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**THE ISSUES OF COMMITMENT AND THE LANGUAGE OF
AFRICAN LITERATURE IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S ESSAYS**

A dissertation submitted to the department of English in partial fulfilment of the requirement for a Master degree in English Language, Literature and Civilization.

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Dedication

To my parents, to Mr BELAMRI Amirouche and to Halim my
best and dearest friend.

Abstract

The purpose of this research, as the title points to, is to study the issues of commitment and language of African literature in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's essays: "the Writer in a Changing Society" selected from *Homecoming* (1972), "Writers in Politics" from the book *Writers in Politics* (1981) and "the Language of African Literature" extracted from *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986). The objective of my analysis is to show Ngugi's conception of the relation between the commitment of African writers and the language in which they should produce their creative works.

For this sake, I will rely on Jean Paul Sartre's theory of Committed Literature and Frantz Fanon's theory of Literature of Combat. Ngugi is a fervent adherent to these two theories, as he is very much influenced by Sartre and Fanon.

Throughout my analysis I will attempt to answer the question why indigenous African languages are so important in the commitment of African writers for Ngugi. I will conclude that Ngugi is a virulent committed writer to his people and society and who asserts that it is through indigenous African languages that his action of commitment could be fully legitimate. African languages are crucial for the creation of an authentic African literature which should contribute to build a genuine national culture. For Ngugi, an authentic African literature has to be written in African languages. It must be rooted in African people's culture which is a culture of struggle for liberation from western imperialism.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Literature has always played an important role in the evolution of its society. It is the mirror of society as it carries a great deal of social significance reflecting its dynamism, issues, and changes. So, commitment in literature is a firm conviction to devote the self to something one believes in. It is a vehement willingness to put one's energy and time to bring this belief into reality.

The African writer is a committed artist. For him, writing is more than an engagement to take part in certain aesthetics which characterize his work. It is a literary engagement which is to be appropriately understood as a deeper and thoughtful choice. Chinua Achebe once said "it is impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of commitment, some kind of message, some kind of protest..." (Qtd in Gurram Seetaramulu 2009). Therefore, African writers are considered to be the spokesmen of their society. This is what Jean Paul Sartre wants to highlight in his definition of literature. For him, literature is a weapon which writers ought to use in order to deal with the problems of their era.

African literature is considered to be the body of work produced in different languages and various genres starting from oral literature to the literature written in colonial languages (French, English, and Portuguese). Moreover, African literature by its nature is an engaged art towards its society; it has never been an art for 'art's sake'. As a matter of fact, in pre-colonial Africa, oral literature which consists of oral histories, myths and proverbs, served as a reminder for whole communities about their ancestral customs, traditions, and past.

African writers, due to their colonial education, wrote in colonial languages in order to bring the international audiences' attention to the plight of their people. They also committed their writings to restore their image, identity, and past. After independence, African writers felt the duty to engage their literature to proudly assert the existence and validity of their cultures which the colonizers tried to erase.

Chinua Achebe declared: “there were people [westerners] who thought we didn’t have a past. What we were doing was to say we did. Here it is.” (Qtd in Gurram Seetaramulu 2009). In fact, postcolonial African writers devoted their writings to their peoples and societies and often shared the same themes such as the clash between African and colonial cultures, condemnation of European subjugation as well as the pride of the African past. However, most of them opted for the use of European languages at the detriment of their own African languages, while only few tried their creativity in their local languages. For instance, the South African Mazisi Kunene wrote epic poetry in Zulu and the Nigerian Obi Wali wrote a novel in Ibo.

The problem of the unequal coexistence of the colonial languages with the indigenous ones led to a discord between African writers and critics about the language of African literature. This language debate first appeared during the conference of African Writers in the English Language in Kampala (Uganda) about African literature in 1962. The Nigerian Obi Wali confronted the whole assembly, which poured scorn on him when he declared that African literature must be expressed in African languages. He even wrote an article entitled *The Dead End of African Literature* published in *Transition* (1963) where he urged African writers to produce their literary works in their mother tongues so as to enrich their own cultures.

In contrast, some African writers like Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Wole Soyinka view the use of the colonial language as a weapon in their anti-colonial struggle. Some others pushed the debate a step further suggesting an alternative like ‘linguistic hybridity’ which was first advanced by Kojo B. Laing, the Ghanaian writer who is considered to be the pioneer of this linguistic movement. The Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong’o completely rejects this idea and impetuously opposes the use of European languages to express African literature because he is committed to Africans and intends to address them

in African language. For him, commitment could not be completed without the use of the appropriate language i-e the African language. These two issues of commitment and language of African literature were the subject of numerous research works and studies. Ngugi has also been a source for prolific studies.

The work of the contemporary critic Su'eddie Agema, *Commitment and the Language of African literature (2010)* is worth considering. In this work, Agema speaks of commitment as “the essence of African literature.” (Agema) Agema makes it clear that African literature is a committed art. He supports his argument with influential writers like Achebe, Ata Aidoo and Ngugi. He also refers to Ngugi as one of “the two big chiefs of the black literature” (ibid). Agema further explains that African writers always tried to manifest in their works a dedication to their roots, so as to prove their strong commitment.

The Nigerian critic Peter W. Vakunta studies, in his essay entitled “Ngugi’s Fatalistic Logic on the Position of Indigenous Languages in African Literature” (2010), the question of language choice in African literature. He discusses the origin of its debate first introduced by Obi Wali (1963) as well as the participation of Ngugi. He thinks that “the most vocal voice among them all [African writers] has been that of the prolific Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong’o.” (74). Vakunta aims at ‘shedding light’ on this language question; he wants to delve into the contradictions inherent in Ngugi’s position in favour of indigenous languages for the African creative writings. He argues that the most important aspect of Ngugi’s contradiction is his “decision to translate his books originally written in his mother tongue, Gikuyu, into the English language for the purpose of widening his readership” (ibid). Therefore, Vakunta feels that Ngugi’s stance is a “little hypocritical in that after condemning European languages” (75). Additionally, Vakunta expresses somewhat his confusion concerning the language complexity and its use for literary works; he declares that creative writers need to give ‘serious thought’ to the language question in African literature.

Another recent work on Ngugi is Nicole Sieben's *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: Literature's Challenge to Post-colonial Imperialism in Africa* (winter-spring 2012). Sieben sees Ngugi as a revolutionary who does not distinguish between his art and his politics. She argues that Ngugi believes that his literature is part of the African people's "anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control" (Sieben 1). She considers his fictions as the reflection of his ideology and commitment as a writer to his society and community; Ngugi wants African writers to help awaken revolutionary spirits in the African peasants and workers.

Sieben believes that Ngugi has made many enemies among the new governing class of his country, Kenya. He overtly denounces the similarities that these leaders share with the British imperialists. She asserts that Ngugi is a very committed writer; his writings are committed to provide his people with a concrete and obvious understanding of the dangers of imperialism and the importance of a revolutionary reaction to exterminate its oppression (Sieben 2).

Ngugi's concern and perspectives on Africa's struggle for independence and liberation through his novels is the aim of a study by Chijioke Uwasomba in her research work *The Politics of Resistance and Liberation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross* (December 2006). Uwasomba explains that these two novels represent a strenuous effort towards the liberation of Africa from the oppression of imperialism (94). Uwasomba asserts that the actual African leaders and their administrations are only a continuation of the previous colonizers' oppression who seek for personal interests at the expense of their people. Therefore, African countries undergo the worst human conditions (Uwasomba 98). She concludes her work saying that Ngugi's novels are political ones; both of them are supporting the view of the proletariat and condemning the bourgeois philosophy and practice. Therefore,

he encourages the peasants and workers to unite together against their oppressors and exploiters to liberate themselves from misery (Uwasomba 105).

Equally important is the work of Muzigirwa M. Bonaventure *Devil on the Cross: Ngugi's Marxist invitation (2012)*, in which he demonstrates how Ngugi is committed to the struggle of his people (Kenyan and African) against imperialism and neo-colonialism. He says that the novel of Ngugi is presented as an invitation for the proletariat and oppressed people to react (Bonaventure). This novel is a contribution to social change and the improvement of the working class living conditions. For Bonaventure, Ngugi claims that a writer ought to awaken his people's consciousness about the crisis and conflict between them and the bourgeoisie (Bonaventure). Bonaventure also considers Ngugi as the 'prophet of justice' embodied in the narrator, and fighting the social evils prevailing in his society (Bonaventure). He also speaks about the commitment of Ngugi as a Marxist through his writings to his society and people since he believes that his duty and the duty of any African writer is to denounce the prevailing evils that ruin Kenyans and Africans.

From the above review of literature, one can deduce that the issues of commitment and the language of African literature are widely studied and so are the works of Ngugi. Yet, the relation between commitment and the language of African literature in Ngugi's essays remains a relatively unexplored area of research. Therefore, my aim in this paper is to study Ngugi's conception of the issues of commitment and the language of African literature in the three selected essays, namely "The Writer in a Changing Society" from *Homecoming (1972)*, "Writers in Politics" which is part of *Writers in Politics (1981)* and "The Language and the African Literature" extracted from his book *Decolonizing the Mind (1986)*. I will try to answer the question why language is so important in the commitment of African writers for Ngugi.

For my analysis, I intend to rely on Jean Paul Sartre's theory of Committed Literature and Frantz Fanon's theory of Literature of Combat.

The theory of Committed Literature advanced by the French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre in his book *What Is Literature?* rejects the notion of art for art's sake. Sartre asserts that writing means revealing the world's issues in order to change them. He argues that any given writer is inevitably committed to respond to the needs of his society and to raise the consciousness of the people for physical reaction.

The Martinique-born, French-Algerian revolutionary writer Frantz Fanon assumes in his theory of Literature of Combat that the oppressed should react violently against the colonial hegemony, and that literature must be a call to this violent reaction. The African writer must use his pen to urge his people to fight for liberation. In fact for Fanon, literature of combat is a literature that aims at awakening peoples' consciousness for change and revolution.

To achieve my aim, I intend to divide my work into the three following chapters: the first chapter is about commitment and the language issue in African literature. It will provide the different views African writers expressed about commitment in African literature. Furthermore, it will present the linguistic situation in Africa and the language debate in African literature. The second chapter provides a brief historical background of Kenya in order to show that this country suffers from the effects of the colonial period such as capitalism which is oppressing the masses. It also discusses the dominance of the English language in Kenyan society. The third chapter will focus on the analysis of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's essays. Besides, it highlights his ideological evolution.

**CHAPTER I: COMMITMENT IN AFRICAN
LITERATURE AND THE LANGUAGE DEBATE**

Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of commitment in African literature. I will highlight the different views of African writers about their role in society. I will also try to show that African literature is a committed art to society, though African writers have divergent opinions concerning the appropriate language for their writings.

Moreover, I intend to explain Jean Paul Sartre's theory of Committed Literature, developed in his book *What Is Literature?* (1948), and Frantz Fanon's theory of Literature of Combat, which I will use for the analysis of Ngugi's essays in the third chapter.

Then, I will present the linguistic situation in Africa and the language debate in African literature which is a fundamental issue in African literature.

1-Commitment in African Literature

Unlike European literature, African literature did not enjoy the modernist tradition's concepts of universalism and art for art's sake. African writings emerged as a response to their colonial context. The young generation of writers witnessed the colonial circumstances which they represented in their literary texts. It is the case of the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe who wrote his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), to answer back the erroneous views and stereotypes Europeans advanced about Africa. He claims that Africans do have a past and "did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans" (Qtd. in Gurram Seetaramulu, 2009).

For Achebe, the African writer has to commit his works to his people in a way they can identify themselves and recognise their own historical, social, and communal characteristics and activities in those works (ibid). Achebe said that he would be satisfied if his novels: "did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—

was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (Achebe, 1975).

Achebe insisted upon the committed stance of the African writer and so did the Nigerian Wole Soyinka who wrote that the primary task of the African writer is to rehabilitate African culture through his literature. The latter was distorted and crushed by the dominance of the colonial culture. Like many other writers, Soyinka agrees that the African writer is the spokesman of his society and that his works are addressed to the whole community. So, he has the responsibility to use his pen in order to claim the cause of his people.

This is the reason that pushed the Algerian Kateb Yacine to reconsider his perspective. At the beginning of his career, Kateb was considered to be an 'ecrivain errant'; in other words, he was not a committed writer. However, his meeting with the Algerian masses and for whom he felt sympathy, led him to devote himself to establish a theatre. He did so with the firm conviction to speak and express the concerns of those 'voiceless' people (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia).

The Senegalese Ousmane Sambene, in contrast, chose cinema to address his people to display a great sense of commitment towards their plight. He wanted to address his people in a way they could get his message. For him, cinema was an appropriate means for such enterprise and he produced many films like *Le Mandat* (1968), *Xala* (1975), *Ceddo* (1977), and *Moolaadé* (2004), to mention only few.

Therefore, the duty of the African writer is to deal with the problems of his people and to condemn the evils of his society. This idea is supported by the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o who asserts that African writers have now to focus their attention on the post-colonial problems of the continent. He explains, in his book *Writers in Politics* (1981), that

the African writer must align to his people in their struggle to free themselves from the oppressing domination:

what the African writer is called upon to do is easy (...) he must write with all the vibrations and tremors of the struggles of all the working people in Africa (...) yes, he must actively support and his writing reflect the struggle of the African working class (...) yes, his works must show commitment (51).

The Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah shares this stance. This is obvious in his novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968)*, in which he denounces social and political corruption in his country and sheds light on Ghanaians' suffering of oppression and regression.

Female writers also contributed in the deliverance of a committed literature for Africa. Ama Ata Aidoo the Ghanaian writer uses literature to educate Africans and particularly women. She further established in 2000 the Mbaasem Foundation to promote and support the work of African women writers. She has committed herself as well as her works to help emancipate Ghanaian young women. In addition, the Senegalese Mariama Bâ also has a determined commitment. Like Ata Aidoo, she uses her pen to denounce women's struggle in society.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that African writers are all concerned with commitment even if they have different opinions about the language of African literature. They are all in the same arena as their writings deal with the African society.

2-Jean Paul Sartre's Theory of Committed Literature

The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre was at the head of the philosophical movement of existentialism which emerged after the Second World War. He advanced a new concept of engaged literature and initiated the term 'engagement'. Sartre believed in

commitment through literature calling the writer to commit his works to his society. He was soon accused of contentious literature (literature of contest) and those accusations pushed him to write *What Is Literature? (1948)* in order to explain his theory of committed literature and committed writer.

Sartre was, and still is of great influence especially for postcolonial writers. He calls writers to inevitably commit their literature to the service of their era. For him, a writer cannot avoid the problems and social issues his people endure. Furthermore, he has to urge them to react against their oppression and repression. For Sartre, the committed writer knows that: “words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change. And one can reveal only by planning to change. He has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of society and human condition” (23).

Sartre argues that the duty of any writer is commitment because, for him, literature is more than an effort; it is a struggle to attain knowledge and freedom. He also considers himself as a committed writer, and his works are an attempt made to bring responses that could make the act of writing an act of commitment (61).

3-Frantz Fanon’s Theory of Literature of Combat

The Martinique-born Frantz Fanon explicitly advanced his conception of literature in his works, where he calls his people to react against their oppressing situation. He believes that literature is a weapon which serves to raise peoples’ consciousness calling them obviously to react against their pitiful conditions. In *The Wretched of The Earth (1961)*, Fanon explains the colonial domination of colonized nations and encourages the oppressed to break those chains of ‘mental slavery’ imposed to them by the colonizers.

Fanon believes that even after gaining independence, “the masses battle with the same poverty, wrestle with the same age-old gestures, and delineate what we could call the

geography of hunger with their shrunken bellies, a world of underdevelopment, a world of poverty and inhumanity” (53).

Fanon better explains his literature of combat as follows:

This may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It is a literature of combat, because it molds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space (238).

In the quotation above, Fanon explains his conception of literature of combat. For him, literature must serve the oppressed to raise their consciousness about their dreadful conditions. It must be committed to push them to fight for their existence and liberate themselves so as to build a national culture.

4-The Linguistic Situation in Africa

Africa has probably the most complex and varied linguistic situation in the world. When the national boundaries of African countries were formed, European colonizers did not pay much attention to the cultural, historical, or linguistic affinities of Africans. These boundaries were fixed arbitrarily regardless to the linguistic situation of the continent. Africa witnessed, therefore, an impressive linguistic diversity, as African ethnic groups within each country had their own dialects. Furthermore, of the estimated 6,200 languages and dialects in the world, 2,582 languages and 1,382 dialects are found in Africa (Lodhi 79).

Though this multilingualism could represent numerous cultural advantages, it engendered a problem of communication for Africans among themselves and with the others. In her work, *Language and Identity in Postcolonial African Literature: A Case Study of*

Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart 2011, Abigail K. Guthrie explains this fact; she argues that “hundreds of [African] spoken languages further divide the African states, with an inability to communicate with members outside of the native [speaking] community negatively affecting the sense of nationhood and belonging” (15). Moreover, due to the colonial practices, these languages and dialects disappeared at a fast rate while some others competed with the colonial languages.

European languages were imposed on Africans because the colonizers wanted to unify every colony with an official language, the colonial language of course, whether English, French or Portuguese. It is said that European colonial enterprise would not have been that successful without the imposition of their languages on the natives on the one hand, and the suppression of their local languages on the other. This is what Ngugi denounces in *Moving the Centre* (1993):

It was language which held captive [Africans/ colonized] their cultures, their values, and hence, their minds ...The first was to suppress the languages of the captive nations...the second mode of captivation was that of elevating the language of the conqueror. It became the language of the elect
(31-32).

Africans were affected in all fields: politics, economy, religion and education. Mazrui (1998) states that the colonial administrators had an interest which consisted “in African education in so far as it could provide them substantial pool of potential low-level government employees” (55). The latter was a fundamental aspect in the colonial process, a process that the French termed ‘assimilation’ through education. This policy of assimilation “was predicated on a presumption of the superiority of French culture and ‘Civilisation’. As part of France’s ‘mission civilisatrice’, when confronted by ‘barbarian’ people, it was the duty of France to civilise them and turn them into Frenchmen” (Mills).

The British on their part were extending the benefits of European civilization, including education. In the article *The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy (2011)* which examines British education policy in Africa, Clive Whitehead argues that indigenous people were “brainwashed to discard their own cultures and embrace Western cultures which were supposedly superior”, a situation that led to a culture of dependency and a sense of inferiority (Qtd. in Çağrı Tuğrul Mart 192).

The problem with the linguistic diversity persisted then in post-colonial Africa, besides the unequal coexistence of the colonial languages with the indigenous ones. It was in the conference of Kampala in 1962, when African writers met to discuss ‘African literature’ that the problem of the language for African literature emerged. When African writers tried to define African literature, they confronted a vivid and animated debate.

5-The Language Debate in African Literature

The language choice in African literature was, and still is, a recurrent issue upon which African writers disagree. It is obvious that colonization brought European languages’ imposition as means of oppression and colonizers understood that it is only through language that they could successfully impose their culture. This imposition led to the marginalization of African languages in education. Thus, African literature written in colonial and postcolonial era was produced in European languages and there were only few writers who tried their creativity in their own languages.

Many of the writers, who attended the famous conference of Kampala in 1962, discussed this issue in their works. For instance, Achebe talked about this debate in his essay “The African Writer and the English Language”:

*IN JUNE 1962, there was a writers' gathering at Makerere,
impressively styled: "A Conference of African Writers of English*

Expression."... *But there was something which we tried to do and failed—that was to define "African literature" satisfactorily...and then the question of language. Should it be in indigenous African languages or should it include Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans, and so on?* (Qtd. in Routledge 427).

In this quotation, Achebe says that the gathering participants had opposing views about the language of African literature. Like many other writers, Wole Soyinka believes in the suitability of using European languages because they favour national unity and facilitate communication between African communities.

On his part, Achebe claimed that European languages can be ‘Africanized’ to carry the African thoughts and experiences. He was convinced that English could well express his Africanity. To put it in his words, “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.” (Qtd. in Routledge 433).

The Senegalese Leopold S. Senghor further defended European languages with such enthusiasm. As a writer in the French language, he claimed that even if he was given the choice, he would choose to write in French. In addition, he argues that his mother tongue recalls him of “slap and blood” whereas “French words send out thousands of rays like diamonds” (Qtd. in Ngugi 19). He also believes that the best way of expression is in European languages which allow him to express his creativity.

Some postcolonial African writers try to move beyond this dilemma of whether to use African or European languages proposing a better alternative to rally both sides. They argue about ‘Linguistic Hybridity’ which consists of a new linguistic movement introduced by the

Ghanaian Kojo B. Laing. The latter expresses that “there are no self-sufficient languages, but complementary languages.” He contests the notions of “authenticity, superiority and purity in language” (Qtd. in Issifou 56).

However, other writers like Obi Wali, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, and Abiola Irele do not share this view. They consider the use of European languages as a betrayal towards their mother tongues and that writings produced by Africans in European languages are not African literature. In his essay “The Language of African Literature”, Ngugi writes:

what they [African writers] have produced, despite any claim to the contrary, is not African literature (...) what we have created (...) can only be termed as Afro-European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European languages. (26-27).

Writers like Ngugi call for the espousal of African languages in order to enhance the Africanity of their writings. This is also to show the authenticity and particularity of African literature and to differentiate it from the other literatures of the world.

The Nigerian O. Chinweizu writes in his critical work entitled *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature (1980)* that African literatures must be “works done for the African audience, by Africans and in African languages whether written or oral” (Qtd. in Boyejo 11). Thus, for him, there is no other alternative; African literature cannot be African unless it is produced in African languages.

In addition, Obi Wali is fatalistic when he declares, in his article *The Dead End of African Literature (1963)* that “until African writers accepted that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would merely be pursuing a dead end” (Qtd. in Ngugi 24). Obi Wali affirms that African literature could not be authentic and worth the name unless it is produced in African languages because these are the languages of the peasantry

and working class. Wali adds that African languages do not have to be “underestimated and relegated to an irrelevant status” (Qtd. in Eme & Mbagwu 118). From the discussion above, we conclude that African writers show commitment in their works whether written in European languages or in African languages. But, the problem of language in which African literature should be written remains unresolved.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I can say that African literature is a committed literature. From the very start, literary works produced in Africa showed a sense of ‘engagement’. African writers were committed to denounce the social evils that oppress their people, during colonialism as well as after independence. Some used fiction; others chose theatre, whereas some others changed completely to produce films to target their people. I also briefly explained Sartre’s theory of Committed Literature as well as Fanon’s theory of Literature of Combat.

Moreover, I presented the linguistic situation in Africa which is characterized by its diversity and complexity, and discussed the language debate which represents the most important issue in African literature. Many writers and critics were involved in this debate and have expressed diverse competing and even conflicting opinions. Ngugi, who shifted from English to Gikuyu, was a leading figure in the language debate; he took a radical position because for him literature produced in English is not African. He believes that in writing in English or any European language, the African writer is perpetuating the hegemonic practices of colonialism through language.

**CHAPTER II: POSTCOLONIAL HISTORICAL
BACKGROUND OF KENYA**

Introduction

The second chapter will provide a brief historical background of postcolonial Kenya. Yet, before this, it will shed light on the period of British colonial occupation as well as the formation of its new independent state. It will highlight the effects of the legacy of British colonialism mainly capitalism which the Kenyan people suffer from.

Furthermore, it will review the British colonial linguistic policy which led to the linguistic dominance of English over local Kenyan languages in postcolonial Kenya. Thus, it will demonstrate how much Kenyan mass population suffers from this disproportionate use of English in all the sectors of society.

1-Kenya under British Colonial Rule

The territory of what is now Kenya, a part of Southeast Africa, has seen human habitation since the beginning of the Lower Paleolithic. The Bantu expansion from a West African center of dispersal reached the area by the first millennium AD. With the borders of the modern state at the crossroads of the Bantu, Nilo-Saharan and Afro-Asiatic ethno-linguistic areas of Africa, Kenya is a truly multi-ethnic state.

European and Arab presence in Mombasa dated to the Early Modern period, but European exploration of the interior began only in the 19th century. The British Empire established the East Africa Protectorate in 1895, known from 1920 as the Kenya Colony. The establishment of the colony of Kenya brought in its train racial hostilities. In many areas, Kenyans were then formally dispossessed of their land, whereas the new white owners were flattered by the new legislation. These and other tensions were reflected in the developing political scene; from 1919 the white settlers were allowed to elect members to the legislative.

In October 1952 there was a sudden outbreak of sabotage and assassination in Kenya. The perpetrators using terrorist tactics were Kikuyu, and their ritual oaths of loyalty to their secret organization reflected the customs of Jomo Kenyatta's political group, the Kikuyu Central Association. But the meaning of the name Mau Mau, was at the time and remains today a mystery (History World, 'the History of Kenya').

The colonial government reacted rapidly, declaring a state of emergency and arresting Jomo Kenyatta. Charged with planning the Mau Mau uprising, he was sentenced in March 1953 to seven years' imprisonment. But his absence in British custody did nothing to lessen the campaign of terror.

The worst of the violence was over by 1956, though the state of emergency was not lifted until 1960. By this time the only effective response to the Mau Mau rebellion was under way. A conference in London in 1960 gave Africans the majority of seats in the legislative council. Kenya's first African parties were formed to take part in the developing political process (Ibid).

2-The Formation of the Independent State of Kenya

The independent Republic of Kenya was formed in 1964. It was ruled as a single-party state by the Kenya African National Union (KANU), an alliance led by Jomo Kenyatta from 1963 to 1978. But Kenyatta confounded his critics; he carefully involved ministers from tribes other than the Kikuyu in his administration and developed a successful free-market economy open to foreign investment. When he died, in 1978, Kenya ranked high among African countries both in terms of political stability and economic growth.

Kenyatta was succeeded by Daniel Arap Moi, who ruled until 2002. Moi attempted to transform the single-party status during the 1980s. With the end of the Cold War, the

practices of political repression and torture which had been overlooked by the Western powers as necessary evils in the effort to contain communism were no longer tolerated.

The 1990s proved to be a difficult time. Kenya floundered economically, there were ominous outbreaks of ethnic conflict between Kalenjin and Kikuyu, and the nation's troubles were compounded by evidence of widespread corruption. Moi came under pressure, notably by US ambassador Smith Hempstone, to restore a multi-party system, which he did by 1991. This was seen as the climax of a very undemocratic regime and it led to widespread agitation for constitutional reform. Several contentious clauses, including one that allowed for only one political party were changed in the following years (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia).

In democratic, multiparty elections, Moi won elections in 1992 and 1997, which were overshadowed by political killings. Evidence of Moi's involvement in human rights abuses and corruption was uncovered. He was constitutionally barred from running in the 2002 election, which was won by Mwai Kibaki. Widely reported electoral fraud on Kibaki's side in the 2007 elections resulted in the 2007–2008 Kenyan crisis (History World, 'the History of Kenya').

Since Kibaki is a Gikuyu, as are most of his supporters, the struggle assumed the character of a bloody ethnic conflict. Kenya has been torn asunder by a wave of ethnic and tribal violence that has claimed nearly a thousand lives (Woods). Therefore, protests escalated into ethnic violence and destruction of property; almost 1,000 people were killed and nearly 600,000 displaced. The dispute caused underlying tensions over land and its distribution to erupt, as it had in the 1992 and 1997 elections. Hundreds of thousands were forced off their land and some claim weapons are being bought in the region, perhaps in anticipation of the 2013 elections (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia).

3-Neo-colonialism in Postcolonial Kenya

The effects of colonialism on Kenya did not end with independence. After it was granted independence, this country continued to suffer from British imperialism, and the hope to an autonomous nation that came with its liberation soon collapsed. The British left behind a devastated country weakened politically, economically and culturally. Eventually, the colonizers already elected and designated their successors, the corrupt ruling elites that Alan Woods describes in his article, *Kenya, the Barbaric Consequences of Capitalism, 2008*, as: “just as rapacious as the British, but even more corrupt inefficient and rotten. In effect, they were only the local office boys of the British and American imperialists” (Woods).

Kenya like most African countries was left without any economic infrastructures, in addition to the virulent ethnic and tribal violence. In her article *The Problems of Post-colonial Politics (2013)*, Amy Claire Thompson argues that:

The lack of state institutions was also a problem, given the fact that the majority of African states suffered from weak private sector which placed more pressure on the state. The gap between the elites and the masses was therefore widened significantly, and the propensity of post-colonial states towards cultures of corruption is understandable. (Thompson)

Besides, it is ironic to see that the Kenyan leaders, who fervently opposed and denounced the previous colonial practices, were only perpetuating the same oppression and repression on their people. Alan Woods expresses this idea when he says that “the middle class leaders of independence struggle continued the oppressive and exploitative system as the British” (Woods). From Jomo Kenyatta to Daniel Arap Moi and Mwai Kibaki the governance was the same as the British colonizers; they run behind their personal interests at the detriment of their people.

Paul B. Abudu is categorical in his description of African political leaders. In his essay “the Perils of Capitalism: A Lesson for Africa” (2002), he says that: “the politicians in the high echelon of government are running around and talking big and smart. These are hot balloons and nothing will come out of it” (Abudu). He adds that they were only looking for benefit and that “their anguish is not geared towards improving the situation but towards the ‘poor’ investors in their constituencies who are to vote for them in the next election” (Ibid).

Since independence, the progression of Kenya has been unceasingly impeded by corruption and a limited economy; the country has embraced the system of capitalism (Abudu). Yet, under Mwai Kibaki’s rule, the country took firm steps towards a better economy and a more stable position in politics and economics. It is assumed that Kenyan people had gained greater freedom of speech and greater freedom of press under Kibaki’s rule, which is considered an evidence of a true democracy (History world, ‘the History of Kenya’).

However, in 2006, two major incidents involving political corruption became public. The first led to the resignation of three Kenyan ministers, and the second, only a few months later, involved tax evasion and money laundering in the country’s banking system. Woods notes that in reality “under modern conditions it is impossible for an underdeveloped country like Kenya to solve the problems of the bourgeois democratic revolution on the basis of capitalism” (Woods). Therefore, postcolonial Kenya witnessed the rise of a handful of elites living a bourgeois life in front of a mass population living in agony, poverty and hunger. Yet, this bourgeoisie proved to be too dependent on imperialism to concentrate on the problems of the masses (Woods). So, for the average Kenyan poor worker and peasant nothing changed; they still suffer from the same atrocities, under a new master’s oppression.

In his essay “Underdevelopment in Kenya” (1975), Colin Leys states that Kenya’s experiences of underdevelopment under neo-colonialism led its economy to be “far from static; during these years, although the poor remained poor, it is doubtful if they became, in aggregate, absolutely poorer” (Leys). To support this idea, Thompson argues that this lack of economic development open to western capitalist practices, and excessive international economic interventions (Thompson).

Hence, the Kenyan leaders continued the exploitative system of capitalism as they embraced and urged to adopt the western practices and economic policies. This is highlighted by Woods who argues that “nominally independent, the national bourgeoisie had a servile attitude to Britain. In reality, over forty years after independence, Kenya today is more dependent on imperialism than ever before” (Woods). This quotation reveals the awful reality of Kenyan leaders who failed in their governance of the country, as Kenya endures the capitalist and western imperialist systems of oppression.

4-British Colonial Linguistic Policy in Kenya

The dominance of English language in Kenya goes back to the colonial practices. When Kenya became a British annex subsequently to the famous ‘Scramble for Africa’ after the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), it was later declared Kenya colony in 1920. The British presence was inevitably supported by European historians who advanced arguments about Africans being savage and intellectually deficient, and their languages were described as animal-like utterances. These assumptions gave the British the right to colonize the area; they supposedly felt the duty to ‘civilize’ those people, a mission that Rudyard Kipling named ‘The White Man’s Burden’.

The British were then conscious about the fact that their colonial enterprise could not be achieved without the imposition of their language as the appropriate medium for

communication. So when the colony of Kenya was formed, the British were obviously to use English to administer their new colony. They had to present “a fresh language, English, whose hegemonic influence would be felt for a long time” (Iraki).

However, only the privileged Kenyans learnt English and the mass population was kept aside. Furthermore, Kenyans were to be exposed to minimal English, just to follow the master’s instruction (Ibid). Mohamed Abdulaziz argues that the British settlers “were most reluctant to use English with their native servants and with Africans in general, as they believed that this knowledge might ‘spoil’ them in the master-servant relationship that existed” (Qtd. in Iraki).

The disproportionate use of English, during colonisation, led to the marginalization of the local Kenyan languages. Yet, Kenyans saw in the use of English a certain privilege; they consequently abandoned their own languages to learn that of their master. Thus, despite the fact that there were diverse ethnic community languages like: Luo, Luhyia, Kisii and Kiswahili emerging as the most widely spoken one, it was English which ruled the land.

In his work *Language and Political Economy: A Historical Perspective from Kenya* (2010), Iraki explains this linguistic phenomenon arguing that “from a linguistic standpoint, the oppressed is trapped in the language of the oppressor and now prefers to express his experience and history through the lenses of the master’s language” (Iraki).

English was then preferred to the local Kenyan languages. Likewise, native Kenyan languages had ‘crashed out of the race’ to let English be the dominant language. Iraki explains that “English was the language of the ruler and therefore highly desirable among the African elite” (Ibid). It was mainly a reason for which Kenyans expressed the need to use English, though the masses kept on rejecting English and contesting its use.

5-Linguistic Hegemony of English in Post-independent Kenya

When Kenya obtained independence, Kenyans were confronted with a dilemma; they had to choose between English and Kiswahili which was encouraged by some of the then leaders like Kenyatta. In fact Jomo Kenyatta, besides of the use of English as an official language for the country, motivated Kenyans to use Kiswahili as their national language.

However, by the end of colonization, it became necessary for Kenyans to continue to use the English language as a lingua franca. Eventually, it was practically difficult for the country to develop an indigenous lingua franca considering the diversity of languages. Besides, if they chose one ethnic language like Gikuyu instead of Luo; for instance, this would create ethnic and civil violence. Therefore, local languages left behind, have since continued to depreciate in value, usage, and status.

In their essay “Language Attitudes in Colonial Kenya; a Historical Perspective”, 2014, Mukhwana and Jereno argue that “Kenyans were motivated to learn and use English not for integrative reasons but for moving up the socio-economic ladder” (Mukhwana and Jereno 1). This is due to the advantages associated with English language such as access to modern technology and the ability to engage the wider world. According to Nabea, “the mother tongue was preferred for verbal communication especially in rural areas, while English and Kiswahili were preferred for education from lower primary to the university.” (125). Thus, Kenyans considered the acquisition of English alone as pre-requisite for studying and settling abroad, as well as for the qualification for jobs.

Therefore, English is a high status language, a factor which largely shapes the prevailing language attitudes in Kenya. Despite the advantages associated with it as an international language, the need to feature African languages in African schools, both as

taught subjects and as media of instruction, has gained sociocultural support (History World, 'history of Kenya'). Language communities in the country have voiced the need to prioritise the development and use of African languages in schools as a way to remove some of the obstacles faced by the African child in school (ibid).

Although there are many factors that lead to the failure of African children in school, for example, shortage of learning resources, teacher incompetence, and lack of favourable learning environment, the use of foreign languages is one of the major problems. Indeed, English language has a lion's share in the school curriculum to the detriment of other local languages. As a result, the scenario of the 1920s, where English was the idiom for the privileged minority, seems to persist today (Iraki).

This suggests that people are invariably bound to adapt to other culture and languages that enhance their socio-economic well-being, thereby losing their culture gradually. One of the best means of sustaining ones culture is through language. This is one of the harm being inflicted on Kenya's culture through multilingualism, as some cultures and languages are gradually going into extinction (History World, 'the History of Kenya').

However, Kiswahili is competing with English, for it remains very influential in business transactions beside English. East Africans also employ Kiswahili in social settings such as marriages, religion, informal discussions, etc. Moreover in recent years, the African Union (AU) has for some time now accepted Kiswahili as one of its languages (ibid).

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter provided a brief historical background of Kenya and its formation as a new independent state. Kenya witnessed populous as well as linguistic diversity. Under colonialism, it suffered regression and cultural oppression. After

independence, the country continued to undergo imperialism and capitalist systems of dominance and western economic interventions.

Then, it showed the British colonial linguistic policy in the country that privileged the use and dominance of English as an official and high status language. This led to its hegemonic pressure over the local languages in post-independent Kenya.

**CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS OF NGUGI'S ESSAYS: "THE WRITER IN A
CHANGING SOCIETY", "WRITERS IN POLITICS", AND "THE
LANGUAGE OF AFRICAN LITERATURE".**

Chapter III Analysis of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Essays: "the writer in a Changing Society", "Writers in Politics" and "the Language of African Literature"

Introduction

In this chapter, I will try to study Ngugi's conception of the relation between commitment and language in African literature. I will analyse his three selected essays: "the Writer in a Changing Society" which is extracted from *Homecoming (1972)*, "Writers in Politics" selected from the same title book *Writers in Politics (1981)*, and "the Language of African Literature" which is part of *Decolonizing the Mind (1986)*.

I shall answer the question why Ngugi considers indigenous African languages crucial for a committed African literature. For this purpose, I will rely on Sartre's theory of Committed Literature and Fanon's theory of Literature of Combat which heavily influenced Ngugi's ideology. Moreover, a summary of Ngugi's biography as well as his works will provide insights which help understand the issues under study.

Finally, I will show the evolution of his ideology throughout his career which has influenced his conception of language and commitment in African literature.

1-Ngugi' Wa Thiong'o's Biography

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, baptised James Ngugi, was born on January 5th, 1938 in kamiriithu near Limuru in Kiambu district, Kenya. He is of Gikuyu descent and large family. He was educated at Kamandura mission school, then at Maanguuu, a Gikuyu independent school, during the Mau Mau insurgency, then at Karinga schools association. From 1955 to 1964, he attended the alliance high school, and then Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda. He received there a B. A. in English.

He worked as a journalist in the Nairobi's Daily Nation for half a year. He moved to England to continue his studies in literature at Leeds University in 1964. But he did not

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complete his Master thesis. Nevertheless, he had the opportunity to meet with many writers and professors there. He also discovered great scholars like Frantz Fanon and Karl Marx, and embraced their tenets and ideologies throughout his career. However, it is at Makerere University College that he asserted his creativity as a writer.

Ngugi's works include novels, plays, short stories, and collections of essays and memoirs. He produced his first work in 1962 at Kampala. It is a play called *The Black Hermit*. Shortly after, he wrote his first novel *Weep Not Child* (1964) while attending Leeds University. It was the first novel in English to be written and published by an East African. In 1965, he wrote a second novel *The River Between* which represented the Mau Mau rebellion context.

In 1967, Ngugi wrote *A Grain of Wheat*, his third novel which contained his Fanonist and Marxist embrace. After writing this third novel, he reached a point of crisis which led him to divorce openly with the English language and even Christianity and the name James Ngugi which he considers part of the colonialist hegemony. Thus, he turned back to his mother tongue and wrote his first novel in Gikuyu entitled *Caitani mũtharaba-Inĩ* (*Devil On the Cross*, 1982). It was a work he produced on toilet paper while being jailed.

Ngugi's writings became more and more engaged. He produced a collection of essays entitled *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (1972). Besides, he co-authored with Mirce Mugo a play entitled *Trial of Dedan Kimathi* which was presented in Lagos in 1977. He published in the same year *Petals of Blood*, in which he denounced the austerity of life in neo-colonial Kenya. Moreover, he wrote with Ngugi wa Mirii their famous play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I will marry when I want). It was a play performed by the peasants and workers of Kamiriithu, in open air theatre of Limuru. It

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carried an open political message which denounces and criticises the Kenyan government of that time. It was also the play which provoked his imprisonment by the then vice-president, Daniel Arap Moi. Thus, on December 1977, and without any formal charge, Ngugi was arrested and detained in the Kimati Maximum Security Prison.

After his release, Ngugi was not reinstated to his job as a professor at Nairobi University, and his family was harassed. Because of his writings about the injustices of the dictatorial government at that time, Ngugi and his family were forced to live in exile. Only after Arap Moi was voted out of office, 22 years later, they had the right to return home. His later works showed Ngugi's determination and commitment that grew up through time. These included: *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981), *Writers in Politics* (1981), *Barrel of Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya* (1983), *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) and the play of *Matigari* (1986).

Ngugi published other works in which he calls for the imperative return to the native languages in order to build an authentic genuine African literature. The works consist of *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993) and *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (1998). In 1993, Ngugi became a professor of comparative literature and performance studies at New York University, where he held the Erich Maria Remarque Chair. He is also currently the director of the international center for writing and translation at the University of California, Irvine. He is also the founder of a journal in Gikuyu called *Mutiiri*, created in 1994.

On 8th August 2004, Ngugi returned to Kenya as part of a month-long tour of East Africa. Quite after his arrival (the 11th of August), robbers broke into his high-security apartment; they assaulted Ngugi, sexually assaulted his wife, and stole various items of value.

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Since then, Ngugi has returned to America, and in the summer 2006 the American publishing firm Random House published the novel, *Wizard of the Crow*, translated to English from Gikuyu by himself. On 10th of November 2006, while in San Francisco at Hotel Vitale at the Embarcadero, Ngugi was harassed and ordered to leave the hotel by an employee. The event led to a public outcry and angered the African-American community and the Africans living in America prompting an apology by the hotel.

His most recent book is *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*, a collection of essays published in 2009 making the argument the crucial role of African languages in the rehabilitation of African literature. There are also two autobiographical works: *Dreams in a Time of War: a Childhood Memoir* (2010) and *In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir* (2012).

2- The African Writer in the Present Situation of Post-independent Africa

The collection of essays of *Homecoming* (1972) was written at a time when Ngugi decided to abandon English and to shift towards writing his creative works in his native language, Gikuyu. It is worth mentioning that Ngugi also insists on the fact that his essays should be read alongside his novels, asserting that his essays and novels "have been products of the same moods and touch on similar questions and problems" (xv). Moreover, Simon Gikandi (2000) argues that "although his critical prose and literary works were differentiated by genre and the protocols and conventions of writing and reading, their conditions of production were similar" (247).

The essay 'The Writer in a Changing Society' highlights the relevance of literature in the cultural system of Ngugi's newly independent country, Kenya. In addition, he expresses

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his disillusionment as well as that of most post-independence African writers with the new 'ruling elite'. He says:

The disillusionment with the ruling elite is to be found in the recent works of most African writers: Okot p'Bitek, Leonard Kibera, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, to mention only few. All of them are reacting to a situation very different from the one prevailing in the fifties (47).

For Ngugi, the African writer cannot be cut from his society, and he believes that this society is not static; it changes with time. The writer feels and reacts to those social changes which he reproduces in his creative writings (ibid).

Moreover, Ngugi acknowledges that he too must have changed. He relates his university experiences which led him to meet with the writings of some influential African and west Indian writers. He confesses that these writers made him learn more than what he had been taught at the British schools and universities. He puts it as follows: "I had read a number of writers, African and west Indian, and I knew that what they told,...was different from what I had heard from the British writers..." (47). He further explains that these writers spoke to him about his situation, and "what was [his] situation?" (48) he tends to answer in his essay.

The post-independence situation of Kenya pushed Ngugi to feel concerned with the peasants and the workers of his country for whom he decided to devote his works. Thus, Ngugi tries to picture Kenya, during colonialism, relating the sufferings of the peasants and workers who never benefited from the wealth they created (1972: 48) and remembering the united voices of the women sadly singing for the white man's departure one day. He asserts that "the women had taken a correct political stand in the face of an oppressive enemy" (49).

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However, after gaining independence, the African peasants and workers who fought for 'Uhuru' found their hope and promises unfulfilled and the gap between them and the new elite widened. While a handful of bourgeois elite benefited of relative comfort and luxury, the masses (peasants and workers) continued to suffer the consequences, undergoing the same exploitative oppressions (Ngugi 49).

Therefore, Ngugi thinks that independence did not bring much relief to the peasants and workers. This is the ugly situation Frantz Fanon describes when he writes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961): "The masses battle with the same poverty, wrestles with the same age-old gestures, and delineate what we could call the geography of hunger with their shrunken bellies..." (53). These are the reasons that pushed Ngugi to embrace the fanonist Marxist ideology, as he showed the desire to align himself to his people.

Ngugi delivers his message, calling African writers and intellectuals to align themselves with their people for a 'meaningful national ideal' (50). This idea is shared by Fanon who explains it as follows: "to fight for national culture first of all means fighting for the liberation of the nation, the tangible matrix from which culture can grow" (Fanon 53). Ngugi firmly believes that African writers must commit themselves to shed light on the oppression, dehumanization and relegation of the peasants and workers by the political class in postcolonial Africa. Thus, their writings should serve a social and political purpose.

Likewise, Sartre expresses clearly that literature is an effort, a struggle to attain knowledge and freedom. According to him, the main purpose of literature is to act on readers. In other words, the writer has to stimulate his readers' desire of freedom and liberation. Sartre affirms that "writing is a certain way of wanting freedom; once you have begun, you are engaged" (65). He adds that "A day comes when the pen is forced to stop, and the writer must

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then take up arms" (ibid). Fanon pushes this idea further asserting that "One cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people's struggle for liberation" (168). The writer must then align to his people in their struggle for liberation and fight for freedom.

Ngugi concludes his essay with words of hope saying: "we [African writers] must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country, and sing a new song" (50). These words of hope, African writers must hold on and forcefully believe in, in a way they could help their people articulate the feelings behind their struggle (ibid).

In this essay Ngugi affirms that the African writer lives in a changing society. Then, he asserts that the duty of African writers is no longer in the rehabilitation of the African past. It is the reason why he urges them to focus their attention on the post-colonial problems of the continent.

3-The Relation between the Writer and the Politician

While the first collection of essays, *Homecoming* (1972), is marked by Frantz Fanon's thoughts, *Writers in Politics* (1981) is more clearly Marxist. The latter is written between 1970 and 1980, accompanying the publication of the novel *Petals of Blood* (1977). This novel is committed to a fierce indictment of injustice in Kenyan society; it is also Ngugi's last novel in English where he makes a virulent and ruthless criticism of the various aspects of the Kenyan regime after independence.

Ngugi wrote this collection of essays after his detention of 1977 for a year with no charges due to the production of his play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I Will Marry When I Want,

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1977) in Gikuyu. The latter was promptly banned by the regime. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was first performed in Ngugi's home village of Kamiriithu.

The politics hinted at in the play are believed to have been the direct cause of the writer's detention. Ngugi's project aimed at avoiding the process of alienation which according to him encourages passivity. Although *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was a commercial success, it was shut down by the Kenyan regime six weeks after its opening. Ngugi was subsequently imprisoned for over a year.

In 'Writers in Politics: the Power of Words and the Words of Power', Ngugi starts his essay by quoting Leopold Sedar Senghor's dramatic poem in which the white man is so impressed by Chaka's mastery of language that he utters: "Chaka...you are a poet...a politician" here, the poet is compared to a politician. In the same way, Ngugi affirms that the conscious will of the African writer is to look for literary means for transmitting a political message, as for him, the writer and the politician have several commonalities, as "both trade in words, both are created by the same reality of the world around them. Their activity and concern have the same subject and object: human relationship" (Ngugi 67).

In addition, for Ngugi, the writer is a product of his society in time and place; where he is considered to be an important and active opponent and where his subject matter is inevitably history (68). Moreover, in the relationship between the writer and politics in the African society, culture and dynamism, Ngugi distinguishes three ways in which the social power and organization can affect the writer. So he figures out three types of writers in society. The first is the writer who is driven into the active political struggles of his people. Ngugi gives the example of Leopold Sedar Senghor who is an active Senegalese writer who moved on to politics and became the President of Senegal. The second type is the one who

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finds himself on the wrong side because of his political involvement. For example, many South African writers like Ezekiel Mphahlele are in exile because of their writings that denunciate the system of violent repressions. Finally, there is the type of writer, who is not politically active and who is suddenly involved in the 'hot political power struggles'. Here Ngugi gives the example of Christopher Okigbo who once he realised that his poems were written for and understood by poets only and that he would rather have lived than write. Thus, Okigbo died for the Biafran secessionist cause (Ngugi 69).

Ngugi further believes that the African writer should take personal risks such as exile and prison; he should put his pen to denunciate the social abuses of his time. Then, he calls on the African writers to stop refusing their values, culture, politics and economics and go beyond the racial aspect of their struggle against all the ruling classes that distort those very values. He follows on the Fanonist call to the underdeveloped countries to "endeavour to focus on their very own values...refuse to outright the situation to which the west wants to condemn [them]" (Fanon 57). In this belief, the Marxist stand of Ngugi is recognizable; for he depicts that the African writer should see the shortcomings of the neo-colonial economies and the consequent distortion of values and commit to fight against them.

Like Fanon, Ngugi asserts that writing to African peasants and workers is to engage in writing about their culture which should be rooted in their struggle for liberation. Thus according to him, writing in African languages is a contribution in the making of a national culture which is the way to the liberation of the nation. Fanon argues that the African writer is somehow responsible not to his national culture, but to the nation as a whole, he writes that the African writer:

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Should not be concerned with choosing how or where he decides to wage the national struggle. To fight for national culture first of all means fighting for the liberation of the nation, the tangible matrix from which culture can grow. One cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people's struggle for liberation (168).

Ngugi bitterly concludes as follows: "unless we as African writers embrace such a vision—a vision anchored in the struggles of the people—we shall succumb to self-despair, cynicism and individualism" (176-77). He ends his essay, warning the African writer to show commitment, not for abstract notions of justice and peace, but for the actual struggle of the African peoples. He shares Sartre's opinion about the writer being a guide for his people, as Sartre affirms "he [the writer] describes a hovel, make it seem the symbol of social injustice and provoke your indignation" (10).

In 'Writers in Politics', Ngugi shows his political evolution as he is deeply influenced by his country's political and social deterioration. As it is shown in the second chapter, the Kenyan political scene witnessed much agitation and the country suffered from the ruling class oppressive regime, a situation that faded on Ngugi's stand towards his people.

4-A Language for an Authentic African Literature

In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (1986)*, Ngugi discusses language and its constructive role in national culture and its history and identity so as to give a sense to an African language-based literature. This collection of essays is written at a time when Ngugi firmly promoted linguistic decolonization and after writing his first novel in Gikuyu, *Caĩtaani mũtharaba-Inĩ* (Devil on the Cross, 1982). It is arguing for African writers' expression in their native languages rather than European languages, in order to build an authentic African literature.

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In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi affirms that to be truly free of Africa's old European masters one must write in an African language in order to get rid of the continuing imperialist control of economy, politics, and cultures (Ngugi 4). Therefore, in the essay 'the Language of African Literature', Ngugi gives rise to the issue of language in African literature. He argues that the language of African literature cannot be discussed meaningfully without taking into consideration the context of the social forces from which it is raised.

Ngugi also tells of his childhood in Kenya, of how he was taught in his native Gikuyu language at school when suddenly the British authorities forced schools to teach in English. Moreover, Language was twisted into a mechanism that separated children from their own history because their own heritage was shared only at home, relying on orature in their native language (Ngugi 11). At school, they are told that the only way to advance is to memorize the textbook history in the colonizer's language. Ngugi believes that by removing their native language from their education they are separated from their history which is replaced by European history in European languages. This puts the lives of Africans more firmly in the control of the colonists (ibid).

Ngugi insists on the fact that Europe forced its languages on Africa so as to control it, a process recognized by Frantz Fanon. Therefore, Ngugi argues that colonization was not simply a process of physical force. Rather "the bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (9). In Kenya, colonization propagated English as the language of education. This was devastating to African literature because it silenced the oral African tradition in its African languages.

So, this means that only texts with religious stories or carefully selected stories which would not tempt young Africans to question their own condition were taught. Thus, Africans

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were controlled by forcing them to speak European languages—they attempted to teach children (future generations) that speaking English is good and that native languages are bad by using negative reinforcement (Ngugi 11).

Furthermore, Ngugi recalls 'the Conference of African Writers of English Expression' which included only English writing African authors because those that wrote in African languages were not invited. For this reason, Ngugi challenges the African writers to abandon writing in colonial languages as he calls literature written in these languages 'Afro-European Literature' and instead they must opt for their native languages to give African literature its own definition. He argues as follows "what we have created is another hybrid tradition...that can only be termed as Afro-European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European languages" (Ngugi 26-27). The quotation reveals that in writing in European languages, African writers do not address themselves to the masses for which they committed their literature. Furthermore, in doing so, they are enriching the European cultures at the detriment of their own.

Ngugi further refers to the most important experience of his career, the Kamiriithu experience of 1977. He tells the circumstances that pushed him to start writing in Gikuyu, recalling his collaboration with Ngugi Wa Mirii in the play script of *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*. This made him question himself about the fact of writing in Gikuyu, an African language. To this question he answers as follows: "But Gikuyu is my mother tongue! The very fact that what common sense dictates in the literary practice of other cultures is being questioned in an African writer" (Ngugi 27-28).

This kamiriithu experience represented a turning point in Ngugi's life. It forced him to return to his mother tongue. Then this fact aroused the question of audience, Ngugi asserts

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that "the question of audience settled the problem of language choice, and the language choice settled the question of audience" (44).

Moreover according to Ngugi, imperialism has distorted the view about the African realities. Thus the independence, hardly obtained, did not affect the balance, since African literary field as well as the other political, economic and social domains, are still controlled by the western powers (ex-colonizers). This idea is supported by Fanon who argues that the apotheosis of independence:

becomes the curse of independence. The sweeping powers of coercion of the colonial authorities condemn the young nation to regression. In other words, the colonial power says: 'if you want independence, take it and suffer the consequences (54).

Fanon denounces the evils of colonialism and its continuity in the form of the imperialist system of capitalism. This system keeps the newly liberated nations, totally dependent on their former colonizers.

Therefore, Ngugi believes that writing in his mother tongue Gikuyu is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle of Kenyan and African peoples (28). He promptly affirms that all his efforts are for the Kenyan and African children whom he does not want to transcend the colonial alienation; they do not have to grow up in the 'imperialist-imposed tradition' (ibid).

Finally, Ngugi concludes his work addressing once again the African writers. He reminds them how much they are bound to their culture and all what it carries; so they must do for their languages what Shakespeare, Milton and spencer did for English. Moreover, for him, African writers must reconnect themselves "to the revolutionary traditions of an

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organized peasantry and working class in Africa in their struggle to defeat imperialism" (29-30).

5-Ngugi's Ideological Evolution

From the beginning of his career, Ngugi showed a fanonist and Marxist stand. In the three essays which I analysed, Ngugi discussed the relation between the issues of commitment and language in African literature.

The essay of 'The Writer in a Changing Society' (Homecoming, 1972), emphasizes the important social functions of African literature. Ngugi asserts that the writer is a product of a dynamic society, and on which he has impact as well. He also argues that in his commitment the writer must deal with the present conditions and problems of his society. Thus, in this essay his major influence is Fanon. Ngugi argues that the postcolonial African writer is bound by the duty to denounce the social evils which his people endure and to push them to revolt against their oppression.

In 'Writers in Politics' 1981, from the same title book, we recognize Ngugi's conception of the writer and the politician, the two become a singular entity as for him writing and politics are similar in their dealing with society. Ngugi's Marxist stand is evident in this essay. Ngugi solemnly calls on African writers to align with the peasants and workers and join them in their anti-imperialist struggle for liberation. For him, African writers must commit their works to provide the masses with a concrete understanding of the imperialist dangers.

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, 1986, Ngugi got much success and fame with his essay 'the Language of African Literature'. In this essay, Ngugi shows a more radicalist stand

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concerning commitment. He argues that it is no more sufficient for African writers to be committed to the people and denounce their current oppressing conditions. But in doing this, they must write in indigenous African languages so as to address those peasants and workers. Besides, he believes it is these workers and peasants which should be their target audience. The African writer must talk to them in a language they can understand, their African language of course.

From the analysis of these three selected essays and the insights provided in Ngugi's biography, we can notice that his ideology has undergone a remarkable evolution. From the beginning of his writing career as a student at Makerere to the politically active and the radicalist writer he became, Ngugi's thinking has obviously changed.

In fact, the beginning of Ngugi's career was marked by his belief in the great English tradition of Milton and the moral notions of Leavis. Ngugi began writing when he was a student at Makerere then at Leeds in the 1960s. Indeed, his collection of essays, *Homecoming* (1972) consisted of texts written from a University perspective.

But after writing his novel of *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) the question of audience appealed to him. He admitted that he knew what he was writing about, but whom he was addressing his works to remained a question. Thus, Ngugi revealed his Fanonist and Marxist embrace when he published his first novel *Caitani Mũtharaba-Inĩ* (*Devil on the Cross*, 1980) in Gikuyu. It is only when he met with the people of Kamiriithu with whom he worked on his play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* that Ngugi realized that all he was doing was wrong. The kamiriithu experience represented a turning point in Ngugi's life and career. The period when he simultaneously wrote his collection of essays of *Writers in Politics* (1981), he openly

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divorced with the English language which he considered part of the colonialist hegemony and imperialism.

Ngugi became more and more engaged whether in his creative writings or in his essays. When he wrote *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), Ngugi showed a complete rejection and zealous repudiation of European languages in African literature. He continues to assert that in writing in European languages, African writers keep on enriching the European literatures and cultures at the expense of their own ones.

Therefore, Ngugi's conception of commitment is not at the origin of his reversal. But it was its relation to the language issue that provoked his radicalist thought. According to him, the relation between these two issues is obviously the audience which consist of the African peasants and workers.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, this chapter provided a summary of Ngugi's biography as well as an analysis of his three selected essays: "the Writer in a Changing Society", which is part of *Homecoming* (1972), "Writers in Politics" from the same title book *Writers in Politics* (1981) and "the Language of African Literature" extracted from *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986).

Relying on Sartre's theory of Committed Literature and Fanon's Literature of Combat, I studied Ngugi's conception of the relation between the two issues of commitment and language in African literature. Ngugi argues about the importance of language in his literary commitment; he believes that using African languages is important for the African writer because it allows him to address his people in a language they can understand.

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Therefore, we can deduce that the relation between the issues of language and commitment is the audience. In fact, Ngugi asserts that the African writer must address himself to the African peasants and workers, who represent Africa and who carry its culture. To address these peasants and workers, the African writer has to use language. In doing so, he also contributes to the development of an authentic African literature as well as the creation of a national culture which must be a genuine African culture.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this research paper, I have attempted to study Ngugi's conception of two important issues in African literature namely, commitment and language in his three essays: "the African Writer in a Changing Society" selected from *Homecoming* (1972), "Writers in Politics" from the same title book *Writers in Politics* (1981) and "the Language of African Literature" extracted from *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986). For this purpose, I divided my work into three distinctive chapters.

In the first chapter, I have provided a review of the issues of commitment and language in African literature. I have pointed out that African literature is a committed art which is aimed at denouncing the prevailing evils of society. Then, I have explained briefly Sartre's theory of Committed Literature and Fanon's theory of Literature of Combat.

Ngugi is influenced by Fanon's theory of Literature of Combat, as he adheres to what Frantz Fanon declares about the psychological act of freeing the natives' consciousness from the alienation caused by colonization. Fanon assumes that the masses' consciousness has to be unleashed from the colonial control. Accordingly, the writer has then to awaken his people to a physical reaction against their oppressors; his target mission in postcolonial Africa is to make Africans aware about the political corruptions, the economic problems, and the cultural chaos and to lead them in their struggle for liberation and the creation of a national culture.

After that, I have discussed the linguistic situation of Africa, presenting facts about the linguistic diversity of the continent. Then, I presented the language debate that has shaken Africa since 1962 due to the famous conference of Kampala (Uganda). I deduced that though African writers differed in opinion concerning the use of colonial or indigenous African languages in African literature, they are committed writers.

The second chapter has provided a brief historical background of post-independence Kenya. It has shed light on the pitiful conditions Kenyan people suffer from because of neo-

colonialism and imperialism. This chapter has also shown the linguistic hegemony of English over the local Kenyan languages in postcolonial Kenya where English became the official language as a consequence of the British colonial practices and the Kenyans' need to use this language as their lingua franca for the sake of national unity. This situation of postcolonial Kenya provoked Ngugi's reaction towards its chaotic consequences; he became more radical in his views about the western imperialist capitalism and language dominance. Ngugi virulently criticized the western hegemonic practices and denounced its results on his people.

In the third and last chapter, I have analysed Ngugi's conception of the relation between the commitment and the language of African literature. I have studied three essays written in different periods in order to follow on the development of his ideology which influenced the issues under study. I have also highlighted how the kamiriithu experience of 1977 contributed in shaping his ideological stand. From the analysis of the essays, I reached the following conclusions:

In his essay 'the Writer in a Changing Society' (1972), Ngugi interrogates the oppressive and corrupt power in post-independence Kenya and Africa. He expresses his disillusionment as well as that of most of postcolonial African writers. Ngugi assumes that the rehabilitation of the past has no longer to be the duty of today's African writer. The latter should commit himself to deal with the present problems of Africa and to use his voice to denunciate the evils of his society. Ngugi urges African writers to focus their attention to the postcolonial problems of the continent.

In the essay of 'Writers in Politics' (1981), Ngugi discusses the relationship between art and the political power in African societies. As he is involved in politics, his major concern is the postcolonial Kenyan political and economic situation of deterioration and chaos. Ngugi also argues that art has to be committed to denounce European imperialism and

its consequences on the African masses. He urges the African writer to align with those masses in their struggle.

In his essay 'the Language of African Literature' (1986), Ngugi underscores the importance of African culture in liberating the African people from the effects of imperialism. He also discusses the urge to return to the African languages so as to produce an authentic African literature. This literature must be addressed to the African people who are the peasants and workers in order to awaken their consciousness and push them to react physically for their liberation from their oppression.

Ngugi believes that the African writer must choose to commit his literature to the African peasant and worker who represent the majority of the African society. In order to communicate with these people, the African writer must use his African language.

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Résumé

Le but de ce travail, comme son titre l'indique, est d'étudier les questions de l'engagement et de la langue de la littérature Africaine dans les essais de Ngugi Ta Thiong'o.

Pour cela, je me suis appuyé sur la théorie de la Littérature Engagée de Jean Paul Sartre ainsi que sur la théorie de Littérature de Combat de Frantz Fanon. Ngugi est un fervent adhérent de ces deux théories comme il est très influencé par Sartre et Fanon.

A travers mon analyse, j'ai essayé de répondre à la question pourquoi la langue est-elle si importante pour Ngugi dans son engagement ? J'en ai conclu que Ngugi est un écrivain engagé virulent, et qu'il croit ardemment que sans la langue son action de l'engagement ne peut être entièrement légitime. Les langues Africaines sont cruciales pour la création d'une littérature Africaine authentique qui doit contribuer à construire une culture nationale. Pour Ngugi, une littérature Africaine authentique se doit d'être écrite dans les langues Africaines, elle nécessite un enracinement dans la culture du peuple Africain qui est une culture de lutte libératrice.