. *An African Voice: The Role of Humanities in African independence*. Duke University Press, 1987, p. 18.

involved in the anti-imperialist struggle. Perhaps his painstaking task of recreating the national music has solely artistic purposes. Even though Gatuiria does not use culture as a hypnotic means of appeasing the anger of the popular masses as, say, the MP, Nderi wa Riera does in POB, Ngugi attacks him later when he says that he is “a member of the despised class” and adds that he is part of

*petty bourgeois intellectuals at the university who hide ethnic chauvinism and their moral terror of progressive class politics behind masks of super-nationalism, and bury their inaction behind beer mugs and empty intellectualism about conditions being yet ripe for action. But at the same time they are scared of openly attacking peasants and workers. So they talk progressive and act conservative; they wear populist intellectual masks in order the better to attack any concrete case of worker-peasant anti-imperialist struggles.*³⁰⁵

So Gatuiria’s basic flaw is his political inaction. He is then most likely to be identified with the Sartrean concept of “false intellectual”, by virtue of his indecision whether or not to be involved in the socialist struggle. His self-appointed mission is unfortunately limited to cultural emancipation. It seems that his plea is less received by the poor masses than the call of Muturi, whose words are more convincing and hence more “subversive” than his own. Furthermore, for Ngugi, those who do not actively resist the current state of affairs are to be condemned. He repeatedly asserts that one is either for the ruling class that caters for Western imperialist interests or against it. That is why James Ogude contends that Ngugi fails in his realistic description of the postcolonial realities since he reduces the Kenyan people to two polarities: patriots and traitors.³⁰⁶ The very fact of not taking aggressive action against the traitors of the nation must not always be taken as an indication of one’s complicity with the despicable class of sell-outs. The Kenyan people cannot be all rebels à la Karega or à la Muturi.

Without undervaluing Gatuiria’s work, the writer seems in this novel to affirm Karega’s clearcut assumption that “China was saved, not by singers and poets telling of great past cultures, but the creative struggle of the workers for a better day today” (POB, p. 358). Indeed, the daunting present challenges “demand more than [cultural] self-definition and rhetorical reaffirmation,”³⁰⁷ and for this reason Muturi, the leader of the workers’ movement, who is mainly reminiscent of Karega, strongly states that the exploited workers and peasants “must fight against the culture of fear” (p. 205). He therefore calls for a culture of fight rather than a fight for culture. But this does mean that the present challenge of decolonisation has no

³⁰⁵ Ngugi, wa Thiong’o. *Detained*, op. cit., p. xxi.

³⁰⁶ James Ogude. *Ngugi’s Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. Pluto Press, 1999.

³⁰⁷ Chidi Amuta. *The Theory of African Literature*. London: Zed Books Ltd, 1989, p. 50.

cultural dimension, as it were. The struggle must be fought at different levels, one might rightly argue. The main characters of the story, notably Wariinga, Wangari, Muturi and Gatuiria, engage with the process of decolonisation, each in his own way, and they seem to complete each other. For this reason, those major characters “constitute a sort of collective protagonist.”³⁰⁸ Barbara Harlow notes, too, that the decolonisation struggle must be motivated by joining two ideologies, which are indeed complementary to one another: the ideology of Mau Mau resistance represented by Wangari and the ideology of cultural retrieval of precolonial Gikuyu poetry represented by its exponent, Gatuiria, and points out also that this is made clear in the novel, as it combines what she calls Mau Mau symbolism with Gikuyu poetry³⁰⁹. Therefore, for Barbara Harlow, the past is constructed in the narrative “in such a way that it comes again to play a role in the construction of a new Kenya”.³¹⁰ So the past, whether of the anti-colonial struggle and of the pre-colonial period, can be used as a starting point for the present struggles.

This novel makes it clear that Marxism, which is the philosophical underpinning of the masses’ present moment’s liberation struggle, can go hand in hand with the cultural nationalism that is preached by Gatuiria, although it has been indeed assumed that “while cultural nationalism has sought to *delink* African societies and cultures from the West in order to beat it at its own game, most Marxist-oriented theories have sought to *couple* them with the great train of socialist progress rushing through history towards the goal of universal human emancipation.”³¹¹ The possible fusion of Marxist-based thought with the search for the black essence can be best exemplified in the impending marriage of Wariinga and Gatuiria. It may not therefore seem an over-exaggeration to state that Ngugi sees both cultural struggle and social liberation as two sides of the same coin.

This narrative, therefore, celebrates the ethics and the politics of decolonisation. Its major characters represent varying definitions of how decolonisation must take place. Whilst Muturi calls urgently for the economic decolonisation of the masses, Gatuiria obviously attempts to achieve cultural liberation. Indeed, the former is fully determined to achieve material decolonisation (or objective decolonisation as it is sometimes labelled) while the latter epistemic decolonisation (or subjective decolonisation as some scholars refer to it), and, in fact both kinds of decolonisation, if we may say so, are complementary. Therefore, Ngugi’s

³⁰⁸ Keith Booker. *The African Novel in English*, op. cit., p. 176.

³⁰⁹ Barbara Harlow. *Resistance Literature*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Dieter Riemenschneider & Frank Schulze-Engler. *African Literature in the Eighties*. 1993, p. 20. (emphasis in original).

message should be quite clear by now: since imperialism is a political, economic and cultural phenomenon at the same time, it needs to be fought as such.

The main characters of the novel, especially those with socialist tendencies, are eager to achieve a sort of “sovereignty” as defined by George Lamming. George Lamming argues that there are two integral components of sovereignty: “people’s control over the material base of their survival and a commitment to define and redefine their own reality.”³¹² Whereas Muturi’s speeches and actions are intended to establish a sovereignty of the people, Gatuiria’s cultural redefinition of his community does not seem to guarantee the people’s sovereignty, as it is has just been defined. This is because, as Simon Gikandi clearly contends, the loss of sovereignty implies far more than the disintegration of old cultures and the erosion of African values; it encompasses too “the loss of agency and free will.”³¹³ But his words about African Socialism, if well understood by the masses, can serve them as a preliminary step towards the search for their “lost” sovereignty. Gatuiria explicitly says that

In the past, before imperialism, we had a system of age-groups, of extended families, of sub-clans and clans. In those days we had many types of people’s organization. We had Ujamaa wa Mwafrika, for example- in English, African socialism. Where, then did the eaters of men and the killers of men come from? My heart began to beat. Spirits; evil or good, do not exist. Creatures from other worlds do not exist. Kenya, our country, has no killers or eaters of men, people who drink blood and kidnap the shadows of other men. These days there is no drinking of human blood or eating of human flesh. (p. 67)

Seen from this perspective, Gatuiria’s nostalgia for pre-colonial African socialism levels an acute criticism at the harsh capitalist model upon which his independent country’s economy is doubtlessly founded. Moreover, his above-quoted speech refers to the agents of the foreign system as ogres and man-eaters, and thus he shares the “Brechtian” view that capitalism is a cannibalistic system. We may then conclude, by quoting Gordon, that “in the midst of hegemonic capitalism, [African philosophy] faces the question of formulating a just justice in a system that offers no recourse but a just injustice.”³¹⁴

Nonetheless, despite the fact that Gatuiria does not support at all the hegemonic position and corrupt practices of his father’s class, he fails to perform the role of the organic intellectual in Gramsci’s definition

³¹² George Lamming. “Literature and Sovereignty”. Ed. Adams & Mayes. *Mapping Intersections : African Literature and Africa’s Development*. Africa World Press, p. 258.

³¹³ Simon Gikandi. “African Literature and the Colonial Factor”. Ed. F. Abiola Irele & Simon Gikandi. *A Cambridge Companion to African and Caribbean Literature*. Volume I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 381.

³¹⁴ L Gordon. “Tragic Dimensions”. Ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze., *Post-Colonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p. 242.

*Organic intellectuals [are] those who appear in connection with an emergent social class and who prepare the way for the class's conquest of civil society by preparing it ideologically; and traditional intellectuals, those who seem to be unconnected with social change and occupy positions in society designed to conserve the traditional processes by which ideas are produced.*³¹⁵

To begin with, Gatuiria seems to have a “naïve view” of his past as described by Patrick Hogan; a view which is seen as “the romantic nativism or the celebratory idealisation (what one perceived to be) of the culture and history of the subordinated group.”³¹⁶ He is then a “naïve ideologue”, to use Achille Mbembe’s term, whose naivety is principally due to his “production of an apologetic discourse based on rediscovery of what was supposed to be the essence, the distinctive genius of the black race.”³¹⁷ Ngugi would like the African intellectuals to be political “pamphleteers” rather than apologists (in Mbembe’s sense). Gatuiria’s task of composing music apparently fails to “to encourage people to bolder and higher resolves in all their struggles to free the human spirit from the twin manacles of oppressive man and oppressive nature,” and this function of art has been defined by the Soviet Marxist Gorky.³¹⁸ Simply put, Gatuiria’s art must be more socialist than essentialist in orientation. Ngugi, then, condemns Gatuiria not because of his composition of music, which has great cultural significance as an acerbic criticism of the continuing imperialist cultural influence on post-independence Kenya, but mainly because his arduous cultural task does not guarantee, at least in the short run, what the proponents of commitment in literature see as “a possible union between an artistic rebirth and a politico-economic revolution.”³¹⁹

Formulated differently, Gatuiria’s artistic work cannot be related to what Karl Marx regards as the socialist and ideological role of the aesthetic endeavour. This is because, “for Marx, the aesthetic is a means to an end, contributing to the communist project of emancipation through labour;” On the other hand, Gatuiria’s work appears to lend itself more readily to Oscar Wilde’s view that “the aesthetic is an end in itself, and the cultural self is a human

³¹⁵ Edward Said. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 82.

³¹⁶ Patrick Colm Hogan. “Mimeticism, Reactionary Nativism, and the Possibility of Postcolonial Identity in Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain*”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Winter 1994, p. 112. But as he rejects the elitist privileges of his father, he cannot be accused of “opportunist nativism”, which is, as Hogan writes, “*The cynical manipulation of the people’s hopes and desires through an insincere celebration of non-European customs—a celebration aimed merely at one’s own advancement. Neo-colonial nativists celebrate indigenous traditions in order to advance their own interests as junior partners of former colonies*” (p. 113).

³¹⁷ Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony*. California: University of California Press, 2001. In fact, the quoted statement is a criticism of the Negritude movement. Gatuiria, arguably, reminds the reader of this movement, because all he tries to do is meet the cultural and spiritual needs of the black people, as opposed to their material and “baser” needs.

³¹⁸ Ngugi, wa Thiong’o. *Detained: A Writer Prison Diary*. London: Heinemann, 1981.

³¹⁹ Alaine-Robbe Grillet. “Commitment”. Ed. Harrison, C & Paul Wood, 2003, p. 762.

manifestation of the art that he holds dear, nothing more.”³²⁰. This means that Gaturia does not see any clear political implications of his cultural endeavour. It may be deemed important at this juncture to evoke the notion of “autonomous art”, as explained by Walter Benjamin. The latter sees that autonomous art is set up for individual enjoyment and hence he calls for an art that is “geared to reception by the masses.” Unfortunately, Gaturia’s art is not free from its dependence on rituals and thus it is far from being politicised³²¹. Gaturia’s art lacks the aggressive militancy and hence it is not coalescent with the political struggle of the underclass.

Moreover, the art of Gaturia is to be identified with the second phase of the growth of modern African literature, a phase which is dominated by a romantic view and idyllic nostalgia for Africa’s past, as Fanon aptly observes. In fact, Ngugi argues for a literature that would be more militant, which is indeed characteristic of the third and the most important phase of the development of modern African literary writings.³²² Basically, in spite of Gaturia’s sterility, the content of the novel, as Ngugi insists, is “the Kenyans’ struggle against the neocolonial form and stage of neocolonialism.”³²³ Thus, this work can rightly be read as a piece of “the combat literature,” which is, according to Fanon, literature that “calls upon the whole people to join the struggle for the existence of the nation.”³²⁴ In other words, the combat literature is not only concerned with interpreting and explaining the status quo, but also it forces people to take action. Chidi Amuta argues that the re-interpretation of the realities must be the starting point for a decisive action. For example, he says that the authors’ militancy can also be discussed in relation to their reconsideration and reappropriation of their native cultures. He also points out quite convincingly that “we need a theoretical framework which would seek to integrate cultural liberation into the larger struggle for economic and political liberation.”³²⁵

For Jean-Marie Makang, the nostalgia for the past can be viewed as “avoidance of the present”, because as he further argues “tradition as nostalgia for what ceased to be is not a

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

³²¹ Jurgen Habermas. “Walter Benjamin: Consciousness Revising or Rescuing Critique”. Ed. Drew Milne, 2003, p. 236. Walter Benjamin sees that art must not be freed “from its parasitic dependence on ritual” and that “the politicising of art” must be the main target of the artist.

³²² Linda Toenoskoetter. “Healing the Mind: Negritude as the Stepping Stone Toward an Emancipative Discourse”. *Debates in African Studies: Intellectuals of the African Liberation*, 2004, p. 2. “Fanon distinguishes between the phase of assimilation with Western culture, the phase of rejection of Euro-centric culture, the third phase of fight against colonialism [and also neocolonialism]”.

<http://www.africavenir.org/publications/student-papers/ToenskoetterNegritude.pdf>.

³²³ *Detained*, op. cit., p. 8.

³²⁴ Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*, op. cit., p. 173.

³²⁵ Chidi Amuta, op. cit., p. 50.

living reality, but a dead tradition.”³²⁶ Thus, we could safely assume that Gaturia tries unsuccessfully to “freeze” the past. Here, we need to refer once again to Jean-Marie Makang, who argues that the survival of the African traditions is largely, if not exclusively, determined by their capacity for adaptation to the modern context. Jean-Marie Makang, then, resents the fact that many intellectuals, like Gaturia here, reduce African traditions to the mere concept of cultural rituals. This “simplistic” view of tradition is “synonymous with folklore, and designates only artistic production and external manifestations of Negro-Africa’s emotional life, primarily in music, dance, and rituals.”³²⁷ Thus, one can see that Gaturia, despite his strong Afrocentric stance, lacks energy to create new directions in a fruitful future.

The very fact that he rejects the elitist privileges of his father is highly indicative of his resentment of the present history of barbarity. As Fanon argues, the “native intellectual,” such as Gaturia in our context, “could not stand wonder-struck before the history of today’s barbarity” and hence he “decided to go farther and delve deeper down...and it was with great delight that [he] discovered there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory and solemnity.”³²⁸ The native intellectual is then

*The artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically towards the past away from the actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact cast-offs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all. But the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. He must go until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge.*³²⁹

It must be indicated that Gaturia is less committed to the present struggle as he is somehow far removed from realities, despite the fact that he is trying hard to find out “the truths of his nation”. Fanon sees that the concern for the revival of the cultural heritage is an indispensable part of the liberation struggle. He, indeed, strongly, contends that “when a people undertakes an armed struggle or even a political struggle against a relentless colonialism, the significance of the [cultural] tradition changes [i.e. increases].”³³⁰ Thus, the value of his work will be more perceptible after the end of the armed struggle for, in Ngugi’s view, the war is not yet over.

³²⁶ Jean-Marie Makang. “Of the Good Use of Tradition: Keeping the Cultural Perspective in African Philosophy”. Ed. E. C. Eze, 1997, p. 327. The dead tradition is starkly contrasted, as Makang opines, with the living tradition, which he defines as one which is at the service of people instead of people being subjected to tradition” (p. 330).

³²⁷ Ibid., p. 330.

³²⁸ Frantz Fanon, op. cit., p. 37.

³²⁹ Frantz Fanon. “On National Culture”. Ed. Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisma. *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 1994, p. 42.

³³⁰ Ibid.

Thus, could Gatuiria's work be interpreted as a form of "escapism"? Or is he considering the past as part and parcel of the present struggles?

Ngugi makes Gatuiria a politically conscious man, as witness his words to Wariinga that "the edifice of progress is erected on the top of the corpses of human beings" (p. 131). But this consciousness is not translated into action. The most crucial point is not to understand the world, as the Marxists have contended, but to change it. That is to say, awareness must be a preliminary step towards change and improvement. Despite his acrimonious criticism of his rabidly materialistic post-colonial society, he can hardly be described as a man of action. His wife-to-be has more courage and bravery than he does, and for this reason he is not given a pistol by Muturi, who is doubtful about the intellectuals' commitment to the social cause of the deprived classes.

Wariinga understands well why Gatuiria has, as he says, a "knot" in his heart, that impedes him from fulfilling his dream of composing national music inspired by the love of his country, "a love that inspires the composer to sing hymns of praise to the beauty, the unity, the courage, the maturity, the bravery, and generosity of his country" (p. 132). She simply explains to him that such a knot exists because he has not yet developed hatred towards the ruthless oppressive class that puts out the light of his country (p. 132). Wariinga then firmly believes that the true love for the land has to be nurtured by the hatred towards the merciless advocates of the modern system of theft and robbery who auction it (p. 133).

We can agree with Michael Peterson saying that Ngugi's "demands raised by an anti-neocolonial resistance were not an atavistic desire to return to a primordial past, as was often charged within the colonial discourse; rather, it was a desire for autonomy and self-determination in the political, economic, and cultural realms and the ability on behalf of the national community to chart their own path to the modern world."³³¹ This explains partly why Gatuiria's "back-to-the-source" discourse is not socially mobilising as it should be. The masses are motivated to action by the words of Muturi, the socialist leader, who sees himself as the midwife of Kenya's pregnancy. However, Ngugi would not say that the masses cannot be made conscious through the ideas of cultural revival. Besides, Gatuiria's attack upon the Western cultural values that have gained momentum in the post-colonial African world can serve the same political purposes of dismantling the power structures and dethroning the West

³³¹ Michael Peterson. *Postcolonial Narratives: Nationalism, Modernization, and Cultural Imperialism in the works of Halldor Laxness and Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Division III Thesis for the School of Humanities, Art, and Cultural Studies, p. 6.
([https://dspace.hampshire.edu:8443/dspace/bitstream/10009/82/1/Michael+Peterson+-+\(Post\)Colonial+Narratives.pdf](https://dspace.hampshire.edu:8443/dspace/bitstream/10009/82/1/Michael+Peterson+-+(Post)Colonial+Narratives.pdf).)

as the Western political domination was expanded in the name of Western cultural supremacy, and in this way Gatuiria's repudiation of the rising "fetishised" national culture takes on some political character, and to this point we now turn.

b- Western Culture and the Political Power of Domination

Being strongly marked by political concerns, DOC "satirises the worship, by the new middle class, of all that is foreign and their revulsion for all that is local."³³² Thus, this novel can be rightly viewed as "a weapon and an antidote against the cultural domination of Africa both before and after the colonial era."³³³ In the previous novel, the national culture of the people is used as a "religious cult" (to use Fanon's words) or a smokescreen by the moneyed elite to conceal their illegal activities in the New Town of Ilmorog. However, in this novel, people's native culture is made the object of contempt and derision by the rising conscienceless local bourgeoisie ("local thieves") and also by the world financial elites ("international thieves").

The unworthy ruling elite, while undervaluing the African folk traditions, condones the imperialist view of the superiority of Western existence to African existence. Its members never question the effectiveness of the Western economic systems and cultural models (to the exception of Mweriri wa Mukirai, who calls for a sort of indigenisation of the Western economic system and hence he is later killed by Mwaura) . In Gikandi's terms, the national elite embraces uncritically "a new monetary economy, mode of dress, set of cultural values, and even architecture."³³⁴ Ithe wa Mbooi, one of the self-confident robbers in the cave, expresses the need for the black children to acquire the white people's customs and languages. He states clearly that schools must teach European customs generally and English customs particularly. He even says that "a European is European even though he may be deformed. What matters is the whiteness of his skin" (p. 121). Thus, the comprador moneyed elite perpetuates the racist stereotypes that have been inherited from the colonial mentality, and the continued exploitation of the poor masses by the elite in neocolonial Kenya is partly promoted by its members' valorisation of Western values

Gatuiria, however, resents furiously the identification of European culture with the "pure" culture, as defined in the Enlightenment philosophy (cf. the first chapter), since the narrator of the novel tells us that "Gatuiria has always been ashamed of his parents because of the way they cover themselves in the robes of foreign customs at all times" (p. 236). Gatuiria, without

³³² F. K. Omoregie. "Rodney, Cabral, Ngugi as Guides to African Postcolonial Literature". University of Botswana: English Department, 2004, p. 4. www.usp.nus.ed.sg/post/poldiscourse/Ngugiov.html.

³³³ Karen Laurence. *Decolonizing Tradition*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2003, p. 247

³³⁴ Gikandi, 2000, op. cit., p. 39.

being an anti-modern nativist, does not associate at all Western culture with progress. His attempt at the de-legitimation of the postcolonial fetishised national culture attests to the dissolution of the promise of Western culture, and thus contributes, in the long run, to the deregulation of the Western global system. Gaturia deplors what Armah calls “the fate of the évolué.”³³⁵ He mournfully tells his wife-to-be that “there is nothing terrible as a people who have swallowed foreign customs whole, without even chewing them, for such people become mere parrots” (p. 237). His ambition is then different from that of the chairman of the “Devil’s Feast”, who says that the African people must develop the “Western culture and that women’s way of dressing and the jewellery that they wear can be an indication of “the heights of a culture that have been reached” (p. 125), and who also identifies the Western mode of life with modern civilisation when he says that we should “impress our foreign guests and show them that we are on the way to modern civilization” (p. 125). Thus, Ngugi resents bitterly, as T. Serequeberhan is later to opine, “the process of *singularisation* of human diversity by being forced on a singular track of historical ‘progress’ grounded on an emulation and/or mimicry of European historicity.”³³⁶

The novel, then, shows clearly how the rising local bourgeoisie mimics the lifestyles and the other cultural habits of the international bourgeoisie. The concept of mimicry is lengthily discussed by H. Bhabha who views that mimicry has come to describe the ambivalent relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. He sees that mimicry is an indicator of the indeterminate space.³³⁷ It can indeed mean slavish imitation, but it can also be an ironic device to expose the coloniser’s shortcomings. Mimicry, as seen by Edward Said, is likened to the process of integration into Western culture. For Said, it simply means the colonised’s imitation of “the colonizer by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, institutions and values.”³³⁸ Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, shows clearly that the rising local bourgeoisie tends to imitate slavishly the metropolitan bourgeoisie, and hence it can rightly be seen as a servile class. Fanon defines the local comprador bourgeoisie of the independent African nations as follows

This bourgeoisie, which has unreservedly and enthusiastically adopted the intellectual reflexes characteristic of the metropolis, which has alienated to perfection its own thought and grounded its consciousness in typically foreign notions, has difficulty swallowing the fact that it is lacking in the one thing that makes a bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie of the underdeveloped countries is a

³³⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah. *Why Are We So Blest?* London Heinemann, 1972, p. 83.

³³⁶ T. Serequeberhan. “The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy”. Ed. E. C. Eze, 1997, p. 146

³³⁷ Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 123.

³³⁸ Bill Ashcroft et al. *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

*bourgeoisie in spirit only. It has neither the economic power, nor the managerial dynamism, nor the scope of ideas to qualify as a bourgeoisie.*³³⁹

In the above-quoted passage, Fanon makes it very clear that the rising local bourgeoisie in the post-independence era, besides taking the western bourgeoisie as a model, is maladroit, corrupt, and soulless. Even worse, the villainous ruling elite is presented with no authentic identity. Indeed, the Africans' cultural dependency on the Western powers impedes genuine development and true independence. So this novel is vehemently opposed to both the culture of Western domination and to the domination of Western culture.

On the whole, this novel is a mournful exposé of what has come to be called “the dependency syndrome,” of which cultural dependency is a part. Such syndrome is both the cause and the result of present underdevelopment and gives rise to what Ali Mazrui sees as “the unequal interdependence in the North-South relations.”³⁴⁰ That is why Ngugi's novel unravels “the forces that have hijacked Africa's development” on the other hand and suggests “perspectives of Africa's march towards selfhood and independence.”³⁴¹

Furthermore, white supremacy in the novel is associated with bloody historical episodes. For example, the representative of the foreign delegation (who expresses clearly the so-called white man's “incurable” pride) explains to his “loyal” underdogs how they should extort money from the people at whatever cost. He, for example, reminds the audience of the bloody colonial history or the imperial holocaust and supremacist crimes perpetuated by his ancestors by telling them about the ethnocide committed by the European settlers against the Red Indians in the New World (p. 89). In so doing, he shows that, to use Jonah Raskin's words, “progress drinks nectar from the skulls of the slain.”³⁴² But the spokesman of the international organization of thieves and robbers endorses too the view of the master of ceremonies that the exploiters should better try to wrap poison in sugar canes by hoodwinking soulless exploitation “with honeyed words and speeches” (p. 89). This means that the capitalists use both, to borrow from Gramsci, cultural hegemony and coercive means to thwart the resistance of the labour class. Indeed, cultural hegemony “will act as brain-washing poisons whose purpose will be to convince workers that in this world there is nothing glorious as slavery to the kimeedeeri class” (p. 189), and when the “peaceful” means prove abortive, the military

³³⁹ Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*, op. cit., p. 122.

³⁴⁰ Al-Amin Mazrui. *Power, Politics and the African Condition*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2004, p. 155.

³⁴¹ Chijioke Uwasomba. “The Politics of Resistance and Liberation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*”. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 6, December 2006.

http://www.jpanafrican.com/docs/vol1no6/PoliticsofResistanceandLiberation_vol1no6.pdf.

³⁴² Jonah Raskin. *The Mythology of Imperialism*. A Delta Book, 1973, p. 15.

force will be called into operation. Consequently, the imperial culture that this novel ferociously attacks can turn into a violent repressive action.

This novel, like *POB*, runs down the negative impact of soulless capitalism upon the people. Marx Weber, in spite of his well-known pro-capitalist stand, contends that “material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as not at no previous period in history.”³⁴³ The student, the angel in rags, makes Wariinga aware that the communal values run the risk of being superseded by the Western materialist and individualistic values. He indeed tells her that unfortunately the people “have been taught the principle and system of self-interest and have been told to forget the ancient songs that glorify the notion of collective good” (p. 15). He also adds that “they have been taught new songs, new hymns that celebrate the acquisition of money” (p.15). The words of the *matatu* driver Robin Mwaira, whose temple is business as he unashamedly declares (p. 53), unveil clearly the prevalent values in the post-independence nation. Indeed he tells the passengers that “independence is not tales about the past but the sound of money in one’s pocket” (p. 38). He supports this statement by saying that “these days the land rewards not those who clear it but those who come after it has been cleared” (p. 38).

The dominant values in New Kenya are not based at all on the old values of the Mau Mau heroic war. Nor are they based on the traditional values of precolonial Kenya. They are, in short, purely Western materialistic values. This narrative further shows that the disintegration of the old values has resulted in the development of bestial individuals. The passengers in the bush taxi explicitly say that “if we don’t help each other, we will become like beasts” (p. 38). This means that rugged individualism and excessive materialism lead certainly to the loss of pre-contact communalism because, as Gikandi assumes, “the idea of community [is] itself at odds with the individualism on which the modern identity [is] predicated.”³⁴⁴ This being so, the novel aims at establishing a kind of post-contact communalism and this can be done through socialist thought or through cultural nationalism or both.

Ngugi spares no pain then in exposing the ill effects of soul-deadening materialism on people’s view of themselves. The national bourgeoisie is clearly presented in the novel a western-oriented clique of thieves and robbers who define themselves in purely materialistic terms. The reputation of the man depends on the number of cars he owns and the number of women he has. For this very reason, the Rich Old Man sees his son Gaturia as “a footloose minstrel” (p. 138) because, rather than being an avid money seeker, he is mainly concerned

³⁴³ Marx Weber. “Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism”. Ed. Harrison & Wood, 2003, p. 137.

³⁴⁴ Simon Gikandi, 2000, op. cit., p. 40.

with the “meaningless” task of rehabilitating the people’s folk culture. This shows that the Rich Old Man does not see any meaning at all in his son’s work of reconstructing the cultural identity of his community. The Rich Old Man, therefore equates identity with money, a view that is shared by other members of his class of whom one says openly in the cave that Mwireri wa Mukirai’s “face is beginning to assume the shape of Peugeot 504 (with petrol injection)” (pp. 162-163). So the car is man’s identity in neocolonial Kenya.

The master of ceremonies, the Chairman in the Devil’s Feast, asserts clearly that the robbers and the thieves “should drink from foreign fountains of knowledge” (p. 87). This assumption is fully supported by Gitutu wa Gatacanguru who urges the black people to learn from the Whites so as to be never wrong (p. 102). The student, however, makes it clear that implementing slavishly the Western systems exacerbates the plight of the majority of the population. He explains to Wariinga that “These [African] countries are finding it difficult to stave off poverty for the simple reason that they have taken it upon themselves to learn how to run their economies from American experts” (p. 15). The leader of the International Organization of Theft and Robbery, however, declares publicly and unashamedly that “Theft and robbery are the cornerstones of America and Western civilization” (p. 87).

Still, the Westerners and their local servants rely heavily on such glittering ideas as civilisation for the sake of tightening their grip over various parts of the globe. In this vein, Bhabha observes in his well-known foreword to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* that the Western discourse has shifted from the progressive ideas of progress and Modernity in the classical imperialism period to post-independence prevailing notions of democracy and free market³⁴⁵ (for example, in the novel the robbers declare explicitly that communism, which is usually contrasted with democracy and free Market philosophy, is a poisonous foreign ideology). DOC unveils clearly such hegemonic thought of misrepresenting the neocolonised people’s cultures and economic models is up to now used by the Western powers to maintain their control over the so-called “Restern world”.

In this section, we have made a link between the Western culture and neocolonial hegemony, which is indeed reminiscent of the well-known connection Edward Said once made between the cultural production of the West and European colonial occupation of the non-western territories. This indicates undoubtedly that the neocolonial domination, like the colonial domination, is premised on a set of ideas which include chiefly the superiority complex,

³⁴⁵ Homi K. Bhabha. “Preface to Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*”. Grove Press, 2001, pp. x-xi. The full quotation is: “New global empires rise to enforce their colonizing mission in the name of democracy and free markets where once progress and development were seen as the shibboleths of a modernized; western salvation”.

which is, as defined earlier, the belief in the superiority of European identity to all non-European peoples and cultures. In the following section, however, we shall see that the “inferiority complex” that has been developed by the neocolonised masses stands against their self-willed action of complete liberation.

c- Wariinga’s Cultural Self-Affirmation and the Liberation Struggle: The Link Between identity and Agency

The personal story of Wariinga offers clearly an insider’s perspective of the political and economic devastations of her country caused by neoliberal economic and political policies of Western imperial powers, but her gradually developing revolutionary zeal is worthy of some consideration. Indeed, in this section we shall make a connection between her growing political development and her assertion of her “black” self in an attempt to relate political struggle to cultural self-apprehension. This novel is, interestingly, seen by Even Mwangi as “a kind of proletarian *Bildungsroman* in which we see the girl’s development from a politically unconscious and sometimes self-hating and suicidal adolescent to a politically engaged revolutionary.”³⁴⁶ Ngugi’s politics of self-representation in this novel goes hand in hand with the development of the tone of protest. This assumption can be validated by tracing the heroine’s development in the story. The more she is self-assertive, the more she tends to be critical of the social status quo. At first, the frame narrator of the novel tells us that

Wariinga was convinced that her appearance was the root cause of all her problems. Whenever she looked at herself in the mirror she thought herself very ugly. What she hated most was her blackness, so she would disfigure her body with skin-lightening creams like Ambi and Snowfire, forgetting the saying: That which is born black will never be white. (p. 11)

Due to her social alienation and loss in the urban chaos of a criminal and materialistic universe, Wariinga develops self-debasing attitudes, although we are later made aware that she is a very beautiful woman. For the earnest student who gave her a fake invitation card, “Wariinga’s psychological confusion signifies a national ideological directionless”³⁴⁷. She indeed underwent a number of extremely painful experiences, starting with her rejection by her sugar-daddy Rich Old Man due to her “unexpected” pregnancy, the dismissal from her job as a secretary typist by her employer Boss Kihara whose sexual advances she declined, and her rejection by an unscrupulous young lover, John Kinwana, because of his loss of faith in her. So she is undoubtedly the archetypal victim of the neocolonial Kenyan state. Like Wangari, “her citizenly presence has been annihilated or marginalized,” to borrow from

³⁴⁶ Even Mwangi. “Gender, Unreliable Oral narrator, and the Untranslated Preface in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*”. *Research in African Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 2007, p. 30.

³⁴⁷ Adeleko Adeeko, 1998, op. cit., p. 104.

Bhabha.³⁴⁸ But her travail started with her adoration of wealth and idealisation of modern customs which led her, despite her brilliance, to leave school. This means that when she was blindly tempted to embrace the “Western” mode of life and accept its worldly wisdom, she became marginalised and victimised to the point that she attempted to commit suicide several times. She indeed reminds us of Amiri Baraka’s famous play *Dutchman* in which the black intellectual “Clay” was seduced and then killed by Lula, the symbol of the assertedly “superior” white civilization.

When Wariinga succumbed to the seduction of the “devil” who swindled her by promising her undreamed-of modern luxuries, she was persecuted, which can rightly be regarded as a sort of punishment for her. But when she wears garments in a traditional way and refuses the lure of earthly pleasures, she can kill her elitist persecutor because at the end she fully realises that the Rich Old Man is no more than a seducer, a tempter, or a devil (and the effects of attending the Devil’s Feast are very strong on the growth of her ‘rebellious’ thought). She does not eventually want to sell her soul in exchange for material comfort (she perhaps remembers the second fable narrated by her fiancé in the *matatu*). When she kills the father of her illegal child “Wambui” at last, the thought of the arrested Wangari and Muturi occurs suddenly to her mind, and soon she shoots the other conscienceless high-grade tycoon whom she saw in the cave two years before. This is the best indication that her execution of the Rich Old Man is not only a personal revenge but an act of justice on behalf of all the oppressed people by those “worshippers of the devil”. The recurrent nightmare in her sleep of “a devil being crucified by people in tattered clothes” becomes a reality. The people in rags that she usually sees in her dreams are indeed the poor people.³⁴⁹ So, as G. D. Killam contends, she finally acts “on behalf of the people in her execution of a representative of the oppressor class.”³⁵⁰ In so doing, she culturally aligns herself with the spirit of the Mau Mau resistance recalled by Wangari, the active participant in the liberation war who is now ignored by her country’s “progress”. Thus, Wariinga is rightly called “the harbinger of freedom” because of her refusal of all forms of neocolonial dependency, which is, in Ogude’s view, the major theme of the narrative.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*, op. cit., p. xxii.

³⁴⁹ However, André Viola and Jacqueline Bardolph have a totally different view as they write, commenting upon Wariinga’s shooting dead of the Rich Old Man, that it is “sensational ending that does not offer any political guarantee to the reader since it is no more in the nature of a personal act of revenge than part of a collective struggle against injustice”. But we argue that there is some political dimension, however faint, in her act of revenge. André Viola & Jacqueline Bardolph, Denise Coussy. *New Fiction in English from Africa West, East, and South*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998, p. 104.

³⁵⁰ George Douglas Killam. “Ngugi wa Thiong’o”. 1984, op. cit., p. 139.

³⁵¹ James Ogude. *Ngugi’s Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. Pluto Press, 1999.

Thus, the ending of the novel is indeed “powerful and dramatic” because of Wariinga’s growth “into a an idealized figure of revolutionary womanhood.”³⁵² As Wariinga becomes more politically conscious and socially committed (or proletarianised, to use James Robson’s term), she dispels all self-debasing attitudes (such as the rejection of her blackness) and becomes more self-assertive, which appears clearly in her adoption of the traditional Gikuyu dress, and this means that through political awareness one can change his perception of the indigenous cultural traditions and customs, and the reverse can also be true.

Interestingly too, her growing and burning desire for revolution and revenge is made obvious when we observe her telling her suitor that “there are times for decorating our bodies with necklaces and perfumes..., there are times for keeping our bodies and minds in a state of readiness for the struggles ahead” (p. 242). Gatuiria, however, seems to lull her rebellious feelings by replying that “the struggle for national cultures is still a relevant struggle” (p. 242). Surely, what she means by struggle is not that for national culture but for the social justice and fair distribution of the national wealth ,and still Wariinga’s and Gatuiria’s “different” views of struggle are not in conflict but complementary, as we mentioned previously.

To borrow from the philosopher Schopenhauer, we can state that Wariinga’s vision has developed in the story in a very remarkable way: at first, she sees that the world is ontologically “alien to her agency”, but with the strengthening of her self-assertive attitudes she could see that the world can be “wilfully created” by her.³⁵³ In short, with her rejection of the attitude of self-denial, she no longer surrenders frightfully to the egocentric order established by the robbers and the thieves, both local and international. Arguably, she becomes, in Everselly’s term, “the real negro” who “has a mythology of being that seeks to express autonomous individual experience independent of historical determinism.”³⁵⁴ And hence we can conclude here with the assertion that Ngugi’s “aesthetics of black pride, black affirmation, resistance and ultimate liberation” in this novel is firmly opposed to the “neo-colonial aesthetics of capitalism and subjugation.”³⁵⁵

³⁵² David Cook & Michael Okenimkpe, op. cit., p. 137.

³⁵³ Abdirahman Hussein. *Edward Said: Criticism and Society*. London: British Library Cataloguing, 2002, p. 31.

³⁵⁴ Shelly Everselly. *The Real Negro: Questions of Authenticity in Twentieth Century African American Literature*. New York/London: Routledge, 2004, p. xiv.

³⁵⁵ Georg M. Gugelberger. “Marxist Literary Debates and their Continuity in African Literary Criticism”. Ed. Georg M. Gugelberger. *Marxism and African Literature*. African World Press, 1987, p. 3.

Conclusion

Devil on the Cross clearly elucidates that “the native language and the virile oral narrative traditions are able to bear the weight of the material aspirations of the ordinary Kenyans.”³⁵⁶

This novel’s marked use of indigenous narrative forms is chiefly intended to address the not-so-sophisticated section of the Kenyan population, who are capable of revolution and self-determination. Thus, it discredits the imperialist belief (or fallacy) expressed by the master of ceremonies that the black people “are incapable of such rebellious thought...of planning and working out ways of cutting the ropes that tie [them] to [their] masters” and that they cannot have “the audacity to reject slavery” (p. 85). Basically, Ngugi’s grafting of traditional elements from his cultural background onto the novel does not only have aesthetic purposes, but also pedagogical, cultural, and above all ideological aims.

Also, the idea of class antagonism that is developed more prominently in this narrative has been nurtured by the populist cultural nationalist discourse, even though its representative in the novel i.e. Gatuiria, in the words of Archie Mafeje, does not “identify [himself] with the general populace,”³⁵⁷ and hence the problem is with him, not with his “folklorist” work as his soul-searching undertaking ought to be useful in the present combat because it indicts Kenya’s domination by foreign powers and hence it is patriotic and revolutionary. Still, the author concedes that the emancipatory struggle is a long way ahead and cannot be limited to the question of cultural revival.

All in all, this narrative tries to go beyond the unresolved juxtaposition of a nostalgic vision of a pre-colonial culture and socialist vision of the future by creating a viable possibility of fusion between those two visions, and hence Charles Cantalupo’s argument that Ngugi’s novels view that “culture is and should be a weapon in the struggle for political struggle”³⁵⁸ is fully justified. A statement taken from Carlos Fuentes, who refers specifically to the Nicaraguan revolution, could summarise the main point of this chapter. Fuentes aptly says that, as far as liberation struggles throughout the world are concerned, “we must go forward, because the present is urgent and insufferable, but we cannot kill the past in doing so, for the past is our identity, and without identity we are nothing.”³⁵⁹ In his next Gikuyu novel *Matigari* the protagonist’s revolutionary zeal is primarily motivated by his Mau Mau spirit of fight, of which the populist tendency forms no doubt a constituent part.

³⁵⁶ Adeleke Adeeko, op. cit., p. 111.

³⁵⁷ Archie Mafeje. “the Role of the Bard in a Contemporary African Community”. *The Journal of African Languages*, Vol. 6, Number 3, 1987, pp. 193-223.

³⁵⁸ Charles Cantalupo. *Texts and Contexts*, op. cit., p. xiv.

³⁵⁹ Quoted in Barbara Harlow. *Resistance Literature*. 1987, op. cit., p. 82.

IV. National Regeneration in *Matigari* : Between Myth and Reality

“The failure of the hoped-for social and economic freedoms for their peoples, what is to be found rather, is an increasing division and oppression on the basis of class, ethnicity, religion, and gender; the failure of the economy to provide even basic necessities, never mind prosperity, for the masses of the people, a lack of democratic participation by the masses in the political sphere, and the continued –often increasing- structural dependency economically, politically, and ideologically, on the Western imperial powers” (Tamara Sivanandan 2004: 42).

IV. National Regeneration in *Matigari*: Between Myth and Reality

Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the idea of “the regeneration of the nation” in Ngugi’s second Gikuyu-language novel *Matigari* where his conceptualisation of how the post-colonial African nation should be constructed comes to prominence. Thus, the important question that this chapter poses is: what is Ngugi’s “imagined” nation in this novel? Regretfully, Ngugi’s imagined nation has not come into being after independence as he wished, for he sees that it has remained in the grip of multi-national capitalism. His *Matigari*, therefore, like the two previous works, is clearly an indictment of a post-independence “situation where a client indigenous government is ruling and oppressing people on behalf of American, European and Japanese capital.”³⁶⁰ Accordingly, this novel generates the passion for change and social regeneration. More fundamentally, his construction of an “alternative” nation is moulded in this novel by some utopian concepts and ideological tenets that will be discussed later. It must be added, as MSC Okolo very clearly argues, that “Ngugi identifies imperialist capitalism as Africa’s bane [and] as a solution he suggests a transformation of African society in line with Marxist ideology, which accepts revolutionary violence as entirely justified, and proposes socialism and a classless society as a means of resolving Africa’s problems.”³⁶¹

This work is thus considered by Abiola Irele as “the supreme parable of the African condition.”³⁶² Without having any qualms, as will be discussed in due course, about the concept of the nation, Ngugi in this novel narrates the story of the African nation in the post-colonial era. Instead of being defined by the neocolonial oppressors, whose views are largely informed by the Western discourse of domination, the post-colonial African nation is redefined by the underprivileged classes, whose best representative in the narrative is undoubtedly Matigari, the hero of the story. *Matigari*, therefore, confirms Ngugi’s growing conviction that “the novel, or any narrative, may create a situation in which people are debating the very issues forbidden in real life by the state” and that “the narrative breaks the code of silence” that is established by the repressive government.³⁶³

As done previously, we shall focus in this chapter on both form and content as both the author’s experimentation with the form of the novel and its themes are relevant to his political ideology, which is connected with socialist philosophy. But we will not lay as much stress on

³⁶⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong’o. *A Writer in Politics*. London: Heinemann, 1981, p. 120.

³⁶¹ MSC Okolo. *African Literature as Political Philosophy*. London: Zed Books, 2007, p. 2.

³⁶² Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 65.

³⁶³ Ngugi, wa Thiong’o. *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 27.

the author's aesthetic options as we did in the foregoing chapter because of the obvious stylistic similarities between the two works.

1- Form and the idea of “Social Regeneration” in the Novel

Like DOC, this novel is devoid of any literary stylistic sophistication. The change in the approach to novelistic composition of the late Ngugi is much supportive of his conspicuous liberationist discourse. This statement is quite consistent with Fredric Jameson's view in his famous book *The Political Unconscious* that the formal features of the literary work (particularly the novel) could inform us about the ideological imperatives of the author and the basic meanings communicated by this work. As far as this point is concerned, he bluntly argues that “a dialectical reversal has taken place in which it has become possible to grasp such formal processes as sedimented content in their own right, as carrying ideological messages of their art, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works.”³⁶⁴ Thus, the aim of this section is to establish a firm link between Ngugi's ideology of aesthetics (with particular stress on such aspects as the use of myth, carnivalesque literary techniques, and symbols) and his anti-imperialist political ideology in the presently studied work, as we did with *Devil on the Cross*.

It must be made clear that Ngugi's social realism, in Cantalupo's terms, in his latest works promotes the idea of fiction as “a weapon in the struggle for political power and justice,”³⁶⁵ and such works are indeed characterised further by a number of artistic features which are connected to the popular culture of the “wretched of the earth.” That is to say, this novel is an adroit combination of aspects of realism with those of fabulism because, as André Viola et al. aptly note, *Matigari* “shares with popular fiction a taste for supernatural events [and] sudden conversions in revivalist mood.”³⁶⁶ In that case, it could not be seen as a realist novel in the full sense of the term. This can serve the political ideology of the author, as Laura Moss notes, non-realist writings develop forms that are inherently conducive to political subversion, and that “non-realist forms are inherently somehow *more* postcolonial” and therefore “have greater potential for resistance.”³⁶⁷ But this does not suggest that the realist works are

³⁶⁴ Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Methuen, 1981, p. 99.

³⁶⁵ Charles Cantalupo. *Texts and Contexts*. Africa World Press, 1995, p. xiv.

³⁶⁶ André Viola, Jacqueline Bardolph & Denise Coussy. *New Fiction in English from Africa West, East, and South*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998, p. 106. *Matigari* is often shown to survive mysteriously in very dangerous situations. For example, he escapes miraculously from the burning house surrounded by the police and the military forces, his “mysterious release” from the cell, his “inexplicable” escape from the mental hospital and so on. All these events add to his mythical qualities.

³⁶⁷ Laura Moss. “The Plague of Normality; Reconfiguring Realism in Postcolonial Theory”. University of Manitoba, 2000.

incapable of subversion and of communicating clearly the idea of resistance in the post-colonial contexts.

Matigari can be viewed as an epic novel, if we take into account Bassirow Dieng's definition of the epic work. Dieng views that the epic novel "is a collective discourse whose total significance is focussed on a central character [in our context *Matigari*]." ³⁶⁸ It may not therefore be an exaggeration to believe that this novel is "an ideal example of an oral epic narrative." ³⁶⁹ A lot can be said about the epic and heroic features of *Matigari*. At least, he can be seen as a superhuman hero, whose mighty efforts, that begin mainly with tearing the veil of disillusionment that runs the risk of quelling mass protest and resistance, prepare the ground for the future popular reappropriation of the neocolonial state.

Simon Gikandi, it must be pointed out, makes an important remark that *Matigari* should be better studied from the aesthetic point of view. He in fact argues that "*Matigari* can be better discussed not –or not as much– in terms of Ngugi's personality and his politics but in relation to a set of formal questions." He wonders too whether "the overt and the consistent use of allegory represents a new form of didacticism" or "lend[s] itself to linguistic creativity." ³⁷⁰ Interestingly, then, Simon Gikandi raises a good number of other crucial issues related to what he sees as the aesthetic ideology of the author and writes:

Is Ngugi's concern with the everyday politics of the postcolonial state a continued search for, and refinement of, techniques of realistic representation, or is the site of everyday culture one of experimentation in the tradition of what came to be known as the left-wing avant-garde? Is the powerful religious language of the novel an abdication of Marxist secularism, or is religion deployed in the name of an aesthetic ideal and ideological ends? And what is the meaning of Ngugi's appropriation of Gikuyu oral narratives -does it constitute a significant move away from the European novel, or is orality a mark of his embrace of post-modernism? ³⁷¹

Indeed, *Matigari* "simultaneously falls back on the most traditional notions of story telling." ³⁷² Ngugi's use of folk traditions does not have simply cultural implications, rather, and perhaps more seriously, it has an explicit political dimension. The story, basically, in Charles Cantalupo's view, is "subversive". But as Gikandi further contends, one of the advantages of resorting to aspects of popular culture is to establish or re-establish a firm link

³⁶⁸ Bassirow Dieng. "Narrative Genres and Intertextual Phenomena in the Sahelian Region (Myths, Epics, and Novels)". *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer 1993, p. 37.

³⁶⁹ F. Odun Balogun. "*Matigari*: An African Novel as Oral Narrative Performance". *Oral Tradition*, 10/1, 1995, p. 139.

³⁷⁰ Simon Gikandi. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. London: James Currey, 2000, p. 223.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

between his works and the not-so-sophisticated masses. Such an artistic strategy “seeks to recreate the aura of communicative exchange between the story teller and his listeners.”³⁷³ This is consistent with Lupenga Mphande’s observation that “works like *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* go beyond the Western boundaries set by Ngugi’s early novels, and instead become unique events in language based on the imperatives and direct communication with peasants and workers by (...) adopting more dynamic oral form and style.”³⁷⁴ The oral art, as argued in the previous chapter, is capable of generating necessary stimuli for change. In other words, orality has a functional, i.e. didactic or propagandist rather than “essentialist” or “ritualistic” purpose in Ngugi’s most recent works. Ngugi also uses a simple language and a simple story that can be understood by everybody, as we saw previously with *Devil on the Cross*.

This “tale-novel” which is indeed modelled on a folk tale presents independence as “a disaster” in the form of oral narrative. Importantly, then, a close connection should be made between the features of orality the novel mostly relies on and the use of the quest in order to stress the pathological state of the presently established nation, and this is in tune with Ellington’s and Freimiller’s argument that *Matigari* is a “powerful novel” that “dramatises the disasters of postcolonial Africa through means of oral narrative structures, such as the quest.”³⁷⁵ In other words, the quest, which has some roots in the Gikuyu folk tradition, has been successfully employed by the writer in this “political” novel, if we may say so, to tell the deprived people that they have to ask serious questions about the unhealthy condition that they suffer from.

It might be needed to refer to Pheng Cheah who interestingly establishes a firm link between orality as such and the myth of national regeneration by stating that the “novelistic depiction of how the nation survives and reincarnates itself” takes place “through the interpellative power of oral narrative”³⁷⁶ because, as he would argue, this “oral” novel allows for the de-reification of the masses or the readers/listeners. He indeed explains this link by pointing out that “*Matigari*, like *Devil on the Cross*, incorporates elements of orature, popular music, and popular culture so that, through oral performance, it would become organic to the Kenyan people and organize them into a collective subject of resistance.”³⁷⁷ As argued in the

³⁷³ Ibid., p. 224.

³⁷⁴ Quoted from Lupenga Mphande in Derek Wright. (ed.). *Critical Essays on Ngugi*. 2000, p. 244.

³⁷⁵ Elisabeth Ellington & Jane Freimiller. *A year of Reading a Moth-By-Mouth Guide to Classics and Crowd Pleasers*. Naperville; Sourcebooks, Inc. 2003, p. 174.

³⁷⁶ Pheng Cheah. *Spectral Narrativity: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literature*. Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 175.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

foregoing chapter, Ngugi's recourse to orality in his later writings has to be understood in relation to his recent view about the political function of his literary production.

This novel could also be read as a "magical tale" due principally to the author's use of what has come to be called "Magical Realism". Quite obviously, Magical Realism, which manifests itself more clearly in Ngugi's use of "Gikuyu conventions of storytelling [and] mythic characterisation,"³⁷⁸ marks the novelist's gradual relinquishment of "typical" realism characteristic mainly of his pre-*Devil on the Cross* novels. The magical realist work, it must be emphasised, has recently grown up "with the recognition that in many post-colonial societies a peasant, a pre-industrial population had its imaginative life rooted in a living tradition of the mythic, the legendary and the magical."³⁷⁹ Magical realism also weds "social revolution to local cultural traditions"³⁸⁰. The folk Gikuyu story of a young man looking for an old man who can give him the cure to his illness can be related to Matigari's allegorical search for an antidote to the ailing social situation, and this remedy turns out to be a popular revolution similar to that of the epic Mau Mau war.

Centrally, as Wendy B. Faris puts it, "magic realism is ... a way for seeing in which there is space for the invisible forces that move the world: dreams, legends, myths, emotion, passion, history. All these forces find a place in the absurd, unexplained, aspects of magic realism....it is the capacity to see and write about all dimensions of reality."³⁸¹ Indeed, there is good reason to believe that Matigari is a mythified hero and, therefore, this novel stresses the importance, if not the necessity, of the use of myth in the triggering of people's social revolution. In other words, Ngugi uses myth in this novel to account for the process of the transformation of the world. Thus, African myths, rather than being seen as completely irrelevant to the present moment of liberation in the neocolonised African world, can promote Ngugi's "Marxist" idea of class struggle, which is clearly manifest in the whole narrative, as we shall see later.

Although Isidore Okpewho claims that there are some "radical [African] writers [who] have embraced the Marxist-Socialist outlook as the only real solution to Africa's present socio-political problems" and "from [their] point of view, the old tales are dismissed outright as indices of intellectual infancy of the race,"³⁸² Ngugi uses folk tales and mythical thought in

³⁷⁸ G. D. Killam et al. *The Companion to Literature of Africa*. Indiana University Press, 2004, p. 94

³⁷⁹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 132.

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 132.

³⁸¹ Wendy B. Faris. "The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism". p. 107. pp. 101-119.

³⁸² Isidore Okpewho. "Myth and Modern Fiction: Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*". Ed. Derek Wright. *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah*. Three Continents Press, 1992, p. 280.

his most politically subversive novels. Specifically, it has been observed that “Gikuyu and Christian mythologies, the Messianic myth and the myth of Gikuyu and Mumbi form the nucleus of Ngugi’s novelistic oeuvre.”³⁸³ Previously, we saw how myth can be utilised by Ngugi as a revolutionary weapon, especially by Nyakinyua in *Petals of Blood*. This novel, indeed, solidifies this assumption. To begin with, Matigari does turn a blind eye to the ancestral knowledge and mythical past of his people and this can be shown in the fact that he buries his firearms under the *mugumo* tree (the fig tree), which is deeply linked to the Gikuyu creation myth. Matigari’s choice of the *mugumo* tree is not arbitrary; rather, it shows that this land is not Christian and that it had belonged first to his Gikuyu ancestors. In other words, as F. O. Balogun argues, the reference to some Gikuyu myths in the work is primarily meant to assert “ownership rights.”³⁸⁴ The *mugumo* tree is a tree of life in Gikuyu cosmology and its evocation in the novel stresses the Kikuyu people’s deep attachment to their lands and the mythical stories narrated about their lands. The use of myth, as Ngugi himself insists repeatedly, is also meant to transcend time and space boundaries so that Matigari is not only the spokesperson of the oppressed people in his own country but also the voice of all the oppressed anywhere in the world and at all times.

Interestingly, also, this novel can be ranked within the realm of the “carnivalised literature”, which is, for David Davidson (by quoting Bakhtin), an expression of “the eternal human urge to upset convention [and] subvert power relations.”³⁸⁵ This is observable in the narrative when Matigari alone challenges the inimical neocolonial structures of social injustice and shameful oppression. So, in tune with J. A. Cuddon’s definition that the carnivalesque seeks “a disruption and subversion of authority, [or] a turn upside down of the hierarchal scale,” and therefore the basic aim of the carnivalesque art is “to disrupt authority and introduce alternatives,”³⁸⁶ the novel is carnivalesque in the sense that it makes it very clear that Matigari rejects fear which is, in his view, the cause of his people’s misery and conveys a hope for the disruption of the neocolonial authority, which is obviously represented by Robert Williams and Junior John Boy. So this novel does not only create a theoretical space for the temporary liberation from the hegemonic discourse of neo-imperialist capitalism

³⁸³ Ayo Kehinde. “The Contemporary African Novel as a Tool of Cultural Education”. *The African Symposium: An On Line Journal of African Educational Research*, March 2005, p. 55.

³⁸⁴ F. Odun Balogun, op. cit. ,p. 142.

³⁸⁵ Qtd in C. C. Thomson. *National Imagination and Novel in the Late Twentieth-Century Denmark*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2003, p. 3.

³⁸⁶ J. A. Cuddon. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Fourth Edition, London: The Penguin Group, 1998.

staunchly defended by the pair of Robert Williams and Junior Boy, but offers a possibility of change and social transformation as well. Matigari's quick shift from mere idealism to revolutionary action, as we shall see later, indicates that Matigari is firmly determined not only to lay bare the evils of the present hierarchal structure, but also, and more significantly, to de-hierarchise the postcolonial despotic system of power, and in this way a social regeneration can occur.

It may seem also necessary to shed light on some images that can symbolise the idea of national regeneration, notably, rejuvenation and the recuperation of the house. In the novel the idea of regeneration is partly communicated through Matigari's rejuvenation. At first, we read that Matigari is a very old man. He is described as follows: "Age crept back on his face; wrinkles seemed to have increased and deepened. How everything had changed. What was this world going to?" (p. 29) Much later, we see him more youthful and energetic, and in the following passage: "The courage of truth had once again transformed him. It seemed to have wiped age off his face, making him look extremely youthful" (p. 31). However, shortly after, Matigari's movement is slowed by his old age: "Matigari felt sad. Age seized him. His face slackened, and he merely dragged his feet along" (p. 41). But soon we learn that Matigari has retrieved his younger age when we read that "his eyes shone brightly. All the creases on his face had gone, and youth had once again returned to him" (p. 43). Furthermore, despite his old age, Matigari is given prominent and strong physical attributes. The opening pages of the novel tell us that he is "tall and well-built" (p. 3). This shows clearly that the notion of regeneration is partly symbolised by the process of self-rejuvenation. The old age transparently represents acquiescence to the tragic status quo and the impossibility of improving it, whereas the return to the young age is highly symbolic of revitalisation and resistance to the present state of anomy.

Also, as we shall see later, his house is the symbol of the nation and the very fact that his house and plantations are now managed by John Boy indicates clearly that the country is ruled by a tyrannical neocolonial black elite. Therefore, the process of national regeneration which Matigari embarks on is made very clear in the novel when the hero tells his faithful companions (Guthera and Muriuki) that "I would rather build a *new* house altogether from scratch, a bigger house, a house with proper foundations, a firm foundation!" (p. 157, emphasis added), and this means clearly that the present house that is managed by his black oppressor has a very shaky foundation, and thus the whole nation is built on "shifting sand", as it were. Guthera and Muriuki are also characters who symbolise the coming generation that

will restore order in the upside down post-colonial state. Their important role in the novel will be discussed at a later stage.

So far, we have dealt with the aesthetic ideology of the writer and its intrinsic link to his politically subversive ideology of overthrowing the system of naked robbery and unabashed theft. In the following sections, however, more focus will be laid on Ngugi's political ideals and his views about the possible means to achieve them.

2- Matigari's "Utopian" Vision of the "Post-Revolutionary" Nation

a- Nation and Nationalism and the Narrative of Anti-Neocolonial Liberation

Matigari represents unquestioningly the crystallization of the collective desires of the nation. His personal aspiration of the establishment of a truly independent nation and a just socio-economic system is analogous to his people's desire of social equality and material improvement. It is not then an exaggeration to state that Matigari embodies the dream of how an ideal community might be formed out of the present chaos. But, we shall use more the term "nation" than "community" for a wide variety of reasons. Centrally, a nation means above all the homogenisation of different cultural communities, and the new Kenyan state has different communities. But the issue of nation is not easily settled in this way because there has recently been much sound and fury about the use of the nation model, which is usually taken to be western in the discourse of anti-Western liberation.³⁸⁷

In other words, one might argue that Ngugi's conception of "nation" is a moot point in his work because such a concept has chiefly developed in the sanctum and sanctorum of the Western political tradition. As Derek Wright rightly puts it, Ngugi's "mode of knowledge [in this narrative] is still imprisoned in the romance of nation and of national independence, both notions triggered by the colonial epistemology."³⁸⁸ However, the concept of nation must not be regarded as a stumbling block for the development of a powerful liberationist discourse for the African people. It has to be noted that this dissertation does not question whether or not the nation is an evitable social formation in post-independence Africa. In fact, according to John McLeod, "the origins of the nation in the West have much to do with the pursuit of a set of human ideals often identified as the European Enlightenment, and such ideals include liberty and progress."³⁸⁹ However, since the historical and the political context of Ngugi's

³⁸⁷ Christopher Miller. "Response to Esonwanne: Alien Nation?" *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Fall 2001, pp. 63-68, Which is a response to Uzo Esowanne. "the Nation as Contested Referent". *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Fall 2001, pp. 49-62.

³⁸⁸ Derek Wright. *Emerging Perspectives on Nuruddin Farah*. Africa World Press, 2002, p. 453. Likewise, Emmanuel Yewah notes that the concept of nation is slippery since it has a "shifting and unstable significance within African political discourse" (2001: 49).

³⁸⁹ John MacLeod. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 104.

Africa is different from that of Europe in the Enlightenment era, the nation for Ngugi must be based on the twin ideals of truth and justice, as we shall see later. John MacLeod, in this sense, convincingly states that “to dismiss the ideas of nation and nationalism on the grounds that they have Western colonial origins seems rather naïve, not least because it denies the fact that old ideas can be put to new purposes.”³⁹⁰ In addition, the nation can be regarded as a “mode of social organisation and economic production compatible with the exigencies of the modern world.”³⁹¹ Accordingly, Ngugi does not appear to see the nation-state as a “curse”, to use Basil Davidson’s word, for the African people in their post-independence world, as some Afrocentric scholars might contend. What Ngugi decries is “the murderousness, brutality and corruption –not to mention the ineptitude, cowardice, and greed of so many post-colonial leaders”³⁹² of the African nations. Stated differently, the failure of the nation to materialise the ideals of the epic war for freedom is mainly due to the failure of the post-colonial national leaders and hence cannot be explained in terms of the colonial origin of the political system of the nation in Africa.

Basically, Benedict Anderson makes his well-known statement that “the nation is “an imagined political community,”³⁹³ and hence, if we subscribe to this view, the distinction between the nation and the community should be blurred (that is why sometimes “nation” and “community” are used interchangeably in this chapter). Anderson argues further that the growth of the nation coincided with the decline of the “sacred communities.”³⁹⁴ But Ngugi, as argued before, is not a diehard fundamentalist like Armah, i.e. Ngugi does not call strongly and doggedly for the return of the pure communal past, as Armah does in his *The Healers*. But this is not to say that by adopting the idea of nation of Kenya Ngugi denies completely the concept of community and the ideals of the communal past.

But since the context of Ngugi’s novel is the neocolonial African world, Ngugi’s telling of the story of his community, which is surely rooted in his “anti-imperialist nationalistic sentiments”, has to be discussed in relation to his intentions of freeing his people from all forms of neocolonial dependency. So the new global situation, as Derek Wright clearly points out, “demands narratives which face up the task of representing the ambivalences of the

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 105.

³⁹¹ Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 75.

³⁹² Neil Lazarus. “The Global Dispensation since 1945”. Ed. Neil Lazarus. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 20.

³⁹³ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso 1983, p. 6. Renato Rosaldo states that the nation is a cultural artefact and the community is a natural object. Renato Rosaldo. “Social Justice and the Crisis of National Communities”. Ed. Francis Barker et al., 1994, p. 245.

³⁹⁴ Benedict Anderson, op. cit., p. 22.

postcolonial situation.”³⁹⁵ In other words, the historical context of today’s Africa (especially with the rise of neo-imperialism whose cover term nowadays is indisputably “globalisation”) obliges the writer to assert the autonomy of his nation because, as Bhabha writes, “globalization gazes at the nation through the back mirror, as it speeds towards the strategic decolonization of state sovereignty.”³⁹⁶

The concept of the nation undoubtedly brings to the fore the notion of nationalism which, it must be recalled, was the driving force of the violent Mau Mau war for “Uhuru”. Not surprisingly, it continues to be an impetus for today’s subtle phenomenon of decolonisation, and this is in line with the *bolekaja* critics’ observation that “the task of decolonisation cannot be carried out in a vacuum; rather, it “requires an atmosphere of active nationalist consciousness.”³⁹⁷ Nevertheless, as the novel brings to light, and as Fanon did before, there are two kinds of nationalism: anti-imperialist nationalism and nationalism that is complicit with the Western hegemony.³⁹⁸ No doubt, consequently, *Matigari* is to be identified with the former kind. His projected aspiration of an alternative development of his nation markedly levels criticism at narrow-minded nationalism or nationalism embraced by the sham bourgeois class, which does not lead to the genuine transformation of the neocolonial stratified society.

The novel, to borrow from Fredrick Jameson, is “a national allegory”, and it is more precisely “an allegory for the unfinished nationalist project”³⁹⁹ which has to be completed by Matigari whose sing-song question reveals his messianic faith in the construction of a truly democratic and just nation-state. However, Matigari is not simply interrogating things, but more importantly he is a man of action (as he says “our saying is doing”). His questions are the starting point for a new popular revolution, as explained below

*Matigari’s hunger and thirst are therefore not for physical fulfilment but for nation’s spiritual vitality. His search for an individual or institution concerned with truth and justice is a call for unity in the struggle to establish this spiritual vitality. It is an indictment of the fear and silence that are ironically inspired by any call for a united search and respect for truth.*⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵ Derek Wright. *Emerging perspectives on Nuruddin Farah*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002, p. 451.

³⁹⁶ Homi. Bhabha. “Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*”, Grove Press, 2001, p. xi. For this reason, narrating the nation becomes necessary in the globalised world because, as Achebe aptly notes, “this topsy-turvy world presents new narrative challenges” (cited in Derek Wright, op. cit., p. 451).

³⁹⁷ Chinweizu, Jemie Owuchekwa & Ohechukwu Madubuike. *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*. London: K.P.I., 1980, p. 4.

³⁹⁸ Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (op. cit., p. 144) states clearly that “if nationalism is not explained, enriched, and deepened, if it does not very quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into humanism; then it leads to a dead-end.”

³⁹⁹ Pheng Cheah. *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literature*. Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 371.

⁴⁰⁰ Dieter Riemenschneider & Frank Schulze-Engler. *African Literature in the Eighties*. London: Routledge, 1993, p. 125 (emphasis mine)

Significantly, the novel explores deeply the primordial struggle between the imperialist forces and the down-and-out society. This struggle is an example of the cosmic battle between good and evil (see the previous chapter). Not paradoxically, the neocolonial government represents the evil powers, whereas the hero of the story, Matigari, is obviously an embodiment of the forces of virtue or the power of regeneration, and hence the concept of “nation’s spiritual vitality”, as mentioned in the above quotation, is fully justified.

b- Matigari’s Idealistic Vision of the Post-Colonial Nation

Matigari is a “returnee”, who returns from the forest in the hope of gaining back his rightful inheritance which includes his house and his land and gathering his dispersed family in what he sees as the peaceful “post-revolutionary” period since he murmurs to himself “I must rise up now and go to all the public places, blowing the horn of patriotic service and the trumpet of patriotic victory” (p.6). His full name is Matigari ma Njiruungi, which means in the Gikuyu language “the patriot who survived the bullets” (p. 20). So he comes back with an already patriotic history. However, his search for his family soon turns out to be an endless search for truth and justice, because he discovers that the whole land is still run by ogres (p. 56) and, worse still, is in the grip of fear, poverty, and despair. Once in the forest, he had successfully kept “the fire of freedom burning” (p. 20, 23, 37) and vanquished in his epic battle his oppressors Howard Williams, the white-man-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed, and his “loyal” servant Senior John Boy. However, his “peaceful homecoming”, as he decides to bury his weapons and gird himself with a belt of peace, is short-lived and his dream of a post-revolutionary nation begins to be shattered when he first meets a group of helpless children, with tattered clothes, in total squalor and abject poverty. His hearing of the factory bells reminds him too of the tormented history of his community. Matigari is soon made conscious that independence has not only failed to “heal the hurt of history, but also subverted and left in abeyance all hopes of exorcising [his] bereft continent, by heralding an age of tyranny and unreason, an age teeming with swarms of plagues”⁴⁰¹. So instead of enjoying a period of peace, a new military struggle is perceived to be an urgent necessity. He soon learns that he is yet to claim victory and a more arduous task is still waiting for him in order to “to regain his

⁴⁰¹ Adekunle Olowonmi. “The Writer and the Quest for Democratic Governance in Nigeria: Transcending Post-Independence Disillusionment”. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3, March 2008, p. 56. <http://www.jpanafrican.com/docs/vol2no3/TheWriterAndTheQuestforDemocraticGovernanceinNigeria.pdf>.

kingdom, which has been lost to the ethics of greed and avarice, and to restore to its traditional philosophy of communal sharing”⁴⁰².

Soon after his return, then, his dream is shattered as he is made aware that “a neocolonial nightmare structures modern African life” because of the prevalence of “corruption, underdevelopment, poverty, collaboration, and violence.”⁴⁰³ To make it worse, “Parrotology” is the official creed of the government (Parrotology can be simply defined as mimicry which indeed leads to the creation of servile class loyal to the dictatorial international powers as we saw in the preceding chapter). Thus, Matigari is no doubt believed to be “the superhuman figure [who] has come to complete the freedom struggle”.⁴⁰⁴

The whole narrative, it must be emphasised, investigates thoroughly the theme of “de-territorialisation” for it explores how Matigari suffers enormously from the process of the wrongful appropriation of what he claims to be his home by the duo of the white master Robert Williams and his black “slave” John Boy, and for this very reason he attempts to seize his rightful inheritance, the house and the plantations, after having won the epic Mau Mau war. Because of his participation in the Mau Mau uprising, Matigari reminds us of Abdulla, who tells us about the economic goals for which the Mau Mau fighters went to the war:

To redeem the land: to fight so that the industries like the shoe-factory which had swallowed his sweat could belong to the people: so that his children could one day have enough to eat and to wear under adequate shelter from rain: so that they would say in pride, my father died that I might live, this had transformed him from a slave before a boss to a man, that was the day of his true circumcision into a man. (POB, p. 136)

Above all, Mau Mau is the Independence Movement of the Land and Freedom army. In other words, regaining control of their rightful lands was the top priority of the freedom warriors. So Matigari fiercely fought the colonial structures, epitomised by Howard Williams and his black servant, to be “reterritorialised”. But despite his military victory, his goals have not yet been attained, and hence a new war has to be waged against the neocolonial tormentors, who have not only taken his land but ruthlessly exploit all his people as well.

James Ogude, thus, considers that Matigari is the “mythic redeemer”⁴⁰⁵ of his land as he fought for it in the past and decides to fight for it now. His reclamation of the house and the plantations is the starting point for his second struggle, as it was obviously the starting point for his first one. In the novel, also, the house is, as mentioned earlier, the symbol of the nation

⁴⁰² F. Odun Balogun, op. cit., p. 135.

⁴⁰³ Albert J. Paolini., Anthony Elliott, and Anthony Moran. *Navigating Modernity: Postcolonialism, Identity, and International Relations*. University of New England Press, 2002 , p. 67.

⁴⁰⁴ F. Odun Balogun, op. cit., p. 143.

⁴⁰⁵ Ogude, James . *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. Pluto Press, 1999, p. 106.

since his attempt to find a habitat becomes gradually an attempt “to reverse the betrayal of independence.”⁴⁰⁶ So we can safely say that Matigari acts at the macro-level because of his growing awareness that the emergent nation has betrayed the desires and the expectations of its populace. This observation is consistent with Cantalupo’s view that “Matigari’s quest across the country for fellow believers whom, he hopes, will help him establish a new social order founded on the twin ideals of Truth and Justice, for which taking occupation of his ‘house’ would merely constitute the final test and validation.”⁴⁰⁷

As Ngugi argues, Matigari is a “collective figure” because his actions are triggered by political motives, and this can be substantiated by the ample evidence that he variously represents himself as a figurative embodiment of a farmer, a factory worker, a tailor, a soldier (patriot), and a builder and too by calling all the Kenyan people his family (his wives and children) on a good number of occasions in the narrative. His personal search for his family soon becomes a political mission of finding or establishing the lost ideals of his people’s long-awaited nation.

Matigari is best discussed in terms of the questions that he fearlessly asks, which are indicative of, to use Osei-Nyame Kwadwo’s phrase, a “serious questioning of the idealistic euphoria that accompanied Independence.”⁴⁰⁸ His words are utilised as a tool to bring about the transformation and regeneration of the present to meet the demands of his society. The protagonist of the novel, Matigari, is puzzled by a set of questions related to the foundations upon which independent Kenya is built. His two major questions are: where can he find truth? Where can he find justice? Or how can he establish justice? But to answer these two important questions, he has to answer a number of related questions which are: “what had gone wrong? Why? How? How had the revolution been ‘subverted’? How had the masses been demobilized? How could activists have allowed themselves to be easily coopted?”⁴⁰⁹ Those questions are essentially meant to rally the people, recreate social unity, raise social masses’ awakening, and ultimately plead for armed resistance. Those “subversive questions”, in effect, establish a continuity between the past heroic war and the present redemptive struggle.

⁴⁰⁶ Simon Gikandi, 2000, op cit, p. 371.

⁴⁰⁷ Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1995, p. 198.

⁴⁰⁸ Osei-Nyame Kwadwo. “Love a Nation: Fanon’s African Revolution and Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*”. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 1998, p. 98.

⁴⁰⁹ Neil Lazarus. “(Re)turn to the People: Ngugi wa Thiong’o and the Crisis of Postcolonial African Intellectualism”. Ed. Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi*, op. cit., p. 13.

Matigari is indeed fully aware that a “lie is often woven to justify the subjugation of the majority by a minority.”⁴¹⁰ For Matigari, the Minister for Truth and Justice is a culprit that is manipulating people into believing in his own lies, like other political leaders in post-colonial Africa. Matigari, thus, acts as a social visionary because he clearly exposes the great lies of the politicians as the dream of New Jerusalem has not yet been actualised. So the Minister tries to exercise the cultural hegemony of the state over the people by using the hegemonic ideas of the dominant class. He in fact sees that truth must lead people, or the “Social Other,” to borrow from Lukacs, to accept the status quo, in spite of the obvious existence of a wide gap between the capitalist class and the labour class. In addition, justice (or instant justice as he calls it) can operate through coercive means. Truth and justice, as viewed by the Minister for Truth and Justice, can be respectively identified with the Gramscian concepts of consent and coercion which are, according to his view, the components of hegemony.

Matigari, concurring fully with the student’s view, asserts that there are two radically different truths. There is, on the one hand, a truth that serves the oppressor, and yet there is another truth that is in the service of the oppressed. This view of the existence of multiple truths is largely reminiscent of Edward Said’s argument, which has some roots in the Foucauldian philosophy, about the existence of a blurred demarcation line between “truth” and “representation”. In this regard, Edward Said contends that “there is no distinction between pure and political knowledge,” and ends up saying that “what is “commonly concluded is not truth but representations.”⁴¹¹ Thus, there is some reason to believe that what is truth for Matigari is no more than a representation for Edward Said, because, to Matigari’s mind, the “truth” is a particular view about a given reality. Accordingly, Matigari’s search for truth is in fact a search for a representation of the post-colonial realities, which is certainly different from the representations provided by the oppressive and repressive regime. He is now well aware that there are “truths” which demobilise the masses and discourage them from taking immediate commitments, and thereby these truths ensure the survival of the present despotic system. In other words, he aptly observes that the “truths” espoused by the tyrants nurture in the masses “a spirit of tolerance and generosity” (to borrow from Eagleton).⁴¹²

However, Matigari has a view of justice that is totally different from the one given by His Excellency Ole Excellence as Matigari believes that justice can be established when “the

⁴¹⁰ Ngugi, W. T. *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 23.

⁴¹¹ Edward Said. *Orientalism*. London: Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 21.

⁴¹² Terry Eagleton. *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 23.

tailor demands his clothes, the tiller his land, the worker the produce of his sweat” (p. 21). In fact, it is not an overstatement to say that justice for Matigari seems to be identified with happiness and material well-being because it is only when he sees that most of the people are almost penniless (and some even are homeless) that he comes to the conclusion that the post-independence state has not established justice. Justice, in his view, does not mean absolute equality, but at least adequate living conditions for the citizens must be guaranteed by the government, and this is undoubtedly the chief social obligation of the ruling state. Clearly, then, the struggle for justice is at the heart of this novel, as “Matigari is a leader who will lead the country to equality through the application of honesty, truth, and justice.”⁴¹³ Without a doubt, Matigari, because of his incessant attempt to show the path to rectitude, is made the ideal spokesperson for the establishment of genuine democracy and social justice.

Matigari’s return from the bush prepares the ground for a new battle whose spirit is reinvigorated from the great days of the Mau Mau. Once detained, he reminds his gaol-mates of the glorious achievements of people’s past. He tells them that “it is not the quantity that counts but the act of sharing whatever we have” (p. 55.). As the narrator puts it quite persuasively, “[those] words seemed to remind them of the things long forgotten, carrying them to the dreams they had long before” (p. 56). Thus, in Karen Laurence’s view, in the novel “the communalism of the African past [represented by Matigari] is pitted against the violence of multinational capitalism [overseen in this country by Junior Boy],”⁴¹⁴ and the violence of the local watchdogs of international capitalism is symbolised in the novel by having Matigari arrested by the new illegal owners of his house.

Matigari also advises his countrymen to believe that truth must not be told with fear, but with courage and defiance. He keeps telling them, as the Gikuyu proverb goes, “great fear breeds great misery in the land” (p. 90). He also lifts their spirit by saying that “there is no night so long that will not end with dawn” (p. 46). Therefore, Matigari’s speech creates a “condition of possibility” for the socialist transformation of capitalist society and his desire for the establishment of an egalitarian society is an impetus for all his later actions. Indeed, the novel’s hero is resolutely opposed to the neocolonial stratification of Kenyan society and also, more bitterly, he resents the fact that such displeasing conditions have not been challenged, let alone changed, by the tormented masses. So, unlike many other people including even the intellectuals, Matigari refuses to be the passive “endurer” of the present tormenting conditions. He stresses that the wretched people’s “guilty” silence and

⁴¹³ G. D. Killam. *The Literature of Africa*. 2004, op. cit., p. 97.

⁴¹⁴ Karen Laurence. *Decolonizing Tradition*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992, p. 249

inexplicable lack of defiance worsen their plight as he repeatedly tells them that “too much silence breeds misery” (p. 31). The very fact that Matigari confronts face-to-face the corrupt emergent native elite and speaks on behalf of the oppressed in a country where there is no truth and justice is itself a sign of hope for the transformation of the nation from the land of merciless neocolonial exploitation to a space of socialist utopia. Simply put, his allegorical search, which was initially peaceful, aims at replacing destruction and despair with promise and hope. Matigari is not burdened by the so-called “disillusionment syndrome,” or to use Cantalupo’s term, “postpolitical cynicism”⁴¹⁵ which has resulted from political and economic failures and woes. He rather has to find a way out of the impasse, and the best way in which this is done is by “restoring connection – beyond the single ‘lost’ moment of political independence- to the on-going project of anti-imperialist struggle.”⁴¹⁶ Therefore, this novel does more than negotiate space for democratic discourse; indeed, it mobilises the people and wakes them up from their lethal habit of silence and submissiveness.

In other words, the failure of the hoped-for social and economic freedoms for Matigari’s people “has created an atmosphere of fear and repression, transforming people from truth-sayers to self-interested egotists, blatantly exposed in the student’s and teacher’s idealist response in the cell and their cowardly rejoinder to Matigari’s moral challenge later.”⁴¹⁷ This novel is, therefore, on the one hand, an exposition of “the misrule and the subsequent disillusionment emerging as a chronic symptom of the post-independence era,”⁴¹⁸ and on the other, an expression of a possibility for the people’s creation of a new (i.e. better) nation. Matigari’s role, then, is to crystallise the hopes and aspirations of the downtrodden, while also acting as inspirer of revolutionary actions coming from the same oppressed people. Matigari’s words, if put into effect, would carry Kenyans to the “promised land” where freedom and justice predominate.

c- Marxism and Utopianism in the Service of National Regeneration

Ngugi’s goal in this novel is to promote mass rebellion through his allegorical hero, the seeker of truth and justice. The novel then presents the conflict between the two rival ideologies of capitalism and socialism: the ideology of the tyrannical state and the ideology of the exploited population. *Matigari* projects, like Ngugi’s two previous novels, the author’s Marxist vision of history as class warfare. This warfare is animated by the hated existence of the neocolonial

⁴¹⁵ Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴¹⁶ Neil Lazarus. “(Re)turn to the People: Ngugi wa Thiong’o and the Crisis of Postcolonial African Intellectualism”. Ed. Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴¹⁷ Anders Breidlid. “Ngugi’s *Matigari*: a Non-Materialist Discourse and Post-Modernism”. *The Australian Journal of Trans-national Writing*, Vol. 1, March 2005.

⁴¹⁸ Charles Cantalupo. *Texts and Contexts*, op. cit., p. xv.

class-structured society that manifests itself in the narrative's "juxtaposition of extremes: slums, prostitutes, and street kids as contrasted with the very wealthy John Boy."⁴¹⁹ We noted earlier that Ngugi's ideology is in the service of his conceptualisation of an alternative nation in this narrative. In fact, Matigari's "ideology", so to speak, is, to use Karl Mannheim's term, "situationally transcendent," in the way that it is sharply critical of the status quo and thereby oriented towards its transformation and dissolution, and which runs counter to the "situationally congruent" ideology which, still in his view, is generally about accepting the present social situation.⁴²⁰ Matigari has then developed an ideology that is so critical of the present-day organisation of ossified property relations; and his words that are quoted here attest clearly to this assertion: "*There are two worlds (...) There is the world of those who accept things as they are, there is that of those who want to change things*" (p. 91). Thus, we shall use the term "ideology" in Althusser's meaning which is not a representation of existing relations of production but "an imaginary relationship of individuals to their relations of production and the relations that derived from them."⁴²¹ Formulated differently, ideology involves not only beliefs, but also a wide range of desires, interests and aspirations.

Consequently, the social regeneration is a process which aims at putting an end to the neocolonial class society and this can be done by first awakening the downtrodden people's class consciousness. For Ngugi, the process of regeneration must start with a clear perception of a completely degenerate present condition, whose state of degeneracy is stressed by rampant corruption, immorality, exploitation of the masses, and social injustices. Thus, the notion of regeneration could therefore be simply interpreted as the establishment of social justice and economic equities, and this could be attained by the "healing" powers of the people. In other words, Ngugi seeks redemptive solutions through the people's revolutionary actions. Ngugi's thought is mainly coloured by leftist ideas, but his concept of social class is also nurtured by such related concepts as history, culture, and local epistemology, as we argued in the foregoing chapters.

It could be further mentioned that one of the great advantages of Ngugi's espousal of the Marxist tenets is that, according to Ato Quayson, "[t]here is no question...of the efficacy of Marxism in providing progressive ways by which non-western nations have grasped the processes of globalization and helping them to position themselves strategically with regard to

⁴¹⁹ André Viola, Jacqueline Bradolph and Denise Coussy. *New Fiction in English from Africa West, East, and South*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998, p. 106.

⁴²⁰ Cited in Hayden White. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 68.

⁴²¹ Louis Althusser. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". Ed. C. Harrison & Paul Wood, 2003, p. 957.

these processes.”⁴²² In fact, Matigari seems to bear the mantle of social transformation in his newly freed society in spite of the inhibiting forces of imperialism/capitalism (or globalisation in short) and his “unconscious” use of Marxism, in Ato Quayson’s words, “mobilize[s] the ordinary people for the business of building viable post-independence societies.”⁴²³

Matigari indeed tries hard to “de-reify” and hence invigorate the downtrodden people whose consciousness is now colonised as they are indoctrinated to envision their world from a neo-imperialist perspective. It has to be pointed out that the concept of “reification” was propagated by the Hungarian Marxist theorist Georg Lukacs, who contends that the capitalist system has as one of its undesirable consequences the reification which he sees as the process of “radically transforming everything human, flowing, processual, organic, and connected into disconnected and ‘alienated’ objects, items, lifeless atoms.”⁴²⁴ He, in other words, argues that the capitalist system commodifies labour. The novel, in fact, depicts clearly that the workers are treated as “quantifiable” things, and that they are mechanically objectified wholly separated from their total human personality. Guthera, the woman who accompanies Matigari in his search for the nation’s lost ideals, for instance, makes Matigari aware of the reification process that the Kenyan peasants and workers have been subject to by telling him: “You see, I have known all along that the life I have been leading is not that of a human being. It has been more like that of an animal. My life has not been any different from that of any animal, which breathes, eats, drinks, and goes to sleep” (p. 140). In fact, Matigari’s mind is not reified since the reified consciousness, as defined by Georg Lukacs, “does not ever attempt to transcend [realities].”⁴²⁵ Consequently, Matigari, by re-politicising himself, wants his people to move “beyond this empirical reality into a putative realm of possibility.”⁴²⁶ Nevertheless, Matigari is fully aware that “de-reification” would not be possible unless “the transformation of passive, contemplative consciousness into active, critical consciousness”⁴²⁷ occurs. Active and critical consciousness, generally speaking, propels people into action. Therefore, the de-reification implies both objective and subjective decolonisation, which are necessary ingredients of restoring the lost sovereignty (cf. the previous chapter).

⁴²² Ato Quayson. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, p. 13.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴²⁴ Explained by Edward Said in his *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 230-1.

⁴²⁵ George Lukacs. “The Phenomenon of Reification”. Ed. Drew Milne. *Modern Critical Thought: An Anthology of Theorists Writing on Theorists*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 32.

⁴²⁶ To borrow from Edward Said. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, op. cit., p. 232.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

The idea of class consciousness may lead us to Fredric Jameson's statement that "all class consciousness of whatever type is utopian insofar as it expresses a unity of a collectivity."⁴²⁸ Hence, there is also good reason to believe that Matigari's conceptualisation of the post-colonial nation is based on some utopian beliefs. So here we need to make a difference between ideology and utopia. This distinction is thus seen by Zeus Leonardo, who argues that "utopia has been described as a distortion of reality in the positive direction; ideology has been described as a distortion of reality in the negative direction" and explains his argument by adding that "utopia attempts to represent reality as better than itself, as having reconciled its tensions and contradictions."⁴²⁹ Indeed, bearing in mind Leonardo's definition, Matigari can be said to have a utopian vision of his post-independence nation of creating a utopian space beyond the national independence. Fundamentally, too, as Abiola Irele opines, the myth of nation as it is constructed in such African discourses are pervaded with "utopianism and even millenarianism"⁴³⁰.

The whole novel, it should be added, establishes a firm relationship between the utopian vision and social change, and this is in line with the assumption that every social change must be preceded by (and based upon) some utopian beliefs. As Fredric Jameson notes, "utopia is crucial for change."⁴³¹ Thus, Matigari attempts tirelessly, and through different means (both democratic and military) to reverse the degenerative effects of colonial and neocolonial dominance, which is associated in the novel with such images of degeneracy such as rubbish heap, police harassment, and the violent street urchins. By transcending an extremely deplorable social situation, Matigari can be said to act as an agent of radical change.

Utopianism is often defined as a thought that "includes critique of the present reality and the presentation of the worthwhile future demanding realization."⁴³² Not only does the novel describe faithfully the present realities of post-independence Kenya, it also prescribes an action that is potentially transformative of those hard realities. Basically, Matigari insists that "tomorrow belongs to [him]" (p. 64). He therefore can be said to have gained, to use Kwasi Wiredu's words, "consciousness of the multifarious causes which currently operate to keep the prospect of true social regeneration locked in the dim recesses of the future."⁴³³ For one

⁴²⁸ Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious*, 1981, op. cit., p. 291.

⁴²⁹ Zeus Leonardo. "Reality on Trial: Notes on Ideology, Education, and Utopia". *Policy Features in Education*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2003, p. 504.

⁴³⁰ Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 75.

⁴³¹ Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Methuen, 1989, p. xvi.

⁴³² Elizabeth E. Heilman. "Escaping the Bind between Utopia and Dystopia: Eutopic Critical Pedagogy of Identity and Embodied Practice". University of Heifa, 2005, p. 141.

⁴³³ Kwasi Wiredu. *Philosophy and African Culture*. Cambridge: C. U. P., 1980., p. 98.

thing, *Matigari* could be considered as a utopian narrative since it is, according to Ralph Poradzik's definition, "a quest for an alternative reality."⁴³⁴ More exactly, the utopian thought of the author in this narrative is perceptible in his addressing of the failures of the present by a positive imaginative reconstruction of reality. This novel can thus be as utopian since it "portrays a society in which change is integral, rather than representing a threat of degeneration"⁴³⁵. Rather than being content with simply commenting on the intolerable neocolonial situation, *Matigari* sets himself the goal of putting an end to the post-independence period which is unexpectedly marked by alienation, relentless exploitation and oppression.

Moreover, this novel is best noted for its evocation of millenary images. As Kathleen Greenfield explicitly indicates, Ngugi's "use of Christian imagery [in *Matigari*] seems to provide a vehicle for Ngugi's millenarian message rather than an appeal to any church-based Christian establishment."⁴³⁶ Despite his "secularised" social vision of his nation, Ngugi seems to be influenced by Christian thought (as we saw before with Muturi, the working class leader in *DOC*). However, as Ngugi time and again has noted, Christianity is a tool used by the imperialists to weaken the resistance of the angered masses. The Christian teaching, in his view, then, "is designed to produce passive acquiescence in an unjust and destructive system,"⁴³⁷ that is why *Matigari* announces openly that he does not belong to ruling elite's religions or to their churches (p. 94), and hence such an announcement could be construed as an explicit condemnation of Christianity and its institutions. But, as Porter et al. comment, "his message is not doctrinal, but political and social."⁴³⁸ In effect, *Matigari* does not attack the Christian religion in its own right, but, rather its instrumental use by the institutions of neocolonial power to tighten their grips on the masses.

Even though *Matigari*'s rejection of Christianity is regarded by some as a manifestation of "the highest form of patriotism,"⁴³⁹ *Matigari* is not at all opposed to the ethics of Christianity, which include principally "peace, justice, equality, and brotherly love" because, not surprisingly, "those values are concomitant with traditional Gikuyu or Kenyan values which

⁴³⁴ Ralph Poradzik. "Nationalism, Cross-Culturalism, and Utopian Vision in South African Utopian and Dystopian Writings". *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Fall 2001, p. 186.

⁴³⁵ Chris Ferns. *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in the Utopian Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999, p. 69.

⁴³⁶ Kathleen Greenfield. "Murdering the Sleep of Dictators: Corruption, Betrayal, and the Call to Revolution in the Work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o". Ed. Charles Cantalupo. *The World of Ngugi*, op. cit., p. 40.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴³⁸ Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes and David Tombs. *Faith in the Millennium*. University Press of New England, 2006, p. 384.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

are expressed in the traditional songs of the novel.”⁴⁴⁰ Therefore, this novel contains elements of different cultural influences. Fundamentally, it is premised on the ethical principles of Gikuyuism, Christianity, and Marxism.

Also, the novel deals more explicitly with the Christian idea of “sacrifice”. André Viola et al. interestingly claim that the blood of Matigari, at the end of the story, that mixes with the river, gives ample evidence of his dedication to the “political ideals, to the point of supreme sacrifice.”⁴⁴¹ Before the publication of this novel, Ngugi announced that the Mau Mau was coming back. The Mau Mau movement, as clearly expressed in *A Grain of Wheat* through the voice of its hero Kihika, is based on the notion of sacrifice; to die so that others live. Matigari functions much in the same way, as he appears to be the long-awaited messiah.⁴⁴² In fact, rumour has it that the appearance of Matigari is probably the Second Coming of Christ. To see Matigari as a messianic figure can be further supported by the fact that he hopes to redeem his people’s errors through his own commitment. In this respect Porter et al. indicate that “for Ngugi, the struggle for social, political, and economic equity is not over, but the realisation of this ideal can be expedited by Christ figures whose vision is sustained by total personal commitment, even to the point of death.”⁴⁴³ It could be argued that in the figure of Matigari, as Janie Scott asserts, the author “fuses one of the leaders of the Mau Mau freedom fighters, the mythical General Mathenge Mirugi, with Jesus Christ, and the emotional aspirations of the Kenyan masses.”⁴⁴⁴

In general, the novel explores the biblical notions of birth, death, and regeneration. For example, Muriuki, the street urchin and the faithful companion of Matigari, is seen by many critics as Matigari resurrected, though their claim seems to me unfounded, as he retrieves Matigari’s buried weapons and continues his struggle. Resilience and endurance are thus signalled as necessary virtues for the Kenyans until the final victory is achieved.

d- The Euphemistic Discourse of the State Narrative and the State of Degeneracy

⁴⁴⁰ Anders Breidlid. “Ngugi’s *Matigari*: a Non-Materialist Discourse and Post-Modernism”. *The Australian Journal of Trans-national Writing*, Vol. 1, March 2005.

⁴⁴¹ André Viola, Jacqueline Bardolph & Denise Coussy, 1998, op. cit., p. 107.

⁴⁴² Susan V. Gallagher interestingly points out that Ngugi uses in his works biblical images and stories because of the familiarity of the people of his homeland with the Bible, and therefore, the Biblical story could be used as a call or a loud cry for justice and freedom. Even the priest in the novel tells Matigari that “Christ is the only one who can right a world which is upside down” (p. 92). Susan V. Gallagher. *Postcolonial Literature and the Biblical Call for Justice*. Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1994, p. 31.

⁴⁴³ Stantely E. Porter, Michael. A. Hayes and David Tomb. *Images of Christ*. Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004, p. 250

⁴⁴⁴ Janie Scott. *And the Birds Began to Sing: Religion and Literature in Postcolonial Culture*. Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1996.

The regeneration of the nation cannot take place unless the subjective realities created by the so-called “State narratives” are dispelled. The state narratives include chiefly the speeches of the politicians and the discourses of the media which claim to be “non-discursive”. For example, the speech that the Minister for Truth and Justice delivers in front of the angered workers of the Anglo-American Leather and Plastic Works Company in *Trampville* is a reproduction of the colonial discourse. Centrally, it is a *post facto* legitimisation of the colonial order since “the post-colonial apparatus has replicated, internalised, and totalised the power structures introduced through colonisation.”⁴⁴⁵ He then believes that the legitimisation of the colonialist system will give more credibility to the neocolonial government and hence this will quell the workers’ rising protest and will certainly de-politicise them.

Not surprisingly, thus, The Minister for Truth and Justice tries to embellish his speech with very attractive images. However, his ornamental discourse ceases to quell popular protest after Matigari’s “magical” appearance. For instance, the Minister announces clearly in front of the crowd that he is the true man of truth and justice (p. 101). He also continues to deceive them by saying, “I am the soul of this government. I am the soul of this nation. I am the light in the dark tunnel. I am the torch of the development” (p. 102). The Minister, then, uses such terms as “light versus darkness,” “torch,” and “development,” which bring to our mind the Eurocentric discourse of the Enlightenment thinkers which, as discussed earlier, allowed for the intellectual, moral, cultural, and material construction of colonial hegemony. The Minister for Truth and Justice sees further that the law is the marker of civilisation and the sign of progress. He indeed says that “the rule of the law is the true measure of civilisation” (p. 102). Thus, he echoes obviously the Enlightenment discourse which sees that the introduction of the Western political and social organisation (of which the law is a constituent part) by the imperial powers triggered the development of the African from the lower stage of primitiveness to a higher stage of modernity and civilisation.⁴⁴⁶ The Provincial Commissioner, too, justifies the existence of the status quo by evoking progressive terms, which is most often identified with the colonialist discursive project. Such terms include chiefly “development” and “progress”. Indeed, he wishes that *Trampville* be renamed *Progressville* (p. 118). This, then, confirms the assumption that we made earlier that the Eurocentric discursive project still underpins the Western global governance of the post-colonial world.

⁴⁴⁵ Agostinho Neto. “Postcolonial Theory on the Brink: a Critique of Achille Mbembe’s *On the Postcolony*”. 2002. p. 6 http://www.bakareweate.com/texts/Achille%20mbembe%20-%20african%20identities_web%20version.pdf.

⁴⁴⁶ Pat Caplan. “Civilisation and Barbarism: an Anthropological Approach”. Ed. E. S. Shaffer. *Comparative Criticism: Myth and Mythology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 155-172.

After having listened carefully to the speech delivered by The Minister, Matigari fully realises that the social values are in disorder because of the “hegemonic normality” that has been established by the ruling political class. He even wonders why the “world is upside down” and why “the robber calls the robbed the *robber*, the murderer calls the murdered the *murderer*, and the wicked calls the righteous *evil*” (p. 150, emphasis in original). Clearly put, the social values are imposed by coercive power or are established through cultural domination. Matigari has indeed developed firm counter-hegemonic sentiments which can be seen in his violent opposition to the “hegemonic notion of good, often couched in terms of social order, stability, and advancement.”⁴⁴⁷ That is why he challenges publicly The Minister for Truth and tells him his “subversive” history in the forest as a freedom fighter, and his open challenge shatters the Minister’ initial plan of casting the spell on the workers of William’s factory who intend to go on strike the next day. Before, the representative of the political class was defied by the working-class leader, Ngaruro wa Kiriro, who acquires more strength and faith in his nationalist fight because of his belief that “the patriots are still living” (p. 74), and who has loudly protested before the political leaders that the so-called worker’s government is on the side of capital which is in the post-independence period in perpetual conflict with labour.

Importantly, too, this novel polishes the image of the Mau Mau combatants because it is in the ruling class’s interest to describe the Mau Mau guerrilla heroes as “terrorists” and “outlaws” and to describe their struggle for independence as “the nightmare of history” (p. 119). Their violence which was a necessary liberating act is very often regarded by such “nationalist” people as the Minister and John Boy as a set of evil and separate acts. Ngugi shows elsewhere how the neocolonial oppressive systems view people’s history of resistance and says that

*But it is precisely because history is the result of struggle and tells of change that is perceived as a threat by all the ruling strata in all the oppressive exploitative systems. Tyrants and their tyrannical systems are terrified at the sound of the wheels of history. History is subversive. And it is because it is actually subversive of the existing tyrannical system that there have been attempts to arrest it. But how can one arrest the wheels of history? So they try to **rewrite** history, make up **official** history; if they can put cottonwool in their ears and in those of the*

⁴⁴⁷ Bill Ashcroft et al. define hegemony in their *Post-Colonial Studies: the Key Concepts* “. London : Routledge, 1995, quoting from Gramsci as “domination not exerted by force, nor even by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over economy, and over the state apparatus such as education and media, by which the ruling class’s interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted” (p. 117).

*population, maybe **they and the people** will not hear the **real** call of history, will not hear the real lessons of history.*⁴⁴⁸

For this reason, Matigari tells his people the “real” history of his patriotism and the patriotism of his people in an attempt to correct some “false” explanation of the real reasons for the Kenyan people’s long anti-colonialist resistance which culminated in the Mau Mau mass uprising. The Professor of “Parrotology” falsely claims that “the loyalists [to the colonial government] were the makers of independence...revolutionary politics, revolutionary socialism [are] foreign ideologies” (p. 103).

In his first encounter with John Boy, Matigari narrates his personal history and military victory as well as the collective history of his people. He further justifies the rightfulness of the inheritance of the house and the land with “historical facts,” as he says that the title-deed of the house is the hands that built it and the title-deed of the plantation is the hands that tilled it. Since “correcting” the distorted historical views does not change anything, he finally resorts to redemptive action. In short, Matigari creates a kind of “historical narrative” which defends his argument with John Boy first and then this historical narrative justifies the so-called second liberation struggle.⁴⁴⁹

Indeed, Matigari’s stay in the gaol with the student and the teacher (who can be seen as “pseudo-intellectuals” uncommitted to the people’s struggle because of their clear unwillingness to tell Matigari the “true” story of the nation when he visits them) sharpens Matigari’s understanding of what is going on around him, and hence his discourse grows more “philosophical” as the story progresses. He says in this vein that

The ruling class has their own ideas, culture, history about the land. The working people, on the other hand, have their values, their culture, and their history. The ruling party of messengers was trying to imprison the real history of the working people behind the bars and detention camps. (p. 161)

Matigari is indebted to his “mentors”, in a sense, because they show him how the government misrepresents not only historical facts but also the contemporary situation since its misrepresentation thwarts any form of popular revolution. Therefore, Matigari, before he decides to continue the struggle, discredits the so-called neocolonial state narratives.

⁴⁴⁸Ngugi, W. T. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom*, London: James Currey, 1993, pp. 96-97. (Emphasis in original).

⁴⁴⁹ This is in line with Edward Said’s claim in his *Culture and Imperialism* that the “the main battle in imperialism is over land, of course, but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle on it and work on it, who kept it going, who won it backs its future; these issues were reflected, contested and even for a time *decided in narratives*” (emphasis added).

Matigari's cell-mates too note that the post-independence state is a replica of the colonial regime. They seem to agree that, to use Appiah's words, "the system of an independent postcolonial nation [is] essentially a colonial system, with its British-imposed norms."⁴⁵⁰ Thus, Ngugi's resentment of the "white culture" is clearly articulated in the narrative as the student is at a complete loss to explain why The Provincial Commissioner wears the colonial uniform. So here the proletarian class is violently opposed to the national creed of "parrotology" that intensifies neocolonial dependency, which is clearly shown in the servility of the ruling class to their "foreign masters".

Moreover, the problem of Western education and its connection with neocolonial domination are raised in this narrative. Junior Boy is the stepchild of Western education by which he has been brainwashed (or white-washed). He is unquestionably the embodiment of the local elite who, by being "educated in colonial schools, were injected with Western ideas and sentiments."⁴⁵¹ At first, Matigari and his people thought that Western education could be put in the service of their cause of liberation. With a strong feeling of disappointment, Matigari tells John Boy:

Are you the boy we sent abroad? The boy the cost of whose education we all contributed to, singing with pride...The boy for whom we sang: he shall come back and clear up our cities, our country, and deliver us from slavery? ... That a nation's beauty was borne in a child, a future patriot. (p. 48)

Western education, thus, prepared the neocolonial elite who, instead of freeing African people from all forms of foreign control, rationalises the Western hegemony. Still, John Boy concurs with the Eurocentric binary distinctions such as light/darkness, knowledge/ignorance which are used to differentiate the "European Self" from "the Non-European Other". Junior Boy has been affected badly by "the white death" (to use Armah's famous phrase in his *Two Thousand Seasons*).

But, the "battle of ideas" which may end in combating the neo-colonial regime's hegemonic interpellations, as it is made clear in the text, does not right any social wrong, and hence Matigari moves from the development of the ideological arguments that support his self-declared mission of setting things right to redemptive action, and this will be the point to be examined next.

3- National Regeneration: from Utopianism to "Possibility"

⁴⁵⁰ Kwame Anthony Appiah. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 15.

⁴⁵¹ Elleke Boehmer. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 274.

a- Intellectualism and Peasantry and the Politics of Nation Building

Fundamentally, the role of the intellectual has been greatly emphasised by Frantz Fanon, who says clearly in his seminal book *Les Damnés de la terre* “la chose la plus importante pour l’intellectuel africain est la construction de sa nation.”⁴⁵² Later in his book, Frantz Fanon points out that the role of the intellectuals is to educate the masses about their realities. In addition, if we adhere to Gramsci’s viewpoint, the work of the intellectual must be “central to the socio-political analysis.”⁴⁵³ In this novel, however, one has to note that such intellectuals are almost completely inexistent. Thus, one might wonder about Ngugi’s seeming de-emphasis on the role of the intellectuals in the construction of their nations in his *Matigari*. Does this suggest that Ngugi has recently lost faith in the role of the intellectuals in the overall process of nation-building? In POB, the intellectuals have a more vital role. Karega could be seen as a very good example of their necessity in the present African societies. However, in DOC, the intellectuals’ mission in the correction of the wrongs done by the imperialists and their local underdogs on the people is made less clear. Gatuiria, as we have noted, fails to lead his people to fight against the oppressive and repressive regime of neocolonial Kenya.

Undoubtedly, believing in Fanon’s view that “everything depends on them [the masses],” Ngugi delegates the revolutionary vanguard role to the peasants and the workers. This means clearly that he is “implicitly disgusted with the educated elite who cannot initiate a struggle and bestow [his] faith in the peasants themselves to suggest ways to solve Africa’s contradictions.”⁴⁵⁴ Matigari is an uneducated peasant and yet he proves to be able to stir the whole population into revolutionary action. But this is not to imply that the intellectuals are not needed at all in the post-independence epoch.

Thus, the question that must be raised here is why in this work no provision is made for the presentation of the intellectuals as guides to people’s revolution. We note, for instance, that the spokesperson of revolution in POB is Karega, an educated young man. To solve this puzzle, one needs to be reminded of the Gramscian distinction between “philosophy” and “common sense”. The former is a specialised elaboration of a specific position. The latter, on the other hand, which is our concern here, is “the practical, everyday, popular consciousness of human beings...common sense is thus an amalgam of ideas on which the practical consciousness of the masses of the people is actually formed.”⁴⁵⁵ Even if Matigari has no high

⁴⁵² Frantz Fanon. *Les Damnés de la Terre*. Paris : Maspero, 1961, p. 12.

⁴⁵³ Edward Said. *The World, the Text, and The Critic*, op. cit., p. 82.

⁴⁵⁴ F. K. Omoregie. “Rodney, Cabral, Ngugi as Guides to African Postcolonial Literature”. University of Botswana: English Department, 2007, p. 5 <http://leafcycles.com/Documents/AfrPostcolLit.pdf>.

⁴⁵⁵ Cited in Ania Loomba. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998, p. 29.

educational standards, he is capable of describing the possibility of radical social change. Thus, my contention is that Ngugi expresses in this novel the need for the revival of the spirit of the Mau Mau freedom fighters because the Mau Mau insurrection offers the best model of liberating the Kenyans (and the Africans) from all the forms of foreign power domination.⁴⁵⁶ The novel then addresses directly the people who were behind this struggle, and therefore this novel is considered “popular” because, on the one hand, it uses popular forms (centrally, it was not originally written in English) and, on the other hand, its hero is an ordinary man (as opposed to high-class intellectuals) and this shows Ngugi’s strong “determination to reach a popular public.”⁴⁵⁷ The spirit of the Mau Mau struggle of the people leads us naturally to the subversive acts of people’s revolt against their despotic rules and shameless exploiters.

b- The Plea for “Cleansing” Violent Struggle

“Violence in order to change an intolerable social order is not savagery; it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man”
(Ngugi. *Homecoming*)

In the last chapter of the novel entitled *The Pure and the Resurrected* Ngugi moves clearly to a redemptive solution which is to be arrived at through armed resistance. This chapter, which could be entitled *la luta continua*, “calls for direct armed action as the appropriate response to the [degenerate] situation, but it is clear that any resistance or change can only be effective if it results from a communal effort.”⁴⁵⁸ In fact, Matigari’s individual act of revenge stimulates the anti-neocolonial resistance of the whole community. In other words, following Matigari’s reclamation of his land and his intentions to use military means to have his demands satisfied, the disadvantaged people are motivated to react against the socio-economic situation established by the villainous ruling class.

As clarified above, Ngugi is searching, like many other contemporary African writers such as Armah in many of his recent novels, for the creation of a social formation, (for Ngugi it can be a nation), “that promotes partnership, co-operation, democracy, and good governance,” but for Armah, this could be achieved through a return to “the communitarian and egalitarian

⁴⁵⁶ As Derek Wright aptly observes, Matigari “is a transparently symbolic embodiment of the spirit of militant insurgency left over from this nation’s armed struggle for independence”. Quoted in Jirop Peter Simater. *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa*. Global., 2001, p. 60.

⁴⁵⁷ André Viola, Jacqueline Bardolph & Denise Coussy, 1998, op. cit., p. 130.

⁴⁵⁸ John Roger Kurtz. *Urban obsessions, Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel*. Trenton/New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1998, p. 56.

principles of the traditional African society.”⁴⁵⁹ However, for Ngugi, such an ideal cannot be attained unless people embark on an anti-neo-imperialist armed struggle similar to the anti-colonial Mau Mau liberation war (and this accounts clearly for his choice of a veteran Mau Mau fighter as the new hero of the post-independence nation) as Matigari’s *pax Africana* has seriously failed. Thus, this novel is not different from the previous two novels insofar as it advocates violent resistance, since “the confrontational tone of *Devil on the Cross* is retained” in *Matigari*, and since it “posits a vision of utopia, which must be obtained through armed struggle.”⁴⁶⁰ The hope for the radical reorganisation of the post-independence classes’ relations to one another for the future African community (or in our context the nation) must be then the starting point for a real struggle, perhaps as bloody as the previous one. Arguably, Ngugi seems to be asserting that a truly independent nation cannot be set up unless the national identity of the people is well-defined, and that all of this must be accomplished while the battles for economic development, social justice and true political independence are being fought.

There is some reason to believe that Matigari has a vital therapeutic function in his nation, which can be compared to “super-elite priests and spiritual leaders”⁴⁶¹ in Armah’s *The Healers*. Basically, Matigari can be regarded as a healer of his diseased nation, but he differs from Armah’s group of healers. The latter’s healing actions of their society are rooted mainly (if not solely) in the people’s ancestral wisdom and self-mythical ontological purity. However, Matigari, because of being a gunfighter, bases his “healing” process of the wounds of the neocolonial hegemony exercised by the Western powers on a military action that is firmly rooted in his Mau Mau fighting spirit. But this is not to say that the ancestral knowledge has no place in the present anti-imperialist struggle (hence his choice of the *mugumo* tree, as said previously).

At first, Matigari seems to ask, as Ngugi later points out, “is there a solution to our problems without violence?”⁴⁶² But following a series of dramatic events that start with his imprisonment, then follow with his stay in the mental hospital and the murder of Ngaruro Kiriro, Matigari realises that justice for the oppressed comes from a sharpened spear. In general, therefore, the novel posits the fundamental question about the options that are

⁴⁵⁹ Adeoti, Gbemisola. “The Re-making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of (Alter) Native Route to Development”. Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University, 2004, pp. 1-12.

http://www.codesria.org/Links/conferences/general_assembly11/papers/adeoti.pdf

⁴⁶⁰ Anders Breidlid. “Ngugi’s *Matigari*: a Non-Materialist Discourse and Post-Modernism”. The Australian Journal of Trans-national Writing, Vol. 1, March 2005.

⁴⁶¹ Brenda Cooper. *To Lay these Secrets Open: Evaluating African Writing*. South Africa: David Philips Publishers, 1992, p. 44.

⁴⁶² Ngugi, W. T. *Ngugi Speaks*, op. cit., p. 263.

available so that the crisis of post-independence Kenya will come to an end. Ngugi answers this crucial question much later when he says that

*In another sense, the most fundamental question being posed in the novel is that of resistance and mass intervention in history. Matigari is saying that people have to intervene in their own history one way or another, but the question is how to do so when the structures are so undemocratic. It could take the form of, say, mass demonstrations or mass uprisings. But whatever the form, it would have the character of what has been described as the forcible entry of the masses into history.*⁴⁶³

Therefore, the idea of the Fanonian violence is paramount in this narrative, which has, in his view, a “cleansing force,” because violence is not only a sign of rejection of the status quo but too a will to change it. So violence, as Kanneh Kadiatu argues, “is bound up with utopian dreaming.”⁴⁶⁴ In this novel, indeed, “the utopian dreaming” of Matigari is not sufficient to change the post-colonial intolerable social order and thus the land, which is a symbol of the nation, has to be redeemed by revolutionary violence.

It is worth noting that Matigari realises, as F. Odun Balogun argues, that his “attempt to substitute the weapons of peace-logical reasoning and persuasion- for the weapons of war – brute force and firearms”⁴⁶⁵ is doomed to fail. Therefore, as he further contends, the novel’s hero is subsequently compelled to revise his strategy and to reject vehemently the “philosophy of non-resistance and turning the other cheek.” Commenting more upon this idea, F. Odun Balogun makes the following insightful observation:

*While he [Matigari] pursued his initial theory of peaceful change, he often appeared as naïve ideologue and was frequently ridiculed and labelled as a drunkard or a lunatic. On the other hand, whenever he displayed agonistic traits, he was perceived in the popular imagination as an authentic hero. Matigari then is a character who both reaffirms and revises our traditional concept of the hero.*⁴⁶⁶

As evidenced from the novel, Matigari’s desire (which is the author’s desire) to change the present despotic system cannot be achieved simply by a peaceful search for some ideals in his formally independent country. Rather, as Ann Biersteker aptly observes, “the characters in the novel struggle to understand and resist neocolonialism through the discourses of nationalism, Christianity, and liberation, when these discourses prove unworkable in the struggles they

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p. 265.

⁴⁶⁴ Kanneh Kadiatu. *African Identities: Race, Nation, and Culture in Ethnography, Pan-Africanism, and Black Literatures*. London: British Cataloguing Library: 1998, p. 87.

⁴⁶⁵ F. Odun Balogun. “*Matigari*: an African Novel as Oral Narrative Performance”. *Oral Tradition*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1995, p. 136.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

turn to what Ngugi termed ‘the language of struggle.’⁴⁶⁷ In Ngugi’s view, fighting the neocolonial powers cannot be restricted to generating an anti-neocolonial discourse, however violent and subversive it may be, and hence the armed struggle seems inevitable. This argument is indicated, whether implicitly or explicitly, in the novel by Matigari’s growth from a sharp social analyst, despite the fact that he is an uneducated man, to a gunfighter combating the despotic post-colonial regime.

Matigari has come to the realisation that mere words change nothing, and that is why he finally calls for “armed words” (p. 131). In this regard, Matigari asserts that “words of truth and justice, fully backed by armed power, will certainly drive the enemy out” and he further adds that “when right and might are on the same side, what enemy can hold out?” (p. 138) As his political awareness sharpens, he decides to re-arm himself and resume the fight. He thus steals a black Mercedes Benz and heads towards the *mugumo* tree to retrieve his hidden arms. Unfortunately, all the roads are controlled by the combined forces of policemen and soldiers as if a war had broken out. Irrespective of the fate of Matigari in the end, people destroy everything owned by the “black white man”, John Boy, the dog who barks louder than his master.

Not surprisingly, the novel ends with the burning of the property of Junior Boy. As Kathleen Greenfield argues, “all [Ngugi’s] last novels end with individual acts of violence which represent the desperate acts of the oppressed against their oppressors.”⁴⁶⁸ Of course, Kathleen Greenfield’s description of the violent acts as desperate may undermine the “healing” function of the violent acts of resistance, but it must be noted that a second period of revolution, which Ngugi seems to advocate, has not yet begun and those acts of violence, despite the fact that they cannot change the present system in the short run, can offer the people a blueprint for a course of action in the future. This is in tune with Pheng Cheah’s eye-catching observation that “although the nation cannot fully incarnate itself because national reappropriation at the economic political, and cultural levels has not been accomplished, it will be able to transcend the finitude of the neocolonial world system in due time.”⁴⁶⁹ In short, despite their seeming fruitlessness in the immediate future, the violent acts of resistance by the underprivileged popular masses may set in motion the process of the positive transformation of their nation in the long run. In fact, the nation’s socialist

⁴⁶⁷ Ann Biersteker. “Gikuyu Literature: Development from Early Christian Writings to Ngugi’s Later Novels”. Ed. F. Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi, 2004, p. 321.

⁴⁶⁸ Kathleen Greenfield, op. cit., p. 40.

⁴⁶⁹ Pheng Cheah, 2003, op. cit., p. 177.

transformation takes a long time to be fully realised and therefore the popular resistance to the rabid capitalist system and its agents needs to be carefully planned and organised.

Like POB and DOC, this novel ends with a conflagration which, it must be noted, has the symbolic (often religious) function of purification. Besides, the conflagration symbolically announces the death of the capitalist system. After all, capitalism is seen as an evil, and hence its elimination becomes an urgent necessity. When the angry crowd set Boy's house and property aflame, the children start singing "Everything that belongs to these slaves must be burnt" (p. 167). This song is telling in itself. The furious protesters also collectively sing that "victory should be ours" (p. 175). This explicitly indicates that violence is the ultimate resort of the oppressed when every other possible alternative fails to ensure their basic rights.

For Ngugi, therefore, literature must not be only an aesthetic compensation for the cruel realities of the extra-textual world, but also, and more significantly, a stimulus for a redemptive action. This redemptive action usually takes the form of an armed confrontation with the imperial power structures that are dominating the post-colonial world. Matigari's wished ideals (truth and justice) can be established by re-using weapons, as he finally concludes. Just as violence was a weapon of decolonisation during the colonial times, so it is in the neocolonial period. Thus, renewing the fight can lead ultimately to the regeneration of the whole nation.

c- The Coming Generation and the Renewal of the Nation

Simon Gikandi aptly observes, as far as the problem of the renewal of the fight is concerned, that "although in the end he [Matigari] does not manage to re-arm himself, nevertheless he literally lights the flame of resistance, and sparks off direct physical opposition to the neo-colonial regime which will, we assume, be carried on by Muriuki."⁴⁷⁰ It is Muriuki who retrieves the arms and inherits the mantle of Matigari. Thus, the death of Matigari does not mean the death of the struggle since Matigari claims that "many more of us are being born every day" (p. 124). In fact, a new generation of "Iregi revolutionaries" led by Muriuki can emerge.⁴⁷¹ This echoes Porter's noteworthy observation that "the protagonist, Matigari, is 'the seeker of truth and justice', who symbolizes the spirit of freedom that can never be eradicated

⁴⁷⁰ Gikandi, 2000, op. cit., p. 136.

⁴⁷¹ But André Viola et al. (op. cit.) claim that "Matigari escapes and may return one day return to lead the fight for renewed liberation from neocolonial power". If we accept this view, then we will have a further argument of the idea of self-renewal. But still the fate of Matigari is still clear, even though he is commonly assumed to be killed by the police forces during their epic chase of him as he is attempting to take up his hidden weapons.

or obliterated; while the individual freedom fighters may perish, their vision will not die, for the spirit of freedom is eternal.”⁴⁷²

Matigari is helped in his struggle by both a woman and a child (symbols of the coming generation). The use of the woman and the child should be given due attention here. Their presence is meant to be a call from Ngugi for the union of both men and women (including also the younger generation) in the battle for freedom, and thus a re-enactment of the Mau-Mau uprising during the colonial period seems to be called for by the writer.

The novel lays the emphasis on the role of children in the future national *bildung*⁴⁷³ as well. Ngugi indeed explicitly indicates that “it is left to the orphan, Muriuki, to retrieve Matigari’s arms and continue the struggle.”⁴⁷⁴ The child, Muriuki, grows from a street urchin living in a motor-dump to the carrier of the mantle of Matigari, and so his radical change and his political development are noteworthy. Basically, they prepare the ground for the process of “national regeneration” called for by the author. Muriuki will certainly be the “Matigari” of the next generation, as he is assumed to “carry the torch of freedom into a new day.”⁴⁷⁵ So “in this new struggle Matigari’s legacy continues as symbolised in Muriuki when he unearths Matigari’s weapons.”⁴⁷⁶ Just as Matigari stands for the survival of the nation after colonialism, so Muriuki represents the “promises of the survival of the nation beyond neocolonialism.”⁴⁷⁷ Ngugi’s “decolonising the child” (in addition to his call for decolonising the mind in his *Devil on the Cross*) can intensify further Ngugi’s decolonisation rhetoric.

Women are equally given a vital role by Ngugi. The prominent female role in the novel is given to the strong-willed local prostitute Guthera. Guthera, first, reminds us of Wariinga in DOC. She stands clearly for the revolutionary woman in the post-independence era. Basically, her “role relative to Matigari is primarily one of support” as “she accompanies him courageously into his final moments, but it is he who leads.”⁴⁷⁸ Seen in this way, Ngugi’s message here is that the Kenyan woman can take an active part in the collective task –whether actual or potential- of liberation and nation-building. The development of Guthera throughout the story from the state of “subjection” to the state of “autonomy” is very much suggestive of the rebirth of the marginalised masses’ revolutionary spirit which might ultimately lead to the

⁴⁷² Stanley E. Porter. Et al. *Resurrection*. Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998.

⁴⁷³ Meenakshi Bharat. *The Ultimate Colony: The Child in Postcolonial Fiction*. Allied Publishers, 2003.

⁴⁷⁴ Ngugi, W. T. *Ngugi Speaks*, 2006, op. cit., p. 261.

⁴⁷⁵ André Viola et al., op. cit., p. 130.

⁴⁷⁶ James Ogude . *Ngugi’s Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. Pluto Press, 1999, p. 107.

⁴⁷⁷ Pheng Cheah. *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Narratives*. Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 371.

⁴⁷⁸ Elleke Boehmer. *Stories of Women Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*. Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 50.

disestablishment of the established corrupt and tyrannical government. At first, she was “a subject individual”, but with her accompaniment of Matigari she becomes finally an autonomous individual. She moved from her desire to achieve “negative freedom” to that of attaining “positive freedom.”⁴⁷⁹ Her development from a passive subject who lacks the will to resist to a self-assertive individual can be symbolic of the process of the “regeneration of nation” because, as we saw before, Ngugi sees in this novel that the nation’s renewal depends solely on the resistance and the agency of the dispossessed people.

Guthera was once intent on treading “the paths of virtue and righteousness,” and yet she became prostituted by the exploitative regime. But with the appearance of Matigari her old dream comes to life again. She therefore decides to fight the system that caused her “fall from grace” and becomes a morally upright individual once again. So we can safely assume that by joining Matigari’s revolution, she would redeem herself. That is why she is described as the Pure (while Muriuki is seen as the resurrected) in the last chapter of the novel. Now, her action comes from her free choice, as she claims. Even her breaking of “the eleventh commandment” of not sleeping with any policeman is the result of her free will: she just decides to break her vow and save Matigari as he saved her before from the unspeakable harassment of the two policemen who call themselves the guardians of law (notice then that the novel is fraught with satirical commentary on the present state of affairs). Therefore, Guthera ceases to be “defined” by the general discourse of totalitarian state. Her growing self-confidence is indeed reminiscent of Wariinga’s growing self-pride. Her refusal of the oppressive regime is now clearly manifest in her decisions that she makes and actions that she takes.

In fact, more could be said about Matigari’s faithful companion’s role in the healing of the diseased nation. They can be rightly seen as his “disciples” because they all “want to be among the vanguard” (p. 140) and perhaps this is the author’s way of telling us that there is a possibility of hope for the toppling of the neocolonial structures by the next generation. Thus, Ngugi seems to have a strong faith in the coming generation.

Conclusion

This novel can be considered as a good example of the “transformative myth” that, as defined by Kandioura Dramé, “symbolically reflects social changes.... [and] offers an explanation of

⁴⁷⁹ The distinction between “negative freedom” and “positive freedom” is drawn by Michel Foucault, who points out that negative freedom is freedom from something, say, an oppressive system, and positive freedom is freedom to do action. Guthera, for instance, does not only want to free herself from the current system but to change it as well. Quoted in Johann Graaff. “Struggling with Impasse: Has Development Theory Been Able to Re-invent Itself?”, University of Cape Town, 1992, p. 4., pp. 1-20.
http://www.codesria.org/Links/conferences/general_assembly11/papers/graaff.pdf.

the process whereby a social condition is established through a mutation of social relations.”⁴⁸⁰ *Matigari* then tries to offer redemptive solutions to the present problems. These problems cannot be solved unless a return to the armed struggle, similar to the Mau Mau rebellion, is made, and this is clearly indicated in the novel by Matigari’s decision to renew the fight in order to redeem his land. The redemptive war that Matigari finally wages against the undemocratic and unjust neocolonial system is fundamentally informed by the subversive thought that he has developed, and hence a strong link is made in this narrative between thought and action.

Centrally, Matigari’s conclusion of the inevitability of an armed class struggle incites the oppressed masses to cure their diseased post-colonial nation, and thus the wounds of history can be healed and a utopian state of decolonisation can emerge. So this novel can also be seen as an epic for national recovery. Matigari’s fearless quest for truth and justice sensitises the people to complete their communal mission. Thus, Matigari is the representative of the social powers which fight against the present degenerate conditions of the neocolonial world.

Still, the idea of “regeneration of the nation” can be discussed in relation to the novel’s form and symbolism, as mentioned previously. Centrally, its “simple” form is the best indication that this novel has a socially didactic and propagandist function. In addition, its “appropriation” of the folk culture of the people makes its political message clear and its discourse explicit. Thus, Ngugi relies on both form and content to tell people that the present ailing socio-political situation of nations such as Kenya can be cured if they take the necessary action of combating the inimical global forces of neocolonial imperialism.

⁴⁸⁰ Kandjoura Dramé. *The Novel as Transformative Myth: A study of the Novels of Mongo Beti and Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Reviewed in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer 1993, p. 142-143.

CONCLUSION

“Postcoloniality can be defined as that condition in which colonized peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise, as historical agents in an increasingly globalized world” (Elleke Boehmer 1995: 3)

Conclusion

The three novels discussed in this dissertation give shape to Ngugi's project of telling the story of Africa from an African point of view. For him, the continent is the object of both desire and contempt in the Western hegemonic thought, while Europe continues to insist on its "goodness and civility,"⁴⁸¹ and keeps exploiting Africa's resources including human labour. Thus, Ngugi's fierce indictment of the so-called neocolonial discourse, which is arguably a little more than the reproduction of the colonial discourse during the growth of the classical European empires, has been largely informed by his "proletarian vision" of the post-colonial African world which is managed by both local and international exploiters. In fact, Ngugi's discussed novels seem to tell us that in the age of neocolonialism, as Richard Bjornson is later to assert, the "enslavement has invariably been rationalised on the basis of a benevolent sounding rhetoric that assuages the good conscience of Europeans and beguiles Africans into believing that they are powerless to improve the conditions under which they are obliged to live,"⁴⁸² and thus a firm link can be made between the author's postcolonialist discourse and his loud call for the agency of the oppressed people.

As we have argued, *Petals of Blood* defends the proletarian cause of the Kenyans by its explicit emphasis on the history of Kenya (the precolonial history as well as the history of anti-colonial resistance). In this respect, G. D. Killam claims that Ngugi's "rendition of history is consistent with his political beliefs and motives,"⁴⁸³ and it is no coincidence that the socially committed characters in this novel (i.e. those who champion the proletarian cause such as Karega) use the oppressed class's version of history as means to "stir the ashes of resistance" in the masses' spirit. Joseph's anti-neocolonialist attitudes have been mainly developed by his extensive reading of Mau Mau and the history of the struggle of workers and peasants of other lands. This means that a history of resistance can aid in the formation of class consciousness, which in turn leads to overturn the tyrannical system of labour exploitation by capital. In other words, refuting some misconceptions about the historical (and/or the mythical) past of the African people that aim at clipping the wings of their potential revolution is "revitalising". Thus, the historical memory must be alive in the mind of the people who are willing to challenge and change the neo-imperialist order. After all, a

⁴⁸¹ Antonio Negri & Michael Hardt. *Empire*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 46

⁴⁸² Richard Bjornson. "The Concept of Neocolonialism in the Later Works of Mongo Beti". Ed. Anne V. Adams & Mayes Janis A. *Mapping Intersections: African Literature and Africa's Development*. Africa World Press, 1998, pp. 137-138.

⁴⁸³ George Douglas Killam. *The Companion to African Literature*. Indiana University Press, 2004, p. 93.

close connection in this novel is established between history and class consciousness on the one hand, and history and class struggle on the other.

The subsequent chapter on *Devil on the Cross* discusses two main points. First, Ngugi's different approach to novel writing and "the complicated, often paradoxical, role played by the past [here we mean native culture] in determining conscious resistance strategies for the present and the future."⁴⁸⁴ *Devil on the Cross* indeed uses folk culture to define clearly the political views of the writer. Basically, folklorism can pave the way for the collective struggle of the oppressed people. This can be explicitly shown in the novel's use of oral traditional elements and the indigenous language.⁴⁸⁵ But, as we noted, though Gaturia is an ardent advocate of the folklorist movement, he fails to align himself with the workers and the peasants. The major reason for such a failure is presumed by the fact that he has an atavistic, unprogressive conception of folklore. No less important is the fact that, as Chiji Akoma points out, "the folkloric act occurs when both the performer and the audience have to be in the same situation and be part of the same reference group."⁴⁸⁶ Simply put, the failure of Gaturia to reconnect himself with the "wretched of the earth" is because his interests are totally different from theirs. Ngugi would argue, as Chiji Akoma does, that "folklore is not merely an itemisation of acts and thoughts but a communicative process."⁴⁸⁷ He then lacks what could be seen as the "experience of shared social anxiety."⁴⁸⁸ But Gaturia resents the fact that the petit bourgeois is a pale copy of the English elite and hence is a consumer of the English culture (rather than a producer of one's own culture). The main conclusion of this chapter is that culture (and by extension identity) can be of overriding importance for the present struggle, because when Wariinga heals the psychological scars caused by the ill management of the Kimeedeeri class, and when she asserts her cultural independence by rejecting the illusions of Westernised modernity, she could become so aggressive and subsequently take a redemptive political action on behalf of all those who are silenced and oppressed in her newly black-run country. In other words, *Devil on the Cross* convincingly shows that once self-esteem is broken, African people will be dominated more easily.

⁴⁸⁴ Barbara Harlow. *Resistance Literature*. London: Methuen, 1987, p. 82.

⁴⁸⁵ "As a Marxist, Ngugi associates choice of language with the struggle against neocolonialism". Geoffrey V. Davies. *Voices of Justice and Reason: Apartheid and Beyond in South African Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003, p. 10.

⁴⁸⁶ Chiji Akoma. *Folklorism in New World Black Fiction: Writing and the Oral Traditional Aesthetics*. Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007, p. 10.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

In the last chapter, a close connection is established between dream and oral imagination.⁴⁸⁹ Once again, the style of the novel is useful in illuminating the author's ideological pronouncements. We have also seen how the "oral" form of the narrative addresses in particular the favoured audience of the novelist; the peasants and workers, whom he places in the vanguard of the future revolution. This is why Matigari, rather than being an intellectualised character, is a hero who rises from the masses to become the only reliable example to follow for social transformation.

Also, Matigari "is the tableau of a nation's spiritual and political desires."⁴⁹⁰ His allegorical search for truth and justice precipitates the process of national regeneration in the sense that it attests to the proletarian workers' growing revolutionary force that not only transcends the limitations of bourgeois nationalism, embodied in the novel by His Excellency Ole Excellence, but establishes the desired socialist nation in the future as well. In fact, the immediate consequence of his search for the lost twin ideals of truth and justice as he roams the countryside is that "gradual awakening of the people occurs and widespread panic in the regime takes place."⁴⁹¹ Indeed, in all the novels that have been selected for this study, "there is the same move towards a reawakening of the revolutionary spirit of the people, and an emphasis on the need for armed resistance to neocolonialism and imperialism."⁴⁹²

In a more general sense, Ngugi's proletarian novels (or popular novels as they are also called) oppose forcefully "the unholy alliance of the capitalist countries of the world" because "it holds the Third World communities in lingering financial thralldom."⁴⁹³ Our postcolonialist reading of these novels reinforces indeed our understanding of his "proletarian *weltanschauung*", and more specifically, indeed, the workers' and the peasants' present struggle can be stimulated by rewriting their historical (and heroic) anti-imperialist resistance, revalorising their popular culture, and more importantly reminding them of the failure of their post-colonial established nation. Thus, to induce his despondent compatriots to resist tirelessly the inimical global neocolonial capitalist forces and eventually overthrow the soulless system of "you eat or you are eaten," Ngugi's relocates the centre of narration and discourse about Kenya's history, Kenyans' folk culture, and the post-independence nation in the novels that have been thus analysed.

⁴⁸⁹ Uzomo Esonwanne. "From the Garden of Language, the Nectar of Art: An Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong'o". *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 2006, p. 42.

⁴⁹⁰ Janie Scott. *And the Birds Began to Sing*. Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1996.

⁴⁹¹ Albert J. Paolini, Anthony Elliott, and Anthony Moran. *Navigating Modernity: Postcolonialism, Identity, and International Relations*. University Press of New England, 2002, p. 67.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁹³ Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes and David Tombs. *Faith in the Millennium*. New England: New England University Press, 2006.

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ABSTRACT IN ARABIC

المخلص:

الهدف الأساسي من هذا البحث هو دراسة الكيفية التي من خلالها تمكن الكاتب الكيني "نثوفي واثيرفو" من تحويل مركز الخطاب حول بلاده وإفريقيا بصفة عامة من أوروبا- التي هي في نظر فلاسفة عصر التنوير، من أمثال "كانت" و "هيغل"- الغاية المثلى للحضارة- إلى ما يعتبر في بعض الدراسات الأنثروبولوجية والتاريخية الغربية القارة التي هي على حافة المركز، هذه النظرة العنصرية، في نظر "ادوارد سعيد" في كتابه المعروف "الاستشراق"، بررت الاستعمار الغربي للبلدان الإفريقية حتى في فترة ما بعد الاستعمار ما زالت هنالك أفكار مشابهة تبرز الامبريالية الغربية تحت غطاء "العولمة". هذه الأفكار التلغيفية أنتقدت بشدة من طرف الفيلسوف "هومي بهابها"، وقد دحض "نثوفي" هذه الأفكار الامبريالية في ألبه الذي نحصر بحثنا حوله في ثلاث روايات وهي، *Devil on the Cross*، *Petals of Blood*، *Matigari*، التي كتبها في فترة يصفها كثير من النقاد الأدبيين بأنها فترة التدمير والاستياء لما حدث للشعوب الإفريقية بعد نيل استقلالها، واستمرار الهيمنة الغربية لها. و نعتد في دراستنا هذه على النظرية ما بعد الاستعمارية في تحليلنا للروايات المذكورة التي تعيد النظر في المشروع الامبريالي الغربي و أفكاره النظرية.

في روايته *Petals of Blood* تحدث الكاتب بإسهاب عن مشكلة تزوير تاريخ نضال الشعوب الإفريقية لتحقيق أغراض سياسية استعمارية، وكيفية تصحيحه من أجل تطهير الأراضي الإفريقية من كل أشكال الهيمنة الغربية، وقد تطرق الكاتب من خلال شخصيته المنذمة من إجحاف الرأسمالية في كينيا بعد الاستقلال "كريفا" إلى الدور الذي يلعبه إعادة النظر في تاريخ كفاح الشعوب الإفريقية من أجل التحرر، و الرد على دعاة العصرية الذين هم في الحقيقة كما تبينه الرواية يهرعون وراء مطامعهم الشخصية. و كذلك دعا الكاتب بشدة إلى تنقيه التاريخ ما قبل الاستعماري و هذا من أجل إضفاء الشرعية للحركة التحررية التي تهدف إلى الذود عن حقوق الشعوب التي فقدت كثير من خصوصياتها جراء السيطرة الخارجية لها. وفي الرواية الثانية التي درسناها تحت عنوان *Devil on the Cross* سلطنا الضوء على الأسلوب الذي اتبعه الكاتب الذي يتميز بالسهولة واستعمال المكثف للتقاليد الشعبية "الفيكيوي"، وتجدد الإشارة كذلك إلى أنها أول رواية كتبها بلغته الأصلية. الهدف الرئيسي من تبسيط الأسلوب واستعمال العبارات الشعبية هو تقريب مفاهيمه الايديولوجية إلى العمال والفلاحين الذين يعتمد عليهم في شن ثورة شعبية على النظام السياسي الغاشم، وكذلك تطرق الكاتب بصفة ملفتة للانتباه إلى دور الثقافة الشعبية التي تلعبه في نيل الاستقلال الكامل مما اصطلح على تسميته الاستعمار الجديد، رغم ما قيل عن الكاتب أنه ماركسي المذهب. أكد الكاتب في هذه الرواية على الدور الفعال التي تلعبه مراجعة الشعوب لثقافتها في التحرك ضد كل مستبديها من الداخل أو الخارج. إذا يمكن القول أن هناك علاقة وطيدة ربطها الكاتب بين إحياء الثقافة الإفريقية التي باتت منقرضة و ما يعرف بصراع الطبقات التي تشنه الطبقة الكادحة على الطبقة البورجوازية.

أما الرواية الأخيرة، والمعنونة ب *Matigari* عالج فيها الكاتب مشكلة إعادة تجديد الأمة الكينية في فترة ما بعد الاستقلال التي تميزت بضياح حلم الشعب المناضل في تأسيس أمة تقوم على الحق والعدل، وهذا بسبب استمرار الامبريالية الغربية. وقد لجأ المحرر الجديد لهذه الأمة التي انعدمت فيها العدالة الاجتماعية "ماتيفاري"، الذي ساهم بقسط كبير في تحرير شعبه أثناء ثورة "ماوما"، إلى اللجوء إلى السلاح مرة أخرى من أجل استرجاع ممتلكاته و التي ضياعها يرمز إلى ضياح الأمة وكذا كسر القيود والأغلال، التي وضعها الحكام الموالون للشركات المتعددة الجنسيات و الدول الغربية المستغلة لثروات الشعوب الفقيرة.

وفي الأخير يربط هذا البحث تحطيم "نثوفي" للخطاب الامبريالي في رواياته الأخيرة وحث شعبه على التحرر من العبودية للغرب. ولهذا يمكن القول أن "نثوفي" اعتمد بشدة على الفلسفة الماركسية للتحرر من الرأسمالية العالمية التي

تهدد كيان الشعوب المستضعفة. فإن تغيير " نقوئي " نظرة شعبه حول تاريخه و ثقافته و دوره الأساسي في بناء أمة يسودها العدل و ذلك في خطابه التحرري من خلال رواياته المدروسة لهو أكبر دليل على تبني الكاتب لأسلوب الرد الذي هو من خصائص الأدب الما بعد إستعماري. إن سياسة " نقوئي " التحررية في نتاجه الأدبي يظهر جليا ما مدى إهتمام الأديب بقضايا مجتمعه الشائكة و تصوره الما بعد إستعماري له أبعاد ثورية من شأنها تحطيم نظام عدم توازن القوى القائم بين الغرب و الشعوب الإفريقية.