Chapter II

Giving Voices to Silence

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, a writer of extraordinary accomplishment and vision, has become synonymous with cultural controversy and political struggle. Ngugi’s narratives present the damaging consequences of the colonial and neo-colonial encirclement on the psychology of the common Gikuyu man. Each of his novels examines how social and political circumstances affect the personality and lives of individuals. Ngugi himself admits in *Homecoming* (1972): “I write about people: I am interested in their hidden lives; their fears and hopes, their loves and hates, and how the very tension in their hearts affects their daily contact with other men: how, in other words, the emotional stream of the man within interacts with the social reality” (31).

Ngugi believes that a writer’s work should reflect reality and also persuade the readers to view that reality from a new perspective. Ngugi’s novels attempt to plot the story of exploitation, corruption and cultural denigration under the colonial and neo-colonial leaderships and to present before every Kenyan the truth about his past and his present. Ngugi conceives that modern literature in Kenya has “grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Our culture over the last hundred years has developed against the same stunting, dwarfing background” (*HC* xv).

Adrian Roscoe observes that the “three colonial products Ngugi frequently identifies are loneliness, class divisions and guilt” (312). Ngugi’s men and women are lonely because their traditional world has fragmented as a result of their encounter
with the West. This fracture is heightened in the neo-colony as members of the same society betray their own in a chaotic pursuit of power and money. Prompted by bewildering circumstances to indulge in acts contrary to their inner nature, some of them succumb to the intense trauma of guilt. Ngugi has been consistently preoccupied with the related issues of colonialism, neo-colonialism, emasculation of African culture by the West and the need to restore his people’s psychological, moral and spiritual identity. Though his preoccupations remain the same, the means he adopts to achieve his ends and the intensity of viewpoints undergo a radical shift.

Ngugi’s view of history has a strong influence on his thematic concerns for he feels that a “novelist is haunted by a sense of his past. His work is often an attempt to come to terms with ‘the thing that has been’, a struggle as it were, to sensitively register his encounter with history, his people’s history” (HC 39). A recreation of their past is essential for a communal as well as an individual self-definition. Ngugi himself had been uprooted and alienated from his Gikuyu roots by his exposure to colonial forces. He is forced to search ‘frantically’ for his past, his history. Simon Gikandi finds in Ngugi’s works, a struggle to account for his own emplacement in the colonial tradition and his displacement from his ancestral culture. In reading Ngugi’s works, then, we are abound to encounter an important confluence of emotion and range in which the novelist, in an attempt to analyze and mediate his imprisonment in colonial culture and the post colonial dictatorship, falls back on the emotions generated by his experiential situation. (60)

Ngugi’s life and his writings, both fictional as well as polemical have been
symptomatic of Kenya’s experiences. Since the early Europeans settled in the fertile areas known as the ‘White Highlands’, Kenya’s culture and its people’s souls have been devastated by the combined forces of the settler, the missionary and the colonial governor. The ‘White Highlands’, the most coveted area of the British settlers was the land of the Gikuyus, Ngugi’s people. Being agriculturists, the Gikuyus depended entirely on the land to which they had a spiritual bond. Their culture and values were intimately linked to the soil and the British settlers by unsettling the Gikuyus from their land, destroyed a whole way of life. As Jomo Kenyatta observes in his book, *Facing Mount Kenya*, “A culture has no meaning apart from the social organization of life on which it is built” (317). Before the advent of the British colonizers, the Gikuyus had lived in perfect cohesion and harmony, with a highly developed subsistence oriented economies, collective leadership, strict norms of social behaviour and a substantial body of songs, dances and narratives. With the coming of Christianity and colonial education, a process of disintegration was heralded in. Ngugi states in *Detained* (1981) that the colonizers promulgated “a culture of legalized brutality” to impose silence on the native people (34).

In all his novels, Ngugi invests a great deal of emotion in the land. In *Homecoming*, he recalls the plaintive song sung by peasant women expressing their grief at being displaced from their land: “And there will be great joy/ When our land comes back to us/ For Kenya is the country of black people” (48). Ngugi’s community faced the expropriation of their land by settlers for a longer period than the neighbouring areas. This festered into a desperate and unusually long period of violence in his homeland. Ngugi, therefore, gives imaginative reconstruction to their history of
The British administration rationalized the alienation of land by claiming to civilize a primitive and uneducated people. But this premise denies the community’s traditional and informal system of education. Ngugi was at first educated at the Independent Schools that were organized by the Gikuyus as a reaction against the mission schools. The harmony he received at his home and at his early educational institution was broken when he, later, went to a colonial school. The alienating and debilitating effects of colonial education and religion on the Kenyan psyche is a theme that consistently finds expression in his novels.

Ngugi’s fiction often recreates many of the incidents of his childhood and adolescence. Many critics have observed the recurrence of the theme of return in his novels. Ngugi himself has admitted that it is a crucial theme in his books and is deeply rooted in his return to his village from the mission school, at the peak of the Mau Mau uprising. Ngugi found his home destroyed and the entire village completely devastated. Ngugi recalls in _Detained_ (1981): “Not only my home, but the old village with its culture, its memories and its warmth had been razed to the ground” (73-74). This traumatic experience is responsible for the theme of return, recorded by Ngugi in various contexts, as a necessary return to the roots.

Ngugi found the education at Makarere University, where he went for his graduation, equally alienating as his exposure to the colonial school. With its emphasis on universal values and themes of isolation and individualism based on western classics, Makarere totally distracted the native children’s attention from their East African
communal traditions. The vibrant oral traditions of the East Africans, which were beating with life and energy, were completely excluded. It was during this period, when Ngugi was not quite free from the influence of his colonial education that he drafted his early novels *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965).

Ngugi came under the influence of literary figures like D.H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad, while at Makarere. Ngugi admits in an interview with Dennis Deurden that Lawrence taught him to enter "into the soul of the people, not only of the people, but even of the land, of the countryside, of things like plants, of the atmosphere [...]") (123-124). But Ngugi was particularly impressed by Conrad’s delineation of a man’s capacity for bearing his suffering. Ngugi’s fascination for Conrad lay in the fact that both of them lived in a world dominated by imperialism. Moreover, the Polish born Conrad had chosen to write in English, a borrowed language. Conrad’s novels were mostly situated in the colonial empire and alienation, self-betrayal and heroism underlay most of his themes. But Ngugi felt that Conrad had chosen to be part of the empire and his bourgeois position had limited his vision. Ngugi was especially attracted by Conrad’s technique of employing multiple narrative voices in the same novel with ‘tantalizing’ effect. This prompted Ngugi to later abandon the linear narrative plot he had used in his early novels. *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Ngugi’s third novel, which he wrote later, is clearly inspired by Conrad.

It was outside the formal educational structure of Makarere University that Ngugi first encountered the new literatures from Africa and the Caribbean, which had affinities to his own way of thinking. The library at Makarere exposed him to the writings of Chinua Achebe, George Lamming, Cesaire Senghor among many others. These writers
showed Ngugi that it was possible to read the world from a centre other than Europe. European literature had interpreted the world of the Calibans, the Fridays and the Africans according to their worldview and imagination. Ngugi was excited to find that “Now the Calibans and the Fridays of the new literatures were telling their story which was also my story” (MC 4). Ngugi found the West Indian, George Lamming, interested in his state of alienation in a more intense manner than the Africans. Unlike Conrad, Lamming wrote from the other side of the empire, from the side of the struggling masses and demonstrated a strong commitment to the Third World struggles. Ngugi noticed that, like Conrad, Lamming too dexterously dealt with different narrative techniques.

Ngugi considers Chinua Achebe as his ‘wise elder brother’ and shares with him the opinion that the African past and reality had been distorted by its tragic encounter with Europe. Both these writers attempt to re-tell their story, dramatize the catastrophic changes brought in by the white man and, to use Ngugi’s words, resume “the broken dialogue with the gods of his people” (HC 43). Both are sadly disillusioned with the neo-colonial reality and attempt to effect a cultural renaissance as the means to true liberation. Ngugi’s first two novels seem to bear a remarkable resemblance to Achebe’s, *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

But, unlike Achebe, Ngugi in *Weep Not, Child*, has chosen a more recent phenomenon in Kenyan history, the Mau Mau uprising which still remains a fresh memory to the Kenyan people. The most noticeable difference between the two writers is in their rendering of their characters’ emotional state of minds and their reactions to the external world. Ngugi praises Achebe’s characters as the ‘makers of history’ and adds that Achebe has succeeded “in giving human dignity to his characters, whether
living in their traditional communal life or resisting European colonialism” (“HC 44). But Ngugi’s characters seem to have a more introspective approach and as Charles Larson observes in The Emergence of African Fiction, they are more fully realized than Achebe’s (159). Ngugi is not satisfied by merely portraying the ‘cultural clash’ found in West African writings but he shows the psychic damage caused by colonial subjugation in each family and at the heart of each individual.

Ngugi is much more radical than the mild mannered Achebe and expresses his views with greater vehemence than Achebe. He feels that “Achebe-cum-teacher has left too many questions unanswered” (“HC 53). This might be, perhaps due to the difference in the experience underlying the colonial situation in East and West Africa. Nigeria did not have to indulge in a complicated and protracted struggle with settler forces as in Kenya. There is nothing of the relaxed nature of Achebe’s writing in Ngugi because he had to live in the shadow of the bloody Mau Mau struggle and felt it his responsibility to retell this violent phase in their history. But, in spite of this phase, Ngugi’s fiction abounds in optimism while Achebe’s novels are predominantly tragic.

Ngugi always insists that African writers must speak not merely ‘on behalf’ of the people but ‘in terms of the people’. But Achebe feels that his primary duty is to guide his people as a teacher. Though many critics have felt Ngugi to be influenced by Achebe in his early days, Ngugi’s stance as a socially conscious writer embodying the spirit of struggle and resistance places him in a totally different position from Achebe’s.

Ngugi’s championing of his native language as the requisite move towards decolonizing the mind of his people, takes him further away from Achebe’s influence. Achebe believes in the “unassailable position” of English and feels that Nigeria cannot
be governed without English (qtd. in DM 7). He declares that since he has been given the language, he intends to use it. For Ngugi, on the other hand, the continued use of English is tantamount to an acceptance of the superiority of the alien tongue and an adherence to cultural imperialism. Achebe criticizes Ngugi’s position and feels that Ngugi was merely ‘politicking’ with language. But Achebe fails to comprehend the significance of the English language being employed as a vehicle for maintaining an indigenous elite, imbued with colonial values.

After Makarere, Ngugi arrived at the revolutionary atmosphere of Leeds for his post-graduate studies. His acquaintance with radical figures like Arnold Kettle and Alan Hunt provided the ideological background for opinions that he had vaguely held. Ngugi admits that he was “confused at Makarere. [. . .] Leeds systematized my thinking” (qtd. in Mugo 25). At Leeds, Ngugi was made aware that the education he had received at Makarere had transformed him into an animated puppet, merely uttering meaningless jargon he had imbibed from European textbooks. It had blinded him to the true nature of colonialism and imperialism. He was now aware that the educated African was involved in a choice between knowledge as a source of power, on the one hand and a sense of belonging with the people, on the other. This created a crisis of identity in him, for he felt that colonial education could never be an agent of reconciliation but would always remain an agent of division and marginalization.

Ngugi’s stay at Leeds is marked by a shift in his attitude from that of a liberal humanist to a more outspoken activist. He did not complete his course in M.A. as he began to be increasingly disillusioned with specialized academic degrees. His exposure at Leeds inculcated in him an awareness of the need for practical action in bringing
about change. Ngugi admits that during his phase at Leeds, he had changed from what he was since he started writing in the sixties. His later decision to write in Gikuyu had roots in Leeds, for he felt that the correct basis for understanding the world was to know one's own self and environment. Govind Narain Sharma classifies Ngugi's thinking during this period as "revolutionary traditionalism" (22). Leeds witnessed the maturing of Ngugi's vision and he started to focus on perspectives like Mau Mau, capitalism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism. Ngugi's stance at this time was characterized by a greater focus on the role of a writer and of literature, on the formation of his ideological thinking and an inclination towards the use of a strong and pungent language.

One of the earliest formative influences on Ngugi was the Kenyan armed struggle for independence during the period of the Emergency, from the year 1952 to 1962. This phase of armed resistance was associated with the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, known as the Mau Mau. Ngugi was one of the first among the Kenyan writers to take the Mau Mau as his subject matter. That the importance of this movement on Ngugi as a writer and activist has continued to grow is evident in his creative works, for the Mau Mau is a prominent feature in them. He admits that while writing *A Grain of Wheat*, he was guided by the image of this movement.

Most Africans considers the Mau Mau, the most glorious and heroic aspect of their mainstream nationalism. To Ngugi, the Mau Mau forms the collective memory bank of the Kenyans. He feels that this movement had altered the history of Kenya, possibly even the history of the whole of Africa. "The basic objectives of Mau Mau revolutionaries were to drive out the Europeans, seize the government and give back to
the Kenya peasants their stolen lands and property," says Ngugi in *Homecoming* (28).

Ngugi opposes the exceedingly prejudiced view of the colonialists who considered the Mau Mau merely as an expression of impotent Gikuyu tribalism and a disorganized return to a state of savagery. The historians of new Kenya accede to these falsities churned out by the forces of imperialism and attempt to bury and erase it from memory. Ngugi deems it his responsibility to prove that its activists were not cruel murderers or savages and that the Mau Mau was a political organization with legitimate aims. He justifies that “Mau Mau violence was anti-injustice; white violence was to thwart the cause of justice” (*HC* 29). Ngugi’s works attempt to reassess the moral position of the freedom fighters and the suffering endured by the Kenyans in their struggle against alien rule. He seems to share the Kenyan Professor Ali Mazrui’s comment that remembering past heroes “is an exercise in national self-identification” (21). Written sources of the Mau Mau since independence were highly unreliable and therefore, Ngugi decided to resort to oral sources to prove the authenticity of this important aspect of his people’s history. This recourse to oral tradition became a compelling quest and appears in a more pronounced manner in Ngugi’s later works.

The Mau Mau left an indelible mark on Ngugi, for most of the combatants belonged to Gikuyuland. Many of the members of Ngugi’s family were active fighters in the struggle and had endured enormous torture and grief. Ngugi could not take any active role in the movement as he was, then, a young boy attending school. This non-involvement in the campaign, later gave rise to an immense sense of guilt and failure. Ngugi celebrates the Mau Mau as the precursor of not only their independence struggle but also of the present Kenyan struggle against the forces of neo-colonialism.
Ngugi considers the church in Kenya as the greatest opponent of the people's struggle for freedom. It opposed the Mau Mau but recommended the oppressive tyranny of the colonizers. Ngugi sees the Christian religion as the greatest cause for cultural alienation among his people. Christianity, whose basic doctrine was love and equality of man, formed an integral part of colonialism in Kenya which was founded on inequality and hatred between men. The Church in Kenya created a people without spiritual roots that could integrate them to the soil. Ngugi states: "In Kenya, the European settler robbed the people of their land [. . . ] the missionary robbed people of their soul" (*HC* 32). The people were taught to consider 'white' as the colour of 'God' and 'black' as the colour of 'sin'. During the neo-colonial period, the Church allied itself to the capitalists. The churches in Kenya, Ngugi says, must change their present neo-colonial stance and go back to the roots of the broken African civilization and work with the masses in creating a new society. In his early works, Ngugi subjects Christianity to mild criticism but his growing impatience with the socio-political role of Christianity in independent Kenya makes him treat it with savage satire in his later novels. Ngugi exposes Christianity as an instrument of bourgeois exploitation and succeeds in subverting its imagery to suit his vision of a socialist world.

Realizing the distorting values of the Christian faith in Africa, Ngugi later abandoned it. Ngugi considered his Christian name James, as incompatible with his radical decision to negate an alien scale of values. Christianity denied the African's right to name himself, for it was a symbol of his identity. In an attempt to reject the slave tradition and as part of his strengthening commitment to his indigenous culture and tradition, Ngugi relinquished his Christian name.
Ngugi believes that colonialism was responsible for the mental indoctrination and personality displacement in the African. According to him, the worst colonialism was a ‘colonialism of the mind’, for it undermined one’s dignity and confidence. These ‘parasites’ as Ngugi calls the settlers, prevented the African from realizing the full potential of his mental and spiritual growth, by the imposition of an alien culture and language upon them. In an article in the *Daily Nation*, Ngugi repudiates colonialism: “We Africans who have been under colonial rule for many years believe that colonialism [...] is basically immoral. For anyone of whatever country to be content with alien rule, however sweet, is to be less than human” (29).

Ngugi’s criticism of the colonizers was quite restrained and moderate during his younger days. But later, he becomes more radical and emerges, as David Cook and Michael Okeninkpe state, a “confident spokesman talking back to a band of savage adventurers, devoid of human civilized values, who seized upon a vulnerable phase of African history to lord it over African peoples” (209). Ngugi feels it his duty to retell the past of his people that had been obscured and distorted by the colonial onslaught. When people are coerced into forgetting their history, they are unable to draw any lessons from it. Ngugi dwells on that collective experience in an attempt to recapture his people’s lost dignity.

For centuries the Africans and the Asians have been cruelly exploited to build up the foundations of western civilization. Imperialism brought knowledge to Africans but denied the colonized the means of mastering it. The Europeans merely created a group of people who were apologetic of their past and regarded their colonial masters with awe and reverence. In *Homecoming* (7-9), Ngugi compares the colonizer’s
psychology to that of Prospero's in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Just as Prospero deprived Caliban of his island and its secrets, the European colonizer systematically destroyed the institutions upon which the African had based his life. Like Prospero, the colonizers instinctively feared that men with confidence in their culture and heritage might not prove to be subservient. They, therefore, instilled disunity and alienation among the colonized. Cook and Okenimkpe observe: "Ngugi believed that colonial indoctrination had penetrated the entire sense and psyche of the African and that in the years following independence the African would consequently exhibit negative traits of behaviour in many situations" (17). Ngugi's fictional constructs portray the alienating effects of this mental indoctrination during the colonial and neo-colonial eras.

Ngugi has persistently been preoccupied with the neo-colonial manifestations of imperialism. The post-colonial bourgeoisie portrayed in Ngugi's narratives are defenders of a system that attempts to destroy the very soul of their community. Ngugi unleashes his most virulent criticism upon this class, which had attained power and position in the post-colonial period. This 'overseer' class considered it their mission to ensure the continuity of the colonial institutions under the new guise of neo-colonialism. The cultural and psychological aspects of the imperialistic ideology were the principal weapons of mental and spiritual coercion.

The Kenyan Uhuru in 1963 proved meaningless, for their dreams remained unrealized. The people continued to be ruthlessly exploited and marginalized by a new native elite who had internalized the aesthetics of acquiescence inculcated by the colonizers. Independence merely meant a transformation from a colonial regime to a neo-colonial management. This new class confused the masses, for the betrayers seemed
to have the same colour of skin and hair as the ordinary people. It was clearly a case of "Black skins concealing colonial settlers' hearts", as Ngugi says in *Moving the Centre* (65). The dependency complex generated by colonialism helped to imbue this class with collective self-doubt and induced them to decry their own people. In *Writers in Politics* (1997) Ngugi echoes Fanon's tirade and says that, "this class having an incurable wish for permanent identification with the bourgeois representatives of the mother country, who now become the neo-colonial missionary agency for the continuation of cultural imperialism" (18). This power hungry elites derided their traditions and language with greater vehemence than the settlers. They manipulated traditional culture to justify their betrayal and were intolerant of any work of art that questioned it.

Ngugi regrets that the imperialistic aim of the present Third World countries continues to be what it has always been - to divide, weaken and scatter resistance. The ruling regimes under Kenyatta and later under Arap Moi continue their neo-colonial policy of strengthening ties with the West. These neo-colonial elites become isolated from the people because of their "blinkered visions, congenital corruption and utter inefficiency" (*BP* 85). In an attempt to sustain themselves in positions of social distinction, these rulers suppress democracy and resort to one party rule. Ngugi observes that the new leaders seem to be aiming at a recolonization of the Third World by the West. He is disillusioned by the fact that even those who are educated have joined in the betrayal and live on the sweat of the millions whom they were meant to save. His writings are an exhortation to his people to speak out against the neo-colonial oppression perpetrated upon them. He warns Kenyans that by yielding to the culture of silence and fear, "Kenya would have merely moved from a colonial prison into a neo-colonial prison"
Ngugi sets out to prove that Africans can retrieve their creative potential only by a complete break with capitalism.

Cultural imperialism practised by the colonialist ideology became the major agency of control during neo-colonialism. Culture is the embodiment of a people’s moral and aesthetic values and forms the basis of their outlook on the world and of their self-perception. Jomo Kenyatta in *Facing Mount Kenya* asserts the primary role of culture in establishing a people’s identity. It is a man’s inherited culture that endows him with dignity and also helps him to imbibe his mental and moral values (317). It is an integral part of their growth as Ngugi observes in *Moving the Centre* (1993): “Culture is to society, what flower is to a plant” (57). When a people’s culture is altered, their life too changes. The colonialists, therefore set out to subjugate the mental and moral universe of the colonized by imposing their alien values upon the native’s ethnic culture.

Ngugi laments that the imperialist’s culture emptied African art of all its meaningful content by a fossilization of its culture and in its place erected an art with its centre as Europe. Literature was one of the weapons employed by the colonialist ideology to reinforce their subjugation. The errors and falsehoods about the natives projected through the crude racist literature of the Europeans permanently impaired the psychology of the African.

Ngugi’s fiction seeks to provide a correct perspective of his culture. Ngugi shows that his society was not an acculturate one as presented by the colonialists’ books. The African societies, especially the Ibos of Nigeria and the Agikuyu of Kenya had an egalitarian society where the foundation of holding together was
carried out by culture. Their art was oriented to the community and their songs, dances and folklore were storehouses of their values and beliefs. The European colonizer knew this and deliberately set out to destroy the native art through cultural control. As Amilcar Cabral observes in his article, ‘National Liberation and Culture’:

“To dominate a nation by force of arms is, above all, to take up arms to destroy, or at least to neutralize and paralyse its culture. For, as long as a section of the populace is able to have a cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation” (qtd. in WP 9).

But no degree of suppression or torture could destroy the people’s patriotic national tradition of resistance and opposition to imperialism. The people rediscovered their old songs and dances and reshaped them to meet their new needs. But Ngugi is careful to point out that culture should not be confused with irrelevant traditionalism. It is not possible to lift traditional structures as they are into the modern world. Traditional culture must be oriented to their new needs. “Colonial institutions can only produce a colonial mentality” (HC 12), and therefore Ngugi recommends the Africanization of their economic and political institutions. The inhibitive, imperialist social structure must be destroyed so that his people can be ‘born again’.

As Chairman of the Department of English at Nairobi University, Ngugi championed a radical restructure of the outmoded and irrelevant pattern of studies at the university. Ngugi argued that the Eurocentric curriculum denigrated their ethnic traditions and retarded the growth of indigenous literature. African children learned more about daffodils and wintry snows, long before they were able to name the flowers of their own land. Ngugi and his colleagues recommended the abolition of the English
department in the form in which it was then constituted. Their aim was to place Kenya, East Africa and then Africa at the centre in order to emphasize the fact that knowing oneself and one’s environment was the best means of comprehending the world. Ngugi describes the dominance of the West over the Third World by the term ‘Eurocentric’. Eurocentricism, according to Ngugi, “is most dangerous to the self-confidence of the Third World peoples when it becomes internalized in their intellectual conception of the universe” (MC xvi). African people must reject the Eurocentric view and look at the world from an Afrocentric position. Ngugi therefore, recommends moving the centre in two senses - between nations and within nations to free national cultures from external domination.

Ngugi declares that theirs was the first major challenge to the dominance of the English canon and an essential part of those cultural forces that destroyed the authority of imperialism. Their call was not for the abolition of English literature as such, but for the reorganization of the English departments so that they can begin to mirror the realities of the twentieth century. African literature must be “with the people in singing out in defiance!” (WP 51).

Ngugi’s next fictional work *Petals of Blood*, recognized as the novel which contains the most unrelenting criticism against the neo-colonial regime, was released in 1977. Since the publication of *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi had been becoming increasingly disillusioned with the use of English as the medium for his creative writing. He wondered for whom he was writing, as the peasants about whom he had written in the novel would never be able to read them. Since his term at Leeds, Ngugi had been preoccupied with the challenge put across to African writers by the Nigerian critic Obi
Wali, in 1962. Obi Wali had argued that it was impossible to advance African literature and culture if African writers adopted an uncritical attitude to European languages. Unless African writers accepted the fact that true African literature must be written in African languages, they would merely be pursuing a dead end (qtd. in DM 24). Similar sentiments are articulated by Andre Lord in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, when he points out that “the master’s tools can never dismantle the master’s house” (110).

In *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Ngugi calls the politics of language in African literature as a “quest of relevance”, a search for a liberating perspective (87). By continuing to write in European languages, he would merely be perpetrating the colonial and neo-colonial forms of enslavement. In the year 1966, Ngugi got involved in the Kamirithu Cultural Centre, a creative workshop, which produced plays in Gikuyu with the active participation of the ordinary people. Ngugi’s determination to maintain links with his community and to help them to return to their roots led to a linguistic break with his colonial past. He says in *Detained*, “My involvement with the people of Kamirithu had given me a sense of a new being and it had made me transcend the alienation to which I had been condemned by years of colonial education” (98). In its search for an authentic language Kamirithu had given concrete expression to the vision of a self-reliant Kenya, embodying the spirit of democracy and independence. It symbolized the awakening of the people to their mission of liberating themselves and building a new life free from the clutches of imperialism. Ngugi continues:

To write for, speak for and work for the lives of peasants and workers was the highest call of patriotic duty. My only regret was that for many
years I had wandered in the bourgeois jungle and the wilderness of foreign cultures and languages. Kamiriithu was my homecoming. (DET 105)

Ngugi conceives of a language as “a carrier of values fashioned by a people over a period of time” (HC 16). It is an important tool of self-definition. Language is the medium through which the colonial and post-colonial state controls the people’s psychic space. The British perpetrated alienation by coercing the native people to distance themselves from the reality around them. Their languages and cultures were thrown into the rubbish heap as “incomprehensible noise from the dark Tower of Babel” (MC 31). The Africans were made to view the world through alien mirrors provided by the masters. As a result, the native’s psychology was split and created, as Ngugi says in *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams* (1998), a society of “bodiless heads and headless bodies” (89). By the time Kenya won independence all the African language schools were effectively silenced and completely marginalized.

The attempt of the British to foster a native elite who would be alienated from the popular mainstream continued into the post-colonial era. Ngugi compares this to Macaulay’s attempt to create a class of Indians who were Indians in colour but British in everything else (WP 64). Ngugi finds it ironic that the neo-colonial Kenyans, instead of being ashamed of their ignorance of their mother tongue, are actually proud of being cultural aliens. They seem to revel in their alienation.

Ngugi considers it the greatest tragedy that the African intellectual community continues to be cultural aliens and exiles in their country as they persist in clothing their ideas in foreign ‘linguistic tents’. They make no attempt to restore the Kenyan to his natural environment or to help him transcend his colonial alienation. Ngugi criticizes
writers like Okara and Achebe who advocated the Africanizing of the English language to convey uniquely African experiences. According to Ngugi, this mutilates the tongues of millions and consists of a death wish for African languages for they never reflect the actual social and historical reality. Unlike Prometheus in Greek mythology who stole fire from the Gods to empower humans, Ngugi notes that these neo-colonial intellectuals steal the fire from their ethnic languages and cultures to enrich the languages of Europe (PGD 100). By negating their native languages, these writers have allowed their soul to be captivated by the language of the colonizer. As Katherine Williams contends, “deprived of a native language, the African writer is deracinated and decultured” (54).

Ngugi terms African literature written in European languages as Afro Saxon literature and not African literature. In Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams, Ngugi effects a comparison between the allegory of the cave in Plato’s The Republic (1955) and the colonial and post-colonial intellectuals who adopt foreign languages (78-88). Plato’s allegory speaks of shadows in the cave being produced by light falling on objects and people who pass behind a screen that separates the cave from the world of light outside it. In the colonial and post-colonial situation, this screen is made up of European languages while the ordinary people in Africa live in the shadows of poverty, ignorance and alienation. As it often happens in history, the confined indulge in whispered conspiracies in their own language about breaking down the walls that prevent light from coming into their space. The writer of Afro Saxon literature is so blinded by the dazzling power of his acquired language that he is unable to hear the voices of his people crying out for the light of the sun, which is denied to them. This ‘narcissist’ middle class intellectual lives in the illusion that he represents the nation and attempts
to encourage the people to come out of the darkness of their language into the light of European languages. But, Ngugi reminds his people that a new social order cannot be achieved until the ‘cultural aliens’ reconnect with the ordinary people, with the dwellers in the colonial and neo-colonial caves.

Ngugi suggests that if the Kenyan writer wants to be part of the mainstream, he must align themselves with the people and use their language. It was the masses of Kenya who thwarted the colonialist design of choking up their languages. The Kenyan writer can empower his people only if he chooses to write in his native language. In this context Ngugi quotes the example of Rabindranath Tagore who once advised a young Punjabi poet who wrote in English, to go back and learn to write in his mother tongue if he is to write for the Indian people (qtd. in DET 179). African literature can hope for a successful ‘homecoming’ only if its writers free themselves from the linguistic prisons into which they had been thrown by their colonial education and start to address the problems of their voiceless majority. In Decolonising the Mind Ngugi attempts to make artists realize that,

Kenyan writers have no alternative but to return to the 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 rise to the great challenge of recreating, in their poems, plays and novels, the epic grandeur of that history. (73)

In his early days, Ngugi never discussed the problem of language as an issue separate from his thematic concerns, relationship of art and society and the function of literature. It was after his Kamiriithu experience, but much before contemporary
African writers, that Ngugi became increasingly convinced of the need to express the betrayal of the post-colonial government in the language of the suffering masses. The controversy surrounding the polemics of using the colonial discourse has been addressed by others like Armah and Mphahlele too. But only Ngugi has been able to revert back to writing in Gikuyu. Ngugi’s new stance has created greater opportunities for his individual art and to the genre of the novel as a whole, in addition to revising the political agenda of the African writer. Ngugi may not have succeeded in making many other writers follow suit but he has certainly disturbed the confidence of those who have not found it necessary to question linguistic colonization.

Ngugi’s play, *I Will Marry When I Want* attempts to hold up a mirror in which the people of Kenya can view their past, their present and their future. It delineates, in their own language, their history of struggle, the traitorous role of the betrayers among the elites and reflects the reality of present day Kenya. For the comprador ruling regimes, a writer who presents the issues of the neo-colony in a language the people can identify with and who tries to awaken them to face reality becomes the enemy of the post-colonial state. Ngugi quotes Brecht’s lines to substantiate his view: “Fear rules not only those who are ruled, but the rulers too” (qtd. in BP 69). The neo-colonial manipulators fear the strength of an empowered people. It is not surprising, therefore, that Ngugi’s play provoked the wrath of the Kenyan authorities who imprisoned him without trial for almost a year in 1978.

With grim irony Ngugi points out that representing reality and asking questions is a dangerous exercise in present Kenya. Questioning exploitation of workers and corruption in high places is regarded as treason and sedition. Such a writer is removed
from the very sources of his inspiration and punished by prison, exile and even death. Neil Lazarus maintains: "From the point of new of officialdom, it would seem that what is required of African writers is that they continue to hurl abuse at colonialism while euphemizing the thuggery of different post-colonial regimes under the rubric of 'nation building'" (23). If a writer is committed to the people, he is treated as a subversive character, but if he adopts silence, he ceases to be an effective writer. "Write and risk damnation. Avoid damnation and cease to be a writer. That is the lot of the writer in a neo-colonial state", warns Ngugi in *Moving the Centre* (73). Twentieth century Kenya has relegated many writers to the domains of silence. The state attempts to silence the voice of the community while the artist attempts "to restore voices to the land [...] to give voice back to the silenced" (*PGD* 25). Artists can attempt to question distorted official versions of reality and be the 'unacknowledged legislators' of the post-colonial world, as the poet, Shelley once remarked. The post-colonial regime reacts to this by enforcing silence on the writer by maiming his mind and body through imprisonment and torture.

Ngugi considers prison a metaphor for a post-colonial space, for even in a country without a military regime, the majority of the people are condemned to conditions of physical, social and psychic confinement. The neo-colonial state attempts to confine a writer to prison, in order to break his communication with his people. But, Ngugi's prison ordeal has only strengthened his determination to continue the battle for social justice. He refuses to be intimidated and as an assertion of his determination to keep his mind and heart together, he decided to write his next novel, *Devil on the Cross* (1982), in the very language which had been the cause of his confinement. He
proudly asserts that, to “be arrested for the power of your writing is one of the highest compliments an author can be paid” (qtd. in Cantalupo *The World* 24).

While Ngugi was in London for the launching of *Devil on the Cross*, he was informed of the Kenyan government’s plans to arrest him yet again. Ngugi now resolved to remain in exile. He considers exile in the literary landscape, as a paradigm of the general condition of exile and alienation experienced by contemporary Africans under neo-colonial regimes. It has been “an occupational hazard of the writer and thinker in history” says Ngugi (*PGD* 35).

Ngugi’s physical distance from his audience has not diminished the force of his ideology. In *Matigari* (1989), his novel from exile, he has revived a militant Mau Mau figure and readdressed the sensitive issue of land distribution. Ngugi could never bring himself to acknowledge the fact that he was an ‘exile’ and was surprised to find himself mentioned as a writer in exile by Andrew Gurr in his volume titled *Writers in Exile*. Ngugi points out that both prison and exile creates an awareness of a loss of freedom. He continues that in such a condition, a writer is “haunted by a tremendous longing for a connection. Exile can even be worse than prison” (*MC* 106). His novel *Matigari*, written as a novel of return, is an attempt to reconnect himself to the community from which he had been so brutally removed by the neo-colonial regime.

Referring to the assassination of Ken Saro Wiva in Nigeria, Ngugi argues for more democratic space for writers to articulate their visions. They must have the right to dream without having to face the risk of extermination. Ngugi asserts: “We who write in Kenya, in Africa, in the Third World, are the modern Cassandras of the developing world, condemned to cry the truth against neo-colonialist and imperialist
cultures and then be ready to pay for it with incarceration, exile and even death” (DET 191). Ngugi continues that, though the neo-colonial regime may smash any number of mirrors, they cannot wish away Kenya’s social reality and no amount of repression can succeed in silencing its writers. They are the new generation of socially conscious artists, who are ‘born again’ to enlighten their people.

Songs, dances and folklore were an integral part of the life of the peasants and coming from a country of highland Kenya, Ngugi was inevitably exposed to these traditions. Orature is rooted in the life of the peasantry. The name, coined by the late Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu, ‘orature’ represents what is most vital and vibrant of the ancient aesthetics of the oral tradition. Orature forms the basis of the Kenyan culture of resistance in the colonial and neo-colonial times. Ngugi tends to disagree with the tendency to treat the oral as occupying a primitive stage among the different genres. It is a different system consisting of dramatic and poetic elements and continues to be a major force in the African community life. Emmanuel Obeichina in Culture, Tradition Society in the West African Novel, points out that in spite of the introduction of literacy by the colonial government, the majority of the common African people continue “to possess a consciousness more typical of the oral than of the literary tradition” (26).

Ngugi deplores that in the twentieth century the legacy of African orature and languages goes to enhance the European languages. He points out that just as minerals mined in Africa are processed in Europe and resold to Africa, the literature of Africans in European languages borrows from its rich store of orature. This material of imagination is then processed through European languages and packed between hard covers and labelled as African literature. Orature thus becomes “a stolen legacy” (PGD
127). It is the responsibility of African artists and intellectuals to restore this legacy to the people in order to empower them with a new culture of self-confidence.

Justifying the use of the European genre of the novel as the means of his reconnection with his people, Ngugi points out that the African novel is an extended narrative in written form and had antecedents in African oral literature. The most important element in the oral tale as in that of the novel is the story. Even in his early novels, composed in the Europhone tradition, Ngugi had borrowed from African orature in the form of proverbs, riddles and legends. The break with the linear structure of his early novels was not merely due to the influence of Conrad but also due to the predominance of digressional patterns in the oral narratives. The narratives of his later novels are conveyed through verbal acts like conversations, confessions and oratory.

*Devil on the Cross* is an experiment to appropriate the novel into the oral tradition through a simpler narrative and a stronger story element. The rendering of this as a ‘gicaandi’ novel is an effort to contemporize this tradition of the Agikuyu. Satire is an effective weapon of the oral tradition and Ngugi resorts to it in his later books. The transformative nature of the folktale with its powers of redemption is evident in *Matigari*. In his last two novels, Ngugi evinces the tendency to use archetypal characters to represent the collective rather than the individual voice. This tendency, typical of the oral tradition, is another marker for the novelist’s representation of the nation.

Ngugi believes that the African novel will find its form and character by rooting itself in the rich oral traditions of the peasantry. In doing this, it will play a crucial role in Africa’s general ‘quest for relevance’. Ngugi’s stories develop into communicative acts and assist his people to comprehend their identity and motivate them to establish
a common basis of action. Ngugi’s endeavour to turn away from the metropolitan culture and to return to his ethnic traditions is not new in the context of the African novel except that, as F.Odun Balogun analyzes it, “he has followed the logic of African oral narrative aesthetics far more comprehensively, far more audaciously and far more successfully than most other African writers” (364-365).

Ngugi endows his female characters with an integral role in the development of the story. Though women in East African fiction play a more important role than female characters in West African fiction, no one has accorded women characters, the unique position bestowed on them by Ngugi. In Detained, Ngugi speaks of his need to position himself among the people for inspiration. “For me, in writing a novel, I love to hear the voices of the people [. . .] I need the vibrant voices of beautiful women: their touch, their signs, their tears, their laughter” (9). These words eloquently proclaim the importance that Ngugi bestows upon women. Ngugi’s vision of a liberated Kenya invests a great deal of prominence on the part played by women. He portrays them as emerging from the culture of silence and fear and assuming leading roles in the revolutionary struggle for Kenyan liberation.

Ngugi enriches his female characters with immense dignity. Even in his early works where single heroes predominate, his women characters like Mwihaki of Weep Not, Child and Muthoni and Nyambura of The River Between are pictured as individuals with unusual courage and endurance. In A Grain of Wheat and in Petals of Blood, it is women like Mumbi and Wanja who attempt to link people together. Wariinga and Guthera, heroines of Devil on the Cross and Matigari are presented as ‘resistance heroines’ and invested with immense fortitude and resolution in their acts against exploitation.
They represent the strength and resilience of the Kenyans. In *Detained*, Ngugi says that since women are the most exploited among the entire working class, he would create in the figure of Wariinga, a strong and determined woman with a will to resist all forms of oppressive conditions (10). Ngugi’s senior women characters are pictured as the embodiments of great nobility and wisdom. Jennifer Evans states that in Ngugi’s novels, women become the “strongest symbols of cultural identity, community, and continuity” (qtd. in Cantalupo, *Texts and Contexts* 310).

Since his exile in 1982, Ngugi has travelled widely. As a Professor of Comparative Literature and Performance Studies in New York University, Ngugi continues to maintain his position with regard to writing in the Gikuyu language. Since 1982, he has published many children’s books in Gikuyu in the hope that his fiction would inform the youth of Kenya of the socio-political realities of their lives. Ngugi has recently turned to studying the techniques of filmmaking as a new medium that would enable him to reach a wider audience. In *Matigari*, Ngugi had been influenced by the technique of films for he has conceived the scenes as a series of camera shots.

Ngugi’s prison ordeal and exile has not perturbed him but has only fortified his resolution to continue the fight for social change and self-perception for his people. However, Ngugi’s commitment has not been confined to his fictional narratives, but has found expression in a number of polemical and theoretical essays. The brilliant essays contained in books such as *Homecoming* (1972), *Barrel of a Pen* (1983) *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), *Moving the Centre* (1993), *Writers in Politics* (1997) and *Penpoints Gunpoints and Dreams* (1998), provide the theoretical background to his creative works. These theoretical statements are evidently elaborations of his
fictional world and remain widely influential in the field of post-colonial studies. Charles Cantalupo in his introduction to the collection of essays entitled The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, observes that since his exile from Kenya, “the eloquence of Ngugi’s novels, essays, and plays has rung out and echoed in nearly all the geographical and intellectual centers in the world of arts and letters, with the tragic exception of Kenya itself’ (5).

Ngugi’s radical concerns at Leeds brought him under the influence of the Martiniquan revolutionary and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, who developed the most extensive analysis of the psychological and sociological effects of colonialism. He considers Fanon’s book The Wretched of the Earth as a Bible among African students. It was Fanon’s adherence to Marxist tenets in his social theory that steered Ngugi towards Marx’s political and economic philosophy. Ngugi’s A Grain of Wheat, which is a product of this period, and the novels, which follow it, demonstrate a predominant influence of Karl Marx and Fanon.

Ngugi, like Marx, believes in the conflict between the haves and the have-nots in the society but he does not share Marx’s attitude to the past. Ngugi remains an ardent believer in Africa’s glorious past. Marxist socialism suits Ngugi’s conviction about post-independent Kenyan development but he does not believe in the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie. Marx and Engels regarded the bourgeoisie as a revolutionary power, though they condemned this class’ lust for power and money. Ngugi has only contempt for this class and he always identifies himself with the ordinary peasants.

Marx and Lenin did influence Ngugi to some extent but the relevance of Fanon is greater since he writes from the perspective of a colonized subject involved in the
anti-colonial struggle. The older Marxists obviously did not identify with the African situation. Dennis Walder in *Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, points out that much more than any Marxist texts it is Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, which “has spoken more directly, profoundly and lastingly than any other single anti-colonial work on behalf of the colonized” (57). This book is the acknowledged text in shaping post-colonial aesthetic and cultural theory. Fanon’s theory brings together the concept of alienation and of psychological marginalization experienced by the colonized and emphasizes a Marxist awareness of the historical and political forces by which this alienation came into existence. Fanon’s book, *Black Skin White Masks*, describes the psychological effects of colonialism and the consequences of identity formation.

Fanon observes that personality displacement was induced culturally. The colonized are forced into an internalization of their ‘self’ as the ‘other’ and this succeeds in imprisoning the mind of the native as securely as the chain had imprisoned his body during the period of the slave trade. Parker and Starkey in *Postcolonial Literatures*, refer to Fanon’s argument that “‘blackness’ was a white construct of linguistic opposition disguising a deeper cultural opposition” between the “controller” and “controlled”, between “self-fulfilment” and “self-denial” (5).

Ngugi’s clear vision of the psychology of the colonizers and his intense contempt for the shameless national middle class is derived from a reading of Fanon. The seminal influence of Fanon is visible in Ngugi’s condemnation of the Christian church and his observation of the continuing land hunger in the post-independent era. Fanon stresses that the true demise of colonialism can be achieved only if psychological change is brought about along with political and economic changes. Fanon suggests that a writer
can help his people achieve these ends only if he turns away from the audience determined by the oppressor and starts to address his own people. This is precisely what Ngugi has done with his increasing use of his native language and his campaign for the promotion of indigenous African culture. Ngugi’s observation of the crisis of identity in independent Kenya corroborates Fanon’s argument that reclaiming communal and national bonds is central to the process of decolonization and to the formation of the colonized’s identity.

Ngugi has always been a novelist of the ‘we’ and believes in the power of the peasants in bringing about decolonization. Fanon believes that the neo-colonial rulers would be ousted, not by the urban proletariat of traditional Marxist thinking but by the ordinary people, ‘the wretched of the earth’. Fanon suggests that this is the only option out of the ‘Manichaen delirium’ - the term used by Fanon to refer to the dichotomy between the world of the colonizer and the colonized. In an interview he gave at Leeds, Ngugi echoes these views of Fanon. “He believes that the peasants must control the state, must be involved in the work of social and economic reconstruction. He sees the peasantry as the real revolutionary force in the Third World [. . .]” (qtd: in Sharma 25).

Influenced by Fanon and others, theoretical analyses of post-colonial texts stresses that the literatures from the Third World are actively engaged in the act of decolonizing the mind of their people. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, in *The Empire Writes Back*, demonstrate how post-colonial writers refashion English to express their identity and to accommodate their specific experiences. They point out how these writers first ‘abrogated’ the received English and then ‘appropriated’ it and brought it under the influence of their indigenous tongues. They quote Ngugi as a powerful influence in this field, for he has argued that decolonization of African culture
means a radical movement away from European value systems and their language.

A leading critic and political activist, Edward W. Said’s study *Orientalism*, shows that writing of narratives and assertion of cultural differences are the methods by which colonized people assert their identity. Said observes that Ngugi appropriates for his fiction, the topos of colonial culture as the quest and the voyage into the unknown and claims them for his post-colonial purposes (34).

Critics like Benita Parry feel that writers like Fanon and Ngugi who are engaged in decolonizing narratives go beyond the ‘silencing’ effect of colonialism and reach a stage where a sufficient space can be created so that “the colonized can be written back into history” (39).

Patrick Williams in his book *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, underlines certain important insights in the field of post-colonial studies. The relation of the novel and national identity is not a recent phenomenon in the agenda of post-colonial studies. But, Patrick Williams points out that, the idea of a post-colonial novelist telling the story of his country is not a straightforward affair and he proceeds to elaborate some of the important issues involved in this context.

Some writers feel that the use of the European genre of the novel to express national identity inevitably makes it adulterated. But Ngugi has effected a synthesis by which he retains the genre of the novel, while at the same time, appropriating it to present his anti-imperialist arguments. He has succeeded in effectively transforming it to an indigenous style of narrative construction.

The relationship between the novel and the nation also involves the recognition that national identity is a historical construct, which consists of narratives by which
particular communities conceive their identities. Ngugi envisions his people's history and collective identity as one of resistance, culminating in the Mau Mau. Right from the moment the settler and the missionary had set foot in Kenya, the people had resisted and fought back. They were often crushed but their culture of resistance generated tremendous energy among the people, which empowered them to reorganize and strike back. Ngugi asserts that the colonial culture of silence and fear was primarily a reaction to the Kenyan people's revolutionary culture of unspoken courage and patriotic heroism. Ngugi's fiction presents ordinary men and women embodying the spirit of struggle and resistance. Patrick Williams opines that Ngugi emphasizes "resistance as something like a shared human heritage, a common statement of refusal to forego basic human dignity in the face of violence or oppression" (163).

Ngugi, like other writers from formerly colonized countries, expresses an urgent need to articulate a different story, to construct their identity otherwise. Williams observes that African writers feel it necessary to establish their identity in the face of uncomplimentary versions of Europeans. Gitahi Gititi postulates that writing has been an essential component of the process of decolonization in Africa and "one of the means of countering the suppression and misrepresentation inherent in colonial discourse" (109). As a significant post-colonial writer, Ngugi plays an important role in defining the dignity and identity of the East African, who had been pictured in a negative light in the Eurocentric discourses.

With unrelenting sarcasm, Ngugi cites the examples of writers like Rider Haggard, Joyce Cary, Robert Ruark, Karen Blixen and Elspeth Huxley whose works picture Africans crying out in gratitude to the white masters for having enslaved them
to a nobler civilization. The evil element portrayed in such distorted versions is the revolutionary violence and the culture of resistance of the oppressed. Edward Blyden speaks of such pernicious teachings that create profoundly destructive psychological reactions in the African. “Having embraced, or at least assented to these errors and falsehoods about himself, he concludes that his only hope of rising in the scale of respectable manhood is to strive after whatever is most unlike himself and most alien to his tastes” (qtd. in WP 77). These denigrating versions are largely responsible for the evolution of the new dependent class of elite who opposes anti-colonial movements and sides with the forces of imperialism, in the post-independent period. Ngugi’s fiction attempts to rescue his people from the condescending notions they had been forced to internalize. Only then, can they move towards a perception of their real identity.

Another post-colonial device employed by Ngugi in his attempt at redefining the African novel is the use of short stories in his longer narrative. The strategy of story telling by employing different narrative voices forms an integral part of Ngugi’s fiction and characterizes an attempt by the author to oralize and reshape the borders of the post-colonial novel. The presence of the short stories in Ngugi’s fiction reactivates the mode of oral narratives and uses them as sites for the characters to enunciate their sorrows and mental turmoil. The short story seems to engage the genre of the novel in dialogue. Kimani Njogu in his article, “Living Secretly and Spinning Tales”, elucidates that in Ngugi’s fiction, “narrative voices are collectivized and artistic creativity subverted from the private domain of the individualized novelist” and “rerouted back into the public domain of storytellers where it belongs, at least in Africa” (336).

The concept of a ‘nation’, a ‘shared community’ or as Benedict Anderson calls
it, an ‘imagined community’, has enabled post-colonial societies to forge a self-image by which they can liberate themselves from all forms of imperialist oppression. Ngugi attempts to recreate his people’s identity by imagining the legendary town of Ilmorog, which has been the locale of his fiction since *Petals of Blood*. Ilmorog has now come to represent the site of post-colonial struggles in Ngugi’s writings.

Ngugi’s works show the consistent deployment of the idea of the nation as the basis for social organization, an important concept in post-colonial writing. His involvement has always been with the ‘people’ than with institutions. Much before other African writers, Ngugi perceived the crisis of consciousness in African society and advocated a separation from middle class intellectualism. Highly sensitive to the plight of the ordinary people, Ngugi stresses the need for writers to position themselves directly among the ‘people’. He points out that African writers must forge their creative bonds with the masses, learn their heritage and culture, imbibe their courage and spirit of resistance, and help to bring about a complete demolition of neo-colonialism. He believes that it is the ordinary masses who have the ability to change their history, resist evil and bring about a desirable social change, for these people have never really lost contact with their soil and life-giving traditions. In *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi exemplifies “the need to move the centre from all minority class establishment within nations to the real creative centres among the working people” (xvii). Ngugi has often censured other writers like Wole Soyinka for ignoring the creative strength and power of the ordinary people. Preoccupied with the peasants, Ngugi has drawn all his major characters from this class. His commitment with the landless people forms the deep source of his identity. He shares with them, their sense of alienation, disillusionment...
and guilt for transgressions and weaknesses.

In spite of being sensitive to political and social issues, Ngugi’s fiction reaches down to the depths of our emotions. His novels attempt to convey his sense of pride, courage and dignity in his people. Marked by an intensely optimistic and utopian tone, his writings seek to instil strength and hope in the Kenyan, so that he can “be free from fears and destructive anxiety, physically free to journey towards the heights he can reach and ready to affirm the worth of his life, in spite of its tribulations” (qtd. in Cook and Okenimkpe 16).

Ngugi through his fiction attempts to decolonize the Kenyan mind and to light the path towards self-perception. His narratives constitute a part of the tradition of his people’s struggle to name the world for themselves. The imperialist ideology has perpetrated itself into the post-colonial period prompting their leaders to betray them and silencing the voices of the people. It is now imperative that writers must energize themselves to “build a new country and sing a new song” (HC 48). Therefore, in Barrel of a Pen Ngugi asserts: “Let our pens be the voices of the people / Lèt our pens give voices to silence” (69).
Works Cited


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