CHAPTER 1

Ngugi wa Thiong’o stands as one of the most prominent and vocal voices in East African literature written in English in present times. A Kenyan, he has through his writings been able to force the attention of the reading world towards English writings in the country. His contribution in this regard can be perhaps best understood when one considers the statement made by Harish Narang in his ‘Introduction’ to Politics as Fiction: The Novels of Ngugi, where he writes:

However, it is Ngugi wa Thiong’o who has single-handedly through his writings - fictional as well as non-fictional – forced scholars and critics of African literature to pay serious attention to Kenyan writings in English.¹

A novelist, dramatist, essayist and critic, Ngugi wa Thiong’o has proved his worth in every field of writing which he has chosen to practice. A socially-conscous writer and activist, Ngugi has successfully used the novel form to voice his concern over various themes and issues which he has found disturbing in Kenya. His position as to what a writer should do has always been very clear. He never saw literature as growing out of a vacuum. In an interview with Michael Pozo, when he was asked on the link between aesthetics and a community, his reply was in the following manner:

Aesthetics does not develop in a social vacuum. The aesthetic conception of life is a product of life itself which it then reflects. A flower, so beautiful, is the product of the entire tree. But a flower is also an important marker of the identity of a particular group of plants or even of a particular individual plant. The flower, so delicate, also contains the seeds for the continuation of that plant. A product of the past of that plant, it becomes the future of the plant.²

Ngugi’s view on the function of writing as expressed here have much in common with the view of Mao-Tse-Tung on arts and politics as expressed in his ‘Talks at the Yenan Forum’:
In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics.\(^3\)

The earlier statement by Ngugi makes clear his belief in the task of writing as a continuous process having its roots in the past and again in turn becoming the base for other writings in future. It is a continuous process that Ngugi sees having its firm roots in the community/society it evolves from. Ngugi adds a further dimension to his views on the task of an author when he holds that there is no neutral ground for the writer to work on:

Whether or not [a writer] is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battle filed: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics.\(^4\)

Such onus on the shoulders of an author pushes one into the field of ideological commitment but it was a demand which had arisen out of the socio-political forces in action in the Kenyan society and was of direct relevance to them. Regarding the connection between African writers and politics, Harish Narang observes:

In the case of African literature this question of ideological stand-point of the writer although implicit in the very social nature of literature, became prominent in the context of the various freedom struggles and it continued to remain relevant in the post-independence period as well, as the gap between the affluent few and pauper majority widened alarmingly and as infrastructure of ethics crumbled.\(^5\)

One can indeed feel a Marxist touch in the views of Ngugi when he talks of the position that any writer is forced to choose out of the options available to him/her in
the absence of any neutral ground. Even the above observation made by Harish Narang speaks of the class-based struggle at the root of all ideological positionings. The ‘class’ element in Ngugi’s ideology is made clear by himself in Writers in Politics where he writes:

...For as long as there are classes – classes defined by where or how the various people stand in relation to the means of production – a truly human contact in love, joy, laughter, creative labour will never be possible.  

It is not just that Ngugi perceives class division in the Kenyan society alone as responsible for ideological conflicts. In his opinion the world itself is a larger stage where the eternal conflict between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ is carried out and which, in turn, hampers the fostering of a universal community feeling between nations. In his interview with Michael Pozo his response to the question of whether the conflict between the United States and the ‘Third World’ countries was the result of some “misunderstanding of the definition of a community”, his response was thus:

No, I don’t think that there is a harmonious third world position and a harmonious Euroamerican position...In a world divided into a minority of nations that rule the majority of nations, there has to be difference in outlook. But within nations, western or third world, there are differences in the world outlook of the social haves and the social have-nots.

In keeping with his view of ideological differences between nations and within a society, Ngugi is not in favour of any ‘universal’ theme. Regarding Ngugi’s dissatisfaction with writers who speak of universal themes, Harish Narang notes:

Ngugi is, therefore, quite vary [sic] of those writers who talk of humanism, universalism, justice and peace in the abstract. In this respect he reserves his worst criticism for a section of the bourgeoisie which may be characterised as comprador-bourgeoisie – the class of people which collaborated with the ruling colonial forces during the crucial phase of the national freedom struggle and which wormed itself into positions of political power during the post-
independence phase in order to subserve the interests of neo-colonialism and imperials via the transnationals.⁸

Such view of Ngugi regarding the elite bourgeoisie was the result of what he had witnessed in the wake of *Uhuru*. The rush of progressive developments that followed Kenya only seemed to widen the yawning the gap between ideals and actuality. The African elitist group used their political power to entrench their own economic position while the poor were still half-fed and half-naked. Ngugi saw the entire ‘boon’ of independence for the elite group as:

> Under the banner of Africanization, it grabs at jobs in the civil service and jostles at places on the directing boards of all the foreign companies – Shell, I.C.I., Unilever, Union Miniere, Anglo-American banks and mining corporations that really run the economy of the country. It surrounds itself with country houses, cars, washing machines, television sets and all the consumer durables that are associated with an acquisitive middle-class.⁹

And it is not just Ngugi who holds such views about the African elite. Ayi Kwei Armah too was critical of the leadership that was provided by the African elite. He writes:

> The successful African leader is likely to have gone far up the ladder of assimilation set up for his benefit by the white man. The system is quite overtly one of the progressive isolation of the subject: a heroic adventure, in literary terms. The desire to excel in competition with one’s peers in a colonial situation becomes enlisted in an incentive system that offers increasing rewards in proportion as the competing individual draws nearer the colonialisit ideal.¹⁰

The Kenyan situation that Ngugi laments in the post-independence context is the opposite of what Jomo Kenyatta had hoped it to be:

> I say this to you: in freedom and with unity, there is nothing that we cannot accomplish...Our objective here in Africa is justice, after long years of
desolation, exploitation and neglect. Africa is fast awakening, not for conquest or disruption or revenge, but to contribute to the world a new philosophy. All men are equal. All men are equally entitled to respect...All that is needed is a new social conscience in human relations.\textsuperscript{11}

Referring to the choice of theme by the African writers, Ngugi believes that there can be no “greater theme than the struggle of a people to liberate themselves? In fact, this is a struggle in essence to liberate man.”\textsuperscript{12}

Given the African context, Ngugi’s view on the choice of themes seems to lead to Africa as the chosen one. Ngugi, while discussing the position that the African writers should take has made his won position clear too. He feels that the writer is burdened with the great task of ‘creating’ a nation’s history and reconstruct the same in the people’s imagination, thus making them aware and proud of their own roots so that they can assert their own identity in the face of deliberate and dubious misrepresentations, particularly by the colonial writers, and try for the restoration of the collective dignity of the community as a powerful weapon for liberation. This dual process of rejecting the white man’s rules and affirmation of one’s own ‘native’ identity, is what Omofume O. Onoge calls as ‘the politics of oppression versus the politics of liberation’.\textsuperscript{13} The emphasis is on the unity of the people. Such concern of the postcolonial and nationalist authors over the establishment of their indigenous identity has been precisely described by Elleke Boehmer in the following words:

Again and again nationalist writing emphasized the importance of unity within, cleaving to one’s own. Apart from anything else, the act of reinforcing communal unity was perceived to be politically astute. After colonial policies of divide and rule, the key to success as an independent nation-state was cultural oneness (though once again the nation was not in every case invoked as the basis for unity – continentalism and racial bonding, as in Pan-Africanism, were also favoured).\textsuperscript{14}

Jomo Kenyatta, in \textit{Facing Mount Kenya} had repeatedly suggested the wholeness and completeness of traditional Gikuyu life. Also, in order to suppress or minimize internal differences, it also became acceptable to project some particular
class and cultural identities and regional loyalties on to the nation as a whole, as is evident in Ngugi's novels of the 1960s and 1970s. In novels like The River Between and A Grain of Wheat, the experience of a character is essentially linked to the fate of the tribe or the nation. Sometimes, as in A Grain of Wheat, the history of a particular character (Mugo, in this case) reflects the history of a whole section of the national community. Anti-colonial strategies and philosophies of writers aimed at maintaining continuity with the past and preserve nationalist unity.

This in turn, led to the urge to rewrite history as an effort to challenge the deliberate misrepresentation of the colonized nations as cultural and historical blanks before the onset of imperialism on their soil; a void unmarked by any achievement. Sometimes, the negation of the colonizer’s history is met with symbolic resistance in the text – as in A Grain of Wheat, the white officer’s ‘Prospero in Africa’ remains unwritten. In the same novel Ngugi telescopes the history of the nation’s nationalist struggle in the story of Kihika and other s from the village of Thabai. The focal point of Ngugi’s created history, the Mau Mau struggle, is told in the form of recollection by a group of historically representative characters, both collaborators and heroes of resistance. History is no longer seen as something coming from outside. It is told from within and this act of telling history by the colonized is an act of assuming self-control – taking charge of the past, of self-definition, and above all of charting out one’s political destiny. It is a process of assuming control, of gaining power — both the power over the word and over creation of a race through historical redefinition.

Boehmer notes:

Postcolonial fiction therefore gives structure to, as well as being structured by, history. Here we come to the idea of historical narrative – indeed of narrative in general – as a process of form-giving. The space-time framework and patterns of causality in a narrative work not only impart coherence to a fragmented history, but also help organize and clarify foundational moments in the anti-imperial movement: the initial emergence of political self-consciousness, say, or the explosion of resistance.¹⁵

The colonial situation had destroyed the old culture without laying down foundations for a new one, and this situation had left the Africans derelicts drifting in
the quagmire of the older European-centred colonial system only to build a new post-colonial nation by borrowing freely on the system perpetrated by the colonizers. Even in the post-independence scenario, the colonial control continued in a disguised manner with the help and support of black middlemen. The unholy alliance between the indigenous brokers and the international forces of market capitalism spiralled a mad squandering of the economic resources of the newly independent nations. Corruption had entered into all sections of the African society. In the case of Kenya, such a situation has been portrayed by Ngugi in Devil on the Cross. Lewis Nkosi points out how the destruction of traditional values by European imperialism and the concomitant Christianisation of Africans brought about a shift of focus from the communal to the individual. He was critical of how even the poets and the artists showed a drastic change by replacing the purpose of art from communal celebration to an individual vision.\textsuperscript{16} It was under such conditions that the need was felt for developing a literature which would drive the people back to their roots; and it is what Ngugi wanted from his fellow writers when he talks of Africa as being the only subject for African writers.

The commitment that Ngugi exhibits towards Africa is typical of what he expected other African writers to practise too. It was his view that it is up to the writers to create a history of their own and place it as a counter narrative to the colonizer’s claim that Africa was devoid of any history before the arrival of the whites. At the same time, such commitment is a part of Ngugi’s continuous efforts to ‘move’ the centre and lay bare the falsity of the whiteman’s ‘civilizing’ mission in Africa. It is indeed no hidden fact that one of the prime objectives of the postcolonial writers has been to demolish the myth of the ‘whiteman’s burden’ and bring to light the true nature of their mission in the colonies. However, Ngugi does not idealize the rebels. Rather, as in A Grain of Wheat, he also speaks of their weaknesses and thereby situates them in a more human light, especially as he does in the Fourteenth Chapter.

As a writer, Ngugi’s growth has been through different stages according to his pre-occupation with themes and ideas in these periods. The Companion to African Literature (2000) records the growth of Ngugi as a writer in the following three stages:
The first extends from 1960 to 1964, the year he graduated from Makerere, and was marked by the formative influences of Gikuyu social and cultural tradition, Christianity, and western liberal thought. The second state, from his arrival in Leeds in 1964 to his involvement in the Kamiriithu festival at Limuru in 1976, was influenced decisively by his introduction to Marxism, Frantz Fanon, pan-Africanism, and the cause of black solidarity through his study of West Indian writing and awareness of Black Power Movement in the US. This period was characterized by his increasing disillusionment with the bourgeois nationalism. In the third period which extends from 1976 onwards, the disillusionment is complete and Ngugi loses all hope of improving things in Kenya and in Africa except through total revolution brought about by the peasant masses. The turning point in his intellectual and emotional life was his joining the Kamiriithu Cultural Centre, in 1976. His theoretical leftism now assumes a concrete shape, and the change is nothing less than a spiritual conversion. His realization that he has nothing to teach and everything to learn from the Kenyan peasant he calls a ‘homecoming’ that marks the end of the alienating influence of colonial education. One result of the change is his resolution to write only in the language of his people; another is an increasing reliance on the theatre rather than the novel for creating revolutionary awareness. 17

Autobiographical experiences contribute considerably in the moulding of Ngugi’s sensibilities and performance as an author. It was his experiences during the long period of colonial struggle that provided him with much of the material for his writings. He moulds his personal experiences into fiction, and as he writes about them, they in turn shape a large part of his writing. In his ‘Preface’ to Secret Lives he writes:

My writing is really an attempt to understand myself and my situation in society and history. As I write I remember the nights of fighting in my father’s house; my mother’s struggle with the soil so that we might eat, have decent clothes and get some schooling; my elder brother, Wallace Mwangi, running to the cover and security of the forest under a hail of bullets from Colonial policemen; his messages from the forest urging me to continue with education
at any cost; my cousin, Gichina wa Ngugi, just escaping the hangman's rope because he had been caught with live bullets; uncles and other villagers murdered because they had taken the oath; the beautiful courage of ordinary men and women in Kenya who stood up to the might of British imperialism and indiscriminate terrorism. I remember too some relatives and villagers who carried the gun for the whiteman and often became his messengers of blood. I remember the fears, the betrayals, Rachael's tears, the moments of despair and love and kinship in struggle and I try to find the meaning of it all through my pen. 18

As one reads his novels, there is a growing awareness that the experiences of his life play an important part in devising characters and events in them. Whether it be Weep Not, Child or A Grain of Wheat, there are incidents which allow for direct comparison and reference to his experiences.

When it comes to the presence of postcolonial themes in the novels of Ngugi, there can be no denial of the fact that his writings allow for the direct application of postcolonial approach because of the nature of their themes. As one reads the novels of Ngugi (from Weep Not, Child to Matigari) one finds certain themes which keep recurring in them, especially those of resistance to colonial machinery, armed and unarmed; education, including the effect of the spread of western education and Christianity among the ridges; the ‘space’ of women in the society and nation, both during the colonial and post-independence periods; the opposition/conflict between traditional and western/colonial culture; the need for unity among a people; the conflict for power; the spread of international capitalism and the growth of corruption in the post-independence period; the misuse of power and the question of language. In his novels taken up for this study, the focus of the novelist is on developing one or more of these themes, especially with the view of presenting them as a critique of colonialism (in his earlier novels) and neo-colonialism (in his later novels). Taken from Weep Not, Child, to Matigari, the novels of Ngugi follow the historical passage of time from the early days of the onset and the spread of colonialism to the later years in independent Kenya.
The first two novels of Ngugi are composed against the background of the early days of colonialism and they try to pit the past pre-colonial/pre-historic legends and lores as an inspiring force towards their liberation from the shackles of colonialism. The third novel takes the historical background further as it is set in the twilight zone of the last few days leading to ‘Uhuru’ – the attainment of independence and continues to a few more days into independent Kenya. The fourth, fifth and the sixth novels of Ngugi are based on the experiences of his characters in newly independent Kenya where they find all their dreams and aspirations of a fulfilling and independent nation disillusioned. These last three novels form a scathing remark on the neo-colonial apparatus unleashed all over Kenya which makes the scenario worse, and if not worse, as bad as during the colonial days. The fifth and the sixth novel are more critical of the situation because of the increase in the intensity and virulence of the author’s attack on the system.

It is against such historical background and the focus on the themes mentioned above that Ngugi presents the dynamics of power as an intertwined theme in his novels. The theme of power seems to be a natural growth of Ngugi’s involvement with the colonial and neo-colonial situation in Kenya. As already discussed, the neo-colonial scenario in Kenya had turned out to be a matter of concern for Ngugi since he could not find any fulfilment of the desired objectives with which the nationalist movement had begun. However, before entering into a discussion of how the theme of power operates in the novels of the author, it seems proper to define key conceptual terms like ‘neo-colonialism’ and ‘power’. Elleke Boehmer explains the term ‘neo-colonialism’ in the following words:

...A term from economic theory, current since the 1960s, ‘neo-colonialism’ signifies the continuing economic control by the West of the once-colonized world under the guise of political independence, and the betrayal therefore of the ideals of postcolonial liberation. Although theorists may differ in ascribing causes, they broadly agree that the decline of one sort of colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s led to the rise of another, less overt, some might say more insidious, form – what has also been called a super or new imperialism. Neo-colonial formations grew up particularly pronounced from the 1970s as recession and the burgeoning of Third World debt...
tightened the grip of rich Northern countries on the South. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s, and the triumphal development of a single world economic system, even if by default in many regions, the rise of the new imperialism, a further manifestation of capitalist modernity, has in the new twenty-first century become hegemonic, certainly global. The concept of neo-colonialism is therefore a useful reminder of the optimism of all we refer to when we speak of the postcolonial, while it simultaneously emphasizes the importance, even so, of relentless pressure and resistance within and against oppressive circumstances. Despite anti-imperial developments, despite the apparently subversive energies of postcolonial writing, in a world order powered by multinational companies, colonialism is not a thing of the past.

Such acknowledgement of neo-colonialism as a by-product of the postcolonial situation in most recently independent nations, and as a global phenomenon is important in understanding Ngugi's preoccupation with neo-colonial power-matrix in the post-Uhuru Kenyan society. At the same time such description of neo-colonialism also allows for the division of the historical stages of the process of colonial encounter into the pre-colonial, the colonial and the postcolonial. This division is important in attempting a study of Ngugi's novels because his novels are set against all these three stages in the process of colonization.

There is a gradual shift in the author's perception of the dynamics of power in the Kenyan context with the passage of time and this is reflected in the manner in which he focuses on the different aspects and loci of power in his novels. This shift in his perspective can be perhaps related to his experiences and the socio-political scenario on the nation during different periods. Such a shift in the perspective of the author allows for the application of different approaches to the issue/theme of power in his novels. It has been found in the course of this study that most of his novels allow approaches to the theme of power from the Marxist and the Feminist standpoints and the application of Foucault's views on knowledge and the formation of the structure of power in a society, besides the ever present Postcolonial approach.

In his first two novels, written during the beginning of his career as a novelist, and set in the backdrop of the early days of colonial expansion, he tries to argue that it
is only the political unity among the people that holds the key to the liberation of the tribe and the nation. The argument of the novelist in these two novels is that Western/Euro-Christian education in the Kenyan context will not deliver the desired goods to the people. Through the ordeals and the experiences of the characters in the novels Ngugi shows how the concept of Euro-Christian education in the Kenyan context inverts the Foucauldean concept of ‘knowledge/power’. The Kenyan emphasis on education is seen as a failure until it helps to unite the people towards a larger political involvement. Ngugi’s suspicion of the English language and his rejection of the same led him to compose his later novels in his mother tongue – Gikuyu. He considered the English language as a weapon that worked to erase memories of a pre-colonial past and prevented people from looking up to the past for solutions to their present problems. Perhaps it is why Ngugi refers to the past legends and folk-lore as sources of inspiration to the people in the present.

Ngugi’s criticism of the adoption of the westernised concept of education continues in his later novels too. In this context, he holds the introduction of Christianity into the ridges as another important factor. His second novel, The River Between, takes up this issue in a more detailed manner where the conflict is shown as being directly between Christianity and the native culture; particularly over the issue of female circumcision. In these two novels the theme of the chosen individual as the liberator of the community is also focussed on through the introduction of the myth of the Saviour. Both Njoroge in Weep Not, Child and Waiyaki in The River Between think that they are destined to liberate the tribe and the nation through their actions and their inability to understand the immediate demands/desires of the community results in their failure. In the second novel it is also the clash between two potentially powerful rivals over the issue of leadership of the tribe that the theme of power is propelled forward.

Ngugi’s anger against that section of hypocrites who used the name of Christ to further their own selfish needs without understanding the true spirit of Christianity comes under attack in Petals of Blood. In this novel the truth behind the loss of an ear by Brother Ezekiel and the sham sympathy shown by the Black priest who tries to quench the thirst and hunger of the villagers by giving them food for the soul are instances of his attack on religious hypocrites. It somehow seems that though Ngugi
viewed Christianity as a potent tool in the hands of the colonials, his attack is directed much towards the abuse of Christianity rather than on the religion in its pure form. His feelings are directed much by his experience of the damage that colonialism had caused in Kenya by using religion as means to dull the understanding of the people. However, his attempt to provide a counter-force to Christianity can be traced as far back as *Weep Not, Child*, where he narrates the Gikuyu myth of Creation in juxtaposition to the Christian story of Creation.20

The third novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, carries the historical time-frame in his works further as it is set against the euphoric days leading to *Uhuru* – the attainment of independence from colonial rule, and continues to a few more days into independent Kenya. It is in the background of this festive mood connected with the preparation for *Uhuru* that the author sets the stage for dealing with the theme of power at this crucial juncture in Kenyan history. It is a time for dreams, for aspirations and for plans for building a new nation – a new independent nation to fulfil the suppressed and unfulfilled wishes. At this point of transfer of authority from the colonial to the ‘native’ hands, Ngugi narrates the story of the village of Thabai, weaving into it the part it had played in the nationalist movement and how it has affected the lives of different characters. In this novel, Ngugi projects the dynamics of power in its various forms and contexts.

From his fourth novel, *Petals of Blood*, there occurs a marked change in the thematic concern. This novel onwards, his focus shifts to the misuse of power and the rampant economic exploitation and corruption going on under the banner of international capitalism in independent Kenya. The novel is an expression of his disillusionment with the changed scenario in Kenya where the benefits of independence have gone only to a chosen few – and ironically, to a majority of those who are the least concerned about fulfilling the dreams of those who had sacrificed their all in the movement and the millions who held great hope from independence. Apart from the change in the thematic concern, *Petals of Blood* marks another important change in the development of Ngugi as a novelist – it is in his decision to write in his native tongue and abstain from using English as the means for expression. The next two novels to follow – *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* – were also first written in Gikuyu and later translated into English. The translation was sometimes
carried out by others and at times by the author himself. This practice of writing in his own tongue was in keeping with what he had professed as decolonizing the self from the shackles of colonization by a foreign language.

In terms of theme too, Devil on the Cross and Matigari share the same concern of the author over the neo-colonial situation in Kenya. The multiplicity of themes that he had introduced in A Grain of Wheat continues in these works too. It is in these later novels that Ngugi emerges as a stern critic of neo-colonialism. These three novels show a gradual rise in Ngugi's angry tone on the state of affairs in newly independent Kenya. From Petals of Blood to Matigari, there is a constant rise in the pitch of criticism. With the help of certain literary devices like irony, satire and narrative techniques that include the elements of folklore and orature, Ngugi continues his attack on the corruption and exploitation in Kenyan society under a Black government. The shift towards a belief in armed rebellion is also visible in these novels - and Matigari can be taken as his statement in this regard. The critique of colonial culture that Ngugi presents in his novels makes the theme of power an essential part of his narration.

In the initial stage of my study of the theme of power in the novels of Ngugi (taken up for study in this dissertation) I had begun with the following three approaches to the theme of power in an attempt to arrive at a working definition of power:

(i) The ability to impose one's will on others, even if those author resistance in some way.

(ii) The concept of Power in social theory where power is viewed as "a process, an aspect to an ongoing social relationship, not as a fixed part of a social structure", and

(iii) Foucault’s analysis on the relation between power and knowledge and the systems/structures that perpetrate power. The importance of Foucault’s concept of power lies in its examination of the intentionality, and the ‘real and effective practices’ of power.
My later studies in this regard led me to focus on several other definitions of power as given by different scholars and critics in this respect. A study of the different definitions of power however, led to the highlighting of some important, and at times common elements, in the study of power as a theme: the elements being – relationship between the various classes/units in a society; the scope for resistance; strategies of struggle; the existence of violence; structural/organizational form of power; the attainment of intended affects; the degree of influence and freedom, etc.

Given the nature of the proposed study it was not possible to confine it to the application of a single approach to the subject. So at the later stage of the study the study incorporated the definitions and observations of many other critics on the subject of power. While trying to incorporate the observations of different critics on the subject of power it was seen that the basic approaches that could be adopted in relation to the proposed novels of the author were the Marxist approach, the Feminist approach and above all the Postcolonial approach. The very fact that the novels allowed for postcolonial interpretation provided scope for the inclusion of the other approaches to the texts. However, as already stated at the beginning of this paper, this study does not intend to formulate any new theory of power, nor does it aim at arriving at a new definition of power. The study takes into consideration and applies the different approaches to the subject of power purely in order to study how the author has presented power as a theme in his novels. The focus of the study is to find the changes in Ngugi’s handling of the theme of power in his different novels and the manner in which the dynamics of relationships help towards a better understanding of the same.

As already mentioned above, Foucault’s analysis on the relationship between knowledge and power and the system/structure that perpetrate power formed one of the initial bases for this study primarily because of the fact that Ngugi concerns himself with the power dynamics in Kenya from the pre-colonial to the post colonial period through the colonial. His focus is on trying to describe how power has been exercised in institutionalised manner in the different phases of Kenyan history. While in his earlier novels Ngugi is concerned with the dynamics of power in the context of colonial Kenya, in his later novels he has tried to show how even after independence
the process of colonial exploitation is carried on by the black neo-colonialists who serve as watch-dogs for the Europeans. For Ngugi colonial has only made way for international capitalism which, he feels, is the disguised form of colonialism. Such institutionalised form of power that Ngugi tries to analyse in his novels allows for the application of Foucauldian views on the subject.

In the book, *Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, the authors have highlighted the following three methodological themes in Foucault’s inquiries:

The first is his shift from an exclusive emphasis on discursive formations during the mid 1960s to a broadening of analytic concerns to include once again nondiscursive issues: the move to cultural practices and power. Second is his focus on meticulous rituals of power, centering on certain cultural practices which combined knowledge and power. Third is his isolation of bio-power, a concept which links the various political technologies of the body, the discourses of the human sciences, and the structures of domination which have been articulated over the last two hundred and fifty years (and particularly since the beginning of the nineteenth century). Each of these themes, and particularly the third, raises questions about the nature of this articulation, its significance, and its implications. *What is power? How does it relate to truth? What implications does Foucault’s position have for thinking and acting?* 21

However, Foucault’s account of power is not designed as a theory. His account of power is not ahistorical and he does not see power as existing or being exercised outside a context. Also, he does not call for a generalization of all history. In doing so Foucault seems to acknowledge the individuality of different contexts. Foucault says:

If one tries to erect a theory of power one will always be obliged to view it as emerging at a given place and time and hence to deduce it, to reconstruct its genesis. But as power is in reality an open, more-or-less coordinated (in the event, no doubt, ill-coordinated) cluster of relations, then the only problem is
to provide oneself with a grid of analysis which makes possible an analytic of relations of power. 22

It is this contextuality which calls for the application of his views on power in relation to Ngugi’s novels. Foucault regards power not as a ‘commodity, a position, a prize, or a plot’ but ‘as the operation of the political technologies throughout the social body’ and that it is the functioning of these political rituals of power that exactly sets up the nonegalitarian, asymmetrical relations.23

It is in his History of Sexuality that Foucault tends to ‘towards a definition of a specific domain formed by power relations and towards a determination of the instruments that will make possible its analysis’24. In this book Foucault tries to isolate, identify, and analyze the web of unequal relationships set up by political technologies. However, it should be added that he does not regard power as restricted to political institutions alone; for him, power is ‘multi-dimensional, operating from the top down and also from the bottom up’25. In doing so, Foucault considers power as a ‘general matrix’ of force relations at a given time in a given place. In other words, his view of power is both temporal and spatial. It is the asymmetry in this matrix that helps one to locate and understand the true functioning of power. He regards power as operating throughout society, thereby widening the space of its operation.

Such view of Foucault on the subject of power as a complex strategic relationship in a particular place at a particular point of time very well suits a study of power as a theme in the novels of Ngugi; for Ngugi is highly concerned with the dynamics of power-relations in different historical contexts in Kenya. Seen critically in the post-independence Kenyan context he is pre-occupied with the failure of Uhuru to deliver the desired fruits of freedom to the people who should actually garner its benefits. The application of Foucault’s view of power to the dynamics of power relationships in the novels of Ngugi will surely help towards a better understanding and appreciation of his novels.

Foucault adds another dimension to his views on power when he tells that knowledge is one of the defining components for the operation of power in the
modem world. Knowledge is often considered as an essential condition for the formation and growth of industrial and colonial power. It is the knowledge of things and phenomenon that gives a person an upperhand above others. Knowledge is formed by the dynamics of power; it is rather an integral part of and agent in the process of perpetration of power. In ‘Why Study Power: The Question of Subject’, Foucault wrote:

It is true that I became quite involved with the question of power. It soon appeared to me that, while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations which are very complex.  

In the same article, Foucault suggests another way of approaching the relationship between power and knowledge. He writes:

I would like to suggest another way to go further towards a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point...Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies.

In this sense, resistance also becomes an important focal point in trying to understand the dynamics of power under any situation. Regarding resistance, Foucault himself offers his own classifications which are relevant to my study of power as a theme in the novels of Ngugi. Foucault first mentions “transversal” struggles that are not limited to one country. Such struggles he says, “develop more easily and to a greater extent in certain countries, but they are not confined to a particular political or economic form of government”. Such struggles, Foucault feels, are ‘immediate’ because they look for the ‘immediate’ enemy and want an immediate solution to an immediate problem. These struggles do not aim to “find a solution to their problem at a future date” and are termed as “anarchic struggles”.

18
But there are struggles that Foucault finds to be original and more specific in nature. In his own words:

4) They are struggles which question the status of the individual: on the one hand, they assert the right to be different and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way.

These struggles are not exactly for or against the "individual", but rather they are struggles against the "government of individualization".

5) They are an opposition to the effects of power which are linked with knowledge, competence, and qualification: struggles against the privileges of knowledge. But they are also an opposition against secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations imposed on people.  

He identifies three types of (power) struggles in history:

"...either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission)."

By identifying the different types of power struggles in history in this manner, Foucault has included almost all factors that propagate the dynamics of contestation – ethnic, religious, social and economic. All the three types of struggles as mentioned by Foucault can be seen in the novels of Ngugi wa Thiong’o taken up for an analysis of power as a theme.

In relation to the question how power is exercised, Foucault feels it necessary to “distinguish power relations from relationships of communication which transmit information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic
medium”. He does not equate power-relations to relationships of communication or objective capacity. His is an analysis of power relations and not power itself. The nature of power, in his analysis, is determined in the manner in which individual or collective actions modify others and “Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, or course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures” 33. It is interesting to note that Foucault defines power-relationships as actions upon actions, thereby modifying the present nature of the action or which may arise in the future instead of acting directly upon the persons (the doers of the actions) 34. When it comes to the exercise of power in order to guide the possibility of conduct towards a possible outcome, Foucault imposes a qualification to such exercise in the sense that such exercise is possible only when the subjects are free. By this he means that individuals or groups should have a field of possibilities which allows them scope to behave and react in diverse ways. In other words, there should be availability of options for the subject. In his opinion, the constriction of options ceases the possibility of power-relations. In this sense, Foucault negates slavery as a power-relationship because the slave is already in chains and has no options 35. It is the possibility for the refusal to submit to slavery that sets the dynamics of power-relations in such case.

Foucault also lays emphasis on the crucial role played by institutions in determining the exercise of power in a given society at any point of time. His insistence on the importance of social institutions in determining the dynamics of power leads him to observe that power-relations are thus deeply rooted in the social fabric, and are generated from it, rather than being reconstituted above it 36, and since power-relations are generated from the root of the social structure, no society in the real world is free from it. This calls for an historical and political analysis of the relationships based on power, but at the same time Foucault cautions that an analysis of power-relations within a society should not be reduced to a study of the so-called ‘political’ institutions only. The very fact that power is rooted in the system of social networks makes it necessary to take into account the other forms of institutions that help to propel power. He further adds that Power-relations require strategy which is defined by the use of winning solutions. He writes:
Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal.

An analysis of power-relationships in view of the strategies of struggle makes visible the fundamental phenomena of domination in most human activities. The importance of the study of power relations with relations of strategy gives us an understanding of the resistance and revolts which a dominant group comes up against at the level of that social body.

In his essay, *Disciplinary Power and Subjection*, Foucault reminds the readers very clearly that power is not something that is localized at a point or in a person. In his words “Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power”. In this sense, Foucault regards individuals as the vehicles of power in a chain-like formation, and not just points of application, i.e., the points at the receiving ends; but as being constituted by the same power: “The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle”. George Simmel too, while talking about the institutionalized form of power, also suggests a two-way flow of power. However, this two-way flow does not mean that the flow is equally strong in both directions and for a better and proper understanding of power, the secondary flow, the factors responsible for it, and the consequences arising out of it should be carefully considered.

Hannah Arendt also holds an opinion which is quite similar to that of Foucault when she writes that “Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.”

To understand how the network of power relations operates, Foucault advocates for an ‘ascending analysis of power’, studying every ‘infinitesimal mechanism’ involved in the process and find out how these mechanisms of power invest, transform, displace and extend the process to wider and yet wider levels. He holds that when the mechanisms come into force they grow independent of the...
ideologies that might have put them into motion at the initial stage, as such, the mechanisms cease to be ideological constructs.

Besides Foucault, the link between power and politics has been accepted by other critics like Robert Dahl. Robert Dahl, in *Power as the Control of Behaviour* states the following in speaking about the relevance of an analysis of power in the study of politics:

In approaching the study of politics through the analysis of power, one assumes, at a minimum, that relations of power are among the significant aspects of a political system. This assumption, and therefore the analysis of power, can be applied to any kind of political system, international, national, or local, to associations and groups of various kinds, such as the family, the hospital, and the business firm, and to historical developments. 43

Dahl’s statement extends the boundary of the application of the analysis of power. His feeling that an understanding of power is usually thought to be indispensable for moral or ethical appraisals of political systems, can be taken as a statement in support of analysis of power. The importance that he attaches to analysis of power relations can be understood from the given statement from the same essay:

From Aristotle to Hobbes political theorists were mainly concerned with power relations within a given community. But external relations even more than internal ones force attention to questions of relative power. The rise of the modern nation-state therefore compelled political theorists to recognize the saliency of power in politics, and particularly, in international politics. 44

A large proportion of the view on power that Dahl holds are a reflection of the ideas of Meinecke as expressed in the latter’s work, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d’Etat and its Place in Modern History*.

Talcott Parsons is another critic who focuses on the relationship of power in a social system. However, he is also one who acknowledges the difficulty in defining the concept of Power on a unanimously agreeable basis. In his words:
Power is one of the key concepts in the great Western tradition of thought about political phenomena. It is at the same time a concept on which, inspite of its long history, there is, on analytical levels, a notable lack of agreement both about its specific definition, and about many features of the conceptual context in which it should be placed. There is, however, a core complex of its meaning having to do with the capacity of persons or collectivities 'to get things done' effectively, in particular when their goals are obstructed by some kind of human resistance or opposition.  

Regarding this animosity in the analytical approach to the concept of power, as treated in literature, Parsons points out the following three contexts:

i) “The first of these concerns its conceptual diffuseness, the tendency, in the tradition of Hobbes, to treat power as simply the generalized capacity to attain ends or goals in social relations, independent of the media employed or of the status of 'authorization' to make decisions or impose obligations”.

ii) “Secondly, there is the problem of the relation between the coercive and the consensual aspects”.

iii) “Finally, the third problem is what, since the Theory of Games, has widely come to be called the ‘zero-sum’ problem...which is to say that there is a fixed ‘quantity’ of power in any relational system and hence any gain of power on the part of A must by definition occur by diminishing the power at the disposal of other units, B, C, D…”.

Parsons conceives power as ‘a circulating medium’ (like money) within and over the ‘economic’, ‘integrative’ and ‘pattern-maintenance’ systems in a society. He also recognizes the provision for ‘discipline’ and ‘punishment’ in the propagation and maintenance of power when he later defines power as:
Power then is generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organization when the obligations are legitimized with reference to their bearing on collective goals and where in case of recalcitrance there is a presumption of enforcement by negative situational sanctions – whatever the actual agency of that enforcement. 47

Such definition of power brings him nearer to the views of Foucault on the relationship between discipline, punishment and maintenance of power.

Nicos Poulantzas, in his essay, Class Power, defines power in terms of class-power. He writes:

By power, we shall designate the capacity of a social class to realize its specific objective interests. 48

This reference to the capacity of a class to realize specific objective interests draws it to the Marxist analysis of class organisation. The relationships of power that arise out of such reference and analysis form complex and dislocated positions, 'determined in the last instance by economic power'. 49

It is important to note that in discussing the manner or the tools through which power is manifested, force, and at times, violence, is seen as intricately connected to its perpetration. Hannah Arendt, for example, makes quite a few subtle points when she analyses the intimate, yet somehow tricky, relationship between power and violence in her essay Communicative Power. Regarding the relationship between power and violence, she says that there exists a common consensus among all political thinkers on the view that “violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power”. She quotes C. Wright Mills to this effect: All politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence, and compares it to Max Weber’s definition of the state as “…the rule of men over men based on the means of legitimate, that is allegedly legitimate, violence. This, Hannah Arendt fells, is based on Marx’s ‘estimate of the state as an instrument of oppression in the hands of the ruling class’. 51

This, in turn, seems to take us to Althusser’s views on the
(Repressive) State Apparatus, as he expounds in his 1971 essay *Ideology and the State* (published in *Lenin and Philosophy*).

Power, as Arendt later tries to sum up by referring to other political thinkers, is closely associated with the instinct to dominate and impose one’s will over another (here, she is referring to Sartre and Voltaire). According to her, the extreme form of violence is impossible without instruments. At this point she comes very near to Ngugi’s representation of power, conflict and violence in *Matigari* and *The River Between*. There is one point which she makes regarding the relationship between power and violence and it is the proportionately inverse relationship between power and violence. She writes:

> Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears when power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance.  

This statement is in keeping with one of her earlier observations on the subject of power and violence:

> Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power.

This view of Hannah Arendt, however, goes against Ngugi’s view of violence as a means for ascertaining justice for the weak and the oppressed in a corrupt society – the view that he expresses in *Matigari* that justice for the oppressed comes from a pointed spear.

Gerhard Lenski recognizes force as the foundation of sovereignty. In his essay, *Power and Privilege*, Lenski considers power to be a highly confusing and misunderstood concept. He considers force as the most effective instrument in establishing power and holds that force is not only the foundation of political sovereignty, but also “the foundation of the distribute system in every society where there is a surplus to be divided”. He states that Force is the means to an end, the
being the establishment of a new social order, and which cannot be attained until most members of the society accept it out of their own willingness. However, Lenski argues, that with a certain amount of foresight and intelligence and through a process of seizing of offices, proper use of media and propaganda, force can be transformed into authority. The necessity of securing a livelihood for the general people also serves as an obstacle to the establishment of resistance and furthers the process of turning might into right. Thus, consensus can be created through coercive power, and Lenski cites the example of the process. In the context of the colonial situation that Ngugi presents in his novels, this transition of force into authority is very much evident in novels like *The River Between* and *Petals of Blood*; particularly in those portions which deal with the settling of the colonial government in Gikuyu-populated regions of Kenya.

The use of force also brings in the concept of ‘domination’ to be applied to the study of power. The views on domination as presented by Max Weber form an essential component in the study of the theme of power. According to Max Weber, ‘domination’ constitutes a special case of power. He writes:

> Domination in the quite general sense of power, i.e., of the possibility of imposing one’s own will upon the behaviour of the other persons, can emerge in the most diverse forms.  

But later he equates domination to power when he holds that “In other words, in our terminology domination shall be identical with authoritarian power of command.” His final definition of domination stands thus:

To be more specific, domination will thus mean the situation in which the manifested will (command) of the ruler or rulers is meant to influence the conduct of one or more other (the ruled) and actually does it in such a way that their conduct to a socially relevant degree occurs as if the ruled had made the content of the command the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake. Looked upon from the other end, this situation will be called obedience.
It will be seen that the element of intentionality remains a very important element in most of the definitions and views associated with the theme of power. Whether it be Bertrand Russell, Max Weber or Michel Foucault, intentionality guides a considerable proportion of their views on the subject of power.

When it comes to a study of power in the novels of Ngugi, the relationship between the individual and the society is one point which requires a fair amount of analysis given the context of the Gikuyu society which he is portraying in his novels. The position of the individual vis-à-vis the society of which he is a member is very important in determining the amount of power that he/she is allowed to enjoy. Many factors are to be taken into consideration in this regard like the question of gender, the custom of the society, and above all, the position of the individual in a colonial/recently independent nation (as the context might be).

The discussion on power that has gone above, and which constitute the basic paradigm for the analysis of the theme of power in the novels of Ngugi that have been taken up for study, includes within itself various approaches to the subject. While the views of Foucault form a major pillar of the approach towards the subject of power that I have adopted, other views and approaches, especially Marxism and Feminism also need to be considered because of the nature of the content and context of the novels. At the same time the presence of some of the important elements, such as, force and violence also need to be examined in connection with the theme of power since they are usually seen as important factors or determinants of the presence and exercise of power in a given context. The proposed study is an attempt to understand the presentation of power in the novels of Ngugi in view of the approaches discussed above and thereby examine how the novelist has enriched his works in the process.

Notes:

2. Michael Pozo, *An Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. St. John’s University Humanities Review. Vol. 2.2 (May 2004). Published with the assistance of the St. John’s English Department.


21 Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow, p. 184.

22 Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow, p. 185.

23 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*. p. 82.

24 Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow p. 184.


26 Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow, p. 211.
27. Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow, p. 211.

28. Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow, p.211.


32. Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow, p. 214.

33. Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow, p. 220.

34. Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow, p. 221.

35. Hubert L. Dryfus and Paul Rabinow, p. 222.


37. Michel Foucault, ‘Disciplinary Power and Subjection’


45. Talcott Parsons, ‘Power and the Social System’ Power, p. 95.

46. Talcott Parsons, p. 94-95.

47. Talcott Parsons, p. 103.


52. Hannah Arendt, p. 71.

53. Hannah Arendt p. 69.

54. Gerhard Lenski, ‘Power and Privilege’ p. 244.


57. Max Weber, p.33.