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Ogude, James

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NGUGI'S SENSE OF HISTORY AND THE POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSES IN KENYA

James Ogude
African Literature Department
University of the Witwatersrand

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NGUGI'S SENSE OF HISTORY AND THE POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSES IN KENYA

James A. Ogude
African Literature Department,
University of the Witwatersrand.

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1. Introduction

In his essays, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has argued for a 'radical' re-interpretation of Kenya's history. The thrust of his argument is that Kenya's history has been distorted by Kenya's professional or guild historians, trained and schooled in Western critical modes of thought. At the heart of Ngugi's thesis is his contention that Kenya's working people; the workers and peasants are marginalised, if not totally ignored in Kenya's narrative history. Ngugi therefore seeks to intervene and to salvage history of the 'oppressed' from the ruins of colonial plunder in Kenya.

This paper is both a critique and a demonstration of Ngugi's sense of history as a major voice in the struggle for democratic space in the post-colonial state in Kenya. The paper seeks to demonstrate that Ngugi's sense of history is closely linked to his politics of interpretation; to his political project vis-a-vis the post-colonial body politic in Kenya; that his post-colonial texts are best understood if placed against the contradictory flux of post-colonial discourses in Kenya. It seeks to demonstrate that although Ngugi's novels have been perceived largely as discourses on cultural decolonization, they involve the quest for a new socio-political order. In this quest Ngugi foregrounds land as a recurring economic and political metaphor in the decolonization process in Kenya; he critiques the African elite that captured state power at independence as mere watchdogs of Western capitalism and indeed, he raises his pet theme of cultural imperialism and the strategies for the African revolution. A dialogic reading of Ngugi's texts, as this paper will hopefully show, links his post-colonial discourses to dependency theory discourses in Kenya and Fanon's conceptualisation of the post-colonial revolution in Africa.[1]

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[1]The debate on Kenya's underdevelopment has been raging since the seventies. Brett's Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa (1973) and Ley's Underdevelopment in Kenya (1974) underscore the manifestations of basic features of

2.Ngugi's Narrative and the Post-Colonial State.

Fiction is a representation of history. And to the extent that both history and fiction deploy the narrative structure, they can both be seen as "a primary and irreducible form of human comprehension, an article in the constitution of common sense".[2] It is for this reason that the narrative has increasingly come to be regarded as a type of explanation and a form of knowledge as forceful as the so called 'scientific knowledge'.[3] It is in this sense that narrative can be said to be representative of the social and historical; they are therefore allegorical in nature.

Ngugi recognises the link between history and fiction. Indeed, for Ngugi, the narrative is a tool for shaping, ordering and re-interpreting history. As Carol Sichermann puts it: "In Ngugi's hand, the pen has written not only story but history, sometimes with a deliberate intermixture of the two".[4] Sichermann's point is that Ngugi's narrative is steeped into Kenya's historical landscape and indeed at times borders close to direct allusion to factual historical personages and events. But Ngugi does not just give us a factual reproduction of historical facts; he is both selective and creative in the process. He seeks to foreground certain aspects of Kenyan history and also invests them with new images. He is not just giving us bare historical facts and events, but he re-interprets them. Sichermann has argued that Ngugi places great accent on three major aspects of Kenyan history: the history of common people, the history of mass movements and history of

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underdevelopment and dependency perspectives in Kenya's development processes. Kitching (1977, 1980), Langdon (1977, 1981) have reasserted some of the basic tenets of the dependeny and underdevelopment frameworks in Kenya which seeks to argue that Kenya is an integral part of international capital in which the development of indigenous bourgeoisie was impossible. Ngugi seems to share this dependency perspective and Fanon's critique of the African national middle class as both decadent and parasitic (see Wretched, 119-165).

[2]Louis O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in The Writing of History and Historical Understanding, ed. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison, Wis., 1978),132.

[3]Hayden White, The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation. London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1987.xi. Mink has made a similar point in "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument" in Canary and C Kozicki, ed.133.

[4]Carol m. Sichemann. "Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Writing of Kenyan History". Research in African Literatures. 20. 3.1989.

heroes.[5]

Indeed, a reading of Ngugi's novels would seem to vindicate Sichermann's assertion. In most of his creative works, Ngugi has consistently foregrounded history of the common people whom he argues have been marginalised in the writing of Kenya's histories. He has attempted to locate them at the centre of mass movements, depicting them as the prime movers in history and indeed as the custodians of Kenya's destiny. It is no accident that in his works heroes like Kimathi, Waiyaki, Karega, Wariinga, Muturi and Matigari are all linked to mass movements that seek to change the socio-political climate in Kenya.

In my view, four basic thematic strands have tended to characterise Ngugi's recreation of Kenyan history. Most of his works are marked by the portrayal of a peaceful African past until the coming of whites; a documentation of the injustices of colonialism; a portrayal of glorious struggle to Uhuru, and the betrayal of the common people in the post-independence period and the resilience of the people, - their continued struggle against new forms of oppression in the post-colonial state.

The first theme of a glorious past manifests itself clearly in Ngugi's novels dealing directly with the colonial presence in Kenya (The River Between, Weep Not Child) and may not concern us directly here. But to the extent that this theme of a glorious past lingers as a sub-text in Ngugi's novels whose main project is the post-colonial period, it remains an important theme. It is crucial to point out that Ngugi's pre-colonial African society is often portrayed as a peaceful one devoid of any major conflicts and social differentiations.

The single most important virtue in the traditional African society was common ownership of land which was worked by all for the common good and when the land was appropriated by the white colonialist conflict and general suffering ensued. Indeed, Ngugi tends to suggest that Kenya's pre-colonial history was devoid of any turmoil and conflict until the advent of colonialism. Thus one might argue, that for Ngugi history of conflict in Africa is history of colonialism and how it impacted upon the African populace. Ngugi is therefore at pains to document the colonial injustices in most of his works. Indeed, in works that deal with the post-colonial experience, the colonial context always serve as a major backdrop against which the post-colonial experiences (read neo-colonial) are examined.

The colonial state for Ngugi is always allegorical to the post-colonial state. The most outstanding image in Ngugi's recreation of the colonial and post colonial experience is

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[5]Ibid. See pp.5 - 6.

land. Land for Ngugi is an important metaphor for explicating Kenya's past and present history. Land is depicted as a metaphor for life; it is a source of livelihood. Land is a metaphor for struggle; it is also the physical space for political contestation in virtually all works of Ngugi. Land is a metaphor for flux; it is the agent for social change and economic mobility - the agent for social transformation within society. Indeed, the theme of resistance to and collaboration with the colonial institutions are all linked to this metaphor. Thus the flux of colonial and neo-colonial experience in Kenya are only comprehensible through the contradictory and multiple functions and conflicts that land generates for Ngugi. The solution to social conflict is by implication, only possible when land is shared and worked by all - because it is only in this way that we can change the power relations according to Ngugi.

For example in Petals of Blood(1977), land is portrayed as a living entity with its moments of misery and joy, with the periods of sterility and fertility. As the narrator tells us:

> Ilmorog, the scene of the unfolding of this drama had not always been a small cluster of mud huts lived in only by old men and women. It had its days of glory: thriving villages with huge population of sturdy peasants who had tamed nature's forests and, breaking the soil between their fingers, had brought forth every type of crop to nourish the sons and daughters of men. Petals. 120

Land for Ngugi becomes the living manifestation of history and he uses it to dramatize three major historical phases in Ilmorog - a microcosm of Kenya. The pre-colonial, colonial and neo-colonial Kenya is depicted from the vantage-point of changes taking place in Ilmorog. Underscored in the pre-colonial time is the fact that land belonged to the people and was worked by all and for all. "In those days", we read, "there were no vultures in the sky waiting for the carcasses of dead workers, and no insect-flies feeding on the fat and blood of unsuspecting toilers" (Petals 120). Colonialism disrupted this communal life through land alienation and forced taxation. The explosive problem of land shortage in the post-colonial state in Kenya started with the dispossession of the peasantry by the British and the African collaborators, who acquired land with the support of the colonial administration. Indeed, the fate of the native landowners who eventually become the native bourgeoisie in the post-colonial state is closely linked, in Ngugi's view, to their betrayal of the Kenyan struggle while in the loyal service of the colonial regime. In Petals Ngugi tells the story of Ezekial Waweru, a homeguard (read a collaborator) who at the height of colonialism bought land from poor peasants - 'the declining Mbari's' - who needed money to pay taxes to the British. On the eve of 'Uhuru', he purchased more land from the departing colonialists and joined the national K.C.O.(read KANU) party to protect his interests. "This K.C.O." Waweru observes, "is

not a bad thing. It brings unity and harmony between the rich and the poor"(95). Similar stories are found in Devil on the Cross (1982), where we have collaborators like Gitutu and Nditika, and in Matigari (1987) where we have John Boy, - all who prosper because of some ill-gotten land bequeathed to them by their colonial masters.

Thus, Kenya's history is closely intertwined with the story of land ownership. Land is important because it is life; when it is shared, Ngugi posits, it improves the life of the whole community, - it feeds its people. When land is forcibly expropriated it leads to impoverishment of the majority of the people and the enrichment of a minority group in society with social conflict as a natural consequence. Most of the characters in all the three novels of Ngugi are linked to land; either they possess it or they crave for it.

Thus in Ngugi's post-independence novels, the unequal distribution of land in the colonial period seems to have been the major cause of resistance to colonial rule and continues to be the major source of conflict in the postcolonial state in Kenya. The inability of the new leadership at independence to reward the freedom fighters with land, it would seem, underscores the existence of a class of landowners and politicians whose ambition is to live the life of their white colonial predecessors. The poor peasants continue to toil for the private benefit of the landowners. Waweru, the powerful landowner, grows pyrethrum and tea as cash-crops, and boasts that the "prosperity has multiplied several times since independence" (Petals 95). It is the group of landowners like Waweru, Ngugi seems to assert that have reaped the 'fruits of Uhuru'. Those who fought for independence like Abdulla in Petals continue to suffer after independence. As an ex-freedom fighter, crippled for life, Abdulla seriously thought that he could own some of the land he had fought for, but the reality of post-independence is bitter. He says:

> I had that they were giving loans for people to buy out European farms. I did not see why I should buy lands already bought by blood of the people. Petals 254

Wangari's experiences with capital in Devil on The Cross would seem to support Abdulla's fears. Wangari's land is auctioned by the Kenya Economic Progress Bank because she has failed to pay back a loan (41). Wangari, like Abdulla, fought during the Emergency on the side of the Mau Mau, but she now finds herself without resources and she is compelled to sell her labour to survive. In Ngugi's view, many Kenyans lose their land to wealthy Kenyans and Europeans in the manner in which Wangari lost hers. For Wangari: " the water in all these places has become bitter for us peasants and workers" (41) that fought for independence; that fought to get their land back. Thus, through the plight of Abdulla and Wangari, Ngugi seems to be suggesting that the former freedom fighters together with the poor peasants are crippled by an expanding

native bourgeoisie who have roots in colonialism as lackeys and continue to thrive in the post-independence period in Kenya.

The problem of land hunger is also the basic source of conflict in Ngugi's latest text, Matigari. Land is again foregrounded as a metaphor for ideological and material contestation. Matigari, the hero of the novel, is a former freedom fighter who spent much of his life struggling to free their land from the colonial settlers. Matigari, was not only dispossessed of his land, but also his house. He struggled against Settler Williams over his house and land, only to come back after independence to find that his house is now occupied by a collaborator - John Boy Junior - the son of Williams's houseboy. And as if to foreground the alliance between foreign capital and local capital and indeed, the reproduction of colonial power relations, we read that the son of Settler Williams is now in partnership with Boy Junior. Again the conflict over land becomes the central motif for explicating historical meaning in Kenya.

Land, Ngugi demonstrates, is the primary source of capital accumulation in the post-colonial state and yet those who fought for independence like Wangari are landless. Ironically Nditika, a collaborator in the colonial regime can boast that "most of the labourers who dig up the grass on [his] farms are the very people who once took up blunt swords and home made guns claiming they were fighting for freedom" (Devil 77). Gitutu, another collaborator in Devil, has enough land to spare and sell to foreign investors, an apparent hint at collaboration between the national bourgeoisie and international capital. Indeed, the greatest political irony in the text is that after the departure of the settlers, Western multi-national companies take over and buy land for their industrial plants. As Gitutu proudly declares:

> Today, I'm about to join hands with some foreigners from Italy, who are planning to purchase an entire country in Meru and Embu to grow rice and sugar. Devil 107

The plan to buy the entire country takes place in spite of the ever increasing number of landless peasants. Thus, the link between the national and foreign capital is established at the expense of the deprived peasants who are disregarded and disowned.

It is the ruthless dispossession of peasants that leads to exodus to the cities. The phenomenon of rural to urban exodus is best exemplified in the experiences of Wangari in Nairobi. Wangari, dispossessed of her land and jobless, finds herself in the city of Nairobi which is both alienating and hostile. She is eventually arrested as a vagrant in her own country. (Devil 44).

Through Wangari, Ngugi foregrounds the plight of the rural

peasantry in Kenya, much in the same way that he does with the peasantry of Ilmorog in Petals of Blood where the rich Africans like Mzigo and Chui collude with the multinationals to force Wanja and Abdulla out of their business. Wanja is forced back to whoredom and Abdulla is reduced to a tramp. Ilmorog, the land of the famous Ndemi" who tamed the forest" and "the evil genii" (121), - Ilmorog "the once thriving community of a people who were not afraid to live on the sweat of their hands", the narrator observes, "started its decline and depopulation" with the advent of the railway line and other institutions that came with colonialism (123). Evidently, Ngugi foregrounds the dispossession of the peasants and in spite of the obvious romantic picture of the African past, his concern for the plight of the peasants is unequivocally sympathetic.

Ngugi's interest in the plight of the peasantry as a dispossessed lot seems to concur with Fanon's understanding of the peasantry both as the most exploited group, but also as having the potential to provide the revolutionary change in the post-colonial state(The Wretched 1967, 85 - 118). It is significant that Ilmorog which is both a symbol of land at its most ideal state - land as a communal property and a home of the peasantry, is one of the major settings of the two novels, Petals and Devil. And with the advent of colonialism and capital investment in Ilmorog, we witness nothing but economic deprivation, - the impoverishment of the peasants and the exploitation of the workers. They are forced to live off the slave wages of African landowners and African businessmen in partnership with multinational companies that have recently taken over Ilmorog. The deprivation of the peasants of Ilmorog contrasts with the wealth of colonial settlers and African farmers. Independence does not usher in any comfort or economic gains for peasants and workers; it is the same group of collaborators, otherwise called 'homeguards' by Ngugi, that emerge as the beneficiaries of Uhuru. Ilmorog is therefore, a physical manifestation of the contradictory presence of poverty and capital in Kenya. Thus the ills of the colonial state are simply reproduced in the post-colonial state. Kimeria who betrayed Abdulla and Ndinguri during the Mau Mau war are the new heroes of political independence. Through Waweru, - the landowner, and his father Brother Ezekiel, Ngugi demonstrates that the exploitation of deprived peasants and workers becomes a family business. Waweru's material obsession is reflected in the firm authority he exerts on his family, - a possible parallel to the kind of authority the new African leadership exerts over Kenyan people. It is also a hint at the reproduction of a class of homeguards and collaborators as the beneficiaries in the colonial and postcolonial state.

The 'mutilation' of land by both the colonial and the postcolonial oppressor is done through the aid of religious, cultural and educational institutions which instill and perpetuate mental slavery of the oppressed and buttress the

interest of the oppressor (Homecoming, 31). Christian religion, is used to inflict, what Ngugi calls a "psychological wound ... on the whole generation."[6] Ngugi's position is that religion is a tool for oppressing workers. In Petals, Waweru is portrayed as a man who propagates christianity because it is rewarding to him and his family. Rev. Waweru is said to have taken refuge in religion at the time of Kenya's struggle for independence, denouncing all anti-colonial activities such as Mau Mau oathing rituals as the devil's work. Munira's comments on his father's effective use of christianity are instructive. The peasants, he asserts, "had one thing in common: submission" (Petals, 91).

Waweru uses religion to undermine rebellion in his farm. Significantly, the same Waweru betrayed Mau Mau fighters as a homeguard in the colonialist government and he continues to prosper in the postcolonial state. Thus, religion, collaboration, betrayal and prosperity in the colonial and postcolonial state seem to be linked and embodied in the person of Waweru. Religion emerges as the single most important tool for economic gain and a weapon for enslaving the poor in Ngugi's view. Ngugi goes further to suggest that the traditional churches established by the missionaries have since been joined by modern American churches in the postcolonial state (Petals 306). Christianity is therefore a disruptive force because it undermines traditional values and promotes the interest of the ruling class whether it be European or native (Homecoming 32). Ngugi views christianity as an alienating force in Kenya.

Cultural and educational institutions are seen by Ngugi as tools for mental slavery; they are used to perpetuate mental captivity in the post-colonial state. Criticism of naked imitation of Western values is chiefly represented by the native bourgeoisie in Ngugi's novel, Devil. Kihaahu in Devil is a typical example of the alienated black who aspires to be white in all respect. He changes his name to that of a white. Indeed, Ngugi's satire on Kenyan bourgeois attitudes is best expressed by Kihaahu's nursery school scheme whose success is associated with everything white. The advert of the nursery school is a classic example of cultural alienation:

> Modern Day Nursery School.
> Experienced European Principal. Formerly for Europeans Only, Now Open to a Few Kenyans. Foreign Standards as Before. National Languages, National Songs, National Names Banned. Foreign Languages, Foreign Songs, Foreign Toys, etc., etc. English Medium of Instruction. Limited Places. Telephone or Call in Your Car. Colour is no Bar: Money is the Bar. fees High. Devil 113

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[6]See Ngugi's Introduction to P'Bitek's Africa Cultural Revolution, 1973. pp.xii.

What Ngugi reveals is the almost religious worship towards everything European. It is like a disease within the African bourgeoisie's psyche, - "equating European culture with culture of God" (Devil 236). The love for Western goods reaches a level of absurdity when Gitutu suggests that they should import air (Devil, 107). Thus, for the African elite goods only acquire their true value if and when they are imported. In a way, the writer is providing a salient critique of the postcolonial economy in which the raw materials are exported from the colonies, manufactured in the West and brought back as finished products. From Ngugi's point of view, the national bourgeoisie is even worse than Fanon's assessment of them as entrepreneurial, because they are mere consumers helping to entrench trade imbalance between the poor and rich Western countries, while perpetuating the poverty of their people. They are a decadent class which perpetuates contempt for African values.

In Petals, Karega is desperately in search of an alternative education that would restore his dignity as an African and also replace the kind of alienating education provided at Seriana by the colonial educators such as Fraudsham and perpetuated by their African successors like Chui. Perhaps Munira best exemplifies the alienation of the educated elite in the novel and Karega is highly critical of his mindless assimilation of colonial values with no real foundation (Petals 20). In Devil, the cultural message is conveyed by Gatuira through his academic research. Gatuira's longlife project has been to understand the culture of his people through a study of folklore, traditional songs and traditional instruments with the ultimate dream to compose a "truly national music for Kenya, music played by an orchestra made up of the instruments of all nationalities that make up the Kenyan nation" (Devil, 60). Gatuiria's project is allegorical to the extent that it is an expression of desired unity of the nation on the part of the writer, unity based on Kenya's cultural diversity and rich heritage (Decolonising the Mind). Gatuiria critiques education in post-independence Kenya when he points out that European history and English literature still dominate the university syllabus. This is reminiscent of Ngugi's much publicised crusade against 'neo-colonial education' while heading the English department in Nairobi and eventually leading to the abolishment of the department and in its place founding the new department of literature that placed African Literature at the centre of its curriculum (Homecoming, 15; Decolonising the Mind, 96-102).

For Ngugi education in the post colonial Kenya remains a form of 'cultural imperialism' which is mother to the slavery of the mind and the body. Gatuiria comes to the realisation that the true culture of the nation has to rest on our traditional cultures because "the kind of education bequeathed to us by the whites has clipped the wings of our abilities, leaving us limping like wounded birds" (Devil 63). Thus in Devil, Ngugi develops the idea he only alludes to in Petals, that Western

Education alienates and separates the educated persons from the people.

Ngugi seems to point to a conspiracy between the African leadership in the postcolonial state and the International capital as the major cause of this cultural and economic impoverishment. In Petals, the displacement of Abdullah and Wanja of Thengeta breweries is depicted as a conspiracy between rich African financiers and their foreign allies. The three African Directors, Mzigo, Kimeria and Chui transform Abdullah and Wanja's petty business into an international enterprise creating Thengeta Breweries "now grown into a huge factory employing six hundred workers with a number of research scientists and chemical engineers"(281). But the reader is informed that the Theng'eta Breweries are in fact owned by an Anglo-American International combine with African directors as a cover.

Within no time, the whole of Ilmorog is said to belong to the three African business tycoons (representing the local bourgeoisie) who are in the league with foreign capital. By literally owning Ilmorog, these financiers destroy what is left of the people's dreams about independence. Ironically, Ngugi stresses that Nairobi newspapers present them as having brought "happiness and prosperity to every home in the area as well as international fame for the country" and that their factory is "cited as an example of their joint entrepreneurial genius unmatched even by the famed founders of the industrial revolution in Europe" (Petals 194).

To encapsulate, Ngugi seems to be suggesting that the churches, the African leadership, the local media and foreign capital, are in an undeclared pact to exploit Kenya's resources, thereby depriving black masses of what is left of colonialism. Ngugi seems to be echoing Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie as a shallow and uncreative lot; a class which works at naked imitation of its European counterpart without helping the lot of the African masses because it cannot simply sever its links with the Western bourgeoisie which it serves. In Devil, Ngugi is apparently dramatizing the fate of this class through the use of the fantastic and the unbelievable, by putting on show characters who boast about their cleverness and their cunning, on how to steal from the people and to serve their foreign masters.

Ngugi's 'robbers'(read comprador bourgeoisie), Gitutu, Kiahaahu, Mwireri, Nditika, among many others, display the mentality of the alienated bourgeoisie which despises national African products. The patronising tone of the foreign delegation reveals their attitude of superiority as masters and any dissenting voice from the native bourgeoisie is met with maximum repression. Mwireri who believes in creative and authentic indigenous capitalism is eliminated. Mwireri calls for reversal of roles: " why don't they allow us to steal from their America, their Europe and their Japan so that we can

import their loot into our country?" (Devil 166). The reigning ideology, Ngugi suggests, is that there is nothing else outside capitalism and that foreign capital is the effective master of the post-colonial economy.

But as a response to this deplorable state of affairs in the postcolonial state in Kenya, Ngugi seeks to go beyond a mere reproduction of the socio-political and economic state in Kenya to suggest, almost openly that there is resistance by workers to all the naked robbery by the postcolonial leadership. He does not just create the possibility of revolt and a revolution, but actually demonstrates that Kenya's history has never been a one sided story of the victorious oppressor, but that it has been characterised by heroic resistance of ordinary people: workers and peasants. As Karega, the main protagonist in Petals says:

> The true lesson of history was this: that the so-called victims, the poor, the downtrodden, the masses, had always struggled with their spears and arrows, with their hands and songs of courage and hope, to end their oppression and exploitation. Petals 303

Ngugi reinforces the possibilities of revolt in his creation of characters who are positively disposed to revolutionary transformation within the society. For example, he creates in the people of Ilmorog, in Karega, Munira, Abdulla and Wanja the possibility of taking action, of possessing a will to fight and resist the new African leadership. But Ngugi's position as to the revolutionary force in Kenya remains blurred. It is not consistent as he seems to shift his opinion in all the three novels from the peasants' political consciousness to the proletariat's as the custodians of the political future. At times Ngugi seems to be espousing Fanon's theory on the role of the peasants as a decisive force in Ilmorog, exemplified by the march of the Ilmorog peasants to the city in Petals. And yet he shifts to the alternative of the trade union as a vehicle for change. Karega the brewery worker and trade union leader embodies Ngugi's shift. After having organized with the peasants the march to Nairobi, he moves to the building of a union and the organisation of strikes in the industrial world, for better wages and better working conditions.

Ngugi seems to anticipate a socialist revolution through organised labour (Petals, 343). The description of the desperate conditions of the workers show that Ngugi moves from Fanon's theory on the urban proletariat as a pampered lot (Wretched, 86). Ngugi does not, however, create a distinction between urban working class and the poor peasantry. In Petals, neither the poor peasantry nor the factory workers own the means of production, and those who own some form of business like Wanja and Abdulla are displaced by big capital.

Ngugi's message would seem to be a revolutionary movement

consisting of committed intellectuals such as Karega and the people whether they are peasants or workers in factories. It is this same vision that we find in Devil where Muturi rallies the Ilmorog workers to invade the Devil's feast. Muturi also tries to create awareness by organising the workers for higher pay in Boss Kihari's company. Apparently the role of trade-unionism as a tool in building a socialist state appeals to Ngugi. This would seem to be Ngugi's primary discourse on resistance in Petals and Devil as reflected in his portrayal of Karega and Muturi.

And yet, even in Petals and Devil the possibility of violent resistance is an undeveloped sub-text in these two novels. We have the constant reference to Mau Mau as the ultimate symbol of national liberation in Kenya. Resistance through armed struggle is pushed further through a symbolic gesture in the action of Wariinga in killing Gitahi "to save many other people, whose lives will not be ruined by words of honey and perfume" (Devil 253). At the scene where Wariinga confronts Gitahi, we are told that Wariinga looks at him "like a judge at an unrepentant prisoner who is pleading for mercy" (249) and when she shoots him, it is as "a jigger, a louse, a weevil, a flea, a bedbug ... a parasite that lives on the trees of other people's lives" (254). Although Wariinga's shooting of Gitahi appears contrived, it is meant, I believe, to symbolise the larger struggle to root out parasites, the class of Gitahi, from the society.

But the theme of violence in Kenya's history is best dramatised in Matigari. According to the hero, Matigari, the oppressor cannot be rooted out without the force of violence (131). Indeed, Ngugi seems to be suggesting that armed struggle ought to supplement trade union resistance. What Ngaruro wa Kiriro is doing in organising workers only finds its concrete expression in the violent attempt by Matigari to win back his house and land taken by settler Williams and later passed on to John Boy and family.

Ngugi seems to be saying that history of the post-colonial state in Kenya is one in which peasants and workers grow poorer, where women are exploited, where the national cultures of the people are trampled upon by a powerless bourgeoisie, - alienated to the extent of thinking European and serving them blindly. The answer to all these is a concerted struggle of peasant workers through mass mobilisation, trade union movements and violent resistance aimed at defeating, as Ngugi himself puts it "imperialism and creat[ing] a higher system of democracy and socialism in alliance with all the other peoples of the world" (Decolonising, 29-30).

3. Criticism and lessons in the struggle for democracy.

The thrust of Ngugi's narrative concerns over the last two decades has been the struggle for Uhuru na Matunda - Freedom and the Fruits thereof. It has been a project directed at that

decolonization process which embodied the varied processes of political independence, national liberation and people's revolution. It has been a project in the making of democracy; the struggle for democratic space in the post-colonial state and therefore a useful intervention in the post-colonial discourses in Kenya. And yet, Ngugi's understanding of the historical processes in Kenya is too deeply imbedded in dependency theory to allow for a nuanced understanding of the complex colonial and post-colonial experience in Kenya.Thus the weaknesses inherent in Ngugi's sense of history are infact attributable to a large measure to the weaknesses of dependency perspective which has long been discredited in Kenya(Leys 1978, 1982; Cowen 1979, 1982a; Swainson 1980). Ngugi attempts to link the conditions of the colonial state and those of the post-colonial state "through what Gunder Frank called 'continuity in change', i.e. the persistence of the relations of dependency and self-reproducing underdevelopment within the apparently changed forms brought by flag independence" (Berman and Lonsdale, 1992, 179). Ngugi himself has characterised the post-colonial stage in Africa as the period of 'flag independence' - Uhuru ya Bandera. In his view, the post-colonial state in Kenya is:

> ... a situation where a client indigenous government is ruling and oppressing people on behalf of American, European and Japanese capital. Such a regime acts as a policeman of international capital and often mortgages a whole country for arms and crumbs from the master's table. Writers in Politics 120

Thus, like the custodians of dependency theory, Ngugi sees an alliance between a native comprador class and a foreign bourgeoisie. The local comprador class are merely policemen, acting on behalf of international capital - indeed, "they are", he asserts, "the present day slave-drivers and plantation overseers hired by international monopoly capital" (Writers, 121).

The problematic inherent in dependency theory is that it seeks to explain the problems of Africa and indeed those of the so called 'third world' as those of global imperialism "depicted as part of a self-reproducing global system in which the perverse underdevelopment of the periphery was the necessary mirror of genuine capitalist development at the centre" (Berman and Lonsdale, 1992, 179). And since the basic determining casual factors of Africa's underdevelopment were seen to be located in the metropolitan centres of the global system, no detailed understanding of the specific contradictions, or internal and economic history within Africa or individual African states was necessary or even required to explain the local situation. After all, the result of colonialism, whatever specifics of the internal structure, was considered the same everywhere. As a result, dependency theory remained disturbingly silent about questions of structural variation and internal contradictions within specific states

and societies. The state in the post-colonial period continues to manage the economy on behalf of the global system much in the same way the colonial state did on behalf of the metropolitan. Dependency theory was reinforced by Fanon's theory of the African middle-class that captured the state power at independence as mere surrogates of imperialism. In this scenario, the oppressed (often meaning workers and peasants) are historically pitted against the local bourgeoisie and the post-colonial state, both working in league with foreign capital. The danger with the theory of a dependent national bourgeoisie is that it tends to divert attention from the national struggles within Africa by "underplaying the growth of real local divisions" (Cooper 38) and by implying that the local bourgeoisie may not be as dangerous as international capital that it serves.

It seems to me that Ngugi fails for example, to capture the ambivalent relationship between the colonial state and the so called collaborators on the one hand, and the ambivalent relationship between the comprador bourgeoisie, the post-colonial state and the forces of global imperialism on the other. As Berman and Lonsdale have argued:

> The development and character of the African petit-bourgeoisie in Kenya, and elsewhere in colonial Africa, cannot be understood outside its deeply ambivalent relationship with the colonial state. This ambivalence, expressed in sharply contrasting and often alternating patterns of collaboration and conflict, encouragement and constraint, attraction and rejection, was felt both by African and the colonial authorities and was grounded in some of the most fundamental contradictions of colonialism. Unhappy Valley. 197

In my view, the dialectic of collaboration and struggle which characterised the relationship between the emergent African petit-bourgeoisie and the colonial state continues to characterise the relationship between the comprador bourgeoisie and the post-colonial state on the one hand and the global metropolitan community on the other. This relationship cannot be reduced to a linear relationship of collaboration in which the only antagonists are the oppressed workers and peasants. Indeed, even the so called oppressed majority do not always represent a coherent voice of opposition free of contradictions and self-serving interests. As Berman and Lonsdale have aptly observed:

> The history of Kenya, most dramatically in the case of 'Mau Mau', demonstrates that we cannot assume the African societies have entered on a linear process of development that will make them cultural as well as structural facsimiles of Western industrial societies, or that Africans will inevitably become the secular nationalists or class-conscious capitalists and proletarians predicted in theory. Unhappy Valley 200

The point I am trying to reiterate here is that Ngugi's ideological framework underpinned by Fanon's prediction and dependency perspective tends to obscure the way in which classes reproduce themselves and derives any relative autonomy of politics within these class formations. It therefore obscures the particularities of different social formations. Ngugi, seems to be imprisoned within a static evaluation of classes. His framework tends to be deterministic in its rigidity to locate connections of state and capital and the depiction of the national bourgeoisie as mere puppets or watchdogs of western capital; deterministic in its insistence that there is continuity between resistance in the colonial state and resistance in the post-colonial state and, indeed a linear reproduction of the colonial class formations in the post-colonial state. The path to democracy in Africa cannot ignore the internal contradictions and the specific social dynamics of the post-colonial state. And yet the fundamental pre-condition for democracy is that unrelenting struggle to create space for political dialogue and change. In this act of social transformation Ngugi has played his part precisely because his narrative discourse, whatever its limitations, "is dominated by its transformative 'text' in which the captive nation, overcome in recent history, awaits its desired redemption" (Gurnah, 142).

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