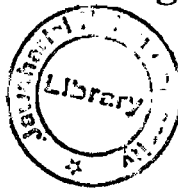


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**Orality and African Drama: Reading Select Plays by
Ngugi wa Thiong'o**

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy

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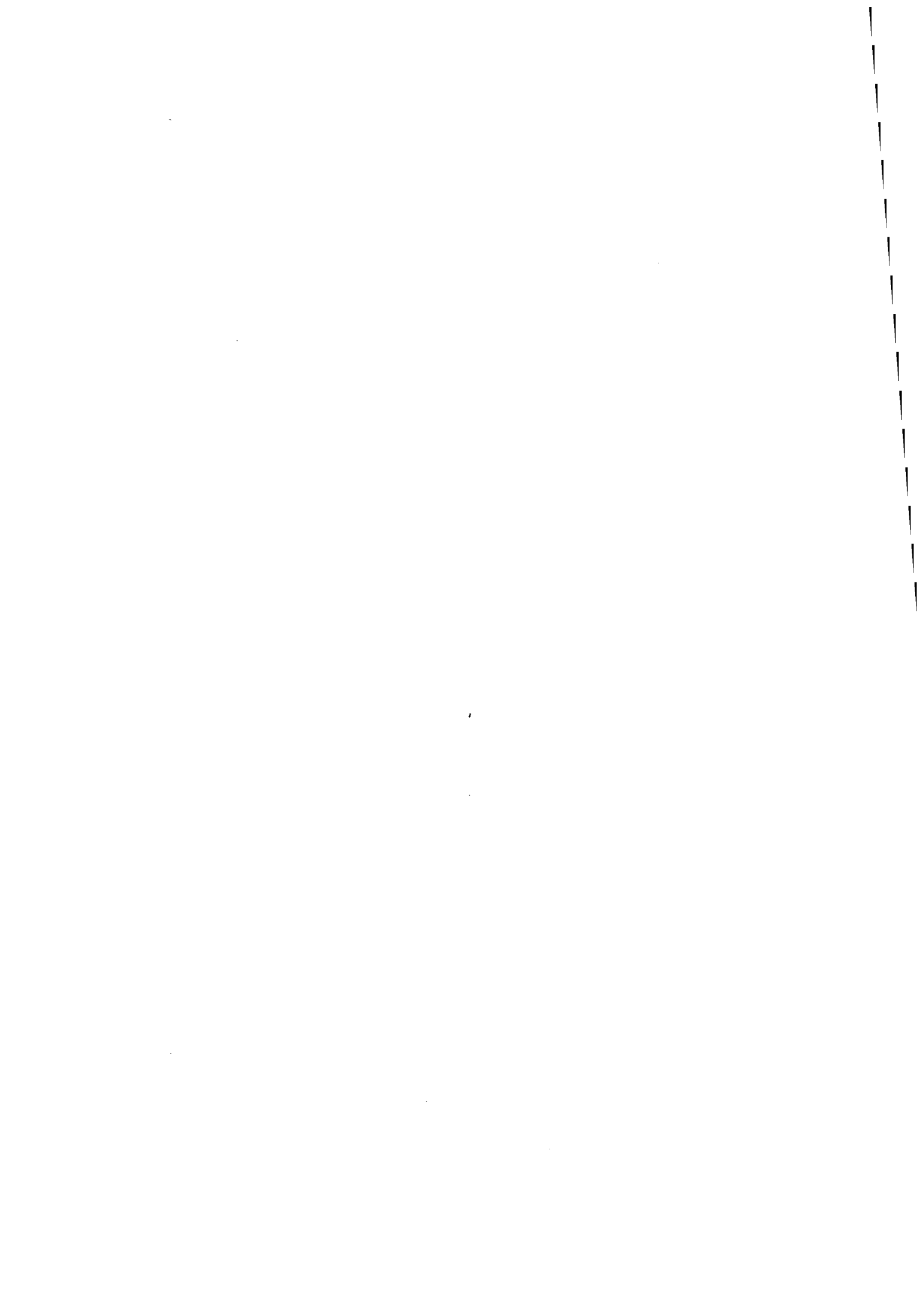
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Chapter 1
Introduction
History, Oral Tradition and Literature in Africa

When I pronounce the word Future,

The first syllable already belongs to the Past.

When I pronounce the word Silence,

I destroy it.

When I pronounce the word Nothing,

I make something no non-being can hold.

(Szyborska 29)

In an attempt to express the inherent paradoxes and limitations of spoken word vis-à-vis the actual experience, Nobel Laureate Wislawa Szymborska thus treads the fine line between past and present, incident and its narrative, and the abstract and the real. The above lines also seem to echo the claims, counterclaims and lacunae seen in the various, often paradoxical, interpretations of the history of Africa: in the wake of cornucopia of interpretations of African history, both “minimal” and “maximal”, its progression still remains a debatable issue. For example, the linear and the most usual way of categorizing history into ancient, medieval and modern, fails in the context of that history which is influenced deeply by the various experiences of the twentieth century, like colonialism and post-colonialism, and yet, at the same time, it is also the history that takes us back to the appearance of Homo sapiens itself. Thus, to speculate an analogy between the dilemma of the above-mentioned poet and the various African writers concerned with the true portrayal of their history, the utter importance of various modes of narration that depict the actual experiences in the manner they are encountered becomes indispensable.

Such modes of narration seek to overcome the inadequacy of language in presenting the simultaneity of myriad experiences we go through at the same time. Linearity and categorization can only serve the purpose of distancing us from the multiplicity of perspectives such narratives can provide. One mode of historiography, in the context of Africa, is to analyze it simultaneously at the three levels of political, economic and social development. Here one needs to be cautioned as the two opposite strands of interpreters are evolved: “insiders” and the “aliens”. Also, such a methodology takes recourse to the development witnessed by Africa in the pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial eras, i.e. colonialism becomes the sole reference point of history. Aijaz Ahmad has rightly pointed out in his analysis of Frederic Jameson’s definition of the three worlds that it is not fair to define the ‘Third World’ merely as that part of the world which once experienced colonialism and imperialism:

It is significant that First and Second Worlds are defined in terms of their production systems (capitalism and socialism respectively), whereas the third category- the Third World- is defined purely in terms of an ‘experience’ of externally inserted phenomena. That which is constitutive of human history itself is present in the first two cases, absent in the third case. Ideologically, this classification divides the world between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it. (Ahmad in Ashcroft 78)

This fixation with the fact of colonization has affected the perception of the world about the so-called Third World countries. One may ask the question whether the membership of this third category is a permanent phenomenon for its constituents or is it just a passing phase in the histories of the member nations? Going by the Jamesonian definition, the answer is obvious- Third World will always remain third world because it can not erase its history which is in fact the basic premise of its identity as the third world. The First World has thus frozen for long term preservation, its opinion and perception about the erstwhile colonies by clubbing them together and dumping them in the category of the Third World.

While we are thus occupied by the question of history and representation of history, we must also consider representation *in* history as an important episteme to be perused critically. During the colonial period, history was dominated by various administrative apparatuses of the state. The colonial period is earmarked by the conflict of the colonial states vis-à-vis indigenous systems of governance. The subsistence economies of the African tribal communities were seen as primitive and backward by the new colonial administration. Development and progress in accordance with European idea of 'modernity' were promoted in a continent where the modes of economic production did not match up to the lifestyle, administrative machinery and judiciary introduced by the masters. Even most of the African languages did not have proper scripts at the time of the first colonial encounters. Amidst all the chaos of cultural conflict, the discourse that perhaps suffered the most in relation with Africa was history. The culture which was acutely aware of its own history, though never put down in writing, was represented as a culture with no sense of history- a culture suspended in pre-historic limbo. No wonder that the oldest written records of history of the African people were actually produced during the colonial rule. They are of course very often biased against the Africans because the European historiographer had little training to comprehend a worldview all together different from his own. In the post-colonial period, therefore, a deep concern with representation in history has gripped the third world. Authentic accounts are the prime concern in their projects of history-writing and hence, the writing of their selves into nations. In other words, forces of decolonization were responsible for the creation of history. Though the economic history was not as intense as the political one, yet the changes in the pre-colonial periods, along with those of the colonial period that was responsible for the integration of the African and the World economy, paved the way for a "stronger" post-colonial economic historiography. However, this kind of historiography is not far from naiveté because in the case of most third world countries and more so in the case of Africa colonialism in some form or the other still persists. Colonial experiences are omnipresent in these regions and are seen actively evolving in today's political, cultural and artistic domains. Accordingly, "colonialism for Africans is not an event encapsulated in the past but is a history which is essentially not over." (Woods 1) Moreover, even the history of colonial times is mediated

because the documentation and records of the times were written and maintained by the colonial masters. The scripting was not limited just to history. It extended to African cultures, languages and even geography. One must remember that the concept of distinct nations and nationhood itself is an imposed one. Division of Africa into different nation-states was indeed division of a people belonging to the same cultural pool. The written verdict on the map was not integral to the African ethos which is essentially oral and fluid in nature. Since it is neither possible to erase the colonial part of African history nor to glorify the colonial age, writers are increasingly aligning themselves towards a stand more critical of the era. Their choice of writing about the interface between the African and the European cultures and the entire colonial experience stems from their anxiety relating to the possibility that colonialism might extend its reach into Africa more effectively in its latest avatar of neo-colonialism, nay globalism. Ngugi wa Thiongo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) and *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982) are outcomes of such an anxiety.

At this point, it becomes relevant to recall that history for Africans was a site of contest from the very moment the first European stepped upon the continent. This forced the Africans, particularly writers and artists, to keep vigil over any sort of misrepresentation of Africa by the "aliens". They've also been wary of the representation coming from the repressive neo-colonialist regime. In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "tyrants, whether colonial regimes or their successors, are terrified at the sound of the wheels of history.... So they try to rewrite history, make up official history; if they can put cotton wool in their ears and in those of the population, maybe they and the people will not hear the real call of history, will not hear the real lessons of history, which teach of struggle and change". (Ngugi, *Kimathi Papers* xiii) Much of Africa's written history has indeed taken the part of its rulers rather than that of its people, but that is rapidly ceasing to be the case. "There is already a vigorous alternative historiography which illuminates past African constructions of varied political languages of debate. These may well be seen as subversive of tyranny, but for that very reason might also prove to be supportive of responsible government." (Lonsdale 128) Ngugi's exercise, for instance, in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is not only an enterprise in protest against the neo-

colonisation of Kenya but also an attempt at rewriting history of subversive movements in the colonial days which were either misrepresented or not represented at all in colonial historical records. In the preface to the play Ngugi and Mugo state that the Mau Mau movement was “a resistance movement whose history goes back to the 15th and 16th centuries when Kenyans and other East African people first took up arms against European colonial power- the Portuguese forces of conquest, murder and plunder.” (Ngugi, *The Trial* ii) They go on to say that:

Our historians, our political scientists, and even some of our literary figures, were too busy spewing out, elaborating and trying to document the same colonial myths which had it that Kenyan people traditionally wandered aimlessly from place to place engaging in purposeless warfare; that the people readily accommodated themselves to the British forces of occupation! For whose benefit were these intellectuals writing? Unashamedly, some were outright defenders of Imperialism and lauded the pronouncements of colonial government, basking in the sunshine of their pax-Anglo-Africana Commonwealths. (Ngugi, *The Trial* ii)

The progressive writers had to fight therefore, the misrepresentation of African history not just by the colonial rulers but also by their African collaborators. They have to begin from the beginning because the available accounts are not to be trusted. Thus, through his writings, Ngugi tries first to explore the basic question: how does the progression of history take place? One thing is for sure: Ngugi knows that the history of Kenya is the one that is “known to a Kenyan, rather than as it is told by the white colonialist oppressors... Thus, the history of Dedan Kimathi, the great warrior and leader of masses, that is passed on from generation to generation by the poets, artists, warriors, and others is endorsed; it is a censored history, left to the legends passed from generation to generation for its survival” (Woods 89). As is clear from this assertion, creative writers in Africa prefer oral history over the official written one which is a colonial legacy. In the writings of revolutionary playwrights like Ngugi:

... very consciously, very deliberately active historical contents are played off against the old myths, the supernatural and magical explanations of man's existence within society and nature. And no wonder, for quite often these plays deal with the more basic, more concrete problems that confront Africa and Africans: foreign domination, hunger, poverty, the degradation and oppression of the "little people", that is of Africa's vast and rural masses. The sights are focused more sharply on all the means of liberation, as much from foreign and domestic oppression, as from the system of thought and mystifications of reality inherited from previous ages unencumbered by the problems of the present epoch. (Jeyifo 62)

Another such site of contest was in the representation of the African "nationhood" itself: "where colonial writing had sought to demonstrate that Africans remained outside the development of the modern nation-state, post-independence writing portrayed Africans as active within it" (Woods 5). However, this development has done a serious harm to the authenticity and genuineness of presenting true African history especially because such a representation was moulded in a western framework. It brought before the writer, deeply concerned with the past, the issue of what kind of past to represent rather than the primary question of 'whether or not to have a past'. The writer faces the state of dilemma at both levels of selection and omission. "It is an issue of the control of memory: not only how to get a hold on the past, but also how to let it go" (Woods 5). The case of Africa is as peculiar as that of any third world region. Nations were carved out of continents and sub-continents by merely drawing lines on the map. The cartographic division had little regard for the social, linguistic and cultural realities prevalent in the regions. Nations in this third world are therefore often like incomplete entities with one or the other of their integral parts lying beyond their international boundaries, in the neighbouring nation. People's consciousness was often marred by such divisions. As is evident from this fact, it has been an uphill task for the third world countries to define themselves as nations and for their people to distinguish themselves on grounds of citizenship from people of other nations who were perhaps once their kiths and kins and

with whom they share a common culture, customs and traditions and even a common history- the history of the colonial era. Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983) states that in such circumstances, the role of building a national consciousness was thrust upon writers of the newly-born nations. Nationalism is hence often seen as a product of print capitalism. Though the idea has its own limitations yet we can employ it in the present context. If the writer's writing was the carrier of nationalism, then it becomes essential to look at the different methods s/he came up with to install a sense of unity and national pride in his readers. The future had to be integrated in all the visions of the past and the present. Every account of national history had to be contributory to the consolidation of the national consciousness. The question of past thus, became an important one.

The question of past that "haunts" the African writers, is in no way, detached from the concern to shape the future for their nation and their people. For Ngugi, too, the understanding of the present is not different from its past. This urge to know one's past to construct the future is seen in Ngugi's work of child fiction: *Njamba Nene and the Flying Bus* (1982), where he attempts to "historically inform" the future generation of Kenya. "We must . . . find out where we are, in order to decide where we will go next. We cannot know where we are, without first finding out where we come from". (Ngugi, *Njamba* 19) In fact, for him, a writer is more authentic in presenting "the moving spirit of an era than all the historical and political documents treating the same moments in a society's development" (Woods 79). This tendency of the African writers to return repeatedly to the past is accompanied by the question of remembrance and the relevance of tradition, both of which rely heavily on memory. For an African, remembrance provides the force that enlivens the history as well as the tradition. It is believed that the ancestors who uphold the traditional values keep living with the future generations as long as the successors keep remembering them. Similarly, for African writers, tradition survives as long as writers take up the charge of addressing and touching upon the histories of the peoples, culture, nation and colonialism. African writers visit pasts embedded in the various forms of oral tradition. For example, Amos Tutuola revisited West African past that sprang from the Yoruba folk-tales and that "has been resurrected and thereby

installed as the part of the significant cultural history of Nigeria” (Woods 55). Hence, the ultimate source of the authentic past for the writers comes from the oral narrative tradition. In the preface to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ngugi and Mugo locate the history of the Mau Mau struggle for freedom not in the immediate realm of twentieth century written history but in the legends of resistance against the early colonial contexts, in the oral traditions which have descended from generation to generation since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They also comment on the lack of factual precision in the oral imagination and narration which presents Kimathi as a World War hero. Though factually, this historiography may lose out, in spirit it can not be defeated as it has the “correct” anti-colonial and pro-Mau Mau perspective. The Karunaini people’s refusal to accept that Kimathi is dead conforms to the oral ethos where no one dies: people simply become part of a narrative continuum once they cease to exist physically.

The oral tradition is omnipresent as it pervades all aspects of the daily doses of the African cultural life. The mythical or folk past motivates, feeds and informs this tradition. In other words, history is embedded in this tradition. One is automatically treading the path of history when one steps into an oral narrative. Ngugi exploits this quality in his plays to present a contemporary problem with all its historical baggage simply by using the oral narrative technique where one never needs to quote history as one is always in history. Ngugi’s writings witness the history of Kenya in the twentieth century in a phased manner: colonial, anti-colonial and post-colonial (which is often portrayed as neo-colonial in his writings). Ngugi, both as a child and as an adult, witnessed the significant events of the modern Kenya, of which land, education and independence are the most crucial issues. The immediate effects of the greedy land grabbing by whites was the conversion of Gikuyu land owners into ahoi, the landless tenant farmers, working for others or renting their land. Ngugi experienced all these traumas in his childhood itself; he belonged to a large farming family that fell prey to the greed of the white colonizers. This process of forced ‘detachment’ from their land led the Africans to emotional and spiritual shock as well, since the attachment with land permeated through all dimensions of African lives. As a result of this, Ngugi, like all other writers, returns to the question of land frequently. In *I Will Marry When I Want*, the

issue of land amplifies the complicity of the post-colonial regime with the erstwhile masters:

Kiguuda: One and a half acres of land in dry plains.

Our family land was given to homeguards.

Today I'm just a labourer

On farms owned by Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru.

My trousers are pure tatters. (Ngugi, *I Will* 29)

Later, when Kiguunda's wife realizes that it is their piece of land that interests Kioi who wants to build a pesticide factory there, she says:

Aren't they the real bedbugs,

Local watchmen for foreign robbers?

When they see a poor man's property their mouth waters...

Don't they have any lands

They can share with these foreigners

Whom they have invited back into the country

To desecrate the land? (Ngugi, *I Will* 31)

In fact, the entire play is centred around the concept of land. Kiguuda is cheated out of his land once again, this time in the regime of his own people: these are no aliens, they are the Kenyan stooges of foreign powers. The fears of a regime far worse than the foreign reign materialize in this play in the economic, religious, cultural and political arenas. One need not go into history for a confirmation of this massive take-over. Kenya

has recently been in news for the nationwide violence generated due to the political deadlock over power-sharing between President Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga. The international community, especially former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, former President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Ghana's President John Kufour, mediated in order to contain the violence and to help the Kenyan leadership arrive at some kind of consensus. Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel peace prize winner says:

Some Kenyan politicians claim these efforts represent an unwarranted meddling in the country's affairs. According to them, Kenyans should be left alone to solve their problems. While this may appear to be patriotic, it is just the opposite. These politicians know how dependent Kenya is on the international community... moreover, to be worthy leaders of an independent and sovereign state, Kenya's politicians should have demonstrated the capacity to manage the crisis. (Maathai 'Kenya cannot')

The anxiety of the intelligentsia of Africa in general and Kenya in particular, is not misplaced. In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, too, Ngugi weaves in these fears of a neo-colonial regime where the Kenyan and Asian leadership merely nods in agreement with the global powers. The idea of writing a play about the freedom struggle after a decade of freedom does not only have the intent of paying a tribute to a leader officially unsung. It is done actually to critique the present state of affairs in Kenya when the national leadership failed to live upto the expectations of its own people. The recourse to the oral tradition is part of the wider scheme which seeks to highlight people's sufferings, anger and aspirations in their own medium. It is the other side of history: the subversive history and hence, it has to be oral. By late 1970's Ngugi had even shifted to Gikuyu, his people's language and worked with peasants on his Gikuyu play scripts. Oral tradition is utilized thus, both structurally and functionally in Ngugi's plays and novels. The content and method both are integral to this tradition. That is probably why, Ngugi believes that in a play all the scenes are to be viewed as one and can be frequently merged into one

another. A discerning use of voice-over and division of the 'stage' into several parts where different scenes take place simultaneously, may also reduce the gap between the word and the experience. For instance, when Kimathi is in prison which is one half of the stage space, his dream about the "dances of the people" is enacted in the other half of the stage. Also, right in the beginning of *The Trial*, the mime depicting the "Black Man's History" is performed in phases but the stage directions state clearly that "the phases flow into one another, without break or interruption" while the peasants sing in the background. Division of the play into scenes is an imported concept. Oral narration takes place differently- there can be no division between scenes and acts just as there is no division between the audience, artist and critic. This bonding between the audience, critic and artist was also revived by Ngugi in his Kamiriithu Cultural Centre. *I Will Marry When I Want* was originally written in Gikuyu as *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, with creative assistance from the peasants of Kamiriithu:

Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii collaborated on scripting the play. But when they presented the script to the peasants at Kamiriithu, the latter made several changes to the script. The project became a truly collective effort and all aspects of the theatrical process were in the hands of the community. The play drew large audiences but was banned on November 16, 1977 by the Kenyan African National Union (KANU) government. Ngugi points out that this action was in direct contradiction with the government's official policy of integrating rural development with cultural practice. (Desai 40)

The collaborative nature of the project lent it a threatening character because this form of art was not detached from the audience. It was a fruit of their labour and hence, incited large scale participation which in turn invited state intervention. At this point, it is also relevant and necessary to point out that both the plays under consideration in this research have been written in collaboration. Yet one is focusing on the role of Ngugi as the playwright because he has shown potent signs of consciousness regarding the discursive power of oral literature throughout his writings. As discussed further in this research,

many of Ngugi's novels and non-fictional writings have laid stress on the role played by orature in the formation of the Kenyan national theatre tradition. Another point to be noted is that after the success of *I Will Marry When I Want*, only Ngugi was detained. It was therefore an attack on his ideology and political leanings than an assault on a particular play. In the light of such arguments, it becomes quite clear that in order to study the ideology behind these plays, one needs to explore the ideology of Ngugi. Thus, one has chosen to focus on the role he has played in the developments of these collaborative efforts.

As emphasized earlier and as is evident from the example of Kamiriithu theatre, the oral tradition is a potential tool to address people's issues in Africa as it is the repository of people's history: the way common man looks at history and the way common people deal with the consequences of history. Ngugi's employment of this tool also shows that, though talking of history, this kind of narrative looks forward to future and can bring about effective changes if allowed to flourish. On the whole, the debate about form and language of art generally in case of Africa and particularly in case of Kenya is enmeshed in the larger or rather parallel debate about history, nationalism and representation of a people. And finally all these debates fit in the larger discourse of resistance in the third world against any totalizing narratives about us. This discourse seeks to dismantle and subvert the insistence of the first world on defining itself and its experience as centre, self, master and relegating the third world, the erstwhile colonies to the margins as periphery, other and slave. Progressive writers like Ngugi have constantly tried to lay bare the implicit as well as explicit methods of subjugation that were applied on the Africans to instill in them a permanent sense of inferiority. The job of these progressive writers has been to undo this inferiority through a glorification of the past of Africa and the use of indigenous modes of narration and interpretation in their writings. The greatest project that these writers have undertaken is perhaps that of originality. The most constructive way to define oneself in opposition to the 'other' is to project oneself as different and original. African writers have done that from the very beginning. Amos Tutuola's writings, though in English, carried the fragrance of the African soil and the natural flow of the African languages and imagination. In order to define a national

literature, all the new nations go back to their soil, their people, their art forms and their music. National literature as a category in itself is founded on the principles of resistance and originality. The two plays in consideration in this dissertation score high on both these criteria. Ngugi's writings have come to symbolize in the contemporary literary scenario not only Kenyan consciousness but also the potential of a writer in the present age of globalization and neo-colonialism to resist power structures in ways totally compatible with the dreams and aspirations of one's fellow beings. The use of oral and popular elements in his writings is a method to articulate these dreams and aspirations of the common, poor, and often exploited people of Kenya. It is, thus, an articulation of the need for change and the need for ceaseless struggle towards a just and humane society.

Chapter 2

Locating the Oral Culture in the Written Word: Role Played by Oral Tradition in Ngugi's Plays

In societies, like those in Africa, where writers come from cultures in which orality still predominates, it could be convincingly stated that the substance of the memory that these writers rely on is embedded in the oral tradition. At one level, this approach could provide an opportunity to read the entire history of the respective societies, and at the other level it helps one to participate integrally in that oeuvre of literature which challenges the hegemonic European discourse and the belief propagated by the colonizers that the Africans were rescued from a pre-historic limbo by European 'civilization'. This belief of the colonizers probably arose from the prejudice that only the written word is authentically preservable and, hence, reliable. However, now this belief has come to be commonly considered as biased against the native cultures and oblivious to the richness of their traditions. Nevertheless, this myopic view of the academicians, scholars, and critics to confine the word 'literature' to those forms that could be exclusively associated with the written tradition was not challenged until recently; today in many universities, both in Africa and abroad, African oral literature is studied in the departments of literature, rather than being relegated to "such branches of knowledge as folklore studies or ethnography... merely as source material for social anthropology." (Andrzejewski 18) Such a belief stands contrary to the fact that for Africa nothing is exclusively written as far as literature or art is concerned; most of African literature has oral linkages, though the degree to which such associations occur varies. Thus, the partial or exclusive influence of oral form is to be seen almost in every expression of art in Africa. The attitude of the "outside" world to confine African literature into various forms that deal with oral tradition exclusively and in a different manner from literature per se was a great barrier, often prone to the seismic upheavals of representations. These "outsiders" who were most commonly associated with the study of African culture were also the advocates of as well as the collaborators in the colonial project. That is why they lacked both the interest as well as the expertise to analyze and understand African culture

in totality and in its original form which was so different from the European literary forms. Various colonial officers, missionaries, historians, travellers, anthropologists, ethnographers, etc. interpreted African culture according to their own will, area and interests. Thus, initially African literature could not imbibe in its critics the spirit of understanding it as exclusively literary.

In the post World War II period, the interests of the scholars to gain knowledge about Africa and its culture prevailed conspicuously. One important factor behind this event was the rise of several independent states. Decolonisation of Africa had begun and was picking up pace. The changing scenario of rising interest in Africa and its culture was soon merged with the interest in the literary culture of Africa. This development was seen primarily as “the flowering of literatures written in European languages, in particular English and French, which produced some outstanding writers who deservedly won world-wide recognition.” (Andrzejewski 18) For people outside Africa, therefore, ‘African literature’ was synonymous with all that was written in European languages. This affected adversely the literature written in African languages. It is paradoxical, in this regard, that many literatures in Africa were far from any sort of European influence. This was more conspicuous in the case of oral literature. Although the issue of language in the context of African literature and the language and style adopted in oral literature becomes the rallying point of any debate in this regard, yet it is deliberately deferred to the later section of the present chapter for bringing out certain parallels from the other such traditions that would substantiate the arguments presented.

One may also look into another issue which relates to the oral and the written word not as two antithetical categories but as two discourses that can be mingled with each other to produce a new and unique kind of literature. Increasingly, African authors are borrowing content, narrative techniques and even characterization techniques from orature. In this case, any attempt to “locate” oral culture within the written ‘word’ is bound to take the language itself as its point of departure: both oral and written traditions use language as their medium of expression. The first thing that strikes our imagination at the very moment we encounter the European belief that strongly asserts that Africa was devoid of writing and all that existed here was merely oral is the irony inherent in it that

the continent considered to be devoid of written word is also commonly accepted to be the place of origin of the oldest system of writing in the world: Egyptian-ideographic-hieroglyphic. Although these variants are quite different from the actual writing traditions, yet it could be established to counter the belief which declares Africa to be lacking the attitude of transferring knowledge through permanent methods. Many African societies show this attitude and that too much before the true writing system emerges in the sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in Tanzania “young men recorded the teachings they received during initiation rites on sticks called *kirengo*, and a similar custom has been found among the Akamba of Kenya.” (Pilaszewicz 49) Another oft-quoted assertion that needs scrutiny is that African writers in European languages serve as the connecting link between the oral literature and the written literature. For obvious reasons, many scholars have time and again questioned this belief. While attempting to analyze the orality present in the works of Ngugi wa Thiong’o, it becomes difficult to draw parallels between the writers who claim to conform to this belief. For example, Ngugi’s work is not completely immersed in the traditional African ways of living and thinking as seen in the writings of certain writers who are mainly concerned with their own and sometimes even other tribal societies. In other words, Ngugi’s oeuvre is a shift from the Nigerian Yoruba writer O. Fagunwa’s writings which are inseparable from the traditional ways of Yoruba tribe. This difference is maintained even by those writers who adopt the “narrative conventions of folk-tales” (Pilaszewicz 62) into their writings, e.g. the likes of Amos Tutuola. Nevertheless, Ngugi, like other writers concerned with the oral heritage, introduces myths, proverbs, riddles, songs, folk-tales, etc. in his writings, but with a different intention: on one hand, Ngugi uses the elements of oral tradition to counter the normative stylistics of European written tradition. On the other hand, he also adopts this technique as a tool to narrate the anti-colonial sentiments and hence catalyses the struggle against the oppressive regime. Even in his critical writings, he appreciates the use of oral elements in written literature by other authors. He views this phenomenon as a distinct and powerful strategy of protest. Of *Song of Lawino* by Okot p’Bitek, he says:

The significance of *Song of Lawino* in East Africa's literary consciousness lies not only in its ruthless exposure of the

hollowness and lack of originality of a colonial middle class but also in its form. The author has borrowed from the song in the oral tradition. The African song gets its effect from an accumulation of details, statements and imagery, and in the variation of the tone and attitude of the poet-reciter to the object of praise. Lawino employs all these tactics in her dispraise of Ocol. (Ngugi, *Homecoming* 75)

Ngugi is well aware of the fact that imperialism is the root cause of many problems in Africa. He cautions against the media-propagated misbelief that all the African realities are to be seen in terms of the differences and struggles between the tribes and suggests that these realities be seen in terms of the struggle between imperialism and the contemporary tradition of resistance in Africa. In other words, these realities are affected by the struggle between two distinct groups in Africa: those comprising imperialist tradition (the international bourgeoisie) and those forming the resistance tradition, like the peasants, proletariats, patriots, intellectuals and many other progressive elements. For Ngugi, the biggest tool that imperialism adopts against the collective resistance of the people is “the cultural bomb”, which attempts “to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves... It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves: for instance, with other peoples’ languages rather than their own.” (Ngugi, *Decolonising* 3) Ngugi is also critical of those “henchmen” who define themselves in terms of the languages of Europe and categorize themselves as English-speaking, French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking Africans. Therefore, the language issue, for Ngugi, is the very question of life and death. So is the case with the use of language in the literature of Africa: one betrays the seriousness of the issue of language of literature and never addresses the question that what exactly qualifies as African literature. Ngugi clearly stands in opposition to the likes of Gabriel Okara, who advocate the birth of “Nigerian or West-African English that could express their ideas, thinking and philosophy in their own way.” (Ngugi, *Decolonising* 9) Contrary to this, the language, which is both the medium of communication and the

carrier of culture, becomes the most important vehicle of spiritual subjugation of Africans, which has far greater impact than the physical subjugation through bullets. Even the education system, as Ngugi recalls, collaborated with the colonial apparatuses to alienate the African people from the language of their culture. To put it in the words of Ngugi himself, “the language of my education was no longer the language of my culture.” (Ngugi, *Decolonising* 11) Since this was the conspicuously prominent phenomenon in the case of literature, the alienation of African masses from their own self, their own world was continuously forced simultaneously by the language and the literature propagated by the colonizers. This trend was forging a new culture in Africa. However, it was followed by not a so flimsy resistance as was expected by the colonial masters. This struggle was deeply rooted in the belief that the “language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world... language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.” (Ngugi, *Decolonising* 16) Therefore, the literature written in the European languages was “wearing false robes” for Ngugi. It avoided the real confrontation with the language issue.

As acknowledged earlier, the imperialist powers deliberately avoided to demarcate what actually constituted African literature. Rather, they tried to embalm African literature with the European languages and, hence, with the norms of the western written traditions. This was no more than a false identity imposed on the Africans, e.g. the characters that spoke European languages were in reality far from any knowledge of these languages:

In the process this literature created, falsely and even absurdly, an English-speaking (or French or Portuguese) African peasantry and working class, a clear negation or falsification of the historical process and reality. This European-language-speaking peasantry and working class, existing only in novels and dramas, was at times invested with the vacillating mentality, the evasive self-contemplation, the existential anguished human condition, or

the man-torn-between-two-worlds-facedness of the petty bourgeoisie. (Ngugi, *Decolonising* 22)

However, paradoxically, these classes that were “misrepresented” also became the custodians of preserving African languages. For example, it was peasantry that kept alive the heritage of African languages. Amazingly, they saw their mother-tongues in a relationship of harmony with their African national identities. Hence, it could be convincingly assumed that whatever the foreign languages produced in Africa was not African. At most, it could be regarded as a “hybrid tradition” or, Afro-European literature. It is, indeed, a positive sign for Ngugi to find the vigour of the likes of Obi Wali who declares that the African literature can be comprised of only African languages and to carry forward the anti-imperialist struggle of peasantry and working class, nothing else could provide the desired impetus but their own mother-tongues. However, Ngugi asserts that writing in African languages should be facilitated by anti-imperialist content in African literature. Only then one can expect the cultural renaissance. Only then one can expect African children to live in harmony with their environment. What is important is that any struggle to restore the legacy of addressing the issues of people according to their own culture, particularly in their own language, should be preserved. This ideology was the prime mover behind Ngugi’s own shift from English to Gikuyu in 1977:

In his decision to write and produce *Ngaahika Ndeeda* in Gikuyu, Ngugi had finally begun to address an audience of workers and peasants who had served as central subjects in his novels and plays, but for whom his writing remained inaccessible as long as he continued to produce it in English. The implications of this step had, however, been obscured by Ngugi’s detention at the end of 1977 and the questions that he had left unanswered. ... In “Return to the Roots,” Ngugi set out to redefine African literature in terms of its ideology and language. ... At the end of his speech, Ngugi restated the answer presupposed by his questions: “Only by a return to the roots of our being in the languages and cultures and heroic histories of the Kenyan people can we rise up to the

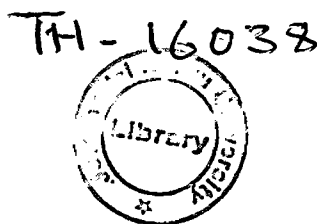
challenge of helping in the creation of a Kenyan patriotic national culture that will be the envy and pride of Kenyans. (Gikandi 131)

As is evident from this, in Ngugi's choice of Gikuyu as the language of his writings was also embedded a nationalistic agenda geared against cultural colonization or neo-colonization of independent Kenya. According to Ngugi therefore, the writer is a reformer, a leader and also a teacher- it is for him to decolonize his own self and also to decolonize the minds of his fellow beings. Another important issue that the writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o deal with is the conflict between different sections of the African society that arises with the advent of modernity. For the expression embalmed with the overtones of such a conflict, the powerful legacy of oral tradition becomes the obvious choice.

African literature raises certain important issues with regard to readership as well. There are two types of literature from this point of view. They are: literature written in African languages and that written by Africans in European languages. It is generally accepted that the former is for African readers, whereas the latter is for the non-African readers or the elite Africans. For Ngugi, who has been the active participant in both of these traditions and who shifted from writing in English to writing in Gikuyu, the native languages seem to be a better medium of expression. Firstly they reach a wider readership because the majority is better equipped to read the local language rather than English. He says, "An African writer should write in a language that will allow him to communicate effectively with peasants and workers in Africa; in other words, he should write in an African language... Literature published in African languages will have to be meaningful to the masses and therefore much closer to the realities of their situation. (Ngugi, "On Writing" 151) Secondly, in oral texts, unlike their written counterparts, there is no finality and therefore the writer/performer has greater freedom for improvisations and innovations in their works. In this regard, the native languages are more appropriate for the expression of the aspirations of the writers and the artists. This may be different in the case of Afro-American writers because of various reasons, but in comparison with the writers like Ngugi the Afro-American writers appear to rely on European languages as the sole medium of expression because they have lost link with their languages and

hence, to great extent with their oral traditions too because during the slavery phase, a systematic cultural cleansing was forced on them. Ngugi on the other hand, has direct links with his oral culture. To change the assertion, one may say that the writers like Ngugi have attempted to textualize their oral tradition, whereas the others attempt to rely more on the written versions of the respective art/tradition.

Apart from the above-mentioned points of view, the differences between the oral and written literatures need a close analysis. Since orality is a universal phenomenon, it becomes difficult to claim for a distinct African oral form. In other words, it is not proper to talk about generalizations in terms of African versus others. However, the generalizations can safely be made in terms of oral literature and its written counterpart. First and foremost is in the manner both are perceived: while oral literature is primarily aural, written literature is visual. Therefore, the former has a limited accessibility in comparison to the latter. This brings in the issue of documentation- the oral literature needs the techniques of recordings through tapes, discs, etc, which unfortunately are rarely seen in the form of published information. Though the situation in this regard is changing, yet majority of times memorized knowledge is the sole source of oral literature. However, this does not conform to the stereotypes associated with oral literature: the views asserting that oral literature lacks grammar, has limited vocabulary, etc. should be discarded since oral utterances as the means of expression are just as adequate as the written words. The stylistic and literary devices are to a great extent common between these two forms: metaphors, symbols, allusions, etc. show presence in both oral as well as written literatures. However, oral literature has a different vocabulary and diction. There are many other differences in this regard, e.g. oral literature uses the vocabulary that is used in day-to-day communication. This is contrary to the European written tradition where "a defamiliarizing poetic device should be used in literatures." (Andrzejewski 21) Also, the codification of knowledge about culture in the form of words is fundamentally different from the African oral form: oral literature in Africa is the basis of living memory where its exemplars preserve their cultural heritage. The tendency of categorizing different forms in genres in the case of written literature fails in the case of oral literature as it could not be fitted in any of the frameworks of written



tradition. For Africa, social role and a “weness” of the community determines (and is identified with) a particular genre. This stands in contrast to the genres created in Europe.” Hence, the success of any literary genre in Africa in the social context depends on its orientation towards the community and its interests. The inclusion of orature in the written forms by progressive writers therefore is meant not only to integrate the new written literature into the traditional thought process of the African people and make it more acceptable, accessible and educational but also to give African literature a distinct flavor and to make a unique place for it in world literature. “The pedagogical value of adapting indigenous theatrical techniques to educate adults has also been recognized by the independent African states. Some countries have used theater to advocate development in rural areas. A discursive practice commonly labeled ‘theater for development’ has emerged in several post-independence African states.” (Desai 71) Some critics also point out that the use of oral elements in written forms has opened up African literature to newer interpretations. For instance, Simon Gikandi opines that “Ngugi’s recourse to Gikuyu oral traditions (especially in *Matigari*) allowed him to accept a hitherto unrecognized affinity between modernist and postmodernist forms and African oral traditions.” (Gikandi 139)

Oral narratives that depend significantly on human memory are not mere depictions of the past, rather oral tradition is still present in all aspects of African life, i.e. the day-to-day existence of African culture is pervaded by orality. Therefore the writers engaged in the pursuits of oral narrations are to be seen in the light of present events, rather than a mere conservatism:

It would be a grave cultural error to equate a writer’s administration for the techniques of oral narrative as the mark of literary regression or as a sign of cultural conservatism. There is a complexity in oral narrative, with its swoops, spirals, digressions, and reiterations; and such eminent scholars as Ruth Finnegan have impressed upon people that oral literature is not a thing of the past but a part of the current vibrancy of cultures throughout Africa. (Woods 53)

Orality resides in different forms of dramatic expressions: the performance depicts human struggle with nature, or with other human beings, or the conflict within itself. Unlike the individual authorship of the written world, drama in Africa, from the very beginning, was not an isolated event. As Ngugi puts it, “it was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community. It was an activity among other activities... and it was also a strict matter of life and death and communal survival. This drama was not performed in special-buildings set aside for the purpose. It could take place anywhere.” (Ngugi ‘The language of African Theatre’ in *Narang* 162) However with advent of British colonialism this tradition was destroyed by repressive impositions, including restrictions on gatherings, banning the ceremonies, etc. In the post independence period however, certain Kenyan writers led by Ngugi himself revived the oral performances by incorporating them in his plays.

Ngugi’s play *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982) raises the issue of language as its prime concern even before it opens; in the dedication itself Ngugi and Mirii express their indebtedness “to all those who have been at the forefront in the development of literature in Gikuyu language, their songs and books.” (Ngugi, *I Will Marry When I Want* “Dedication”) Therefore, as evident from the dedication this play is the writers’ offering “to all patriotic Kenyan writers who deny to forfeit the cause of their own language” (Ngugi, *I Will* “Dedication”) The language issue is more conspicuously given impetus on the title page itself, where it is mentioned that the book is a translation from the Gikuyu by the authors. Thus, it is acknowledged that the play was originally written in Gikuyu (the author’s mother tongue) and later translated into English.

In terms of its structure, the play incorporates two important elements of oral culture so as to depict the richness of the legacy that follows: proverbs and songs. The proverbs are frequently used, and they subtly resolve the complexity that arises by the encounter with the foreign culture. While Gicaamba, the protagonist’s neighbour, a factory worker, talks of his misery and curses the exploitative imperialist set-up, the wisdom of the ‘otherised’ miserable worker is shown through a proverb: “a fool’s walking stick supports the clever.” (Ngugi, *I Will* 37) Here it is indicated that as long as the workers are unable to learn to use their labour for their own good, exploitations would

continue. In another incidence, Gicaamba again wittingly compares the workers to monkeys, who, unaware of the long-term damages, jump at the immediate offerings, irrespective of the irrelevance of the offer or the heavy cost they would paid for it. He reminds what Gikuyu said: “If you want to rob a monkey of a baby it is holding, you must first throw it a handful of peanuts.” (Ngugi, *I Will* 33) Even the hymns are used to raise the issues related to resistance, e.g. in a hymn: “He oppresses the whole nation, let’s crush him”, (Ngugi, *I Will* 6) the people’s voice is heard. This is later contrasted with a Christian hymn, which again is different from the songs of revolution. Thus, the language becomes a tool to instill patriotic sentiments in Africans and, at the same time, attacks the norms of European language and culture.

The cultural heritage of Africa is reflected through the rich and powerful legacy of songs and dance in this play. When interrogated by Wangeci, his wife, if he can still to dance to Mucung’wa, Kiguunda asks for his sword and transcends into the vision of how the dance was performed in the days of his youth. At this point, actual dancers led by Kiguunda and Wangeci appear in the play. Starting with a playful teasing between the performers, the dance is followed by the revolutionary rigour where “the crown of victory should be taken away from traitors and be handed back to patriots like Kimathi’s patriotic heroes.”(Ngugi, *I Will* 12) The dance becomes a powerful medium of dovetailing several issues together: nostalgia for the past glory, the disapproval of colonialism, the praise of heroes of the Mau Mau, etc. The dancers perform the task of a storyteller who weaves the entire narrative into the scene. The dance is the site of culture where a young man describes his prowess to his beloved (while in reality he is a miserable man) and, hence, the entire narrative attains the legitimacy of a lost heritage. The function of writer is fulfilled by narrating something which can’t be fitted in the framework of writing, how-so-ever vivid the description may be. It is the Mucung’wa dance that has the cultural legacy of rigour and strength, which even a reader far distanced from African culture and least acquainted to it, can relate to. This identification is possible only because of the universality of the oral tradition where dance and songs have such values associated to them in all societies. In another instance of dance and song in the play, memory is given shape elaborately. Wangeci and Kiguunda are singing and dancing together. They are, at

the same time, praising each other and at last the revolutionary tone is adopted. The memory further leads to cultural dance Mwomboko where again the past is recalled. However, when the scene ends, the struggle of freedom is recalled by Kiguunda. This is followed by the scene of procession demanding freedom. This again merges with the remembrance of the past through memory:

Take care of me

I care of you

Problems can be settled in jokes...

Oh, the seven years were not even

When we began

To sing new songs with new voices.

Songs and voices demanding

Freedom of Kenya, our motherland.

(Ngugi, *I Will* 25)

The continuous intermingling of scenes, along with dances, songs, processions and memory could not have been attained through the narrative style of written tradition. It was possible only through the oral style of narrating several things together; the linearity of actions is unlimited in such a tradition. What else could have been a better medium of narrating the dilemma of a nation that has encountered many happenings at the same time and the continuous struggle to overcome all of these via restoring back their cultural heritage? Also, these songs and dances are the source of the wisdom passed on from generation to generation. E.g. Gitiuro, a dance song in the form of an opera, has proverbs infused in it. It also presents the misery of people wittingly and demands freedom. The technique of taking recourse to such a medium of praise, complaint, angst,

action, etc. brings the play close to people only because the tradition it follows is close to people. Hence, it produces the desired effect.

On one hand, orality is vividly used to raise the patriotic sentiments and encourage nationalism; on the other hand, it wages a war against the colonial enterprise and imperialism. This is heightened by the frequent examples of dances and songs. The unity of the nation and the community feelings are expressed through a procession of women singers:

Pray in truth

Beseech Him to truth

For he is the same Ngai (God) within us...

Great love I found there

Among women and children

A bean fell to the ground

And it was shared among them

Pray in truth

Beseech Him to truth

For he is the same Ngai (God) within us...

(Ngugi, *I Will Marry* 27)

However, the danger of imperialism is not forgotten:

Let's now go back to cultivate our fields

While seeking ways of getting back

Lands stolen from us by the whites

Yes we join our two hands

To see if we can defeat the enemy

Of this, our land

Our beautiful land of Mt. Kenya.

(Ngugi, *I Will* 66)

Again to uphold unity, a reference to the legendary Gikuyu is made, who says:

Two hands can carry a beehive

One man's ability is not enough

One finger can't kill a louse,

Many hands make work light.

(Ngugi, *I Will*)

It is further analyzed why Gikuyu said all those things. The interpretation anticipates a day (which is sure to come) when a bean fallen to the ground will be split equally among all, i.e. the day of unconditional unity among the people of Kenya. Finally, through a song, the trumpet of "have-nots" is blown, the trumpet,

Of the workers has been blown

To wake all the slaves

To wake all the peasants

To wake all the poor

To wake the masses...

The trumpet –

Of the poor has been blown.

(Ngugi, *I Will* 115)

The songs are also used to highlight a contrast between the western culture and the African culture. With the help of songs, prayers, hymns, etc. the latter shows more of a community feeling, whereas the former is more individualistic and oriented towards acquisition. This contrast is sharpened in a scene where an African marriage ceremony is depicted. The marriage in African society is an event associated with the clans of the bride and groom, with the entire community, unlike the West. The ceremony is a celebration of harmony with all: nature, land, fellow human beings, etc. So is seen in the case of prayers and hymns. Give example- quote from wedding and prayers.

The social problems, too, are raised in the form of narration that appeals to the people. Sometimes it is done in direct didactic tone, and at other times it is so subtle in the form of sarcasm, ridicule, taboo, etc. that it has to be disguised as riddles, proverbs, and many such devices. E.g., Wangeci scolds her husband Kiguunda in a sarcastic tone while raising the social problem of drinking. She asks Kiguunda, “So Chibuku has married you?” (Ngugi, *I will* 108) In an answer to this, the protagonist starts singing, which is his last act of resistance:

I shall marry when I want

While all padres are still alive

And I shall get married when I want

While all nuns are still alive.

(Ngugi, *I Will* 108)

Ngugi's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) follows the norms of oral tradition, which is evident from the preliminary note itself (it is a note before the play begins and gives certain directions for the interpretation of the play), where all the three movements (substitute of the scenes) are to be seen as one. It is also asserted that the various scenes (street, cell, courtroom, etc.) should flow into one, the action on the whole should also not conform to the process of dividing and conforming it into formal and finite time. Another technique that the authors adopt directly from oral culture is to assign different roles to the same character, therefore the one who plays judge in one scene may act convict in the other. This was done primarily to present the "duality and interrelationship of people and events" (Ngugi, *The Trial* 2)

The legend of Kimathi, a charismatic warrior and a patriotic hero, was known all over the country. However the writers went to people, even Kimathi's companions who accompanied him in his rebellious struggle, to gather information about him. Thus, the making of the character of Kimathi, directly or indirectly, relies on memory. For Ngugi, the historical revival of heroes and heroines of Kenyan masses should not be neglected by the writers and a continuous attempt should be made to restore this past glory. It is the duty of the Kenyan writers to tell, through their writings, the grandeur of the heroic resistance of the masses led by the heroes like Kimathi. In order to bring these "historical markers" to light, what else could be more authentic and powerful than the language of the masses, the culture of the masses, the accumulated wisdom of the masses that is passed on from generation to generation, the aspirations, expectations and celebrations of the masses, and the collective struggle of the masses against oppression. And where does one expect to find all these expressions? Where could one find the richness and vividness of all these variations? What else could be the answer other than the rich heritage of oral culture? These are attained through the elements of oral tradition, like myths, legends, mimes, songs, drums, etc. in the present play. These elements, along with restoring the cultural heritage of Kenya, present a powerful medium to counter imperialism and encourage nationalist and patriotic feelings in people.

The Trial of Dedan Kimathi is written and structured in such a way that its progression is not possible without cooperative effort. Even a small scene relies heavily

on this interdependence. Even the actions of the central character Kimathi can not be performed without the cooperation of the most minor of the characters. As Micere Githae Mugo herself says:

Some of the scenes, the movements, would make absolutely no meaning without the presence of people who actually say nothing but occupy the stage, sometimes as mimers, other times as singers and dancers and other times as mere members of the crowds. You know, the sheer people volume of the cast really creates a spirit of collective involvement and participation. (Wilkinson 112)

Therefore, this play adopts the norms of oral culture not only in its text but also in the manner of its making. This “collectiveness” recalls the oral culture where every person involved in the play, both the performers and the audience, is a participant: there is no limitation on the person watching a play to encourage the performers or even to stand up and dancing with them. Such an element makes any performance ‘a real drama’, a drama closer to life. Such a performance can go as far as presenting a mock fight where everyone participates. In this way everyone become a participant. Hence; historical and cultural experiences become communal. This is how drama becomes “a vehicle of communication and ‘conscientization’ in social development, whether through body language, mime or whatever, brought from an orature set-up. And when we speak of orature we do not speak of it in the past tense, for this is the art that people are still consuming in the rural areas, in the villages and in the working-class environment of the cities. Again, the definition of African orature theatre has always defied boundaries that would make it to be contained within a given house or room; it defies the idea of the bourgeoisie being the exclusive audience because they can come and buy expensive tickets that reserve them front seats. Orature theatre is very community-conscious: it depends on that to excel and to continue.” (Wilkinson 116) These explanations from Mugo, the co-author of this play, declare what aspirations it holds and what it aims at. This is explained by the frequent use of orality in it. This communal act is presented explicitly in the play, which qualifies Kimathi to be endowed with such attributes as of considering community above the individual, when Kimenia, one of the Mau Mau

generals, referring to Kimathi says, “His motto has always been talk, talk till agreement is reached.” (Ngugi, *The Trial* 71) Thus a legend carved out of the oral legacy is chiselled into an epitome of the custodian of the same legacy. Even the myths and legends associated with Kimathi uphold this virtue. In the words of a female character in the play, “Kimathi was never alone... will never be alone. No bullet can kill him for as long as women continue to bear children.” (Ngugi, *The Trial* 21) Kimathi is believed not only to have “oneness” with his fellows, but also with other living creatures, like birds, animals etc. “He could also act and mimic any character in the world: a storyteller too, and many were the nights he could calm his men, make their hearts light and gay with humorous anecdotes. But above all, he loved people, and he loved his country.” (Ngugi *The Trial* 62)

The orality in *The Trial* is incorporated through the constant use of proverbs, mimes, music (including drums), songs and dance. The proverbs depict the ancient wisdom and passion of the community, e.g. when Kimathi says, “My heart is full like the Gura River in flood” (Ngugi, *The Trial* 45), the witness of long stood struggle acquires the form of the river. The site of civilization also becomes the carrier of struggle. Similarly, songs and dance carry forward the cultural heritage of the struggling people. One important thing to note is that the songs written here are in original Gikuyu language and not in translation, e.g. ‘Kupigwa na kufungwa jela’ (Ngugi, *The Trial* 6), which is followed by few voices shouting: Uhuruuuuuuu-uu! Here both struggle and freedom are voiced in the native language so as to impart authenticity and credibility to the people involved. This is given support by the use of drums that respond to the machine gunfire. The mingling of these two voices is typical of the oral tradition. In the words of Hans Zell, “One must listen to the tune of the drums. If a singer is out of tune with the drums, he is a poor singer. He is a sweet singer when everybody joins in. The sweet songs last longer, too. They have more meaning and more emotions.” (Zell 431)

Another important element that is drawn from oral tradition into this play and plays a relevant role in narrating the African history is mime. Through mimes, along with the dance and songs of revolution, both the cultural heritage of Africa as well as its history is painted elaborately. E.g. in the “Second Movement” of the play, when Kimathi

is whipped in the prison, the semi-dark ambience is merged with the noise of the clamour and the miming of the black history. There is a similarity between the actions of the torture and the miming of history. By incorporating such scenes with oral elements, which provide structural strength of orality to the play, and enhancing it with the use of other oral techniques, like the use of drums etc., along with the songs and dance, the writers narrate the entire nation itself. It is the narration of the very identity of the Kenyan people. Even the conclusion of the play is marked by people's song and dance, which again is in Gikuyu. This is an open conclusion as far as language and cultural legacy is concerned. There is no finality to this conclusion since there is no finality in the tradition that it is based on: like the oral tradition, the play sustains the continuity of the struggle until the real freedom is attained. The trial of the white masters' court may claim to have attained the conclusion, but Kimathi's court is still open to all the voices, it is open till the agreement is reached among all the people of the community.

The Trial prominently brings out the anti-imperialist sentiments of the people of Kenya right from the beginning of the play. In the preface itself it is said, "America's immense wealth was gained through the impoverishment and misery of millions." (Ngugi, *The Trial*, i) This impoverishment is the cause of people's misery and, hence, is also responsible for their struggle. E.g. the inspiration for the Mau Mau struggle comes from the Vietnamese peoples' struggle against America. This is evident in teachings of the woman character in the play who asserts that in our land, where the whole share belongs to us, the leftovers are thrown to us. She reminds the boy of Kimathi's teachings: "unite, drive out the enemy and control your own riches and enjoy the fruit of your sweat". (Ngugi, *The Trial* 18) This is further asserted by Kimathi when he says,

I recognize only one law, one court:

The court and law of those who

Fight against exploitation,

The toilers armed to say

We demand our freedom...

Fight

Struggle

Change. (Ngugi, *The Trial* 27)

Kimathi further warns against the entire imperialist endeavour:

Creating a new colony

Where we shall be mere pawns.

We must denounce them!

We must fight them out and root out the

Trend

In our midst. (Ngugi, *The Trial* 70)

The oppressive colonial project is laid bare in terms of the religious impositions attempted by the whites. For Kimathi, there is no difference between padre and settler. Addressing an African priest, he asks, “when will you throw off your ill-fitting gown and create something you can truly call your own?” (Ngugi, *The Trial* 49) This is the reason that once baptized as Dedan, he now calls himself as “Kimathi wa Wachiuri... of Iregi generation”. When asked by the priest to speak to Jesus, he says that he has spoken to the God of his ancestors in his dreams and “on the mountain and not once did he counsel me to barter for my soul” (Ngugi *The Trial* 49) There are various occasions in the play where Kimathi has dreams and visions, which are the combination of the past and present respectively. This element of visitations and dreams is deeply rooted in the oral culture where these are the powerful link between the present generation and the ancestors. It is an old African belief that as long as ancestors are remembered and are seen in dreams

they are kept alive. Hence for Kimathi, the future has to draw its essential living force from the past legacy. And for this dreams become the connecting link.

Ngugi's plays serve as sites for articulation of people's voices, struggles and aspirations. The incorporation of the oral tradition in these plays hence serves not only functional purposes but structural ones too. These plays are capable of reaching out to their audience more effectively and integrally. As the choice of language and the mode of communication are loaded with political implications in case of Ngugi, these plays become live examples of resistance and protest through literature. They are valuable sites of counter-discursivity where the entire discourse of colonialism is challenged through different means. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the incorporation of the oral elements in these plays and in other writings of Ngugi serves multiple purposes at the structural, formal, and even practical levels. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want* even transcend the limits of realism because of this incorporation. The most important contribution made by such incorporation, however, is that it propels the play to the level of pedagogy where the audience is trained to think and react against the hegemonic structures surrounding them. This motive brings them closer to the category of the popular or the people's theatre- a theatre geared towards the welfare of the people through their co-operation.

Chapter 3

Orature as a Political Tool: Kenyan Nationalism as it Emerges in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

The post-colonial desire is the desire of decolonized communities for an identity...Obviously it is closely connected to nationalism, for those communities are often, though not always, nations. In both literature and politics, the post-colonial drive towards identity centres around language, partly because in postmodernity identity is barely available elsewhere. For the post-colonial to speak or write in the imperial tongues is to call forth a problem of identity, to be thrown into mimicry, and ambivalence. The question of language for post-colonialism is political, cultural and literary. (During in Ashcroft 125)

The nexus between language, identity and nationalism in the present post-colonial context as enumerated above is the crux of Ngugi's philosophy and politics. The concept of nationalism for Ngugi is inevitably and inextricably enmeshed in the question of language which is in itself a marker of the larger question of culture. His deliberate choice of Gikuyu over English reveals the interface between nation and culture. His insistence on the role of the writer as a leader of the masses- poor peasants and workers- uses as its fulcrum the idea of culture and language: "For the Kenyan artist, the most minimal step towards his own freedom is a total immersion in the struggles of the Kenyan workers and peasants. Imperialist foreign domination of a people's economy and culture is completely incompatible with the freedom of the artist in the third world". (Ngugi, *Barrel* 68) The medium of this struggle is of course Gikuyu. In an essay entitled "Freedom of the Artist," included in *Barrel of a Pen* (1983), Ngugi asked, "Will the artist choose the angle of vision of the possessing classes? Or will he choose the angle of vision of the dispossessed and therefore struggling classes? Each artist has to make a choice. For

this is the area of spiritual freedom. Or call it the area of self-liberation!" The most important point to be noted here is that these questions are being asked in the context of an independent and post-colonial Kenya. The struggle of the writer is no more against the colonial regime. Rather it is a fight against the neo-colonial administration that has failed to bring about an emancipation of the native culture and languages. The modern Kenyan leaders have abandoned the cause and hence, it is up to the writers to take it up. Writers like Ngugi identify the cause of the 'national' languages, literatures, history and culture with that of the peasants and working classes. They are the repositories of the native culture and they are as marginalized as their cultures. In fact, Ngugi visualizes Kenya as divided unavoidably into two parts- the haves and the have-nots even after uhuru. The situation lends itself to a classic Marxist reading- the culture of the bourgeoisie dominates the culture of Kenya. One may even go a step further and state that the idea of a 'national culture' propagated by the bourgeoisie seeks to dominate the proletarian definition of national culture not only in Kenya but in several other African nations too. Fanon defined national culture thus: "a national culture is the whole body of efforts made by the people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (Fanon in Ashcroft 151) However in Kenya, the official national culture sought to bury several facts of history and to obliterate the Mau Mau struggle. In an attempt to counter and nullify the misrepresentations of Kenyan culture, patriotic Kenyan intellectuals have insisted upon seeing the Kenyan nationalism from the perspectives of the masses; the true portrayal of national struggle in Kenya is possible only through the depiction of the struggles waged by the peasants and workers. "Ngugi, therefore, chose as the subject of his writings that single event in the history of Kenya which has affected them the most, namely, the most crucial phase of their struggle for freedom-the so called Mau Mau." (Narang *Ngugi* 141) It is to be concluded, therefore that to know the contemporary Kenyan society, one needs to seek the "correct" version of Kenyan past. Thus, the historical reconstruction, which has been pursued by the Kenyan artists enthusiastically, involves the "correct" depiction of "heroic figures who have suffered denigration and vilification in the hands of colonialist and imperialist historians and writers." (Amuta 157) In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, the specific point of focus is the heroic stature of Dedan Kimathi, the freedom

fighter and the leader of the Mau Mau struggle. Later in the play this stature of Kimathi is enlarged and it is merged with the broader canvas of peasants' and workers' struggle. In a similar fashion, *I Will Marry When I Want*, too, draws its theme from the struggle of the masses. Ngugi states that:

The play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* in part drew very heavily on the history of the struggle for land and freedom; particularly the year 1952, when the Kimathi led armed struggle started and the British colonial regimes suspended all civil liberties by imposing a state emergency; and 1963, when Kenya African National Union (KANU) under Kenyatta successfully negotiated for the right to fly a national flag, and to sing a national anthem and to call people to vote for a national assembly within five years. The play showed how that independence, for which thousands of Kenyans died, had been hijacked. In other words, it showed the transition of Kenya from a colony with the British interests being dominant, to a neo-colony with the doors open to wider imperialist interests from Japan to America." (Narang, *Ngugi* 170)

The constant struggle of the artists of the masses rely heavily on the traditional art forms as the latter shows a concern with the fundamental process of integration and survival, which is an impetus for the creative endeavours of many African artists. This helps the contemporary writers in Africa to attain the skills of a traditional artist who is both a technician and a visionary; it enables the artist to use the resources from the past heritage and at the same time, it helps him to prepare a path for the future success of their struggle against oppression, injustice, and human humiliation. In the words of Micere Githae Mugo, the co-author of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, this is what one expects of a progressive artist:

I think that this is what progressive theatre traditions are trying to do today- to be part of the class struggle by rooting themselves within the communities of those struggling for economic and

political freedom. Just as some of the orature drama has focused on our rites of passage- the milestones in life are dramatized as part of our social functions- so revolutionary theatre will focus on the milestones of our history of struggle for justice and human development.” (Wilkinson 116)

Fanon has described the birth of national literature at the moment when the native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people: “it is only from that moment that we can speak of a national literature. Here there is, at the level of literary creation, the taking up and clarification of themes which are typically nationalist. 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 moulds the national consciousness”. (Fanon in Ashcroft 155) One of the chief concerns of Ngugi in his writings is to develop this national consciousness- a vision of united and conscientious Kenya. Ngugi attains this in his plays through a successful blend of orature, epic Theatre and popular Theatre. As it would be discussed elaborately in the next chapter, Kenyan theatre crystallized into a people’s movement in the form of the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre under the leadership of Ngugi. Also, the genesis of two plays *I Will Marry When I Want* and *Mother Sing for Me* (1981) at this centre was an enterprise in orature and people’s theatre. The plays drew a lot from the popular culture and from the oral traditions of the local workers and peasants. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* had already set the stage for the synthesis of the popular and the traditional with its extensive use of culture-specific instruments, songs, dances, metaphors, idioms, and even humour. Oyeniye Okunoye notes in a research paper on this play that “as a legendary figure, Kimathi is imbued with such feats as the ability to disappear at will and communicate with God. His portrait in the play underscores the fact that heroes in African oral traditions, especially the traditional epics, serve as the rallying point for national narratives... The Mau Mau songs authenticate *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as a popular play, conforming its affinity to an identifiable cultural environment and initiating a dialogue with the oppressed in the bid to mobilize them for a definite revolutionary action.” (Okunoye 236) Hence, culture is forged anew in struggle: the old

songs and myths, the erstwhile values, customs, relationships and identities are reshaped and given a new meaning and a new role as a vehicle of nationalism. Ngugi drew the inspiration for such reshaping from the Mau Mau rebels who “gave things meanings and values in harmony with the aspirations of their struggle. Christians had often sung about heaven and angels, and a spiritual journey in a spiritual intangible universe where metaphysical disembodied evil and good were locked in perpetual spiritual warfare . . . The Mau Mau revolutionaries took up the same song and tune and turned it into a song of actual political, visible material freedom and struggle for land. The battle was no longer in heaven but here on earth, in Kenya.” (Ngugi, *Writers* 27). The play gestures to 400 years of Kenyan history, linking pre-colonial, colonial, and neo-colonial authorities and that of collaborators. Kimathi's trial barely proceeds beyond a re-reading of the charge and the accused's repeated refusal to acknowledge the court's authority to charge, imprison, try, and sentence. In the play all colonial subjects are alienated from an identity as national citizens; instead, they are subjects of the imperial power by proxy. The white judge is the true citizen, “a Kenyan. By might and right”. Implicitly questioning the validity of colonial citizenship, Kimathi turns the tables in the courtroom, judging the court according to “the eternal law of the oppressed”. In addition, he rejects any legal compromise with his colonial captors that would change his status, relating it to the international agreements that led to dispossession: “Deals! Pacts! Treaties! How many nations have you wiped out, and later said: well, according to this treaty and that treaty, they had ceded their land and their lives”. *The Trial* is significant in the sense that it reaffirms that it is people through conscious will and action who are the true subject of history. Kimathi's heroic stature establishes this fact and it further transforms into a metaphor for revolutionary action. In the preface itself, the playwrights identified this:

Kimathi was still a hero of the Kenyan masses... Karunaini people were proud of their son; they talked of him as a dedicated teacher, the committed organizer of a theatre group he named Gichamu, as a man with tremendous sense of humour who could keep a whole house roaring with laughter. They talked of his warm personality and his love of people. He was clearly their beloved son, their

respected teacher and they talked of him as still being alive.
 ‘Kimathi will never die’, the woman said. (Ngugi *The Trial* iii)

It is further mentioned in the preface that “the play is not a reproduction of the farcical ‘trial’ at Nyeri. It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression.” (Ngugi *The Trial* “preface” iv) Therefore, according to the authors, the real challenge was the true depiction of the masses symbolized Kimathi “in the only historically correct perspective: positively, heroically and as the true makers of history.” (Ngugi *The Trial* v)

The play reinforces a Kenyan identity counter to the vision of the authorities. The opposition is expressed against the authority no matter what complexion it wears. Though set in 1956, the play implicitly attacked the contemporary regime of ‘free’ Kenya. Needless to say, the playwrights also resurrected in this play the history of Kimathi and Mau Mau along with the oral culture of Kenya and presented it as a national allegory.

In order to be able to discuss fruitfully the oral and popular elements, coupled with the nationalist agenda inherent in Ngugi’s plays, a detailed textual analysis of *I Will Marry When I Want* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is essential. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as mentioned earlier was published in 1976. The point to be noted here is that Ngugi returned to the story of a freedom fighter eight years after Kenya gained independence. The best way perhaps to look for the answer to this puzzle is to look critically at the text and try to locate those aspects of the play which made Kimathi’s story relevant even in the post-uhuru days of late seventies.

As mentioned above, the play is preceded by a preface written jointly by the playwrights discussing the genesis of the play. The first thing that strikes the reader about the preface is its anti-America rebuke. The first paragraph states the ills of American capitalist conquests that have produced ghettos for the blacks and Puerto Ricans at home and devastated war fields in Vietnam and South Korea and indirectly controlled exploitative business houses in South Africa and Palestine. The detailed discussions on the problems of Vietnam led the playwrights back to their own national history- i.e. the

Mau Mau struggle. They felt that the space given to it in literature and history of their country was not enough. “There was no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic resistance of Kenyan people fighting foreign forces of exploitation and domination.” (Ngugi, *The Trial* ii) hence, they decided to write a play each on Kimathi, Koitalel and Me Kitilili. The research included visits to important places related to Kimathi like Karunaini where he was born. The focus of the play, as evident in the preface is not on the historical aspects of Kimathi’s struggle but on the ideology of the Mau Mau struggle as such. The objective of the play is therefore, to unmask the exploitative regime of Kenya, acting as a mere puppet in the hands of neo-imperialist powers. The best way the playwrights could conceive of to do this, was through the employment of the history of protest in Kenya.

Following the preface are ‘Preliminary notes’ and the ‘Opening’. The preliminary notes are almost like directions to the director of the play. It sets some important guidelines for the director and also actors about the general hue and tone of the play. It is mentioned here that the play consists of three ‘movements’ (not scenes) viewed actually as a single movement i.e., the audience must not be able to notice the division in terms of the structure. “The action should on the whole be seen as breaking the barrier between formal and infinite time”. Past, Present and Future hence flow into each other disregarding all restrictions. Also, the different locales of different ‘scenes’ must flow into each other. This technique of undoing the rigidities of time and space and viewing them as fluid categories has been undoubtedly borrowed from oral literature where such categories are considered trivial in comparison with the theme of the play. This also helps cast in assisting the audience to avoid simplistic interpretation of relations of power and to be able to locate the “complexity, duality and interrelationship of people and events.” (Ngugi, *The Trial* viii) The play also employs Brechtian dramatic techniques (which are also parts of oral, indigenous theatrical traditions) like impersonation and merging of characters to affect an alienation of the audience from the actors and concentration instead on the theme of the play. These techniques also highlight the web-like structure of oppression that surrounds the audience in their real life. E.g., when the same actor plays Shaw Henderson and the Judge-Prosecutor, the point that is being driven home is that

both the characters are two facets of the same coin- they are both exploiters though they seemingly belong to two very different walks of life.

After these prefatory items, the play opens in a courtroom. The opening is a very short monologue by the white judge who states Kimathi's offence and asks him to plead guilty in his own defense. Kimathi's silence spells out the acrimony between the two parties. His silent refusal is a way of protest not only against the colonial judicial system but also against the charade fair trial and truth and justice played by the administration. The opening scene ends with silence and then, sudden darkness. The stage is thus set for the First Movement. This scene is a very important part of the oral ethos of the play. This depicts the history of common man in Africa- the history of the down-trodden and oppressed Africans, victimized since four centuries by capitalist and colonialist (and now, neo-colonialist) enterprises. In the darkness, "distant drums grow louder and louder until they culminate in a frantic, frenzied and intense climax, filling the entire stage and auditorium with their rhythm." Slowly, the intensity of the drums is eased to accommodate human voices. The first articulation by Kenyans in the play occurs here- in the form of a peasants' song that combines aggression and determination. It is obviously a Gikuyu song for Uhuru and it is cut short by a gunshot, followed by silence. The pregnant silence is broken by screams of humans and sounds of whiplashes on human skin. After a spell of abrupt silence again, *Black Man's History* is depicted onstage in a vague twilight. The mime is divided into four distinct phases- the first phase depicts the inhumanity of slave-trade where a group of women is thrown into slavery for a mere piece of posh looking cloth. The second phase shows the mass exodus of slaves in boats, under heavy whipping, to distant shores. The third phase depicts black labourers toiling on plantations, supervised by black overseers. The white master merely inspects the goings-on. The last phase shows angry black protestors, chanting anti-imperialist slogans. This sequence is obviously designed to present the complicated oppressor-oppressed relations. The first phase emphasizes that to begin with, misery was brought upon the Africans by the greed of their own brethren. The second phase highlights the inhumane behavior and exile that resulted out of this greed. The third phase portrays the collaborators among the blacks who did not mind whipping their own people at the order of the white masters. The final phase depicts the reality of 1956, i.e. in the temporal

setting of the play, when the voice of dissent and protest had already become prominent. It is also important to note the racist strain in the entire mime. Race as the prime reason and the most striking feature of brutal violence is highlighted here. The final phase is brought to an end by a song and a staccato burst of machine gunfire. But this time, the gunshots do not yield dead silence. Rather they lead to a loud and protesting response- “the drums respond with a deafening, rhythmic intensity” (Ngugi, *The Trial* 6) and a loud clamour for Uhuru.

The following scene opens at the dawn with noise of whiplashes, slapping and voices of protest in the background. The police force, led by the white officer Waitina is screening villagers on the road. They go to the extent of arresting the whole village on the basis of mere suspicion. The villagers are beaten and kicked for not carrying ‘passports’ i.e. identity cards issued by the Government to be carried by all natives at all the times. Since the scene is about people being ordered around, a major chunk of dialogue takes place in Gikuyu. One of the major characters, the Woman is introduced in this scene. The Woman is a very strong character- she symbolizes the creative force of Kenya. She is carrying a gun to the Nyeri district court to help Kimathi escape. Her encounter with the police is an episode that reveals her courage, wit and ingenuity. She is successful in duping the police officers. The next people to enter the action onstage are the Boy and the Girl. These two characters symbolize the underbelly of the Kenyan society. They are worse than beggars. With no one to guide them, they lead a life of utmost poverty, ignorance and meanness. They eat food from garbage bins and lead an animal-like life. Their stories force the woman to ponder over the condition of the big cities in Kenya:

It is the same old story. Everywhere. Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, Eldoret. The same old story. Our people...tearing one another and all because of the crumbs thrown at them by the exploiting foreigners. Our own food eaten and leftovers thrown to us- in our own land, where we should have the whole share. We buy wood from our own forest: sweat on our own soil for the profit of our oppressors. Kimathi’s teaching is: unite, drive out the enemy and

control your own riches, enjoy the fruit of your sweat. It is for this that the enemy has captured him. (Ngugi, *The Trial* 18)

The Boy's story works symbolically. It is the story of all the poor, landless Kenyans. His father was driven away from Mbari land by one of his relatives who worked as a court interpreter. Later the cheat became a big government chief and a landowner. This story echoes of thousands of such cases of land-grabbing that left the agriculture based subsistence rural economies devastated. The Boy's father was driven by poverty towards a timber factory where, in an accident, his hand was cut off by the machine and he bled to death. This story epitomizes the reluctant and often disastrous movement of villagers to towns in search of livelihood. Their lives become struggles for merely making the two ends meet and their lives are spent dreaming of autonomy but never reaching it. The only ones to flourish in this system are the collaborators- the ones who join the exploiters against their own people. The Boy also despises the Indians who were mostly sycophants during the British rule. The Woman however shows him the correct path. She makes him understand that the real enemy who makes enemy out of brothers is the white colonizer. She provokes in him the man who wants to help his country, help Kimathi and not merely exist fighting over crumbs of food. She instills confidence in him by placing trust in him and perhaps for the time in his life, making him feel human.

The Second Movement begins with the appearance of the Woman disguised as a fruit-seller on the street outside the court. This short sequence reveals the interest people have in Kimathi's trial. A lot of people, black and white come to listen to the proceedings. Whites come dressed up as if for a show while blacks offer a stark contrast- they are shoved on one side of the courtroom in their torn clothes and tattered shoes. The playwrights have added a small incident in the courtroom scene to mark the racial tension that arose in Kenya during the first half of the twentieth century with the opening of limited access to education for blacks. When the Clerk, who is black, orders the audience to maintain silence as per his duty, a white settler jumps up from his seat and grabs his collar. He obviously does not want to be ordered by a black man though the order was not meant for anyone in particular. It was a general announcement. The settler goes back to

his seat only after extracting an apology from him. The black crowd hisses and some make as if to move forward in solidarity with the clerk. “The aggressive settler and whites with guns put up some resistance mumbling and complaining about the cheek of the ‘educated black chaps’”. (Ngugi, *The Trial* 24) Another stark difference between the settler crowd and the African crowd is that though the Africans are denied even to carry sticks in the courtroom; several whites are carrying guns and revolvers. It is ironical that Kimathi is being tried for carrying an unlicensed gun- it is just an excuse to execute him.

Kimathi’s first utterance in the play is that of fearless defiance. He ridicules the legitimacy of colonial law, courts and judges. He draws the court’s attention to the fact that two laws operate in Kenya: one for the white man and one for the black man. One protects the whites, the other condemns the blacks. His defiant speeches have been given a chant-like rhythm because owing to their musical quality, they can be easily memorized, and can stay readily in the audience’s minds even after they leave the theatre. For instance:

Us.

Those who make factories roar

Those who wait and groan for a better day tomorrow

The maimed

Their backs bent

Sweat dripping down their shoulders

Beaten

Starved

Despised

Spat on

Whipped

But refusing to be broken

Waiting for a new dawn

Dawn on Mount Kenya. (Ngugi, *The Trial* 26)

His speeches are designed so as to stir the masses:

There is no law and order without liberty

Chain my legs,

Chain my hands,

Chain my soul,

And you cry, law and justice?

And the law of the people bids me:

Unchain my hands

Unchain my legs

Unchain my soul!

Some blacks clap. Whites hiss. Guards stand on alert. (Ngugi, *The Trial* 27)

It is notable that the reference to freedom, liberty and equality in Kimathi's speeches is not limited to the context of independence from the British regime. They are of a very general nature and fit easily in the neo-colonial context. Hence, through the words of Kimathi, the playwrights try to break the constraints of temporality, despite functioning apparently within its limits- the play moves out of the incident of 1956 and becomes relevant even for the contemporary scenario.

Irony is employed in abundance in this play to bring out the misery of the African people. The Settler Gets up and spews his anger at Kimathi. He narrates his story- that he came as a mere soldier to Kenya. He set up his own farm through great diligence. He

married and had children and just when he thought that he was happily 'settled', the Mau Mau struck and poisoned the 'simple' minds of his 'boys' (i.e. black servants) and "led astray their God-fearing souls with their black mumbo jumbo." (Ngugi, *The Trial* 29) The audience is reminded of the story of their deprivation in their own land. It is not stated but it replays in the minds as the Settler narrates his own story. The Settler feels deprived of the land that never belonged to him in the first place. While he stands in the court room accusing the 'savages' of all sorts of crimes, the Africans accuse him silently.

The farcical trial in the courtroom is followed by 'trial' in the cell. Kimathi is enticed by four persons to give up his struggle. The first one to approach him is Shaw Henderson himself. When he enters Kimathi's cell, he is dreaming about his mother who became insane on losing both of her sons. Henderson wants to humble the people's struggle and thus makes an offer to Kimathi- if he pleads guilty, his life will be spared. He says, "I call it a deal, not magnanimity. We want this war to end. Stanley Mathenge is still at large. Your confession and your co-operation would bring them all out." (Ngugi, *The Trial* 33) However, Kimathi is clever enough to understand Henderson's real motive. He knows that he is craving for another George Medal and that he can go to any extent for it. Through the exchange between Kimathi and Henderson, we also come to know that they had been playmates in childhood and even then Kimathi had refused to play the horse for Henderson. Kimathi compares himself to a character in a folk tale- Balaam's ass, the one who rejected his rider. Kimathi proclaims that "When the hunted has truly learnt to hunt his hunter, then the hunting game will be no more." (Ngugi, *The Trial* 34) Kimathi's fierce patriotism leaves Henderson, who proclaims himself as a Kenyan by right and might, burning in anger and he swears that he would destroy Kimathi. With this the first 'trial' comes to an end.

In the intervening period between the first and the second trial, Kimathi recalls the art forms of pre-colonial Africa:

It is true that I've always wanted

To dance the dance of my people...

They used to dance these

Before the white colonialist came
 In the arene.. at initiation.
 During funerals.. during marriage..
 Then the colonialist came
 And the people danced
 a different dance. (Ngugi, *The Trial* 36)

Kimathi's words are accompanied by a mime in which artists perform a sequence of dances. But at the end, with the mention of the colonialist, a colonial governor enters the stage and immediately the dance becomes one of fear and humiliation. This sequence draws the audience's attention towards the cultural subjugation of Kenyans during the colonial period. It was a systematic annihilation of people's pride in their culture, traditions and customs. Kimathi goes on to recall his own efforts in the direction of re-installing that pride in his fellow Kenyans through his Gichambu youth cultural group:

Gichambu we called ourselves
 And we devised new dances
 Talking of the struggle before us
 Readyng ourselves for the war.

Mime: *The dancers return, singing a song of struggle and performing a militant dance.* (Ngugi, *The Trial* 37)

This passage is important because it contributes to the popular ethos expressed in this play. Kimathi's struggle was not only physical or material. It was a fight against the colonial regime even at the spiritual level. The spirit of Kenya, broken by ceaseless physical and cultural violence, needed healing and nurturing. The Mau Mau leadership became a popular phenomenon because their war tactics were people friendly and committed to the promotion of their cultural, social and economic interests. The

playwrights have inserted such sequences in the play that highlight the reasons behind the popular mass base of Mau Mau struggle. In other words, the play is not just a tribute to the struggle. It is also a piece of rethinking on the struggle.

In the next trial, Kimathi faces a Bankers' delegation. This delegation consists of a White man as the leader, an Indian repeats what the white man says and an African who does not speak but merely nods at whatever is said by the white man. The purpose of their visit is to persuade Kimathi to plead guilty and help them in bringing about stability in the country by ending the struggle. Their plan is to set up a government in partnership. This is obviously going to be a government where the Indian and African collaborators will just be partners in promoting the interests of the British. They offer money to Kimathi in exchange for stability. When he expresses concern over his people- the poor, hungry and homeless masses of Kenya, they suggest that "toilers there will always be", hence revealing their evil designs.

The Girl appears in the next scene. She picks up a fight with Boy again but during the fight, they accidentally break the loaf of bread given to the Boy to be delivered to the fruit-seller in Nyeri. A gun was concealed in this loaf. The gun in the bread is a metaphorical representation of the Mau Mau struggle here. The message is clear- bread is the symbol of life, sustenance and a wholesome existence. The gun is a symbol of resistance and struggle. Hence, the bread and the gun symbolize the purpose and objectives of the Mau Mau struggle. These fighters were ultimately fighting against the misappropriation of their resources by colonial powers and also in favour of complete freedom, which they thought would enable them to set up a sustainable economy in which food and opportunity to rise in life would be available to all. In the larger post-colonial or neo-colonial context, the metaphor also conveys the message that when basic needs of common people are compromised, they are forced to violence as a means of protest. Ngugi and Mugo seem to be prophesying another violent and mass-based struggle in 'independent' Kenya which might take place in case the government does not redress its economic policies.

In the following scene, an African Business Executive dressed like an Englishman, a Politician and a Priest come to woo Kimathi to plead guilty. The Executive

at one time used to finance the struggle and his shop was once an oath-taking centre. But later he was tempted away from the Mau Mau by the British. The Politician informs Kimathi that the government has abolished racism and colour bar and placed the alternative in front of the Africans to get independence province by province. This is seen as complete freedom by the Politician who is happy that the first province chosen for independence is the Central Province because his tribe belongs to that area. He feels that the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru tribes deserve freedom first because they fought more fiercely for freedom. His ideas are deeply affected by tribal favouritism and Kimathi curses him as a "neo-slave". Ngugi and Mugo thus comment very subtly on the contemporary political scenario which was dominated by tribal politics. The conditions continue to remain so even today. The trial is not yet over because the Priest speaks up now. He tries to tempt Kimathi back into the folds of Church by insisting that they are "Africanising the Church. We want to see Christ reflected in our culture. Drums in Church. African Bishops. African Moderators. African Cardinals." (Ngugi, *The Trial* 49) He even reminds Kimathi that he was once baptized as Dedan. Kimathi however summarily rejects that identity and states forcefully that he is no longer Dedan. He is Kimathi wa Wachiuri. He expresses his suspicion of those "who would preach cold peace in the face of violence." He says that he has spoken with "the God of his ancestors in dreams and on the mountain and not once did he counsel him to barter for his soul." (Ngugi, *The Trial* 49)

The final trial is devoid of any subtlety and civility. Here we get to see direct coercion- Kimathi is tortured in prison by Waitina on Henderson's orders. His is their final attempt to break his spirit by breaking his body. "As Waitina lifts the whip lights go off and the audience only hears noise from the torture chamber. Gradually, semi-darkness. In semi-darkness we watch the miming of black history (earlier enacted) going on, against the torturing behind the scene. There should be as much harmony as possible between the action on the visible stage and the goings on in the torture room." (Ngugi, *The Trial* 56) These stage directions convey clearly the message of the playwrights. The black history and the torture of Kimathi must seem to be a continuum. The audience must understand that the history of oppression is not all that 'historical' and it continues till date in both direct and indirect ways. Kimathi refuses to sign the paper declaring his surrender. The torture continues and with this the second movement comes to an end.

The Third movement has three significant and distinct parts. In the first part, we are acquainted with the Woman's leadership quality and also her determination to rescue Kimathi. The Boy and the Girl have become by now her trusted confidantes. They resolve jointly to help Kimathi, even if they are killed in the process. This part also enumerates various myths and legends that had become popular about Kimathi by now. The Third movement on the whole is a testimony of the fact that Kimathi had by then entered the popular imagination and people were already knitting stories, songs and riddles around the subject of his patriotism, trickery and bravery. It is not surprising that the second part of the movement, which takes place in a guerilla camp in the Nyandarua Forest, begins with the song of Kimathi. This scene presents Kimathi as a human being vulnerable to emotional turmoil. This part shows the trials Kimathi used to hold in the forests. In the first trial, he orders execution of the two European and African soldiers. He weakens at certain points- he asks the two European soldiers whether they come from a poor background and if people in their countries fight for the rights of the working people. But finally, he orders their execution. In the second trial, however, his strength fails him when he sees his own brother as one of the accused and when he reads his sister's letter about his mother's madness and her paranoia about the safety of her youngest son. This time his swift judgment fails him and he adjourns the meeting for a while. The Woman advises him to be just and to mete out equal justice to all the accused. Yet Kimathi spares his brother Wambararia who succeeds in escaping the camp. Kimathi orders his soldiers to catch him and shoot him at sight. But it is too late. Wambararia betrays Kimathi and informs the police about his whereabouts. It is notable that this scene comes at the heels of the legends which seek to immortalize Kimathi and which describe him in supernatural terms. Ngugi and Mugo portray Kimathi's shortcomings and failings immediately after such glorifications to drive home the point that Kimathi was as human as any of us and that to idolize someone is like distancing oneself from her/his qualities. Any human being can do what Kimathi did. It is not wise to raise him to the stature of gods and make his accomplishments and good qualities seem god-like and hence, unattainable by any human being. The playwrights stress on his humanness so as to inspire people to aspire to his stature.

Kimathi's speeches in this part enumerate his vision for Kenya- a vision that was still unfulfilled when the play was written. This vision was that of complete and uninterrupted autonomy of the people of Kenya and an all-inclusive, all-round development. Ngugi has woven in this vision a significant role for women too. Kimathi says:

When this struggle is over
 We shall erect at all the city corners
 Monuments
 To our women
 Their courage and dedication
 To our struggle
 Come forward, mother of people
 Teach us a lesson on
 Diligence and commitment (Ngugi, *The Trial* 73)

The history of Kimathi's struggle- the death of his father in the first world war, the death of his elder brother as he fought for the cause, the formation of his four armies, and the growth of the movement is laid down in the speeches that are parts of the two trials.

The forest trials are followed by the courtroom trial of Kimathi. This is the last scene of the play and perhaps the most significant one too. The farcical trial comes to an end with prosecution of Kimathi. The Woman is also arrested but she breaks into triumphant singing (she sings a freedom song) and causes a stir in the courtroom. At this point, the Boy and the Girl enter the courtroom and occupy the same place that was occupied by the Woman before her arrest. This is a very significant development. It states distinctly that the two youngsters have matured intellectually and that they have become politically aware. They are no longer unaware of their duty towards their country and people. The Woman has initiated them into the world of wisdom and they are there to fill

the vacuum caused by Kimathi and her incarceration. The message is that the struggle would go on until there are people ready to fight for their country. Kimathi watches the Boy and the Girl until they take their seats. In his final speech he says:

In the forest, I was sometimes plagued

By doubts.

If I died today,

Would our people continue

The struggle?

...but now I know that

For every traitor

There are a thousand patriots.

...Our people will never surrender

Internal and external foes

Will be demolished

And Kenya shall be free! (Ngugi, *The Trial* 83)

Kimathi is sentenced to death and the Girl and the Boy take out the gun and shoot. The lights go off at this point and one does not know who fires the shot on whom. When the lights come on, the stage gives way to a mighty crowd of peasants and workers led by the Boy and the Girl, singing a thunderous freedom song. The fate of Kimathi is left unexplained. This ambiguity further emphasizes the fact that the struggle has found new heroes and it will never come to an end. The uncertainty also adds to the contemporary relevance of the play. The ending is not bound by historicity. This ending is relevant to any socio-politico-cultural setting where a message of ceaseless struggle has to be initiated. Such an ending does not allow the audience a catharsis and the complaisant thought that after all the play was 'historical'. It compels them to think beyond the history

of Kimathi and to take decisions to carry on the struggle against oppression. The play ends with “people’s song and dance”

On close analysis, certain important points emerge which are useful for this research - it is not simple stage drama. With its numerous traditional dramatic techniques like overlaps of scenes, use of a stage with no curtains and wings, swapping of roles by actors and rich use of song and dance, the play transcends the definition of realism and aspires towards total or epic theatre. It employs some other elements from people’s day to day lives too e.g., in the third movement, the Woman tells the Boy and the Girl the story of Kimathi like the traditional story-teller. Also, the merging of past and present in the scenes of the play provides swift movement to the play without making it boring.

Even in his novels, Ngugi again and again comes back to the Mau Mau struggle. A classroom conversation in *Weep not Child* between Njoroge’s friends highlights the high hopes people had from the movement:

‘The homeguards with their white masters. They are as bad as Mau Mau.’

‘No. Mau Mau is not bad. The freedom boys are fighting against white settlers. Is it bad to fight for one’s own land?’...

‘But they cut black men’s throats.’

‘Those killed are traitors. Black white settlers.’ (Ngugi, *Weep not* 72)

The above example also shows that the movement was founded on the loyalty to ‘the land’ and not along racial lines. The idea of the nation was identifiable with that of the land and hence, Mau Mau was not only a struggle against oppression but also for independence of Kenya. In *Matigari*, Kenya is metaphorically presented as Matigari’s house which he seeks to free from both the white (Settler Williams) and the black (John Boy) ‘parasites’. Towards the end, Matigari proclaims another war, another Mau Mau struggle, this time against the neo-colonial regime: “If we manage to cross the river you see over there...the enemy will never be able to touch us. There in those forests and

mountains, we shall light the fire of our liberation. Our first independence has been sold back to imperialism by the servants they put in power.” (Ngugi, *Matigari* 172) The novel uses the oral strain extensively to define the action. The technique is integral to the subject at hand because as mentioned earlier, orature played a very important role in the propagation of the struggle. Much before this novel, even in *The Black Hermit* (1962), which was Ngugi’s first play, the oral strain is prominent. “Ngugi gives validity to life in the city and the village by using prose with jazzy rhythms for the city, and verse for all village scenes. The earthy verse gives a sense of the ritualistic, ‘rooted’ quality of life in the village, contrasted with the rootlessness of the city.” (Nazareth 88) “In turning to the ‘literary’ traditions of their ancestors, African writers, the good ones at least, have sought to show its worth and to give it a role which far transcends a simple curiosity for things of the past.” (Akyea in Heywood 117) So, the elements of traditionalism become the components of the literary expression, even though the language of communication adopted here is a foreign one. What is important here is the use of culture that marks a strong influence on African literature. This also seeks to strengthen the nationalist discourse by countering the views of European supremacy in terms of culture and language; the difference between the two world-views is portrayed vividly in this entire process of asserting one’s own culture. Therefore, the differences between the formal representations of Drama vis-à-vis Africa and Europe are not confined merely to the stylistic and formal aspects alone, rather they cover the vast canvas of cultural differences. It enables African writers to “create within a cultural tradition, a tradition that defines its own aesthetics and functions.” (Awoonor in Smith 166)

“The writer who is concerned with the cultural and nationalist movements is not only vehemently critical of the exploiters but also is seen to be identified with the exploited, from whom he derives the courage to fight back: He desires to speak for them and; he sees himself both as a teacher of the people and as being taught by them... goes on to define collective art as that which must be from the people and must be returned to the people.” (Innes 17) This collective art encompassing every aspect of the culture of people is seen in contrast to that of the colonizers and at the same time it becomes the point of departure for cultural nationalism. In the eyes of these nationalists, the agrarian, pastoral, innocent, rhythmic, rich, and natural culture of people is opposed to (more

conspicuously in art and literature) the mechanical, artificial, materialistic, and sterile culture of the colonizers. However, they are well aware of the fact that it should not be confined to mere glorification of the past. Therefore, along with asserting the importance of drawing upon traditional myths, legends, philosophies, and artistic techniques, they also engage themselves frequently in examining the past critically. In other words, the mistakes of the past must be avoided. Therefore, the role of the artist is “to cut through the obfuscations caused by the orator and the Court Historian, with their rhetoric about the glorious past, and to remain a detached critic of the inglorious reality – past and present.”(Innes 18) The same argument is elaborated in Chinua Achebe’s ‘light and glass’ analogy vis-à-vis past heritage. Accordingly, a ray of white light hitting a glass surface produces a glorious spectrum which is both a beautiful image as well as a distortion. Similarly, Light from the past, too, undergoes this phenomenon. Therefore, “we can either look for the accurate though somewhat unexciting image or we can look for the glorious technicolour... we cannot pretend that our past was one long, technicolour idyll. We have to admit that like other peoples’ pasts ours had its good as well as its bad sides.” (Achebe in Killam 9) What the likes of Achebe try to put forward is the relevance of human values while dealing with the past. In other words, as the values are “relative and in a constant state of flux” (Achebe in Killam 10), the new nations witness the confusion of values. For instance, in modern societies, certain people may find it more important to finish their daily tasks, like going to office or dropping their children to school, than to help a person who has had an accident and needs to be rushed to the hospital. For Achebe, the blame of this selfish act of the modern man does not lie solely on the person involved; rather it is the outcome of the vacuum created by the loss of values. The above mentioned example “merely shows a man who has lost one set of values and has not yet acquired a new one – or rather has acquired a perverted set of values” (Achebe in Killam 11) in which performing the mundane activities is more important than offering help to a suffering human being. Now, in such a crisis of human values and human ‘soul’, it is the duty of the writer to address this question and help the nation and its cultural legacy by exposing and dramatizing such problems. “They must initiate a vital inter-change of ideas between themselves and the African masses now... Nothing could be more positive than their visionary grasp of those things which will be

needed to recreate a virile and united Africa, or their determination to harness all the basic elements of nationalism, which are already there in the tribal consciousness.” (Bown 85) However, for Bown this is not only the duty of the writer alone, rather it is also the duty of the politically conscious educated Africans. Therefore both the artist and people should help each other in developing a national consciousness that reaches to the cultural roots of their past. This argument coincidentally forms the theme of the play *The Black Hermit* (1968) as well. The protagonist Remi in *The Black Hermit* represents the enthusiastic, optimistic youth who is “the vanguard of the nationalist struggle and is the leader of tomorrow.” (Chanda in Lindfors 63) Like Ngugi, the protagonist Remi’s efforts are representative of the aspirations of the Western-educated individual’s efforts to conform to the ideals of the nationalist struggle and to side with the masses in the era of new nation’s new realities. This is an attempt on the part of the writer and the educated ones both to offer a vision that is concerned with much more than mere “flag independence.” Such a vision is important for creating the history that transcends the depiction of mere momentous events and traverses the path of human hopes, fears, courage and commitment. It is only in this process of humanization of a nation’s history that the true participation of people in the construction of the nation through their cultural assertion is encouraged.

Chapter 4

Ngugi and Peoples' Theatre: Oral Tradition of the Kenyan People and its Productive Use in the play *I Will Marry When I Want*

In oral tradition, texts are preserved in memory and performed and recited. Africa abounds in such traditions of preserving orature through memory, performance and recitation. Orature coupled with drama played a revolutionary role during and after the decolonization of Kenya. The roots of the contemporary Kenyan drama are tightly anchored to the traditional dramatic forms that have evolved as parts of people's cultural and historical legacy. Therefore, to understand modern Kenyan drama, it becomes indispensable to understand and appreciate both the origins of indigenous traditional drama and the social context in which certain dominant dramatic forms developed.

Traditional Kenyan drama is essentially the Theatre of the People, even in terms of its evolution. "Kenyan traditional drama owes its origins to the beliefs and worldview of the people about the relationship between human beings and the cosmos, as well as the relationship between the human world and the supernatural. Drama came to be used as a tool for survival, interwoven with the whole social fabric". (Banham 206) This "tool" encompassed almost every aspect of man's existence: from the primary act of "demystifying" nature and other forces operating in cosmos to the belief in supernatural powers, African traditional drama acts as a "safety-valve" for the fears and aspirations of human beings. It was the drama that helped Kenyans to satiate the desires of evil forces. It was the drama to please Gods and other forces, which was done through ritualistic and ceremonial performances. On more realistic dimensions, drama was associated with one's life right from one's childhood. In other words, drama was the most potential tool for the socialization of a child with nature and society both. The traditional style of story-telling aroused the child's interest in learning. It is significant hence that Ngugi dedicated *Matigari* (1987) to "all those who love a good story". This instantly arouses the interest of the reader in the novel. Much earlier, even in *Weep not Child* (1964), while describing Nganga, he emphasizes that "he could tell a story. This is considered a good thing for a man. (Ngugi, *Weep Not* 20) The oral narrative form was given high respect in the Kenyan

society. So, to serve the purpose at hand, various dramatic forms were either adopted from the previous oral traditions or were invented by the particular generation. These forms included drama in the form of games, riddles, skits, songs, dances, rituals, story-telling and many others. All these helped the child to develop a relationship of harmony with the nature and at the same time get socialized with others. Education was yet another dimension of drama present in Kenyan society, e.g., quite often drama included “off-stage” voices telling the audience about taboos and the ill-effects of immoral behaviour, like young men warned against the sexual immorality from the back stage. However, the art of story-telling, which is as old as the human race, was probably the most relevant form of drama that served as the record of people’s history, their dos and don’ts, prevalent norms, customs and values, along with the rich cultural heritage. It was also special in the sense that it blurred the line of distinction between the performer and the audience and hence, was more participatory and communal in nature. This is substantiated by the fact that oft-time the narrator threw some riddle at the audience who reciprocated quickly and engagingly. At the social level of rituals and ceremonies, all the events were supported, rather dominated by dramatic performances: the canvas of dramatic performances was so vast in the social context that all the events of one’s life, from birth to death (in a sense even beyond death as the ancestors are the part and parcel of African social life), formed the content of drama, like the act of comforting the mother to relieve her labour pain, the circumcision, love, marriage, etc. Certain dramatic forms were, however, related to specific events, e.g. dance-drama, one of the most popular art forms, was prominent in the performance related to the phenomenon of death. To change the assertion one may say that no aspect of human existence was beyond the dramatic expression in Kenyan society; it was integral to the phenomena of life and death.

The foregoing overview of the relationship between the traditional and the modern drama in Africa, particularly Kenya (as the examples are specific to Kenya), asserts that the beliefs and worldview of Kenyan people have enriched the modern Kenyan drama. Both in terms of its form and content, the contemporary Kenyan drama draws closely from its people. It must be stated in passing however, that this tradition was hampered severely in the colonial and neo-colonial phase of Kenyan history, which

prompted, rather forced various writers to address such issues in their writings. Ngugi emerges in this arena as one of the chief advocates concerning the Kenyan drama in the post-colonial theatre on the lines of African traditions.

In the context of the modern Kenyan theatre, the Kenyan National Theatre, opened on 6 November 1952, and became the hub of theatre activities. It was surrounded by the political agendas defining various theatrical performances and, hence, it is relevant, along with the Kenyan Schools Drama Festival that worked under the aegis of the British Council and the East African Theatre Guild, in order to understand the history of Kenyan theatre. However, the Kenyan National Theatre was very unpopular with the Kenyan people. With the exception of Seth Adagala, the first African adjudicator, it only contributed to the process of colonizing Kenyan people further as the performances were mainly in English and were modelled on conventional European theatre. This provoked writers like Ngugi to come up with their persistent complaints deriding it as an elitist space. This also prompted them to shift towards more popular and people friendly modes of expression:

A primary way of defining popular theater has been to distinguish it from high or literary theater. This distinction has been based on several grounds, the most prominent of which have been those of language and theatrical aesthetics. Critics who base their arguments on language follow Ngugi wa Thiong'o in asserting that a truly popular theater is necessarily one which is conducted in indigenous African languages. Any theatre in foreign languages is thus considered un-African and plays to an elite audience. From this perspective, playwrights as stylistically different as Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan are classed together as elitist by virtue of their choice of language. (Desai 65)

In such circumstances, it was obvious that plethora of plays emerged during this period so as to ensure the decolonisation of Kenyan theatre. In this regard, Ngugi's play *The Black Hermit* (1968), which was written to mark Uganda's independence from Britain in

September 1962, stands as one of the pioneering efforts. Despite being in English, it employed the techniques of popular theatre. Though not a masterpiece, yet the play is important because it reveals the disparity encountered by those who were exposed to the modern life and were still rooted in their tradition, a consequence of the colonialism of Kenya.

The process of resuscitation of traditional dramatic forms and a persistent attack on colonialism and neo-colonialism was the dominant theme of the Kenyan drama in the 1970s. And, Ngugi's striving efforts gave impetus to such efforts. "The aims of modern African writers were, therefore, overtly political, namely, to protest and resist through their writings the continued exploitation of their people by the colonial masters. Since the colonial administration of various African countries had, as a matter of policy, not only rejected the cultural achievements of the Africans but had also imposed, with a vengeance, their own culture, language, religion and system of education, African writers decided to invoke their 'past' and bring out their respective rich cultural heritages to debunk the colonial propaganda that Africa had no history, no culture, no past. Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ngugi's *The River Between*, p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, for instance, were all written to counter what Ngugi wa Thiong'o has called the 'cultural bomb'. "The hands of modern African writers were, therefore, quite full with political commitments from the very beginning." (Narang, *Mightier* xiii) In other words, drama in Africa has an inherent sense of commitment. This marks the shift to more contemporary and secular themes in drama in 1960s from the metaphysical and supernatural obsessions seen in the majority of the performances earlier. For example, from supernatural plays like *A Dance of the Forests* Soyinka has shifted to the writing of the plays like *Kongi's Harvest*, *Madmen and Specialists*, *The Road*, and *Opera Wonyosi* which explore socio-political scenario of contemporary Nigeria.

The most crucial question regarding the aforesaid commitment is: to whom do the writers attempt to be committed? In response to this question, there arise two broad categories: on one hand there are those writers who commit themselves to the socio-political and cultural problems of the elite, while on the other hand there are those writers

who concern themselves with the problems and aspirations of peasants, workers, rural and urban masses, along with their leaders and heroes. This is voiced by Chidi Amuta:

The immediate sociology of revolutionary drama in Africa is furnished by the realities of imperialist domination, rural and urban poverty co-existing with the oases of affluence and opulence. Mass participation in literary culture reflects these realities and is in turn complicated by the deliberate “hoarding” of literacy by the African ruling classes thus limiting the access of the masses to cultural expressions requiring literate competence and participation...The imperative is towards greater popularization and the evolution of an alternative theory and practice of performance. Given its socio-historical ambience, a truly revolutionary African theatre must, at the level of technique, marry elements of traditional festival drama with folk opera under the intellectual and ideological guidance of the best achievements in the radical literary tradition with a popular audience in mind. (Amuta 156)

Ngugi conforms to this expectation in his writings generally. The most significant “attempt to reconnect with the severed roots of African civilization and its theatrical traditions” (Ngugi *Decolonising* 42) was the atonement, in the form of Kamiriithu Community Education and Culture Centre, to the hollowness created by the contemporary Kenyan theatrical traditions as imposed by the Kenyan National Theatre and other such colonial enterprises. Kamiriithu was much more than a physical space. It fulfilled the expectations of a truly national theatre. It conforms to what Ngugi thinks a theatre must be:

Theatre is not a building. People make theatre. Their life is the very sniff of drama. Indeed Kamiriithu reconnected to the national tradition of the empty space, of language, of content and of form. (Ngugi *Decolonising* 42)

Kamiriithu, which was an open air theatre, provided that which Ngugi always longed for: an actual empty space for theatre. There was no restricted space between the auditorium and the stage and, hence, there was the possibility of an unrestricted flow of people and actors. It would be no exaggeration to say that the actors performed not only to the audience present in front of the stage alone, “but to whoever could now see them and hear them, the entire village of 10,000 people was their audience.” (Ngugi *Decolonising* 42) This centre later helped Ngugi to resolve another very significant issue related to drama: the issue of language of African theatre. Though for him the use of English never gave him the sense of satisfaction as a writer, yet, in the words of Ngugi himself, “the possibility of using an African language stayed only in the realm of possibility until I came to Kamiriithu.” (Ngugi *Decolonising* 44) It was at this point of his career as a playwright that he shunned the use of English and completely adopted Gikuyu as the medium of his writings. This decision, taken in 1979, was the outcome of much contemplation and introspection that took place while Ngugi was in prison- he had been arrested by the orders of the Government headed by Jomo Kenyatta, from Kamiriithu on charges of sedition. He says, “The question of audience settled the problem of language choice; and the language choice settled the question of audience.” (Ngugi *Decolonisation* 44) Therefore, language raises the question and also answers the issue of commitment simultaneously. This commitment is, probably, best illustrated in the play *I Will Marry When I Want*, which incorporated the language of the common people, the language that they understood best and, most importantly, the language that they can associate with and participate in its enrichment. The play adopts the language of peasants and actors who are also participants in its performance. This was a two-way process as the language of this play was becoming the language of the people’s daily existence. As Ngugi himself notes, “The language of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was becoming part of the people’s daily vocabulary and frame of reference.” (Ngugi *Decolonising* 58) In fact, it was the sheer power of this play that brought about the untimely death of the Kamiriithu experiment in 1977. The revolutionary activities of Kamiriithu got a severe blow from the anti-people regime in that year, when its licence was withdrawn and Ngugi was detained even without being told the reasons for his arrest. However, this was not the end as Ngugi’s commitment was not to be broken so easily. In 1981, the group rejoined hands for the production of

Ngugi's drama in music *Maitu Njugira (Mother sing for me)*. But what awaited them was not the support for this revival, rather it was the government's final act of showing its colonial legacy of oppression and anti-people mentality:

An 'independent' Kenyan government had followed in the footsteps of its colonial predecessors: it banned the entire peasant and worker basis for genuine national traditions in theatre. But this time, the neo-colonial regime overreached itself. On 12 March 1982, three truckloads of armed policemen were sent to Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre and razed the open-air theatre to ground. By so doing it ensured the immortality of the Kamiriithu experiments and search for peasant/worker-based language of African theatre. (Ngugi *Decolonising* 59)

Howsoever short the span of physical existence of Kamiriithu had been, it had a long-lasting effect on that movement of Kenyan theatre which attempts to restore confidence in people's theatre and the very use of their language in its performances. In this sense, Kamiriithu became the source of bringing about "the renaissance in the Kenyan theatre as it was significant in the revival of the culture that goes back to the lives and languages of the people." (Ngugi *Decolonising* 61)

Is it possible to destroy/kill the willingness to be true to the cause of one's identity and the existence? Is it possible to crush the passion of peoples' toiling efforts and their continuous struggle? If answer to this is in the negative, then one can easily imagine the survival of the tradition of the popular theatre, which depicts the problems of the common mass, in the line of Ngugi's language of the People's Theatre. This trend is evident in 1990s where several examples of theatrical adaptations show a marked shift towards the people-oriented aesthetics and demands. It is notable that this trend borrowed its philosophy from the Theatre of Development movement that took place in the 1970s, the early phase of post-colonial history. Through this programme, the message of adult education was spread from village to village in several newly independent countries. This

educational theatrical form used the oral aesthetics as its basic design to attract and convince people:

The first major institutionalized theater for development project in independent Africa was implemented in 1974 in northern Botswana. The project, which was called *Laedza Batanani* or, "The sun is already up; It's time to come and work together," was organized in the Bokalaka area, home of about 30,000 Kalanga people. *Laedza Batanani* was conducted as an annual, one-week campaign covering the five-village cluster of the Bokalaka with the theater troupe traveling from village to village every day. The guiding principle of the actors' workshop was "lots of action, less talking." In order to keep the enterprise simple and to allow for contextual adaptation and audience participation, the skits were not scripted into a fixed text. A multimedia approach was implemented. Not only were indigenous theatrical elements such as songs, dances, and drama used but certain imported media forms, such as hand-puppet theater, also enriched the enterprise. The themes and issues had clear developmental overtones. However, because it presented itself as an entertaining activity which was free of charge and conducted in the indigenous language, the *Laedza Batanani* campaign was able to draw of the community which would otherwise have been upon that sector reluctant to engage in any purportedly adult education extension project.(Desai 72)

Hence, from the point of inception itself, the people's/popular theatre has aimed "to nurture commitment to the use of popular modes of communication in order to stimulate and initiate social change. The movement aimed to use theatre as a teaching methodology, an awareness tool on issues affecting the community, a form of cultural self-assertion. To achieve these, it employed African artistic modes as its central theatrical form." (Banham 226) This view-point served as the point of departure for

several popular theatres in Kenya to relive Ngugi's Kamiriithu phenomenon (although sans the oppositional politics of Kamiriithu). This is how Ngugi's vision of the total participation of people continues to be seen in Kenyan theatre scene throughout the country. Needless to say, this methodology was adopted for the multi-dimensional approach of communicating, teaching and socio-cultural and traditional self assertion of Kenyans. This, in fact, is what culture meant for Ngugi:

Culture, therefore, includes for Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the education system, the legal system, the religious system, language, literature, forms of dances and songs. Of these the two most significant instruments of cultural imperialism were the church and the western education system both of which subserved the interests of colonialism. It is because of this that these two underline the themes of almost all his creative writings beginning with *The Black Hermit* and right upto his latest book *Matigari*. (Narang *Ngugi* 143).

In fact, the description of the sons of Settler Williams and John Boy lays stress on this cultural imperialism that continued to the post-colonial days. It also stresses on the fact that now that Kenya is independent the number of her oppressors has increased from one to two. Even the elite Kenyans have joined hands with the erstwhile colonizers:

A white man and a black man sat on horseback on one side of the narrow tarmac road next to the gate. Their horses were exactly alike. Both had silky brown bodies. The riders too wore clothes of the same colour. Indeed, the only difference between the two men was their skin colour. Even their postures as they sat in the saddle were exactly the same. The way they held their whips and the reins- no difference. And they spoke in the same manner. (Ngugi, *Matigari* 43)

Post-Kamiriithu theatre in Kenya witnessed the emergence of various theatre groups that adopted the norms of the Peoples' theatre. In this regard, two groups from the western Kenya are significant: the Sigoti Teachers Group (established in 1994) and the Sigoti Ramogi Dramatic Community (formed in 1987). While the former brought together secondary and primary teachers, the latter was initially made up of seventy women community health workers. Both of these groups dealt with the traditional as well as the contemporary themes of social and cultural importance, e.g. the plays on the theme of AIDS epidemic in the region were frequently staged by the former group, whereas the themes of latter group ranged from the domestic issues to nutrition and the proper sanitation. Such attempts on the part of popular Kenyan theatre groups revived the democratic tradition of participation in the making of a play; it was the revival of something that Ngugi always advocated. Now the actors and the audience were not restricted by the opaque spaces, rather there was the inherent possibility of a "flow" between the two in every performance. This was strikingly conspicuous in the last decade of the twentieth century. 1990s also saw the emergence of the Kenyan Drama/Theatre Education Association and the Free Travelling Theatre (between 1995 and 1997) that performed Imbuga's play *Aminata* with a reworked script: it involved the participation of the audience in every aspect of the play, including speaking, listening, discussing and even role-playing. Another relevant example in this regard is the Mizizi Creative Centre, a self-supporting group formed in 1996, which asserted the popular African culture against the emergent neo-colonial western culture, the result of the process of globalization. The interesting feature adopted by this group is the evolution of *sigana*, an interactive participatory storytelling form which "weaves together acting, narration, music and other expressive techniques in the form of traditional call and response, chants, role-playing, banter and communal dilemma resolution." (Banham 228) This marks the significant trend of shifting towards the oral legacy of the masses that enables the performers and the audience to engage in the developmental tradition of theatre in Kenya.

As Ngugi's plays are concerned with the lives and struggles of people, they can be understood with the desired intention/success only through the understanding of the

elements of the rich oral tradition inherent in them. It is in orature that the immediate, spontaneous and participatory style of literatures and theatre emerges. Such a work of art is essentially communal as everyone in it becomes a participant. Within this tradition of oral legacy even different forms of expression, like song, music, dance, drama, etc. become one and the same thing. In fact, all the techniques adopted by the dramatists today in order to “use drama as a vehicle of communication and conscientization in social development, whether through body language, mime or whatever, are being borrowed from an orature set-up.” (Wilkinson 116) This tradition of peoples’ participation is best illustrated in the play *I Will Marry When I Want*. Even *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, written much earlier, embodied the spirit of people’s theatrical tradition and the orature style. Though it was not a part of the Kamiriithu experiment, it did contain the germs of the ideology that Ngugi adopted five years down the line. Though the Kamiriithu experiment was short-lived, Ngugi carried on the use of oral stylistics beyond the plays, to his novels too. The beginning of *Matigari* is a potent example of this:

This story is imaginary.

The action is imaginary,

The characters are imaginary

The country is imaginary...Reader/ listener: may the story take place in the country of your choice....So say yes, and I’ll tell you a story!

Once upon a time, in a country with no name... (Ngugi *Matigari* ix)

The traditional narrator hence sets the tone of the story to come. Though this narrator is like any other oral story narrator at the obvious level, the use of this ploy also helps the author in avoiding political censure because *Matigari* was a very controversial novel that sparked the wrath of the State and it was banned in Kenya a year after its publication (in 1986, in Gikuyu). Hence, the use of such ploys from the oral tradition served several

purposes at the same time. *I Will Marry When I Want* is also replete with many such examples where techniques and elements of orature are used to fruitfully convey the message of the play.

Unlike *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* which was preceded by an elaborate preface, Ngugi's next play, *I Will Marry When I Want* begins with a brief dedication. It is worthwhile to halt at this little piece because it is important from the standpoint of Ngugi's politics. The writing of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was an intermediary step in Ngugi's career as a writer and a thinker. Various signs of this are present in that play. While it was written in English, almost one-fourth of the dialogue and all the songs were in Gikuyu. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* drew a lot from the Gikuyu oral tradition though most of its mimes and dances were more pan-African in nature. It also borrowed certain elements from the Bible though most of the times, for a subversive purpose. For instance, the trials and execution of Kimathi can be read as parallel to those of Christ. By the time Ngugi started working on the script of *I Will Marry When I Want*, he had already realized that English as the medium of his writings was not adequate to communicate his ideology and to bring about any conscious change in the Kenyan society. One can say that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was the process which reached its culmination in *I Will Marry When I Want* and its acme in 1977 when on returning from detention, Ngugi took the conscious decision to write only in Gikuyu. Significantly, the play *I Will Marry When I Want* was originally written in Gikuyu as mentioned earlier and it was dedicated:

To all those who have been at the forefront in the development of literature in Gikuyu language through song and books... and to all the other Kenyans who have been developing literature in all the other Kenya national languages through songs and books... In particular, we can never forget the contribution of Gakaara wa Wanjau who long before the Mau Mau armed anti-imperialist struggle used to write books in Gikuyu language. And even after Gakaara was detained by the British for his patriotic anti-imperialist literature, he never gave up his struggle to create a

patriotic literature in Gikuyu language. ... All patriotic Kenyan writers accept this, our offering! (Ngugi, *I Will i*)

The dedication emphasizes on two points- firstly, equal importance has been given to developers of Gikuyu literature through songs and book, i.e. through both oral and written means. Secondly, somehow the playwrights seem to equate writing in national languages to being more patriotic. Both these points are interesting if one traces the trajectory of Ngugi's career itself. He moved gradually from English to Gikuyu and its richness in orature- a move parallel to the shift in his personal life from being James Ngugi to being Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *I Will Marry When I Want* has to be viewed therefore not only as a patriotic play in terms of its content but also in terms of its language and its exact location in the chronology of its conceiver's career.

One should keep in mind that this play, just like the earlier one, was a joint effort. But in this case, Ngugi was assisted not only by a co-author but also by the residents of Kamiriithu village, the birth place of this play. Though Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii own the copyright of the play, they have acknowledged time and again the efforts of the peasants and workers who helped in the construction of the theatre and also of the play. Considering all these facts, one can surely state that *I Will marry When I Want* is a classic example of weaving of oral and popular elements in the written tradition.

This play narrates the story of a farm labourer called Kiguunda and his wife Wangeci. The other important character, Gicaamba is a factory worker. Unlike *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* it is divided distinctly into three acts. Act One opens with a description of Kiguunda's home and his poverty. The family is expecting guests. The stage directions prepare the reader to focus on the past glory of Kiguunda and more importantly on the issue of land because the two items in his hut which are highlighted happen to be his sheathed sword and a title deed for one and a half acres of land. Kiguunda is proud of these one and a half acres simply because they belong to him: "these are mine own, not borrowed robes said to tire the wearer. A man brags about his own penis, however tiny". (Ngugi *I Will* 4) While Kiguunda mends the chair for his guests, Kioi and his wife Jezebel, a drunk man passes by their hut singing the song 'I shall marry when I want'.

Wangeci shoos him away, grumbling at the prevalent evil of drunkenness that has gripped all the men around her. The playwrights thus project alcoholism as a problem that is eroding the social system in the villages of Kenya. We are further told that the drunk took to alcohol because he lost his precious job as a night watchman and this happened because of Kioi. Kiguunda asks Wangeci not to be too judgemental because “he who judges knows not how he will be judged.” (Ngugi, *I Will* 5) This reference to Bible is immediately followed by a Christian hymn: ‘The Satan of poverty/ Must be crushed’. This hymn repeatedly points towards an impending second coming. Though the song is meaningless to the Kiguunda family because they are not Christian, it does invoke a sense of premonition that perhaps the playwrights are pointing towards an impending second struggle for freedom from neo-imperialist forces that have gripped Kenya. The singers belong to ‘the sect of the poor’ and they ask them who can’t afford two square meals for money to build their church. Kiguunda ponders on the situation thus:

Religions in this village will drive us all crazy!

Night and day!

You are invited to a haraambe fund-raising for the church.

Which church?

Of the White Padre and Virgin Mary...

Of the P.C.E.A...

Of the Anglicans

Of the Greek orthodox

Of Kikuyu Independent.

Of Salvation Army

Of the Sect of Deep Waters

Are we the rubbish heap of religions?

So that wherever the religions are collected,

They are thrown in our courtyard. (Ngugi, *I Will* 9)

Thus we get to see the frustration of the common man in the face of utter poverty and continuous attempts at religious conversion on the part of different kinds of churches. The playwrights take a dig at Christianity which accompanied and reinforced the colonial and neo-colonial regime hand in glove. They also present a contrast to Christian song and dance immediately after this with Kiguunda's Mucung'wa dance. This dance transports him to the pre-Emergency days when he used to be full of vigour and positive energy. The traditional song about love and chivalry is modified partially towards the end to accommodate the theme of patriotism and the ideals of the Mau Mau struggle:

Mother ululate for me,

For if I don't die young I'll one day sing songs of victory.

Oh, yes, come what come may...

The crown of victory should be taken away from traitors

And handed back to patriots

Like Kimaathi's patriotic heroes. (Ngugi, *I Will* 12)

Kiguunda is a free man. He values his freedom and autonomy more than prosperity. Much to the chagrin of his wife, he never sold his land to anyone and ended up working for the same people who were once his equals. He believes that "a man without debts is not poor at all". He fiercely defends his freedom and says that "This is mine own homestead/ If I want to roll on the dust/ I am free to do so." (Ngugi, *I Will* 14) Despite his confidence however, he barely has any peace of mind. Gathoni, his daughter accuses her parents for keeping her at home to work while her brothers went to school. She despises the life she leads- that of an illiterate peasant girl with no prospects of rising

up. She also states forcefully that she would not be bullied into marrying anyone and that she would marry when she wants. Kiguunda and Wangeci are perturbed by their child's words. Their helplessness is expressed in Kiguunda's word- "Do you think that we mine gold, to enable us to educate boys and girls?" (Ngugi, *I Will* 17) Ngugi tries thus to highlight the cause behind women's lack of education in poor strata of society. It is not just patriarchal set up that hinders their education. It is patriarchy combined with poverty which makes men's education compulsory and women's optional. The repercussions of this lack of education, vocational training and any prospects in Gathoni's life however are very serious.

Ngugi also portrays the despair that has crept into the lives of the poor people gradually. Kiguunda wonders how the prices have risen but not the salaries since independence. Wangeci's sarcastic answer to his contemplation is: "the difference between then and now is this- we now have our independence!" (Ngugi, *I Will* 19) This is the bitterness of those who once fought for the independence of the country. Wangeci's is the voice of cynicism and disillusionment. But the despair of her present life can not stop her from remembering and reliving the glorious days of her youth. Through her retrospective speeches the playwrights narrate the history of Kenya and her people here. Kiguunda and Wangeci relive the days of their courtship before the imposition of Emergency in Kenya. They are joined in their dance by guitar players, players of other instruments and dancers too. They first dance to the tune of a song of courtship and then they do the Mwomboko dance. "Guitars, accordions and iron rings are played with vigour and the dancers' feet add embellishments." (Ngugi, *I Will* 24) After the Mwomboko dance they remember that within seven years of their marriage, the fight for freedom became very intense and that people "began to sing new songs with new voices, songs and voices demanding freedom for Kenya." (Ngugi, *I Will* 25) This memory is followed by a patriotic song that declares that Kenya is an African people's country. Threatened by the intensity of the struggle, the government declared a state of Emergency in the country. Kiguunda recalls:

The Emergency laws became very oppressive.

Our homes were burnt down.

We were jailed,

We were taken to detention camps,

Some of us were crippled through beatings.

Others were castrated.

Our women were raped with bottles.

Our wives and daughters raped before our eyes. (Ngugi, *I Will* 27)

These circumstances justify the rise of the Mau Mau struggle in Kenya. People were led into guerilla warfare by the brutality and cruelty of the British government. Kiguunda tells the audience that:

Through Mau Mau

Led by Kimaathi and Matheenge,

And through the organized unity of the masses

We beat the whites

And freedom came...

We raised high our national flag. (Ngugi, *I Will* 27)

It is important to note that this recollection of the glorious past of the culture of resistance and protest in Kenya serves two purposes at hand- firstly, it forms the background of this play which actually deals with the deception and deceit to which people of Kenya are vulnerable in the present neo-colonial regime. Secondly, it also educates the newer generation among the audience about the weapon of protest and also about the difficulties that their elders went through so that they could live in a free country. Kiguunda and Wangeci thus assume the role of ancestors in the oral tradition who educate the children

of the community through stories. The success story however gradually changes into a lament as the duo proceed with the narration. They tell the audience about the disappointment they had to face after the independence. Their fertile lands were given to the homeguards who had actually fought against the Mau Mau. Hence, the freedom fighters of Kenya were reduced to penury and left with only one and a half acres of barren land in the dry plains:

See what the years of freedom in poverty

Have done to you!

Poverty has hauled down your former splendour.

Poverty has dug trenches on your face. (Ngugi, *I Will* 29)

Wangechi sums up the story and the situation precisely through a proverb: “a flower is robbed of the colours by the fruit it bears.” The simile applies well to the contemporary political situation of Kenya when the play was written and performed first. The colour of the flower of freedom was soon washed over by its own fruit- the fruit of a neo-colonialist regime. Kiguunda rightly suspects that in present circumstances, the only reason why Kioi wants to meet him can be a plan to grab his land for the American insecticide factory that is about to be established in their village.

The role of Njooki and Gicaamba in the play is that of the representatives of the working classes who are well aware of the oppressive plans of the capitalists but who can not help themselves out of the mess because of their poverty. Whatever they say is full of wisdom and they are well aware about the class struggle in their country. They state the predicament of the worker thus:

Day in and day out,

Week after week!

A fortnight is over.

During that period

You have made shoes worth millions.

You are given a mere two hundred shillings,

The rest is sent to Europe...

Remember the son of...eeeh...you know who I mean...

The chemical dust

Accumulated in his body

Until the head cracked!

Did they take him to the hospital?

Oh, no.

Was he given any compensation?

He was summarily dismissed, instead. (Ngugi, *I Will* 35)

Gicaamba's outburst is structured as a long speech revolving around the issues of the disparity between the lifestyle of the worker and the capitalist, the adverse conditions in which the workers are made to work, the lack of physical and financial security and the indifference of the foreign owners of the factories towards the agony and poverty in which the Kenyan worker lives. He also spews his anger on the general neglect of the environmental issues by these companies. In their own nations, they maintain spotless cleanliness and they dump all their filth in the third world nations:

An open drainage that pollutes the air in the whole country!

An open drainage that brings diseases unknown before!

We end up with the foul smell and the diseases

While the foreigners and the local bosses of the company
 Live in palaces on green hills, with wide tree-lined avenues,
 Where they'll never get a whiff of the smell
 Or contract any of the diseases! (Ngugi, *I Will* 39)

In this way, the playwrights present the woes of both the peasants and the workers. The friendship between Gicaamba and Njooki, the workers and Kiguunda and Wangeci, the peasants is the natural alliance between the deprived classes while that between Kioi and Jezebel, the capitalist and Ndugire and Helen, the nouveau riche is a strategic alliance between those whose sole motive is to rise at any expense. The workers' songs of the first group are contrasted by the Christian hymns and prayers loaded with status quo morality sung by the second group when they come to Kiguunda's house to convince him to convert to Christianity. Those who are never content with what they have, preach contentment to those who have nothing: Let us all be contented with our lot. (Ngugi, *I Will* 45) For them the ideal worker is the one who:

Does not argue back.
 He does not demand higher wages.
 He just believes in hard work,
 Praising our Lord all the time.
 He is a true brother-in-Christ. (Ngugi, *I Will* 44)

Ngugi and Ngugi present Christianity as a status-quoist religion which has been used by the colonizers and the capitalists to subdue the poor man's wish to have comforts of life and to promote the interests of the ruling class. Ndugire tries to justify conversion to Christianity by relating his own tale. He converted to Christianity and with the help of the Church and the powerful people associated with it, he was able to set up some shops. The crux of the Kioi group's conversation is that they want Kiguunda and Wangeci to get

them baptized, to get married according to the Christian customs and hence, abandon the life of sin they've been living. Kiguunda has a foreboding that Kioi wants to grab his land. So he threatens them and orders them to leave his house and go. However, after much thinking and speculation, Wangeci concludes that Kioi wants to get his son Muhuuni married to their daughter Gathoni and thus, he first wants them to convert. She draws this naïve conclusion after Muhuuni takes Gathoni away to Mombasa in his car. The two peasants thus sigh in relief that their land is safe though they are wrong about everything.

The second act is an exposition of the dilemma of Kiguunda and Wangeci regarding conversion and their daughter's future, Gicaamba and Njooki try to dissuade them from conversion. Gicaamba predicts that Kioi means no good. He says: "they are just playing with you, in the same way a cat plays about with a mouse, knowing that the mouse will end up in the cat's belly." (Ngugi, *I Will* 55) He even reminds the silent collaboration between the gun and the Bible during the colonization of Africa:

When the British imperialists came here in 1895,

All the missionaries of all the churches

Held the Bible in the left hand,

And the gun in the right hand.

The white man wanted us

To be drunk with religion

While he,

In the meantime,

Was mapping and grabbing our land,

And starting factories and businesses

On our sweat.

He drove us from our best lands,

Forcing us to eke a living from plots on road sides

Like beggars in our own land. (Ngugi, *I Will* 57)

He reminds Kiguunda the Christian hymns that were taught to them telling them that earthly things were useless:

Goats and cows and money

Are not important

What is important

Is the splendid face of Jesus. (Ngugi, *I Will* 57)

The rhetoric of heaven was fed to the hungry people of the land while the foreigners and their African sycophants filled their pockets with gold. The church was even Africanised in order to shift closer to the poor people. Gicaamba and Njooki's critique of Christianity includes a parody of the preaching in the church too. When Kiguunda asks them why he should not have his marriage blessed for the good of his own child, they say that all marriages are blessed. A true marriage is that in which "two people accept to be two patriots, defending their home and nation". (Ngugi, *I Will* 64) Hence, the playwrights insert the ideal of patriotism in the idea of an ideal marriage. The "national" Ngurario wedding ceremony of Gicaamba and Njooki is replayed in front of the audience. The traditional wedding has been called national here. This is a hint towards the ideological standpoint of the two playwrights- they consider anything associated with the colonial rule or the neo-colonialist culture as anti-national. As a contrast to it, they project the pre-colonial or the traditional ways of the people of the land as national. Even in the re-enactment of the Ngurario wedding, the pact between the two families ends thus:

AAGACIKU: Let's now go back to cultivate our fields

While seeking ways of getting back

Lands stolen from us by the whites.

AAMBUI: Yes, we join our two hands

To see if we can defeat the enemy

Of this, our land,

Our beautiful land of Mount Kenya. (Ngugi, *I Will* 65)

Ngugi and Ngugi thus try to represent the mass base of the anti-imperialist struggle in the first half of the twentieth century. Gicaamba even goes to the extent of reminding Kiguunda of the Mau Mau oath in which they had all promised never to associate with the imperialists' religion of Christianity. A battle between the British and the Mau Mau warriors is portrayed here. Wangeci gets fed up at this point. She is more concerned with the future than with the past. She wants her daughter to be settled in her life. Since she knows that they do not have the means to find a good match for her she does not want to let go of this chance. The love of their child overcomes the love of the traditions and ideals and they decide to have their marriage blessed.

The second scene of this act takes place in Kioi's home. Through a conversation between Ikuua and Kioi, the audience is informed about their evil businesses of smuggling, black marketing and land grabbing. The real motive behind their wish to have Kiguunda converted becomes somewhat clear when Ikuua mentions that the land owned by Kiguunda is strategically well-positioned for a factory of pesticides he is planning to build. He tempts Kioi by offering him the post of the local director of the foreign firm:

Being a local director of foreign firms,

Is not a very taxing job;

What they want is just an African's name.

All we are required to do

is to be their watchmen. (Ngugi, *I Will* 76)

This exposes the real nature of the industrialization and 'development' of Kenya. The playwrights suggest that it is actually being treated just as the backyard of the progress of the developed nations. Furthermore, Ndugire's declaration that he gives this month's salary in the middle of the next month so that his workers never leave him unless he fires them shows how even the wealthy Africans are always looking for opportunities to exploit the poor in every which way. They are shown to have no respect for human dignity. When Kiguunda asks Jezebel for a glass of water, he is given water from a drum kept near the pigsty. When the question of the expenses for the wedding is raised, Kioi suggest that Kiguunda should either sell his land to the American company or he should take loan from the bank against the land as a security. Kiguunda does not want to sell the land and so he agrees to go to the bank. The bank belongs to Kioi and hence, we see Kiguunda totally trapped in the masterplan of Kioi and Jezebel.

The first scene of the third act begins with a note of irony. The description of the Kiguunda household goes thus:

A suit hangs on the wall where Kiguunda's old coat used to hang. On the wall hangs the picture of Nebuchadnezzar exactly like the one in Kioi's home. On another wall, exactly on the spot where the title-deed used to be, now hangs the board with the inscription: 'Christ is the head....etc.', again like the one in Kioi's house. The title deed is not now anywhere in the house. (Ngugi, *I Will* 91)

Wangeeci and Kiguunda are busy preparing for their wedding. They are quite excited. Wangeeci is especially thrilled at the idea of cutting an actual wedding cake. Here Ngugi and Ngugi add an enactment of the Christian wedding by Wangeeci and Kiguunda. The emptiness of the imagined wedding serves as a contrast to the enactment of the Ngurario wedding which was a community-oriented affair. The speeches made in the church are impersonal and formal while those made in the Ngurario wedding were intimate and meaningful. The enactment is however cut short by the sudden entry of Gathoni who informs her parents with tears in her eyes that she has been impregnated and then jilted

by Muhuuni. In the second scene, Kiguunda robbed of his land and his daughter's prestige attacks Kioi with his sword. But Jezebel comes to her husband's defense with a pistol in her hand. This is a poignant scene where the audience is watching a confrontation between the sword and the pistol- a reflection of the earliest confrontation between the colonizer and the African people. The ironic difference between the two confrontations is that then, it was a white man against the black man and now it is black man against black man. Quite predictably, the pistol wins even here and Kiguunda just manages to escape from the gunshot.

Gicaamba sums up the problem of Gathoni very precisely. He points out that the lack of self-confidence and financial security makes the girls of poor families accept any man that comes their way. He says that the neglect of girls' education in the Kenyan society has led to such dire circumstances. He does not forgive the native men of the crime of stereotyping women in many ways and thus reassuring themselves that they do not deserve education. A song presents these stereotypes here:

Women and property are not friends,

Two women are two pots of poison,

Women and the heavens are unpredictable,

Women can not keep secrets,

A woman's word is believed only after the event. (Ngugi, *I Will*
105)

He also reminds the audience that women fought side by side with men for the freedom of Kenya. They deserve better fate than being beaten up everyday. The sequence again adds to the educative quality of the play. We must remember that the prime audiences of the play were peasants and workers from the countryside who were used to drinking and wife-beating. Hence, along with appreciating the good qualities of the people's culture, the play also uses the opportunity to condemn certain malpractices prevalent in the society it addressed. Kiguunda's drunkenness at towards the end of the play is also

condemned. Kiguunda realizes that it is not wise to despair when he still has his able hands. Gicaamba's words sum up the message of the play:

We cannot end poverty by erecting a hundred churches in the village;

We cannot end poverty by erecting a hundred beer-halls in village;

Ending up with two alcoholics.

The alcoholic of hard liquor,

The alcoholic of the rosary.

Let's rather unite in patriotic love...

Two hands can carry a beehive,

One man's ability is not enough,

One finger cannot kill a louse,

Many hands make work light. (Ngugi, *I Will* 115)

Thus, the play ends with a message of unity and brotherhood among the working classes to form an able coalition against the mighty force of imperialism and capitalism. The play ends with a workers' song, 'the trumpet of the poor has been blown'.

Ngaahika Ndeenda provides a new canvas for the Kenyan theatre practice. "The playwrights, working along the same lines as Brazilian theatre artist Augusto Boal and Educationalist Paulo Freire, created a theatre enterprise that incorporated the people as stakeholders in the performance." (Banham 222) The play develops a sense of nostalgia regarding the peoples' participation in every performance, along with the fight for the country's freedom, in the wake of a tradition when the same group of people, comprising peasants and workers, get marginalized and are exploited by a new class of people controlling the country's economy in the neo-colonial regime.

The playwrights adopt the peasants' and workers' fight against the oppressors as the basic theme of the play. This was the first opportunity for the masses to be the part of a major theatre production. "Ngugi and Ngugi only created the plot, the peasants provided the songs and made changes to the work to suit their aesthetic tastes. The resulting product was a text that was at once revolutionary and popular, incorporating local theatre forms and treating thematic issues with which the community could identify." (Banham 223) However, the play also led to Ngugi's detention, not because of any lacuna in the play per se, but only because Ngugi was seen as a formidable challenge to the neo-colonial "tyrants" and collaborators. This is evident from the fact that only one author was detained. It was more of an assault on political leanings of Ngugi rather than on a theatre person.

In *I Will Marry When I Want*, as discussed earlier, Ngugi's prime motive was to train people to question the oppressive capitalist system of 'free' Kenya and also to remind people of their strong tradition of protest through the memories of the Mau Mau rebellion. Apart from these, there was a larger task at hand- the cultural emancipation of Kenya:

Ngaahika Ndeenda arose out of a desire on the part of the Kamiriithu peasants and workers to establish a theatrical tradition which articulated itself against the remnants of the colonial theater still practiced in urban centers of Kenya. At the same time, it was an effort on the part of the villagers to voice their frustration with the post independence Kenyan regime. Their frustration had its roots in several factors, the two most prominent being the unequal distribution of the national product characterizing any capitalist economy and the growing awareness of the betrayal of nationalistic ideals on the part of the ruling class of the neocolonial Kenyan regime. These two aspects of post independence Kenyan society, along with related issues, such as the roles of Christianity and multinational investment in the

socio-cultural and economic exploitation of the masses, inform the tone of the play. (Desai 82)

The foregoing oppositions and circumstances that were associated with *The Trial* are inherently present in the play *I Will Marry When I Want* as well. To a great extent, even the circumstances in which this play was produced testify such trends: the play was conceived of and staged in the company of peasants and workers at the Kamiriithu. “It was also the workers and peasants who physically constructed the theatre with the two Ngugis merely providing intellectual and ideological direction and guidance.” (Amuta 162) This is in accordance to the tradition of the People’s Theatre as advocated by Ngugi. “The performance drawing upon cultural traditions not only makes this play committed to political analysis a rich and vivacious theatrical experience but is central to its ideological assertion. It is an assertion of people’s language, and their culture which has been violently suppressed during emergency clamped on Kenya from 1952 to 1962, and it is a call to people to revive and to take pride in their own cultural traditions. The only power that the Kenya masses can build on is their cultural identity and unity to resist the ultimate appropriation of their “inferiority” which both the colonial and the neo-colonial regimes have been aiming at in the name of religion and education.” (Singh in *Mightier* 126)

The use of oral tradition by the coauthors in these two plays is a reactive as well as pro-active technique; while customs and traditions of the colonizers are derided by using native song and dance like Gitiro and Mwomboko respectively in *I Will Marry When I Want*, songs of Uhuru in Gikuyu seek to inspire the Kenyans to unite despite tribal variations against oppression in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. This play eulogises Kimathi’s “resilience in his rejection of colonialists’ and capitalists’ offers to sell out the fight for Kenya’s self-determination.” (Banham 222) The playwrights were attempting to resist yet another myth that was related to “the most crucial phase of their struggle for freedom- the so-called Mau Mau” (Narang *Ngugi* 141). They were debunking the myth propagated by the likes of Kenyan playwright Kenneth Watene that the Mau Mau movement was nothing more than a group of terrorists inflicting atrocities on innocent people and Kimathi was “a weak, brutal, jealous and murderous womanizer.” (Banham

222) In this way, the playwrights concerned with the common mass fought the colonial oppression and misrepresentation, along with instilling confidence in people for their rich historical past. Another poignant point raised through Kimathi's song is that the clamour for freedom from the British rule borrowed its momentum from the oral tradition itself. This is true not only of Kenya but also other African countries. Akerman points out that "the liberation struggle has always been inspired by freedom songs, and arrogant white South Africans lounging next to their swimming pools, don't understand the militant import of the songs they may hear drifting into their gardens from the streets. They smile and tell each other that the blacks have rhythm-something genetic. (Akerman 38)

This intermingling of the reactive and the proactive techniques in modern Kenyan theatre developed what we have today as the "theatre of the oppressed". On account of both its popularity and revolutionary agenda, this experiment had a strong appeal. This is evident in the direct intervention of the Kenyatta government to ban such performances and even to destroy the Kamiriithu forever. However, these atrocities could not stop an iron-willed committed writer like Ngugi from "shooting back", which is seen in his writings like *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981) and *Barrel of Pen* (1983). The latter, written during the first phase of Ngugi's exile in Britain, is a collection of essays whose unifying idea is the need for a focused resistance in the face of oppression in neocolonial Kenya. This is text which presents the strong will of the writer deeply concerned with the cultural consciousness of his country is the "barrel" through which the oppressed people attempt to "shoot back." Therefore the nature of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of the masses and the latter's united answering back through the channels of cultural consciousness is an overriding preoccupation of Ngugi's *Barrel of pen* as well as his play *I Will Marry When I Want*. The play is successful in bringing out the different dimensions of exploitation happening in the daily life of common masses. Through the characters like Kiguunda and Gicaamba the exploitation of both workers and peasants is objectified. However, these characters are not merely fatalistic in nature, rather they derive inspiration and courage from their historical and cultural heritage in order to combat their present condition. This is the reason why Kimathi becomes an inspiration for all the oppressed sections, irrespective of their nationalities and ethnic

differences. “Gradually, through occasional flashbacks and reminiscences of the heroic heritage of the Mau Mau rebels and the heroic struggles of their ancestors, both Gicaamba and Kiguunda are strengthened in their growing consciousness of the evil nature of the present society. Consequently, at the climactic moment of the play, Kiguunda is able to confront and subdue Kioi, even if for a brief moment while the awakened consciousness of the people identifies, in stark clarity, the class nature of their social predicament.” (Amuta 166) But Ngugi and Ngugi are well aware of the fact that the victory over the parasitic bourgeoisie is not an easy task; the victory of the long suppressed masses will have to handle the pressure from various corners. This awareness of the authors is shown in the play by a scene where Kiguunda is shot by Kioi’s wife Jezebel.

Apart from bringing in the “two sides of the struggle”, inclusion of the oral elements in this play provides for the artistic and dramaturgic appeal. The profound use of songs, particularly the folk songs, constantly amplify and reinforce the view-points of the masses represented by Kiguunda, Gicaamba, Wangeci, et al. The most conspicuous are the religious songs that expose the antithetical conceptions of the oppressed and the oppressors with regard to sin, salvation, good, bad, etc. This exposition is given strength through the fluidity in the structure of the play where one witnesses a “free-flow” from song to dance to action. This stands instrumental in the cultural reaffirmation of the masses. For instance, the songs accompanied by music, assert the validity of the Gikuyu marriage against the claims of the Christian “converts”, like Kioi, Ndugire, and many others, that a non-Christian marriage is not a blessed one. The voice of Gicaamba is the voice of people:

There is no marriage which is not blessed...

Isn't the Ngurario ceremony the true blessings

Of all your family and the nation?

The voice of the people is the voice of the God.

(Ngugi *I Will* 62)

Gicaamba's voice establishes peoples' consciousness and together with Kiguunda becomes a link between the peasantry and the working class in the Kenyan struggle for complete independence. The authenticity with which a working class being oppressed can speak for another oppressed class of peasantry could have been attained only through the known, common heritage of oral tradition. Gicaamba and Kiguunda are not mere neighbours. Their relationship is not only that of neighbours. It is, in fact, an atonement to the Kenyan society where ethnic diversity, tribal identities, innumerable languages, vested interests and bludgeoning weights of neo-colonial "monsters" were consistently used by the colonial powers (and is still used by neo-colonial oppressive regimes) to divide people and use them to destroy each other. What the orature tries to establish most prominently is the consciousness of being Kenyans first and anything else later. To sum up, what else could be more appropriate than the last message of Kimathi to the masses in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*:

Know that your only

Kindred blood is he

Who is in the struggle

Denounce those who weaken

Our struggle

By creating ethnic divisions

Uproot from you those

Who are selling out to imperialism

Kenyan masses shall be free! (Ngugi *The Trial* 83)

Chapter 5

Conclusion: The then Temporal Relevance and the Legacy that Follows

“In the re-awakened songs and stories
A new breed of cultural heroes
Articulate a different discourse...
Demanding reinstatement
Of customary identity
And restoration of ancestral ground
As a belligerent post-script to recent history.”
(Ao 68)

On analyzing the historical process in Africa at the moment, one prominent feature emerges out: the transfer of political power from the European colonizers to the people of Africa did not happen in a uniform and homogenous manner for the different nation states of Africa. Common threads of struggle and aspiration for freedom can yet be traced among people so different from each other in their experiences in African societies. Are there elements of history and culture that are common to all societies? The legacy of orature has been passed down since times immemorial. However, the legacy of protest through the oral literature, the legacy of production of counter-discourse by using orature is a recent one. This new tradition has been led by the likes of Chinua Achebe, Dario Fo, Toni Morrison and Derek Walcott. In India, the trend of protest through traditional means is flourishing among Dalit writers and even other writers belonging to classes conventionally neglected and subjected to hegemonic practices of the dominant class or caste.

Although this may invite a prolonged debate, yet one can convincingly find an answer to this dilemma of identity in the above-mentioned lines of Temusla Ao, the poet-professor and an eminent scholar from Nagaland. One can easily find an analogy between “the re-awakened songs and stories” and the Kenyan song and dance like Gitiro and Mwomboko respectively that attempt to re-establish the traditional culture; the “new breed of cultural heroes” may as well be gesturing towards the heroic stature of Kimathi;

“a different discourse” reminds one of the likes of Ngugi who challenge the hegemonic written tradition of the West; the “customary identity” and the “ancestral ground” take us back to the pristine communal culture of Africa; and, most conspicuously, “a belligerent post-script to recent history” is the reminder of the need and possibility of revolution itself. To change the assertion, one may say, though displaced in space, culture and context, both Ngugi and Achebe represent to a great extent the same oeuvre of literature.

North-Eastern (henceforth N-E) region of India is situated in similar historical context in which modern African writers were placed: First exposure to the written tradition was brought to the N-E region through colonialism, which catapulted oral literature of this region to written literature of the colonial masters. However, the experiences and themes prevalent in such literatures were based on the former. The most obvious thing to happen in this situation was the violation of the foreigner’s language, as seen in the case of Aimé Césaire, Senghor, Soyinka, Okot p’Bitek, et al. Thus emerges a poetic idiom in English different from the existing poetic idiom in orality. The poets in N-E, like the various African writers, experienced the sudden cultural shift from oral tradition. This gave a strong sense of “loss” vis-à-vis language, culture, community, “witness”, etc. In other words, whereas the colonial exigency forced to write in “alien” language, these writers frequently violated the norms of the same language. It was the twin-act of decolonising the colonized minds and oneself. It was the act of writing back. Here, though the writers write in European languages, but they are different from European writers. In Africa, one is bound to fall back on oral tradition. For instance, Senegalese poet Senghor and French poets are writing together, yet the former takes recourse to oral culture.

There are numerous thematic similarities too between N-E writers and the writers from Africa, particularly Ngugi. This can be substantiated, here, through the themes and stylistic distinction mentioned in the previous chapters. To begin with, history was a site of contest for both the societies right from their first encounter with the colonial masters. Therefore, the most prominent point-of-departure for the interpretation of history for both Africa and N-E is colonialism. For the colonial powers, both of these societies were devoid of history as there was no written record of the same; there existed only a pre-historic past untouched by the progressive forces of modern civilization. But for Ngugi,

authentic history is the one that is known to people through the cultural legacy that is passed down generations by the rich tradition of orality. Here one may cite the example of Afro-American writer Alex Haley whose magnum opus *Roots* (1976) traces the lost link of the writer with his past seven generations. With the help of griots, who are the repository of oral history and the traditional story-tellers in African societies, the writer was able to reach to his roots. In this way, the oral tradition documents the entire family history of an African-American writer who has lost link with his past. This example shows the strength of the powerful historical legacy that is preserved through memory. So, the belief propagated by the colonizers that Africans, who have maintained links with their past through the rich oral tradition of their respective societies, were devoid of history proves untrue and unjust.

Therefore, the attitude of interpreting African history through the Western framework is hazardous. This is what Ngugi constantly refers to while talking of history. Moreover, according to Ngugi, present is intrinsically related to the past, which helps to construct the future. This process of visiting one's past is enabled through oral tradition. Similar analogy can be seen in the case of various Dalit writers from India, whose collective memory existed in oral culture. When these writers were first exposed to various literary programmes, they had to create an idiom radically different from the existing poetic diction of English. And it was similar to the form and aesthetics of the various African and the writers from the N-E region of India. For instance, Ao's poems speak from the depths of the wisdom of a whole people rich in its mytho-poetic imagination. There goes an interesting myth in Ao-Naga tradition, which expresses the relevance of oral tradition, rather its origin in Naga society:

The Ao-Nagas say that they once had a script which was inscribed on a hide, and hung on a wall for all to see and learn. But one day a dog pulled it down and ate it up. Since then, the people say that every aspect of their life, social, political, historical and religious has been retained in the memory of the people through the oral tradition. (Ao 11)

This myth establishes two important view-points: firstly, it asserts the temporal relevance of the oral culture, which is a substitute for the written tradition; like the written

documents that preserve social, political, historical, cultural, religious and several other aspects of man's history, the oral culture, too, preserves all of these in the memory of people. Therefore, the oral legacy is neither inferior mode of documentation nor a weak source of preservation. It is, rather, a more communal and collective act of passing on the acquired knowledge, as substantiated by the various societies discussed above.

Orality still predominates in African societies and through memory the knowledge about one's history is passed on from one generation to another generation. However, it is not merely the glorification of past. For instance, Ngugi is well aware of the wrongs done in the past. Therefore, he insists on remembering even the murky side of history. There exists a striking similarity between what Ngugi advocates and N-E writers feel. This is evident in Ao's point-of-view:

Left alone on abandoned ground,
The dejected elder
Gathers a fistful of ash
To defeat his once revered self
Enacting a private atonement
For a summer day's indulgence. (Ao 40)

According to an ancient Naga practice, certain tribes captured people from conquered villages and were kept as slaves. Such slaves were often offered as sacrifices to gods in order to satiate their "thirst". The possession of such slaves was a matter of prestige and the warriors skilled at this were treated as heroes. In the poem, the poet expresses the guilt of an old man, a well-recognized warrior-hero in his youth, who now understands the sins he had committed in past. Through the final act of atonement by the guilt-ridden elder, Ao provides a critique of the futile and inhuman religious practices as well as a hope of overcoming them in future.

Orality has influenced every form of art in Africa, though the degree of influence varies from form to form. It is predominantly seen in different forms of dramatic expressions. The presence of oral influence in various genres and various forms of art brings into light the issue of language as the latter is the carrier of culture. This connection between language, culture and orality becomes an effective tool in raising

and, ultimately, sustaining nationalist agenda. This is the reason why Ngugi feels the necessity of establishing the nationality languages:

I believe in this very strongly, particularly when it comes to the struggle to write in non-European languages, in nationality languages... I am sure we should be able to find ways we can create international forums when prison writers writing in different languages can actually sit down and exchange experiences. I may not be able to read a novel in Telugu and you, say, in Gikuyu, but at least I can know the experiences in writing in Telugu or other nationality languages in India. But apart from that, as a form of cooperation, it is important that what is originally written in Telugu can be translated into African languages directly and those written in African languages can be translated into Telugu directly. In other words, we can find ways of making our languages dialogue with one another, and that is very important in terms of our creation and so on... we can use English as it facilitates translation. (Rao in Lindfors 165-66)

For Ngugi, English should be used only to the extent it facilitates communication; the non-native languages should not become the medium of expressing native culture and experiences. Ngugi's view on this issue conforms to that of the grassroots activists of various traditions, irrespective of their distinct culture and different national identities. This may be the reason why writers in various languages are in communication with his work. This may be the reason why several of his works have been translated into many languages across the world. For instance, Ngugi's several works have been translated into Telugu, including some of these "done by the well-known activist poet in Telugu, Varavara Rao - when he was himself in prison." (Rao in Lindfors 157)

For all the appeal of an activist and a die-hard humanist, like Ngugi, two things transcend the national shores as well as the cultural limits: firstly, the issues concerning the lives and hopes of men. Secondly, the apt medium to deal with those hopes and aspirations. Ngugi specifies these two view-points in the following words:

In my own practice as a writer, I must look at everything from the standpoint of the most oppressed centre in society... In other words, I try and judge the progress of any society from that standpoint" (Rao in Lindfors 163))

Therefore, the lives and hopes of men are primarily the lives and hopes of the most oppressed centre. In order to capture such aspects, one is bound to turn towards the oral culture where the tales of survival are passed down to generations. Ngugi turns towards the oral tradition of peasants and workers, as is evident in the making of *I Will Marry When I Want* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. The entire effort of creating the theatre of people finds its inspiration from this very belief; the creation of Kamiriithu Cultural Centre, on one hand, is concerned with the struggles waged by the most oppressed centre of Kenya, whereas on the other hand, it draws its impetus from the same centre, making use of the language, culture, aspirations, etc. of the same centre. The use of culture and tradition as seen in the functioning of Kamiriithu is a tool to define one's own form and aesthetics of artistic expression. It is like treading on one's own path that one identifies through an age-old acquaintance. This is what Ngugi expects from the educated masses and intellectuals of Kenya: to blow the trumpet of the masses; to wake all the slaves/peasants/poor; to wake all the masses.

Coming back to Indian cultures and societies, one finds the analogy (as discussed earlier) between Ngugi's world-view and the world-views of several dalit and tribal writers strikingly enabling. Nearest among them are N-E poets, writing in English and drawing their content from the oral tradition. Some insights have been developed, in this regard, in the light of Ao's poetry. Here certain clarifications seem important. First things first- why poetry and not drama from N-E writers? There are two clarifications for this. Firstly, drama in North East is prominent only in the Manipur region, barring certain exceptions from the other places. Even in Manipur, it is representative of the dominant Maiti tribe and, hence, does not represent the most oppressed centre that Ngugi refers to. Secondly, the two genres of drama and poetry can sufficiently enable each other. The similarities should be understood in terms of the various common elements that enable these two genres in forwarding the world-view that Ngugi desires to share with the other writers.

Taking recourse to the aforesaid claims, this concluding chapter attempts to draw parallels between the literary struggle taking place the N-E region of India, particularly through the poetry of Temusla Ao, and Ngugi's ideology. Ngugi's aspirations regarding future of language, literature, society, etc. are echoed in the poems of Ao, as is evident from the following lines:

When my time came
 I told stories
 As though they ran in my blood
 Because each telling revitalized
 My life-force...
 Grandfather constantly warned
 That forgetting the stories
 Would be catastrophic:
 We would lose our history,
 Territory, and most certainly
 Our identity.
 So I told stories...
 To instill in the young
 The art of perpetuating
 Existential history and essential tradition
 To be passed on to the next generation. (Ao 11)

The concern of preserving one's identity is possible only through the source from where it emerges:

So when memory fails and words falter
 I am overcome by a bestial craving
 To wrench the thieving guts
 Out of the original Dog
 And consign all my stories
 To the script in his ancient entrails. (Ao 13)

The anxious poet longs for the script that emerges from the mythological "Original Dog" that ate the original "hyde of script". After the script is lost, the stories are to be passed on

through the oral tradition embedded in the memory of people. Therefore, in real sense, the poet longs for the script that emerged from the oral tradition. This ambition of the poet becomes the rallying point for bringing in the parallels from the experiences of African writers, particularly Ngugi. In the dedication of her collection of poetry *Songs from the Other Life* (2007), Ao paints the future that Ngugi and others hope to pass on to the coming generations:

To All
Who can still
Sense the earth
Touch the wind
Talk to the rain
And embrace the sun
In every rainbow. (Ao 5)

It seems that the “penpoints” will remain relevant and the legacy will not fail to follow in future so long as people raise their voices against all sorts of oppression. It seems that people will embrace the sun in every rainbow.

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