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**Identity, Decolonial Agency, and the Issue of Language and Education in  
Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *In the House of the Interpreter***

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## **Dedication**

This humble work is dedicated to: Our dear parents, our dear sisters and brothers, our friends, and all those who directly and indirectly contributed to accomplish this research.

## **Abstract**

As the title indicates, this research aims to study the concepts of identity, decolonial agency, and language and education in Ngugi wa Thiong'o *In the House of the Interpreter*. These themes are very prominent in postcolonial studies and literature. The exploration of Ngugi in terms of depicting his cultural identity and his people reveals the hybrid culture of the postcolonial societies and writers.

For this sake, we will rely on postcolonial theory to explore how Ngugi used literature to bear witness to his community and history. The text under study, a memoir, depicts mainly the author's childhood in a colonial school. Therefore, the themes will be explored through the narration of his personal experiences that simultaneously depict his people's traumatic colonial experiences. Ngugi creatively employed orality in the autobiography, which gave the memoir a sense of oral testimony and reflected authenticity in African literature. Ngugi's attempt is to reconstruct identity and decolonize his society from the colonial ties, such as the issue of language that was imposed by the colonial authorities. Thus, a discussion of Ngugi's articles and essays alongside the text under study will further contextualize and deepen the examination of the memoir.

Throughout the study, we will try to address the questions of how Ngugi used literature to decolonize the Kenyan society and reconstruct identity. Additionally, Ngugi is considered a spokesman of his society, so we will show how the African writer became an active agent in the debate of society. For a writer who shifted from writing in English to Gikuyu, the exploration of the debate of language is a matter of study as well as education, for Ngugi was taught in a colonial school.

### **Key words:**

Postcolonialism; Postcolonial theory; Identity; Language; Education; Agency; African literature; Ngugi wa Thiong'o; Autobiography; Orality.

## Résumé

Comme le titre l'indique, cette recherche vise à étudier les concepts d'identité, d'agence décoloniale, de langue et d'éducation. Ces thèmes sont très présents dans les études et la littérature postcoloniales. L'exploration de Ngugi en termes de description de son identité culturelle et de son peuple révèle la culture hybride des sociétés et des écrivains postcoloniaux.

Pour ce faire, nous nous appuyerons sur la théorie postcoloniale pour explorer comment Ngugi a utilisé la littérature pour témoigner de l'histoire de sa communauté. Le texte étudié est le mémoire de Ngugi intitulé *In the House of the Interpreter*, qui décrit principalement l'enfance de l'auteur dans une école coloniale. Par conséquent, les thèmes seront explorés à travers la narration de ses expériences personnelles qui dépeignent également les expériences coloniales traumatisantes de son peuple. Ngugi a utilisé de manière créative l'oralité dans son autobiographie, ce qui a donné au mémoire un sens de témoignage oral et a reflété l'authenticité de la littérature africaine. La tentative de Ngugi est de reconstruire l'identité et de décoloniser sa société des liens coloniaux, comme la question de la langue qui a été imposée par les autorités coloniales. Ainsi, une discussion des articles et des essais de Ngugi en parallèle avec le texte étudié rendra l'analyse compréhensible.

Tout au long de l'analyse, nous tenterons de répondre à la question de savoir comment Ngugi a utilisé la littérature pour décoloniser la société kenyane et reconstruire l'identité. En outre, Ngugi étant considéré comme un porte-parole de sa société, nous montrerons comment l'écrivain africain est devenu un agent actif dans le débat de société. Pour un écrivain qui est passé de l'écriture en anglais au gikuyu, l'exploration du débat sur la langue sera une question d'étude ainsi que d'éducation, car Ngugi a été enseigné dans une école coloniale.

**Mots Clés :** Postcolonialisme, La Théorie postcoloniale, Identité, langue, Education, Agence, Littérature Africaine, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Autobiographie, Oralité.

## المخلص

كما يشير العنوان،تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بحث مفاهيم الهوية، والفاعلية الديكولوجية، واللغة والتعليم حيث تعد هذه الموضوعات بارزة جداً في الأدب و دراسات ما بعد الاستعمار. استكشاف نغوي وا ثيونقو من حيث تصوير هويته الشخصية و هوية شعبه يعكس الثقافة الهجينة لمجتمعات و كتاب ما بعد الاستعمار .لهذا الغرض سننعمد على نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار لاستكشاف استخدام نغوي للأدب كأداة ليشهد على تاريخ مجتمعه . النص قيد الدراسة هو مذكرات نغوي في بيت المترجم ، والتي تصور بشكل أساسي طفولة المؤلف في مدرسة استعمارية. لذلك، سيتم استكشاف الموضوعات من خلال سرد تجاربه الشخصية التي تجسد التجارب الاستعمارية الصادمة لشعبه أيضاً.استخدم نغوي الشفهية بشكل إبداعي في السيرة الذاتية ، مما أعطى المذكرات إحساساً بالشهادة الشفوية وعكس الأصالة في الأدب الأفريقي. محاولة نغوي هي إعادة بناء الهوية وإنهاء استعمار مجتمعه من الروابط الاستعمارية ، مثل قضية اللغة التي فرضتها السلطات الاستعمارية.وبالتالي ، فإن مناقشة مقالات نغوي جنباً إلى جنب مع النص قيد الدراسة ستجعل التحليل مفهوماً.خلال التحليل ، سنحاول الإجابة على الأسئلة المتعلقة بكيفية استخدام نغوي للأدب لإنهاء استعمار المجتمع الكيني وإعادة بناء الهوية. بالإضافة الى ذلك ، يعتبر نغوي متحدتاً باسم مجتمعه ، لذلك سنبين كيف أصبح الكاتب الأفريقي فاعلاً نشطاً في نقاش المجتمع.كما أنه بالنسبة للكاتب الذي تحول من الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية إلى جيكويو ، فإن استكشاف شكل اللغة سيكون مسألة دراسة بالإضافة إلى التعليم ، لأن نغوي كان يدرس في مدرسة استعمارية.

### كلمات مفتاحية :

ما بعد الاستعمار،نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، الهوية، اللغة، الفاعلية، نغوي وا ثيونقو، التعليم، الأدب الإفريقي، السيرة الذاتية ، الشفهية .

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## General Introduction

Psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers have conducted research on issues such as identity and language. Identity, like language, might be viewed as a common notion that can be explored across several disciplines, including literature, particularly postcolonial literature. In Africa, for instance, the study of literature is considered as one of the most critical aspects. The significance of literature lays in educating people about challenges that their nation has encountered for a long time and that have become part of their identity later after independence. Colonialism, apartheid, gender, post-colonial experiences, slavery and, in all of these, identity, language, agency, and education, which are critical to the expression of a society's history, have sparked the interest of postcolonial and African literature.

It is in the light of what has been said that this study focuses on the issues of identity and language debate in relation to the concepts of decolonial agency and education, respectively, in one of the autobiographical writings of the fabulous and creative writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *In the House of the Interpreter* 2013. Ngugi works have addressed questions of identity and language since Kenya is an East African country with a variety of cultural backgrounds, ethnic languages, tribal groups, and faiths. In terms of Kenya's historical experiences, it has been analyzed and researched alongside other African countries that experienced various eras of colonization. For decades, Kenya coexisted with other African and non-African countries that faced similar issues.

Identity has been revolved around the major concepts that form and construct an identity in postcolonial literature. These important features overlap, which means that when we address one, we unintentionally discuss the other. Language notions, education, agency, and otherness, for illustration, are among these important elements . To examine this topic, one must first understand that colonies experience significant changes before, during, and after colonization. When considering pre-colonialism, we note that the original culture,

beliefs, and traditions of postcolonial subjects did not need to identify with a place or prove they are not inferior to anyone.

Everything is transformed and displaced by colonialism. Through this system, the imperial canon's traditions, beliefs, and cultural norms are imposed on all of its subjects, who have no option but to adopt these new ways of life. This is where their original culture begins to be displaced. And, as a starting point and to establish a communication channel between the colonizer and the colonized, the colonized subjects learn to speak the colonizer's language, and gradually, they find themselves mixing their native language with that of the colonizer due to the brutal encounter with the colonizer who introduces his language either through education or by subverting the colonized and forcing him to learn his language in order to communicate with him.

After a long time of suffering and painful interaction with the colonizer, the colonized unconsciously incorporate features of the colonial customs into their native identities. Furthermore, colonists utilize education to govern their colonies and shape their national identities; they influence the beliefs and ideas held by the younger generation by implanting colonial ideals in their brains.

African literature is defined as the collection of works created in multiple languages and genres, ranging from oral literature through literature published in colonial languages (French, English, and Portuguese). Moreover, African literature, by definition, is a socially involved art; it has never been "art for the sake of art." Literature is more than just engaging in the aesthetics that characterize a work. It is a literary engagement which is to be appropriately understood as a deeper and thoughtful choice. In this respect, Chinua Achebe once said: "it is impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of commitment, some kind of message, some kind of protest..." (Qtd in Madubuike 141-142). Therefore, African writers are considered the spokesmen of their society. As a matter of fact, in pre-colonial Africa, oral

literature which consists of oral histories, myths, and proverbs, served as a reminder for whole communities about their ancestral customs, traditions, and past.

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

In this case, the writer in question is Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the well-known Kenyan writer with a postcolonial background. Through his autobiographical writing, this writer portrayed his cultural identity and that of his people. Discussing his memoir enables us to comprehend the many depictions of cultural identity and the impact of colonialism on that identity. More precisely, this study examines and discusses the effect of language choice and education, the concept of decolonial agency, and the representation of "home" and its effect on the writer's and his people's cultural identity; it also investigates the hybrid nature of postcolonial subjects, and the writer's and his people's view of the world, all of which are important elements depicted in Ngugi's autobiography *In the House of the Interpreter*.

It is evident that the study of postcolonialism is a broad and contentious area that mostly concerns postcolonial nations that have suffered from the process of colonization, have been displaced, and are attempting to define their status in society. And, because we have a similar background, it is essential that we understand the meaning of these postcolonial literatures. Therefore, what brings about the motivation to work on this topic are the following points:

- Postcolonial literature is the best way to find out how postcolonial nations and their subjects try to redefine or rebuild their new identities through their pre-colonial past and their colonial experiences.

- The choice of Ngugi is due to many factors among which is the fact that he used the colonizer's language in the beginning of his career but later on rejected it, preferring to write in his native language then translate into the colonizer's language as a sign that he wants to regain his identity. He wants to send a message through his writings that he is the center of his own world and that everyone else is an Other to him; he wants to create a place to identify with.

The subject of identity is very significant in postcolonial literature, and it is examined in thoroughly by postcolonial writers in their works. It is also a fertile ground for debate over postcolonial writers' attempts to reconstruct or restore their original identities and those of their peoples via literature. Language, agency, and education construct or affect and reshape a society's identity; they are always present in the works of postcolonial writers. And this is the fruit of their personal experience as well as the experience of their society, and their attempt, more specifically, to decolonize their literature and culture to free themselves from the chains of imperial powers. In this sense, Ngugi wa Thiong'o defended this postcolonial identity through his works and explored its features such as language, home, and otherness; and we can see that through his autobiography as well as his non-fiction works.

Ngugi is considered one of the most influential and important postcolonial writers. His works, including his autobiography *In the House of the Interpreter*, have been critically acclaimed for their treatment of different themes such as religion, politics, culture, education, colonization, betrayal, oppression, tradition, independence and postcolonialism. The depiction of the influence of Western colonialism on Africa, as well as Africans' struggle for their lands and identities, are important themes throughout his autobiography.

Ngugi's memoir, *In the House of the Interpreter*, is about Ngugi's life as a student at the Alliance High School between 1955 and 1958. Ngugi narrates the lessons imparted on the boys through the institution, which were designed by the then Principal, Carey Francis, the "Interpreter." The story opens with excitement and hope for the young Ngugi who is going

home at the end of his first term in school. This comes to an end when the young adolescent realizes that his house has been demolished and his family has been relocated to a concentration camp. His time at Alliance High School reinforces in him a passion to learn about the world around him. He also becomes a converted Christian and criticizes the fact that he is unable to convince any of his friends to salvation through Christian ideals. At the end of the memoir, the colonial authority arrests him for failing to pay taxes, but thanks to the confidence he acquired in school, he convincingly defends himself in court.. This narrative is a tribute to the school and Carey Francis whom he indicates played the role of father figure in his life.

- In this study, we will focus on the concepts of identity, decolonial agency, and the issue of language and education mainly with regard to the Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o, but in relation to postcolonial literature and writers. Most of these writers tend to distance themselves from the Western canon and create their own personal identities as related to their own experiences. Thus, The primary issues that we shall attempt to address are as follows: After colonialism, the postcolonial state is undoubtedly affected, and colonial memory is embedded in postcolonial communities. So, where do postcolonial peoples fit in?
- What is really a postcolonial literature? And what is African literature? Is it authentic, and does it really express the voice of Africa? Does it reject western influence or is it just another face of western literature?
- What is the position of the writer in postcolonial society? How do they bear witness to their homelands' situation?
- How does Ngugi employ orature in the autobiography under study?
- What is the significance of the language debate, especially for Ngugi wa Thiong'o who shifted from writing in English to Gikuyu? And how is it linked to culture?

- How did western education shape the youths' minds in the (post)colony? And how did the youths react? This is exemplified in Ngugi wa Thiong'o who narrates his childhood in Alliance High School in *In the House of The Interpreter*.

This dissertation provides a textual analysis of the memoir based on the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory. In addition to a general introduction and a conclusion, the body is divided into three chapters. As mentioned earlier, the dissertation deals with the postcolonial African writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's attitude towards postcolonial identity, decolonial agency, and the issue of language and education at a personal level as it is narrated in the autobiography and in his articles and essays.

The first chapter of this dissertation will offer a brief overview of postcolonial literature. Bill Ashcroft et al have perceived shrewdly that more than three quarters of people's lives, nowadays, have been shaped by the experience of colonialism (1). The latter powers have spawned all manners, strategies and perceptions amongst the people who dwell in the formerly colonized world, predominantly with respect to their current cultures and mainly identities. Literature matters here because, as Ashcroft et al point out, "literature offers one of the most important ways in which these new perceptions of people are expressed" (*The Empire* 1). In this chapter, we will introduce thorough definitions the key concepts related to the domain of postcolonialism in general, such as colonialism, neocolonialism, postcolonialism and postcolonial literature in particular. Finally, we will tackle the concepts of postcolonial theory that will be used in the analysis of the chosen memoir, *In the House of the Interpreter*.

The second chapter will deal with the identity question in itself and the theme of decolonial agency and its relation to postcolonial literature. We firstly look at the nature of the autobiography and the echoes of memories and experiences. Then we look at how Ngugi utilizes orality in *In the House of the Interpreter*. Ngugi deploys orality in ways that complement autobiographical genre rules. He employs aspects of orality such as storytelling

as well as portraying rural atmospheres. These presentation techniques aid Ngugi in realizing a message that connects the nation's problems to its colonial history and lends autobiographical writing the nature of oral testimony. In this chapter we will deal with thematic concerns of postcolonial literature related to identity, exploring components that participate in forging identity and how these components are portrayed in Ngugi's autobiography. Furthermore, we demonstrate how Ngugi used the autobiographical form as a tool to bear witness to his own experience as well as his community's colonial history. Thus, Ngugi through his writing becomes an active agent to the peasant and workers, the voiceless, of his community. From the painful experiences that he and his people endured, creative writing becomes essential to the decolonization of society.

The third chapter will examine the debate of language and the theme of education in detail in Ngugi's *In the House of the Interpreter*. African writers, due to their colonial education, wrote in colonial languages in order to bring the international audiences' attention to the predicament of their people. They also committed their writings to restoring their image, identity, and past. After independence, African writers felt the duty to engage their literature to proudly assert the existence and validity of their cultures which the colonizers tried to erase. However, most of them opted for the use of European languages at the detriment of their own African languages, while only few tried their creativity in their local languages such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Nigerian Obi Wali. Ngugi adamantly opposes the use of European languages to express African literature, because he is committed to Africans and intends to address them in African languages. Because the memoir tells the story of little James Ngugi in Alliance High School, it would be a fertile ground for the analysis of the issue of language as well as education.

We must note that, inevitably, there are limitations in the study. For instance, the topic is demanding, and the dissertation is limited to a certain length, so any missing detail was intentional in order to focus and stick to the scope under study. In addition, Ngugi's memoir

was not studied like his other fictional works, such as *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Weep not Child*. However, it is hoped that this dissertation will provoke further studies on the autobiographical genre and postcolonial studies.



## **Chapter One: Theoretical Background and Key Concepts**

### **Introduction**

The field of postcolonial literature has been vast yet contentious. It is contentious not just about the primary issues it addresses, but also about the meaning of the word "postcolonial." So, in order to comprehend postcolonial literature and its context one must first grasp the background of that literature, which has been a fertile ground for arguments and critique. In this chapter, we will present the theoretical underpinnings of the field of postcolonialism. The first issue to be addressed is the meaning of the word "postcolonial." This phrase has sparked significant debate as to what it represents, whether it refers to purely historical background or something more profound. We are going to examine how various scholars interpret this concept and try to identify a common ground between them.

The study of postcolonialism has resulted in the formation of postcolonial theory, the major purpose of which is to investigate the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized to describe the various methods in which the colonizer has influenced the colonized. We will examine the kinds of literature it deals with and the kinds of themes it highlights.

After dealing with the basic concept of postcolonialism, we must decide what is meant by postcolonial literature, as the background from which it arose is controversial and involves a range of implications; it is unquestionably a controversial subject in and of itself. So, in order to comprehend the central question of decolonial agency and identity in postcolonial literature, we must first define what is meant by postcolonial literature and which categories of writers are regarded as postcolonial.

We are going also to deal with postcolonial critique in order to identify the force and purpose of this field. Scholars can undoubtedly argue over what constitutes the canon of

postcolonial critique. The range of meanings might represent the variety of thoughts regarding this concept and discover a point of convergence amongst them.

To contextualize our work, after going over the basic core of the topic of postcolonialism, we will also deal with a general review of the relationship between postcolonial literature and identity. All of these concepts will be covered in detail in this chapter.

## I – Definitions and Historical Foundations:

Neil Lazarus noted in his preface to *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* that postcolonial studies did not exist as an academic research topic prior to the 1970s. This field now has a presence all over the world and at many colleges. Many centers of postcolonial studies have been founded, not just in the literary field, but also in subjects such as culture, history, and so on. Many journals dealing with postcolonial theory, literature, and so forth began to appear under the umbrella term "postcolonialism," in addition to the numerous publications, essays, books, critiques... etc. dealing with postcolonial studies.

However, this does not exclude the existence of works on the postcolonial theme prior to the 1970s. Anticolonial movements and leaders have been documented. Many publications, such as "*African Literature Today*" (1986 ), were devoted to this issue. The term "postcolonial" was primarily applied to the period after colonialism. As Neil Lazarus highlights throughout the book:

Post-colonial" ("postcolonial"- the American variant), in these usages from the early 1970s, was a periodizing term, historical and not an ideological concept. It bespoke no political desire or aspiration, looked forward to no particular social or political order. Erstwhile colonial territories that had been decolonized were "postcolonial states". It was as simple as that.(02)

Even for writers regarded as postcolonial, the reference was historical. Chinua Achebe, for instance, was frequently classified as an Igbo writer, a Nigerian writer, an African writer, a Commonwealth writer, a Third-World writer, but seldom, if ever, as a postcolonial writer (Lazarus 2004: 03). Postcolonialism, according to Leela Gandhi, is the result of the relationship between poststructuralism, postmodernism, and Marxism. In her *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, she states:

Some hostile critics have been quick to attribute the links between postcolonialism and poststructuralism to temporal contingency and, therefore, to academic fashion alone. And in truth the alliance with poststructuralism has indeed enabled postcolonialism to gain a privileged foothold within the metropolitan academic mainstream [...] thus, in a shift from the predominantly economic paradigms of Marxist thought, postcolonialism has learnt- through its poststructuralist parentage- to diagnose the material effects and implications of colonialism as an epistemological malaise at the heart of Western rationality. (25-26)

In fact, if we search for the definition of this terminology, we will discover that it is referred to as a postmodern thought. "Post-colonialism (postcolonial theory, post-colonial theory) is a particularly postmodern intellectual discourse that comprises of reactions to, and investigation of, the cultural legacy of colonialism."

In her article "Introduction to Postcolonial Studies" (1996), Depika Bahri argues that postcolonialism is a reaction to colonialism that abuses the natives' wealth. Many believe that postcolonialism is about the social and cultural changes that occur after colonialism, notably with the release of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. The emergence of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989), which reduced the usage of terminology like Third World, Commonwealth, etc, fueled this ongoing interest in postcolonialism.

According to *The Blackwell Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, there has been a hesitation to use the term Third World in this context. The authors of this Companion argue that "this hesitation reflects the decline of the national movements of the "Bandung Era"[...], leaving us with the question of why and with what effect this decline has occurred, but helping to explain in the meantime the currency of "post-colonial" as [...] a euphemism for third world"(Larsen 2000: 49). Another element that aided the spread of postcolonial

literature was the European Empire's extensive expansion and subsequent fall after WWII, when many nations gaining independence.

The culture and society of colonized nations before colonialism assist us in better understanding colonial dynamics as well as the new culture and society of the post-colony. As a result, the word postcolonial may also refer to colonized countries or First World minorities. The term "Commonwealth literature" implies, however, that only literature published in English or within the context of the British "Empire" and its demise is important

In Marie Rose Napierkowski's *Postcolonialism: Introduction*(1998), post colonialism refers to the portrayal of culture, race, ethnicity, and identity in the modern world, when several nations have gained independence, while many critics refer to it as "culture and cultural products influenced by imperialism from the moment of colonization until today" (David Galens: 593 ). In an interview, Adam Storlorow stated:

Postcolonial concerns are about the encounter of cultures. As the editors of *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* state in the introduction to their collection, postcolonialism "addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, p.2) so we could say it begins with the cultural encounter of colonization. Repression and resistance, hybridity and difference all have their start here. (98)

According to Napierkowski, the European power ruled over the majority of the world's countries in the first half of the twentieth century. Britain, for example, dominated over half of the world; in the meantime, several nations such as India, Nigeria, Canada, Sri Lanka, Australia, and others obtained independence from colonial powers. The literary products of these independent countries were studied as part of postcolonial studies. She adds that this term was coined in and for academics, primarily in British and American institutions.

According to George P. Landow, a professor at Brown University, there have been numerous disagreements about the usage of the word postcolonial, but all stylistic

terminology have limitations and neglect many aspects. As a result, this is the best term we can come up with to match the context of examining everything related to historically colonized areas. Landow continues, "Terms like postcolonial or Victorian are always open-ended: they are never answers, and they never end a discussion, they begin [...] The purpose of using postcolonial as a label is that it provides a practicable, convenient means of discussing texts and other matters that interest us. (*Why I Use The Term Postcolonial*)

Landow also argues that all postcolonial countries have nothing in common with their former colonizers. In fact, postcolonial governments have altered and become entirely independent of the colonizer. Nonetheless, the new situation under the new regimes, which may or may not correspond to what postcolonial peoples expect, is a matter to be examined by postcolonial studies in conjunction with the problem of the link between the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods.

The term "post-colonial" is used in *The Empire Writes Back* to refer to "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2). However, this definition appears to be too broad and imprecise for many people who wish to make the term more exact and accurate. To demonstrate this argument, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin disputed with Ngugi's writing: "the purpose of post-colonial studies is to assist the total and absolute decolonization of societies in psychological as well as political terms, involving massive and powerful recuperations of the pre-colonial cultures (Ngugi 1986)" (Ashcroft et al. 194). They also state that there are those who assume that we cannot suppose that a country can be completely independent without being affected by the process of colonization, and they provide evidence that modern issues such as "globalization" "are the evidence of the continuing control of the "west" over the "rest"" (Ashcroft et al 194). To that end, the writers of *The Empire Writes Back's* second edition aimed to "refine" the definition of "post-colonial" such that it refers to:

All that cultural production which engages [...] with the enduring reality of colonial power [...] "post-colonial" is still best employed, as it was in the first edition, to refer to post-colonization. This is a process in which colonized societies participate over a long period, through different phases and modes of engagement with the colonizing power, during and after the actual period of direct colonial rule. (Ashcroft et al. 195)

In the preface to their *Post-colonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft et al claimed that no document could ever cover all of the views and theories related to postcolonialism. There are two main points of contention. According to the first view, postcolonialism is an "amorphous set of discursive activities" similar to or related to postmodernism. According to the second point of view, this term is merely historical; it refers to a certain historical era to which a specific form of writing belongs. However, this latter point of view is further subdivided. Some argue that the term "postcolonial" refers primarily to the period after colonialism, or from independence to the present, and these are those who

argue that it is best used to designate the totality of practices [...] which characterize the societies of the postcolonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day, since colonialism does not cease with the mere colonial mode to be active in many societies..(Ashcroft et al.xv)

Under the guise of civilizing the uncivilized, imperial powers transplanted their literatures and powers to the colonies and attempted to eradicate local cultures. However, following the two World Wars, the situation changed, colonizers grew weaker, and independence movements expanded around the world. However, the dismantling of the Empire and all the political changes that accompanied it did not immediately affect imperial cultural dominance, but we cannot deny that an intellectual awakening occurred in the postcolonial world.

Imperialism occurred in a variety of ways and procedures that were dependent on specific circumstances, resulting in the unexpected. The colonizers attempted to dominate not

just the land and money of the colonized, but also their culture. However, with the beginning of the decolonization process, these peoples reclaimed not only their territory, but also resisted the imperial cultural dominance. Furthermore, the newly decolonized people utilized their culture and language to oppose and supplant the culture of the colonizers. This is why postcolonialism began with the commencement of colonialism: "it is the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being" (Ashcroft et al. 117).

Nonetheless, this ongoing interest in postcolonialism evolved alongside the emergence of postmodernism, leading to confusion between the two notions that has serious political implications. Kwame A. Appiah writes in his essay "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern":

Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, western-style, western-trained, group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism of the periphery. In the west they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the west they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other and for Africa. (Ashcroft et al. 119)

To defend his point of view, he claims that African postcolonial intellectuals rely on African university as well as Euro-American publishers and readers. He also mentions Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who employed Kikuyu in some of his writings to "escape the west," as do many other African writers whose beliefs are impacted by their Euro-American formation, which does not deny the fact that they are national.

In her introduction to *Colonialism-Postcolonialism* (1998), Ania Loomba argues that the word postcolonialism is so heterogeneous that it is nearly hard to define and explain it satisfactorily owing to the multidisciplinary character of postcolonialism. Meanwhile, there are several limitations to the term postcolonialism, which Loomba categorizes as follows: The first is that while it is accepted to explore cultural differences in English departments, it is not



permitted to debate economic exploitation. A second issue that arises is that the postcolonial is presented in the syllabi as footnotes. A third issue appears to be what she refers to as "the race for theory," in which a wide range of theories and theorists may mislead students in terms of grasping the term itself.

When we look at world history, we notice that the children of formerly colonized countries live in different parts of the world, which may insinuate that "the whole world is postcolonial" (Loomba 7). According to Loomba, this term has two implications: a temporal implication, which denotes history (after colonialism), and an ideological one that is more likely to be studied by critics. But, for example, if we accept that postcolonialism began with the process of decolonization, which took three centuries: the eighteenth, the nineteenth, and the twentieth, we may ask ourselves the same question as Ella Shohat: "*when exactly, then, does the postcolonial begin?*" (cited by Loomba 08) [emphasis added]. Furthermore, since postcolonial societies did not all begin the process of decolonization at the same time, and hence had diverse origins and conditions, can we still call them all postcolonial? This book's author also claims that anti-colonialism does not reflect the many types of people that live in their country. She contends:

African novelists since the 1960's can [...] be regarded as —no longer committed to the nation. The newly independent nation-state makes available the fruits of liberation only selectively and unevenly: the dismantling of colonial rule did not automatically bring about changes for the better in the status of women, the working class or the peasantry in most colonized countries. (Loomba 11-12)

Loomba claims that we must consider postcolonialism as an opposition to colonial rule in order to include peoples who were displaced by colonialism, such as African-Americans or people of Asian or Caribbean origin in Britain, as postcolonial subjects despite the fact that

they belong to metropolitan areas, and we can also include modern opposition to Western and imperial cultures.

To truly comprehend the postcolonial, one must first understand the process of decolonization and thus, colonialism itself. Loomba claims that “most Marxist thinkers tended to regard colonialism[...] as an exploitative yet necessary phase of human social development”(Loomba:21). They argue with what Marx said: “ England [...] in causing a social revolution in Hindustan [...] was stupid in her manner of enforcing them [...] Whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution”( Loomba 21).Marx here thinks that the colonizer is the triggering tool for the liberation of these countries.

The colonized countries opposed colonialism in their own unique ways, depending on the context and circumstances of colonialism in each location. According to Aimé Césaire, the colonizers justified their colonialism by declaring that they intended to "civilize" some countries. He denies believing in the civilizing mission. On the contrary, he believes that colonization "uncivilized" the colonizer, bringing him to barbarism and bestiality. Césaire uses the example of Colonel de Montagnac, one of Algeria's Conquerors, who said: "*pour chasser les idées qui m'assiègent quelquefois, je fais couper des têtes, non pas des têtes d'artichauts, mais bien des têtes d'hommes*" (to chase away the ideas that sometimes beset me, I have cut heads, not artichoke heads, but men's heads)( Césaire 9)

According to Joanne Sharp in *Geographies of Postcolonialism* (2009), the colonizer studied the colonized in order to control him by exploring the idea of knowing the natives. As a result, the colonizers sought to establish a native elite to control the country's lower and middle levels of governance. By doing so, the colonizer needed to implant new values and cultures in these elites, as well as provide concepts such as civil services, education, and a

unified language for the country. This reality never caused pre-colonial civilization to vanish altogether; it might have been ignored or dismissed, but not utterly eliminated.

However, the colonized nation could not escape being influenced or altered by the colonizers' ideals. This led them to consider a substitute rule, and this "alternative," as Joanne Sharp contended, was a postcolonial national identity. Thus, as the writers of *The Empire Writes Back* think, postcolonialists are in no way continuing or adapting "European models." Indeed, "*decolonization has involved a radical dismantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourse*" (Ashcroft et al. 220) [emphasis added].

## **II- Postcolonial Theory:**

After discussing the definitions and providing some context for the emergence of postcolonialism, now we highlight the major points of contention as far as postcolonial theory is concerned.

Part three of *The Blackwell Companion to Postcolonial Studies* claims that postcolonialism and postmodernism originated practically simultaneously, which is why people may confuse the two terms: "one of the claims frequently made about postcolonial theory is that it is, in one way or another, the "child" of postmodernism" (Schwarz and Ray Alessandrini 431). They also use Arif Dirlik's argument that postcolonialism is a child of postmodernism as an example. Dirlik goes even farther, criticizing postcolonial thinkers for their "residual classical Marxism." Postcolonial theory, according to them, exists not only in the field of postcolonial studies, but also in the field of globalization and other fields of study since it is pertinent to feminism, ethnic and cultural studies... etc.

Ania Loomba challenges postcolonial theory for its dependence on poststructuralist or postmodern ideas. This theory, she claims, focuses on the concept of "many histories," which

obscures the ways in which different histories interact. She also criticizes it for shifting the emphasis from locations and institutions to individuals and their subjectivities, which she attributes to its reliance on literary and cultural criticism and post-structuralism. Thus, Loomba hypothesizes that post-structuralism is to bear responsibility for postcolonial theory's weaknesses.

According to Duncan Brown in *The Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature*, one of the arguments regarding postcolonial theory is the theorization of colonized silence "within the colonial encounter." However, he claims that despite the attempt to "silence the other," "the colonized have continued to speak, often in unofficial ways and from unofficial spaces, but also from the centers of their societies." (Chew and Richards 47)

There is, furthermore, an overemphasis on hybridity in postcolonial theory. Hybridization is viewed in a binary manner, with the mixing of races and the alienation of some races to point at "the Victorian extreme right which regarded different races as different species [...] according to Robert Young"(Loomba 173). This also gives ground to criticism arguing that the notion of "hybridity" underestimates "the clash between the colonizer and the colonized and therefore misrepresents the dynamics of anti-colonial struggle"(Loomba 181). Again, she mentions nationalist movements such as "negritude," which are alienated and unable to adapt to such a concept as hybridity. Another critique leveled at this theory is that it has a pessimistic tone, owing to the fact that it is, as the author claims, the child of postmodernism.

On the significance of using postcolonial theory, Langat, A. K. summarizes it in a paper presented to the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) in 2005, relying on the views of many scholars such as Gandhi, into the following points: rethinking "self," deconstructing the discourse of the "regimes of othering," reconstructing "historical

self-invention," and recreating or deleting the "painful memories of the colonial era" and its consequences after independence.

In addition to concept of deconstruction and reconstruction, one must be precise in the understanding of Postcolonialism and Colonialism. McLeod in, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, contends that the term "postcolonialism" is not the same as 'after colonisation'" (33). Rather, 'postcolonialism' is an attempt at a break from colonial discourse, a "challenge"to colonial ways of knowing" (McLeod 32). Postcolonial theory deals both with texts "produced by writers from countries with a history of colonialism" as well as texts "produced during colonialism"(McLeod 33).

In "What and Where is Postcolonial Theory?" Martin Denyer investigates European dominance over non-European peoples, countries, and cultures. More specifically, he focuses on the immanent notions imposed by imperial colonization regarding Europe's superiority over the countries it formerly conquered, as well as the damage caused to their sense of self-identity. For him, ethnicity, hybridity, and displacement, among other things, are simply three topics in postcolonial theory that lead to a discussion of the wide problem of cultural identity diversity. This is why national identity has become a central concern in postcolonial thought.

John Lye, in his article "Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory" (1998), stated that postcolonial theory is primarily based on the concepts of otherness and resistance. He writes:"Post-colonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonized countries, or literature written in colonizing countries which deals with colonization or colonized peoples" (Lye, 1998).The main concerns of this theory are how the literature produced by colonizers changes the reality of the colonized and memorializes the sense of inferiority within them; and how the literature of the colonized attempts to express their identity and recapture their lost past, which has been eradicated by the new past, placing them in the column of "otherness."

Postcolonial theory attempts to answer concerns regarding language, home, identity, education, and other concepts based on the colonizer's desire to gain control and influence over such concepts through the process of "knowing" the other. As Ashcroft states in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*: "to name the world is to "understand" it, to know it and to have control over it" (283). Similarly, David Washburn in his essay "Post-colonialism: Trying to Regain Ethnic Individuality," points out that "knowledge is power, and words, whether written or spoken, are the medium of exchange, using words incurs responsibility."

Ashcroft et al also define postcolonial theory as a discussion of "migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe [...] and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being"(2). According to Washburn, the critical aspect of postcolonial theory disturbs Western thought, allowing marginalized people to make their voices heard and create alternatives to the dominant voices.

Many questions have been raised about the validity of postcolonial theory by Ashcroft et al, such as: "has postcolonial theory [...] served to re-colonize the post-colonial world by re-incorporating its agendas into metropolitan academic concerns" [...]? Who reads postcolonial texts?" (203). Then they respond that its validity lies in its efficacy; that is, its validity is dependent on how it has contributed to the empowerment of postcolonial intellectuals and the decolonization process in general. They say that one of the ways decolonization strategies function is through language, which has become a contentious topic in postcolonial studies. People know and comprehend the complex world in which we live through the act of naming it; thus through language and representations. The term *representation* embodies a range of meanings and interpretations. Therefore, language has the power to name things and people, and thus to represent and even to control, as discussed earlier. Language is also linked with culture and the decolonization of the mind (Ngugi 1986).

Postcolonial theory has shown positive effect on postcolonial societies; nevertheless, “fears about its homogenizing effects, and of its dominance by metropolitan-based critics have led to a suspicion sometimes erupting into open hostility”(Ashcroft et al. 205). According to Ashcroft et al., this is due to the dominance of certain areas over others where postcolonial theory is rejected in some way. For instance, the tendency of Hollywood films set in such countries to focus on the problems of Americans and Europeans within those societies while marginalizing the views of their native peoples.

This rejection or resistance is a fundamental component of the area of postcolonial studies. They say that postcolonial theory provided its intellectuals with enough material to participate in other universal discourses while remaining committed to the investigation of their particular decolonizing discourse.

The issue of race, including indigenous minorities, which has also formed a large field of study and has recently been replaced by the term "ethnicity," to include a broader scope of human difference such as social make-up, cultural values... etc. rather than the term "race," which divides human beings based on biological traits. This leads to another key topic, that of the Other: “the representation of the colonial other by imperial discourse and the contesting self representation by colonial subjects” (Ashcroft et al. 207).

### **III- Literature and Postcolonialism :**

We immediately think of postcolonial literature when we hear the names Chinua Achebe, Homi Bhabha, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Gayatri Spivak, Franz Fanon, Buchi Emecheta, and others. "Post-colonial literatures can be defined as those Europhone literatures that have arisen in the wake of European colonialism," writes Mark Stein in his book *Black British Literatures: Novels of Transformation* (Stein 201). In the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, we find this definition: “postcolonial literature, a category devised to replace and expand upon what was once called Commonwealth Literature. As a

label, it thus covers a very wide range of writings from countries that were once colonies or dependencies of the European powers”(200).

The problem with these definitions, according to Paul Brians, is that the process of colonization is not the core of postcolonial studies, and that many postcolonial works were written during colonization. It would be irrelevant therefore to say that it is the set of works written after these countries' independence. Furthermore, the majority of independent countries are still in some form dependent on their previous colonizers. Another aspect is that postcolonial writers did not want to be remembered as being inspired by Western studies.

Because of postcolonial literature, history has become a critical problem in literature, as evidenced by its definition. Since the emergence of postcolonial studies, the cultural and ideological implications of a literary text have been increasingly essential. The postcolonial text acts as a vehicle for transmitting a society's identity and national interests. Furthermore, postcolonial literature aims to challenge the idea that it lacks a history, which was assigned to it by numerous imperial writings. Because of these characteristics, the topics of postcolonial literatures vary greatly: place and displacement, language, education, identity, colonialism, resistance, agency ...etc.

Scholars have attempted to refine the notion of postcolonial literature over time in order to make it more credible, such as the following:

Postcolonial literature (or Post-colonial literature, sometimes called New English literature(s)), is a body of literary writings that reacts to the discourse of colonization. Post-colonial literature often involves writings that deal with issues of de-colonization or the political and cultural independence of people formerly subjugated to colonial rule. It is also a literary critique to texts that carry racist or colonial undertones. Postcolonial literature, finally in its most recent form, also attempts to critique the contemporary postcolonial discourse



that has been shaped over recent times. It attempts to re-read this very emergence of postcolonialism and its literary expression itself.(WIKIPEDIA)

According to other scholars, postcolonial authors subvert colonial discourse by employing particular techniques such as portraying a well-known narrative from the perspective of an oppressed character. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that the main protagonists in postcolonial literature are always fighting to establish their identities, feeling imprisoned between their home culture and the newly hybridized dominant culture.

Postcolonial literature represents any writings after independence that deal with one of the following subjects: the colonized's new cultural identity (that is, dealing with the occurring cultural and social changes within postcolonial societies), the notion of independence in itself (whether these postcolonial societies are fully independent or not), and the issue of marginalization and alienation (within the western society, or their own postcolonial society). So, no matter how different scholars' viewpoints on postcolonial literature are, they inevitably come back to the same conclusions.

Postcolonial literature passed through stages that corresponded to the emergence of the national uprising and the strong desire to break away from the metropolitan center. During colonization, literature in the colonizers' language was produced by "a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power" (Ashcroft et al. 5). These works were mostly written by writers who represented the colonizing center: settlers, travelers, soldiers...etc. According to Ashcroft et al., these texts cannot be defined as indigenous or culturally native since, although writing about conquered areas, they appear to promote the colonizing center. And the commitment of these literatures to imperialism is veiled under their claimed objectivity, which covers the imperial discourse in which they were born.

On the link of postcolonial literature to the Western literary canon, John Marx writes in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (2004) that he recognizes

three types of relationships, but he only addresses two of them, which he believes everyone is familiar with. The first is that postcolonial literature is anti-canonical. According to him, the universal audience has become used and well-versed in perceiving colonial literature as the "antithesis" of canonical literature and as an efficient means of restoring the traditional literature and culture that the colonizer attempted to eradicate.

The second point is that postcolonial literature is attempting to revise canonical books and notions. Marx explains that the audience considers that postcolonial literatures criticize Western literatures by employing various strategies such as rewriting certain works or adopting some genres... etc. He adds: "the fact that a writer's capacity to represent a place and its people is widely considered relevant to determining canonicity suggests how dramatically postcolonial literature has changed what we mean when we say —the canon." (Lazarus 85).

## Conclusion

Based on what has been mentioned so far, we may conclude that the term postcolonialism emerged to replace older notions such as the term Third World. It defines what kind of writers should be labeled as postcolonial, as well as what literature should be classified as such. As a result, this term encompasses not only the reaction to the colonial process and its aftermath, but also the social and cultural change that happened during and after colonialism and influenced the identity of the colonized.

Postcolonial theory investigates the colonizer's imposed superiority over his colonial subjects, which intensifies their sense of inferiority and weakens their self-identification, prompting postcolonial writers to write against it and seek to reinforce that identity. Postcolonial theory also addresses topics such as hybridity, agency, language, and multiculturalism.

As a result, the term postcolonial literature was mainly used to refer to the historical period of colonialism and independence that many postcolonial writers addressed in their writings. It was also used to refer to only English-language literature, or commonwealth literature, but this term is broader than that because European languages are not the only means of expression for this literature.

This concept also refers to the representation of identity in the contemporary world, as shown in the argument over its definition. It deals, moreover, with cultures and literatures impacted in some manner by imperialism from the time of colonization until the current day. Postcolonialism therefore refers not just to the decolonization of territories, but also to the decolonization of minds and cultures. And, as a result of this process, the identity of postcolonial subjects is influenced and altered by their experiences.

**Chapter Two: Identity and Decolonial Agency in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *In the House of the Interpreter*:**

**Introduction:**

In this chapter, we firstly look at the nature of the autobiography and the echoes of memories and experiences. Furthermore, we examine how Ngugi uses orality in *In the House of the Interpreter*. Ngugi writes orality in forms that complement autobiographical genre rules. He employs aspects of orality such as storytelling as well as portraying a rural atmosphere. These presentation techniques aid Ngugi in realizing a message that connects the nation's problems to its colonial history and lends autobiographical writing the nature of oral testimony.

As indicated in the preceding chapter, one of the most popular topics in postcolonial literature is that of identity. This identity is influenced by colonial experiences as well as traditional ones. These experiences, when combined, form the modern identity of postcolonial societies.

Postcolonial writers depict nationalists as fighting to construct an independent identity while also coming to grips with the borrowed notions imposed by the colonizer. To understand how these postcolonial authors see their identity in the literature they write, we first must comprehend the impact of colonialism on postcolonial subjects.

## **I-Echoes of Memories and Experiences in the Memoir:**

### **1- The Concept of the Autobiography**

The term “autobiography” is defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica as “the biography of oneself narrated by oneself.” Autobiographical works can take a variety of forms, ranging from intimate writings done throughout life that were not necessarily meant for publication to a full length autobiography. Formal autobiography provides a unique type of biographical truth: a life reshaped by remembrance, complete with intentional and unconscious omissions and distortions. In this respect, author Graham Greene stated that an autobiography is only a sort of life, and he used the phrase as the title for his own autobiography (1971).

Autobiography was uncommon throughout the ancient and Middle Ages. The earliest autobiographical book was presented in the 2nd century BCE by the Chinese classical historian Sima Quian, who gave a brief description of himself in the work *Shiji* [Records of the Grand Historian]. There are several historical collections from the first century BCE, such as Cicero's letters and Julius Caesar's "Commentaries," which summarize Caesar's life, conquest of Gaul, and choices made by the Roman military machine. One must also mention Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, which was written in 400 CE. This was a one-of-a-kind work that not only relates and conveys Christian philosophy and truth, but also perfectly depicts a real-life experience that occurred throughout his Christian life and conversion. *Confessions* gained currency in Europe in the 15th century during the Renaissance.

From the age of Renaissance to the age of Enlightenment, there are many examples of biographical literature. It includes the adventures of the Goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini in Italy of the 16th century, the autobiography of the English historian and diplomat lord Herbert of Cherbury in the 17th century and Colley Cibber's *Apology for the life of Colley Cibber* in the early 18th century. The latter period produced different perceptions and focused on different author personalities such as *The Autobiography of Edward Gibbon* and

*The Confessions* by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Autobiographical poetry was introduced during the Romantic period with William Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*—especially Cantos III& IV— as prime examples.

There are four categories of autobiographies. They are thematic, religious, intellectual, and fictionalized. Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kempf* (1925, 1927) and Edward Bok's *The Americanization*(1920)are thematic autobiographies. In the nineteenth century, religious autobiographies included Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and John Henry Cardinal Newman's *Apologia*. Intellectual autobiographies had evolved by the mid-twentieth century. Later, there was a small change of Biography and Autobiography into a novel. It includes works by Samuel Butler, such as *The Way of the Flesh* (1903), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), George Santayana's *The Last Puritan* (1935), and Thomas Wolfe's Autobiographical novels *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Time and the River*(1929).

“Memoir is a history or records composed from personal observation and experience,” according to the Encyclopedia Britannica. Closely related to, and frequently confused with, autobiography, a memoir usually differs chiefly in the degree of emphasis placed on external events; whereas autobiography writers are primarily concerned with themselves as subject matter, memoir writers are usually persons who have played roles or have been close observers of historical events and whose main purpose is to describe or interpret the events.

The French excelled in this genre. Most prominent of memoirists was Duc de Saint Simon. He was famous for his character sketches, and he had given more information about the court of Louis XIV than any other. Other famous French memoirists were Francis Rene, and Vicomte de Chateaubriand, their very famous reminiscences of World War II are the memoirs of England's viscount Montgomery (1958) and Charles De Gaulle's *Mémoires de guerre*(1954-59). Geoff Wisner's *African Lives* includes a collection of memoirs and autobiographical works. It embraces true life narratives about the African people.

## 2- Echoes of Memories and Experiences in Ngugi's Memoir :

In his book, *History of Black Africa* (1978), the African historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo points out that Africa could achieve development and find a role to play in the world only if Africans remained true to their identity, which would enable them to become masters of their own history. The recent debates on postcolonial studies state that there is a lack of attention to autobiography and memoirs. Edgard Sankara says that, "the memoirs set in the historical space of colonization have the potential to serve as "archives" for future African generation"(Sankara441). Indeed, memoirs played a vital role in rewriting the history of the British colonialism in the African continent.

*In the House of the Interpreter*, Ngugi's second memoir, tells the story of a youth at play who imbibes stories, myths, and folktales as he grows into adulthood, developing his mind, body, and soul. In 1955, Ngugi enrolled at Alliance High School. He cherished the memories of his first days at school. There were moments when he was overwhelmed with delight since he had his own bed in the hostel. "I had a real bed, my own, for the first time in my life"(Thiong'o 9). Ngugi had a fantastic opportunity to attend school, but he had a distinct attitude regarding culture and food.

He craved for the comforts of home. Since his education, Ngugi has been more interested in books of creative imagination than those of history and science. Ngugi encountered Henry Kuria's plays in Kiswahili. Kuria was also the founder and organizer of the Kiambu musical festival for elementary schools, which he accomplished when the country was in a state of emergency. Kuria inspired Ngugi, and he began to focus all of his efforts on student communication and theater.

As a colonized student who was somewhat detached from the actual conflict outside the school , Ngugi wa Thiong'o never survived the daily heart break caused by the political trauma. Books, however, were his company. He loved books. "I loved books. Books can

enlighten but also benight, but at least one can play one off against another" (Thiong'o 65). SEP (*Saturday Evening Paper*) was established at the school, and Ngugi actively contributed to the editorials. His first experience writing for a magazine was with SEP. The Alliance's Debating Society was founded in 1939. Ngugi was looking for an argument and asked: "A person comes to your house. He takes your land. In exchange, he offers you a pencil. Is this a fair exchange?" (Thiong'o 120). Ngugi created an impression on the debate community and he became a leader of the debate society. Against the revolution going on outside the school grounds, there is the aesthetically pleasing order of the Alliance school itself. The teachers and the curriculum offer the students the possibility of personal redemption through study and godliness. The school's message is summarized, for Ngugi, in a passage he reads in the novel *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The novel's hero reaches the "Interpreter's House," a place "where the dust we had brought from the outside could be swept away by the law of good behavior and watered by the gospel of Christian service." But when he leaves the Alliance campus, Ngugi enters a world of checkpoints and armed British soldiers. Returning home, he finds his family and his old village neighbors relocated into a concentration camp similar to the "strategic hamlets" of the Vietnam War. So, from these painful personal experiences, a writer and an agent is born and eventually to question his own and his people's identity via literature.

## **II- The Use of Orality in *In the House of the Interpreter*:**

The narratives that Ngugi embeds in his story demonstrate Ngugi's talent, which results in the aesthetic appeal and coherence of his memoir. For example, in his depiction of his school vacations, Ngugi writes of the stories he hears while working in the fields with his mother and brother. Ngugi incorporates trickster narratives<sup>1</sup>, myths, and legends into his

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<sup>1</sup> In oral traditions worldwide, a story featuring a protagonist (often an anthropomorphized animal), who has magical powers and who is characterized as a compendium of opposites.



work, in addition to educating us about the conditions of their production. For instance, Ngugi presents a story about Mr. Body Parts in his narrative in an orality-enacting style.

Dissatisfied with his failure to appear in court after being rearrested, Ngugi records Mr. Body Parts', so titled because of the stories he normally tells convicts, account of how the Mau Mau<sup>2</sup> hacked up and buried different body parts of loyalists in different locations.

I certainly should not have passed on what my brother told me. Don't feel bad, a voice says. I look up and find Mr. Body Parts standing above me. I tense up, hoping it doesn't, show. *Shauri ya Mungu*, he says, sitting beside me without invitation. God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform. Shall I tell you a story? I don't feel like conversation, and I certainly hope it is not about the burial of body parts.(204)

Ngugi contributes to the transmission of passed-down tales that share the story of self and nation. Such Mau Mau myths give an alternate narrative to the official account. However, it is worth noting that a tale intended to showcase Mau Mau's heroics may instead reinforce the negative image that it is attempting to avoid: that of portraying the Mau Mau as a negative force.

Ngugi's interaction with Mr. Body Parts is documented in ways that imitate a tale telling session in oral literature. This is mentioned by Kabir Ahmed (1992) as one of the oral features used by Ngugi in *Devil on the Cross*. The inclusion of this tale in the memoir deviates from memoir writing rules. This is due to the fact that it reflects on others, in this case fictitious characters from a etiological, trickster tales and stories from traditional folklore. The story of characters such as Hyena and Antelope transforms our focus from a specific incident to showing a story characterized by timelessness and shared memory, in which everyone becomes a participatory audience. The narration brings the other convicts into

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<sup>2</sup>A rebellion in Kenya, in the 1950s, that advocated violent resistance to British dominance.

the story-telling session as a participatory audience. The explanation of why the chameleon changes color, as well as how the chameleon challenged the hare to a race, served to soothe their tensions and bring the convicts closer together. Ngugi contextualizes incarceration as a location of creative production by including these oral traditions into his narrative. In contrast to the domestic scenes by the fireplace or in the garden painted by Ngugi in his early chapters, these narratives shift to prison. Ngugi illustrates the degree to which orality impacts autobiographical writing in the manner in which they were narrated.

Storytelling is another aspect of Ngugi's oral technique in *In the House of The Interpreter*. This characteristic, embedded in the act of autobiographical writing, permits Ngugi to tell the tale of the Mau Mau repressions. Ngugi employs story telling approach to provide diversity on his monotone, presented in a setting approximating the traditional set up for telling stories. An inmate shares a significant story in his narration. He had worked in Nairobi. Saturday is the name he gives it, and he begins the narrative with the conventional introduction: "Once a very cruel area Assistant Chief who had killed many patriots with his own hands, was captured and sentenced to death by people's court"(Thiong'o 132). Ngugi adds: "The folks had body pieces in buckets to bury," capturing the irony that "the package oozed blood, but the police were more interested in those who did not have their papers in order" (Thiong'o132). The use of storytelling, on the other hand, indicates how orality may penetrate the personal narrative and suggests the continuance of historical events. The Mau Mau story is one such example. Ngugi employs storytelling to inject various points of view by showing the excesses of the screening process. The writer utilizes rhetorical questions, direct address, and irony in this storytelling as dialogue, which is portrayed not just from the storyteller's point of view, but also from Ngugi's as narrator.

To sum up, when Ngugi's talent combines with his ideological stance, he transforms autobiography into a revolutionary instrument. Thus, his memoir goes beyond creativity by

emphasizing both history and culture, as well as their relationship to individual freedom. Ngugi illustrates how a memoirist figure may be understood through narrative methods, formal choices, and as a vehicle for ideology, culture, and history. Ngugi also employs African mythology, music, and imitates the spoken word in his written works, implying that he is greatly influenced by African orature. His inclusion of stories that represent the people's culture, songs, proverbs, myths, and parables mirror the oral in his own writing, lending credibility to his experiences. This emphasized the importance of interpreting a personal experience as part of the cultural imagination in postcolonial discourses.

### **III - The Quest for Identity in Postcolonial Literature:**

When we need a definition, we consult dictionaries first. The Oxford English Dictionary 1999 (10th edition) defines identity as "*the fact of being who or what a person or thing is*"(705). In a postcolonial context, however, the phrase becomes a difficult, tricky, and confusing idea to define.

Postcolonial identity is a significant issue in postcolonial literature since it is the outcome of the colonial process; something that validates all of the debates and controversies that surround this term and have been discussed previously. This identity is shaped by colonial history and the postcolonial situation, which has resulted in the formation of cultural and geographical aspects that have influenced postcolonial identity and postcolonial literature. As Albert.J Paolini points out in *Navigating Modernity*: "If postcolonialism forms part of a struggle over discursive power in the constitution of identity, then history, in particular colonial history, also pay a significant part"(51).

Indeed, one of the major motives for colonized peoples to fight against colonial powers was a sense that they were losing the elements that comprised their identity. As Paolini contends, drawing on Stephen Slemon, this struggle was "to continue the resistance to

(neo)colonialism through a deconstructive reading of its rhetoric and to achieve and reinscribe those post-colonial traditions... as principles of cultural identity and survival”(64).

He continues to argue that resistance to colonialism and the search for a separate independent identity are fundamental characteristics of postcolonialism. So postcolonialism is a concept that arose to emphasize the role of postcolonial peoples in the world and to bring to life their voices as distinct from those of their colonizers. It came to differentiate postcolonial identity from colonial identity. Paolini claims that the postcolonial "Other" returns in a freshly constructed identity that is far from western identity, quoting Helen Tiffin's words:

Postcolonial writers “rehabilitate” the self against European appropriation. In fracturing imposed European master narratives and perspectives, postcolonialism replaces them with an “alternative vision”. This is particularly the case for “indigenous peoples” (India, Africa) who are able “to challenge European perspectives with their own metaphysical systems”. (79)

This postcolonial identity can be defined by the various elements that comprise it, such as Otherness, which is a key concept in defining the postcolonial identity as referring to how colonial and postcolonial subjects see each other, or more precisely how the West sees the rest and vice versa; and also how postcolonial subjects perceive themselves within their own societies. For, as Couze Venn said, “identity is an entity that emerges in relation to another or others; it is a plural self...”(Couze 2).

#### **IV- Ngugi wa Thiong’o on Identity, Home, and Exile:**

##### **1- The Quest for Identity:**

Before and after independence, postcolonial states needed a sense of belonging somewhere; they needed a collective identity that could push them to restore unity and independence. Ngugi is among those who believe in this idea that people need to restore or

form an identity first, then talk about independence. He argues in *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*, that “what is needed before the restoration of order” is “an identity that holds things and society together” (93).

Ngugi claims that imperialism attempted to seize all of its colonies' resources in order to benefit Europe and develop its wealth, and that in order to do so, imperial powers attempted to maintain control over the cultural aspects of the colonies. G.D. Killam reflected on this point in *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi*:

To make economic and political control the more complete the colonizing power tries to control the cultural environment: education, religion, language, literature, songs, forms of dances, every form of expression, hoping to control a people's values and ultimately their world outlook, their image and definition of self.(26)

This led to the hypothesis that the greatest way to recover everything that was taken is to completely reject colonial culture, with the goal of redefining one's worldview and giving colonized people the chance to "define oneself" via the creation of a unique literature which is authentic to who they truly are.

The issue of naming is raised by Ngugi as a sign of self-definition. He criticizes colonial governments for changing the names of people they dominated and giving them strange names in order to make them associated with the colonial power. Ngugi writes:

They also planted their memory on our bodies. Ngugi became James. Noliwe became Margaret. Our names got stuck with their names. Thus our bodies, in terms of self-definition, became forever branded by their memory. The name-mark pointing to my body defines my identity. James? And I answer: yes I am.(114)

Ngugi thinks that by doing so, colonial powers indefinitely linked their former colonial subjects to them, as if postcolonial subjects lost a part of their identity and replaced it with a foreign one with which they identified themselves. Should they accept being called by foreign names and did not try to get rid of them or replace them with original names, they will always be associated with the memory of the colonizer. Ngugi addressed this issue in his 2012 speech “Time for Africa to Reclaim the Black Body,” which was published in the *New African Magazine*. Ngugi stated: “the European naming system replaced the African. The very body of the African was defined by the European identity of being: Beatrice, Desmond, James”(41).

Ngugi argued in “AGlobalitical Imagination,” published in *World Literature Today*, that colonial powers made their literatures the center of world literature. Anyone in the world should accept the imperial center as a point of reference, ignoring the fact that there are many centers in the contemporary world, and everyone in the world is the center of his own world (41-42). This is to make the point that everyone may identify with his community, without regard for colonial memory or influence.

## **2- Home and Exile:**

Home and exile, according to Ngugi, are major themes in African literature. He himself was in this situation; he was estranged from his homeland, and he wrote novels to re-establish contact with Kenya and re-identify himself with his homeland. In *Moving the Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, he wrote:

Then in 1983/84 I wrote *Matigari*, a novel of return, in the Gikuyu language, and I felt a sense of belonging such as I had felt when in 1978 at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison in Cell N°. 16, I had written *Caitani Mutharabaini* (Devil on the Cross) as an attempt to reconnect myself to the community from which I had been so brutally cut by the neo-colonial

regime in Kenya. Now I had done the same thing and experienced not dissimilar emotions. (106)

For authors, exile is a factor that causes them to feel alienated from their homelands. According to Aziz Nihil in *Identifying Centers, Centering Identities*, Ngugi opted for "recentering [his] people in the world" through his works and essays in order to undermine the famous European centering of the world. There are two options for this: either move the center or divide it into many distinct centers within each and every nation in the world. And this is a means to escape exile and reintegrate with the community.

Ngugi also argues that authors in exile might experience "loss of freedom" (106) and are continually looking for a connection to their homelands. Not only that, but he claims that by depriving the colonized of their lands, the colonizer is depriving them of a place with which they may identify, as well as destroying not just those peoples but also the whole continent, resulting in an alienated civilization(107). Ngugi says: "Africa is a continent alienated from itself by years of alien conquests and internal despots. Thus the state of exile in the literary landscape reflects a larger state of alienation in the society as a whole, a clear case of colonial legacy which has left scars on the body, heart, and mind of the continent" (*Moving* 107-08). However, Ngugi thinks that nowadays, not just postcolonial nations crave for this sense of belonging; the whole world is in exile, fearing the day when they will no longer find a place to identify with (*Moving* 108).

As Ngugi reminds us in *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*, colonial powers split Africa after the Berlin Conference of 1884; thus there was an English Africa, a French Africa ... etc . As a result, Africans felt disconnected from their lands (5-6).He states: "The subsequent colonial plantations on the African continent have led to the same result: division of the African from his land, body, and mind. [...] yet the state has power over every aspect of his being. Whereas before he was his own subject, now he is subject to another" (6).

Because Africans are deeply linked to their lands and the land is a part of their being, the colonial powers separated their subjects from their lands and therefore their identity.

When people lose a feeling of belonging to a place, they do not feel the urge to resist, and they are susceptible to assimilation and therefore to domination. In this sense, and as Ngugi adds: “A European memory becomes the new marker of geographical identity, covering up an older memory or, more strictly speaking burying the native memory of place” (8-9). This may also be observed in the issue of names, but this time it is the names of places that become European names. Thus, the identity of a place becomes the identity of Europe. Even after their independence, these countries are still identified as Francophone or Anglophone (9). To finish on this point, Ngugi asserts in *Moving the Centre* that writing for him is a means to reconnect with his origins: “Writing has always been my way of reconnecting myself to the landscape of my birth and upbringing ... I lived its landscape, its rivers, its history and only after this imaginative return did I wake up to where I was” (Thiong’o 156).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues, in his essays and interviews, that identity, in all of its aspects, should be restored via literature. Obviously, his battle was mostly with issues of place, home, and exile. He clearly depicts the identity issue that surrounds postcolonial writers and subjects and attempts to address it by providing some solutions.

#### **V- Identity, Home and Exile in *In the House of the Interpreter*:**

Ngugi, like the majority of postcolonial authors, has always represented and wrestled with the concept of identity throughout his career. He has included this notion into his characters' habits, thinking, speaking, and even clothing. However, he did not insert it arbitrarily; rather, he did so because he felt it necessary to demonstrate to the world how imperialism has affected African identity, and how Africans like him seek to restore, if not reconstruct, their lost identity.



Ngugi wa Thiong'o is considered a key figure among postcolonial authors whose work is concerned with concepts such as nation and identity. He also reflects his society's experiences and relationships with the colonial power. According to Reena Mitra, his quest for identity was complicated by the history of colonialism. In one way or another, he examines this issue throughout his writings.

*In the House of the Interpreter*, a story that runs from 1955 to 1958, a period of four years when Ngugi was at the Alliance High School. It begins when he is seventeen years old and ends when he is twenty years of age. *In the House of the Interpreter* opens at the end of Ngugi's first term at Alliance High School. He is on his way back home from school. He is full of excitement and hope. Excitement because he is travelling third class which is better than the time he left home for the school in a goods train. Hope because he is going to reunite with his sisters and younger brother, and he is going to inform his mother about his good performance at school: He was among the top in his class.

Ngugi describes his sorrow after realizing that his home has been destroyed. He allows the reader to visualize the people' suffering after losing their home by providing a clear description of their former home. In the first chapter "A Tale of Home and School," he narrates this incident. From here, all of the subsequent episodes that Ngugi recalls, picks, and portrays from his school holidays are significant in revealing the dehumanizing deeds that people experienced as a result of the country's colonial system. He wonders at the sight of mounds of rubble; "How could a whole village, its people, history, everything vanish, just like that?"(3).

In his second part, "A Tale of Souls in Conflict", he narrates the episode of screening at school to find out those who had taken an oath of allegiance to the Mau Mau (35), the curriculum at school that glorified the West (39), and the fear of going home for vacation and not returning if the authority discovers he is related to Wallace Mwangi, who has escaped into the mountains to join the guerrilla fighters (43). All are chosen for their significance in

depicting Ngugi's deeply disturbed state and how he learns that even the school he refers to as the sanctuary does not provide him with the environment he requires for his developing intellect.

He captures events that occur elsewhere in "A Tale of the Street and the Chamber." By this time he is in his third year of school. He mentions the Suez Canal Conflict (65) and Ghana's independence from Britain (66), revealing that, while the school was no longer a refuge, it became more of a window through which he could get glimpses of what was going on outside.

In the last part, "A Tale of Hounds at the Gate," Ngugi shifts the narrative from April 1959, four months after he left school, to 1957, then again to 1920, and finally to July 1959. This linking together of events from various periods of time underlines a feature of the narrator's memory in an autobiography, which recalls then organizes the events for emphasis. This change of time allows Ngugi to demonstrate his psychological condition and character while relating an event that occurred in April 1959, when he gets detained because he does not have paperwork proving that he pays taxes.

He carries us through the events at Alliance High School while keeping an eye on what's going on at home, especially when he is on holiday. When he arrives to where his house should be and realizes that it is no longer there, he shows signs of anxiety, uncertainty, and anger. Ngugi's descriptive portrayal of the entire scene provides an accurate image of his home. He states:

My mother's hut and my brother's house on stilts have been razed to the ground. My home, from where I set out for Alliance only three months ago, is no more. Our pear tree is still standing, but like the ashy edge, it's a silent witness. Casting my eye beyond, I suddenly realise the whole village of homesteads has disappeared. The paths that had crisscrossed the landscape,

linking, the scattered dwellings into a community, now lead from one mound of rubble to another, tombs of what has been. There is not a soul in sight. (2)

Later, he finds that the former independent families from several ridges have been grouped into a single concentration village with no regard for old neighborhood. When he eventually finds his way home, Ngugi adopts a new identity—a stranger. He feels like an outsider in his own village since so much has changed while he was away at school. His family is suffering on account of his brother, Mwangi, joining the Mau Mau Uprising.

Ngugi refers to the Alliance High School as a safe haven because he believes it keeps the "hounds"—the British soldiers—away. According to the story, he is not the only one who considers the school to be a safe haven, but there are other pupils at the school who are experiencing similar difficulties. On the one side, students fear retaliation by colonial troops since their families were guerrillas in the mountainside; on the other, students fear retaliation by Mau Mau because their fathers are loyalists home guards.

As he narrates the story of his school life, he also addresses his family life, particularly during the school holidays. The people have remained strangers since their relocation to the concentration villages, and this disturbs Ngugi profoundly. He is no more than twenty years old when he decides to explore ways in which the members of the village might collaborate and foster a feeling of community in them. He is content in the end when he sees people gathering, in groups and the occasional dancing in people's homes. Ngugi observes:

The challenge of forging togetherness among the youth of the new villages would not leave my mind. When later I went back to Kamirithu on April 18th for the first break of the year, I started contacting Limuru boys and girls now in high school and those in their last year of their primary, to explore ways in which we might work together. (73)

So, Ngugi through his work does not only depict the strong desire of the writer to come to terms with his traditional Gikuyu identity and rebuild the ties with it, but he also conveys the writer's and his characters' newly formed identity which is a mixture between their pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial identities.

His journey to University is interrupted by British soldiers who demand documents proving that he has paid his taxes. Because he lacks them, he is placed on remand with other people. The event shows a psychological torture in his mind, and at one point he fears he may lose out on the opportunity to attend university. The narrative concludes with him in court, firmly defending himself, earning him his release, and he is finally back at the Limuru Railway Station, boarding a passenger train, not a cargo train, destined for Kampala, Uganda. In *In the House of the Interpreter*, Ngugi's story is being told in an effort to explain the experience of the wider Kenyan community that has been persecuted by British Colonial control. The terror of the British troops that accompany him to school is the same fear that has infected the country as a whole.

## **VI- Decolonial Agency :**

### **1- Ngugi wa Thiong'o on Decolonial Agency:**

This section seeks to explore early nationalist writing in the context of African literature, focusing on the prominent Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who interweaves literature with the public narrative of pre-independence ideology, and to demonstrate how the writer steers his narrative in the direction of a political discourse by drawing on cultural roots and founding myths. Many intellectuals regarded authors' dedication to social and political concerns as a moral responsibility in the context of African literature. "An African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant – like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames," writes Chinua Achebe (*Morning Yet* 78 79).

Many African writers used literature as a "weapon of political liberation," enlisting their work in the anti-colonialist fight during the pre-independence period in particular (Boehmer 175). There was agreement that literature should embody the "moving spirit in the nationalist struggle" (175) and aid much-needed social transformation.

Furthermore, rather than considering national identity as a permanent and unchanging construct, postcolonial writers regarded it as a "historical construct, shaped in particular by the [...] narratives which particular communities tell themselves about who and what they are" (Williams 18). In this sense, the narratives themselves aided in the formation of national identity, hence justifying literature's involvement in nationalistic causes. The emphasis is placed on shared cultural heritage and collective memory to contribute to the cultural revival of colonized communities in an attempt to grasp the national self-image. Writers were regarded as "beacons, soothsayers, and seers of political movements," and it was therefore "the writer's role to reinterpret the world, to take the initiative in cultural self-definition" (Boehmer176).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, as a Kenyan writer, was a particularly ardent activist in the field of national redefinition and regeneration. Ngugi speaks on the connection between literature and politics in his book of essays *Writers in Politics*:

A writer's subject matter is history: i.e., the process of man acting on nature and changing it, and in so doing acting on and changing himself. The entire changing relations of production and hence the changing power relations consequent on mutable modes of production is a whole territory of a writer's literary concern. Politics is hence part and parcel of this literary territory. (Thiong'o 72)

Literature is therefore regarded as a creative process that is conditioned by historical social forces and demands, rather than as a medium that reflects social reality. "[I]t cannot

elect to stand above or transcend economic, political, class, race, or what Achebe calls 'the burning issue of the day,' because those very burning issues with which it deals take place within an economic, political, class, and race context" (Thiong'o, *Writers in politics* 6).

Moreover, the author challenges the concept of historical meaning "by blurring boundaries between national and individual events, between factual history and fiction, thus throwing into question the process by which subjects position themselves in history and the ways in which they might conceive and tell the story" (Kessler 76). The works not only document the country's history, but also allow the author to reconstruct it from the perspective of the formerly mute colonized subject, which was regarded to have been bereft of its voice: "Ngugi posits narrative here as an agent of history because it provides the space for challenging our notions of national identities, uses of history, and ways in which they are deployed in power contestation in modern Kenya and Africa in general"(James, 1999: 2). His novels thus not only reconstruct the history of the country but also take the liberty to modify and mould the historical narrative in such a way that suits his artistic purposes.

Dori Laub distinguishes between "actual" and "traumatic" situations in "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening." Laub expands on Lacan's statement that the real<sup>3</sup>always returns to the same place (68), but its reality continues to elude the subject who lives in its grip and unwillingly undergoes its ceaseless repetitions and reenactments: "The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as causality, sequence, place, and time." As a result, trauma is an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during, and no after" (69).Based on Laub's observations, it would appear that Ngugi's constant repeating of the story of his emergency nightmare in various fora qualified his experiences as traumatic, the kind of testimony that, as Laub observed, "the survivor knows he is being heard" (71). Ngugi was one of the first Kenyan authors and

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3 The Real, according to Lacan, is the totality of reality, the intelligible form of the horizon of truth of the field-of-objects that has been disclosed, and is opposed in the unconscious to the Symbolic (fantasy, dreams, and hallucinations).

professors to dispute the colonial narrative of the emergency period and to highlight the pain and grief encountered by Kenyans during that time. The eagerness with which he narrated and replayed the narrative appeared to be an objective sign of the trauma and the urge to bear witness to it.

## **2- Decolonial Agency in *In the House of the Interpreter*:**

In this section, we are going to examine the experiences that built Ngugi's character as an active agent for his community. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the elite that had been taught by colonizing powers, sees that he has to give a voice to the silenced ones and to bear witness to history, so he included his experiences in the process of decolonizing the community from the colonial ties. *In the House of the Interpreter* is the depiction of his childhood life and especially his intellectual evolution, so to fully comprehend the concept of decolonial agency, we will explore how Ngugi embodied it in his memoir.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o was influenced by various literary figures, including Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, Chinua Achebe and Cyprian Ekweksi. Ngugi was at lost to what to write. He was inspired to write about his own land, culture, and people by George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*. He writes:

I want to tell how it all began, the struggle for school. The barefoot teacher was at the center of the dream. He is the interpreter of the world; he brings the world to the people; he is the prophet of a tomorrow. I want to write about this so bad, it's like a fever that has seized me again and intensified. (Thiong'o, 2010 : 88)

In *Birth of a Dream Weaver*, furthermore, Ngugi showed feelings of responsibility to write and bear witness to the suffering of the Kenyan society.

Chandrasah Choudhary remarks in *The Washington Post*:

A swift moving portrait of the artist as a young man, it describes the profound ripening of his artistic and moral consciousness. Instead, it is a book that should be read by any young person contemplating a degree in humanities. But for the full force of its majestic revelations and wrenching insights about selfhood, literature, history and politics, one should give a whole weekend to Ngugi and reads its prequels first... Every page ripples with a contagious faith in education and in the power of literature to shape the imagination and scour the conscience. (2016)

In the fiction, historical characters such as Jomo Kenyatta and Dedan Kimathi functioned as real heroes rather than mythical ones. Unfortunately, Good Wallace, his brother, and his uncle Gicini, who were involved in the Mau Mau rebellions, were arrested by authorities. Ngugi's entire family was caught between optimism and terror. It was the right moment; Ngugi considered his brother and uncle as heroes who struggled for truth and integrity. According to Ngugi, the colonial authorities had seen the liberation fighters as criminals rather than heroes of the ordinary people. This injustice fueled Ngugi's imagination, and he reconstructed Kenya's untold history in his fiction by depicting genuine historical figures and heroes.

The repeating of specific words in *In the House of the Interpreter* is a strong indicator of the value the narrator attributes to such terms. Every time he returns to school after a holiday, he says "hounds." The hounds are British soldiers, particularly the home guard, who make life miserable for the people. This term comes throughout the story to emphasize Ngugi's persistent terror as a result of the British military. Closely related to this is his continual reference to the Mugumo tree, which helps him provide meaning to everything in his life. In the midst of Ngugi's hardships, the Mugumo tree becomes a symbol of optimism and continuity. He finds hope in associating with the Mugumo tree. The attributes of the tree



motivate him by demonstrating that he is strong enough to overcome all of the problems that he faces and to continue the duty of bearing witness. Mwangi's brother, Mwangi, buries his gun under the Mugumo tree before surrendering to symbolize that the war must continue another day. This deed provides a light of hope.

In Ngugi's situation, as described in the memoir, he is just a secondary witness to his family's pain, and vital facts are concealed from him, causing him to become estranged from important events. Ngugi was not involved in key events and may have suffered from survivor guilt, as seen by the exaggeration of his one heroic deed with bloodhounds at the ending of *In the House*. But, as we illustrate, despite his sorrow over the information hidden from him, he does not pretend to understand what his family and other people went through throughout the emergency. His account of events from fifty years ago is notable for the way the adult narrator filters the experiences of the youth who witnessed them, raising questions about whether the autobiographical narrator's memory is truly recollection or a "retrospective construction," to use Jonathan Boyarin's term. In *Globalectics*, Ngugi asserts that his writing was "an attempt to understand myself and history, to make sense of the apparently irrational forces of colonial and postcolonial" (17). When read in conjunction with Laub's comments, the unending repetition/retelling of Ngugi's emergency nightmare is a narrative that demands more close reading. Ngugi may have been constrained by the genres in which he previously recalled his experiences, but every now and then we see him bearing witness through authorial intermediaries such as Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child*, Kariuki in *A Grain of Wheat*, Karega in *Petals of Blood*, and Muriuki in *Matigari*, or in autobiographical moments in his essays.

While these genres' expectations of neutrality are somewhat limited, the memoir as a genre allows Ngugi to speak in his own voice: in other words, to be a witness at all three levels Laub addresses. Helen Buss demonstrates in her authoritative study of memoir, *Repossessing the World*, that the narrative voice in memoirs performs three functions: participant, witness, and reflective/ reflexive consciousness (16).

Several events in *In the House of the Interpreter* indicate that Ngugi's perspective of the emergency was that of a secondary witness, or of someone negotiating the fundamental scene of postcolonial identity. When he returns home after his first school term, he acknowledges that he "had not heard about the displacement" of his fellow villagers into the Kamirthu Emergency Village (36). Random murders of villagers, the dramatic hanging of freedom fighters in the town square, and the apocalyptic-sounding "doomsday" all occur while he is in school. At home, he encounters a wall of silence as his family refuses to tell the horrific events that occurred during his absence. Even after his older brother Good Wallace is imprisoned, Ngugi hears about it "years later" (82). Ngugi's own strong mother is imprisoned for three months in the Kamrth Homeguard Post for Good Wallace's escape (69), but when she is released, she says nothing about her suffering other than "Gūtīrī ūtukū ūtakīa," meaning "every night ends with dawn" (97). Ngugi's constant re-externalization of the emergency's dislocations seems to be an attempt to eventually tell the narrative to himself. However, he accomplishes this by recalling narrative memory rather than the tragedy from which he was plainly detached.

Because Ngugi was away from the painful events of the emergency while attending the colonial school, whose "warm bosom" provided him with motherly warmth, he uses the memoir to bear witness to the frustration of others, being cautious not to claim that experience as his own. By maximizing the reflective/ reflexive consciousness, he recalls narrative memory that situates his rising consciousness and upward mobility within the larger context of the battle for independence. At the end of *In the House of the Interpreter*, having gained some autonomy as a contemporary subject, he is able to reconcile with his community as its belated hero.

To conclude, Ngugi tells the events in a seamless manner, lending credibility to his narrative. He has gone above and beyond to complement the narrative's material with

paratextual aspects that confirm and demonstrate proof in the narrated text. Photographs and captions, letters, a list of names, an epigraph, and dates of certain historical events and occurrences are among the paratextual elements. These aspects also complement one another, bringing meaning and consistency to the realization of the main purpose of his memoir, which is bearing witness that requires a sense of credibility, so by adding these aspects, Ngugi gave the narrative a sense of trustworthiness.

## Conclusion

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of the postcolonial writers who has properly addressed and dealt with the issue of identity, whether via essays or novels. He passionately believes that since literature is the bearer of culture, it should be authentic to the identity of the writer and his society.

He expressed his thoughts in essays and interviews; he maintains that identity, in all of its aspects, should be restored via literature. Obviously, his fight was mostly with language, which will be dealt with in the next chapter, but he also dealt with issues of place, home, and exile. He depicts clearly the identity issue that surrounds postcolonial writers. This search for identity is portrayed through his characters by depicting key concepts that constitute identity such as home, language, and otherness. He strongly thinks that since literature is the bearer of culture it should be true to the identity of the writer and his society. He certainly has issues with his own identity as with the identity of his people and of Africa in general. And through what has been said before, this writer considers the whole process of writing as a quest for identity. Thus, that identity, which is in his view was lost with the coming of the colonizer, has to be restored and constructed.

He also stated that his works are the result of his own experiences as well as the experiences of his people which made him an agent of his nation in order to bear witness to the traumatic situation of his country and other postcolonial states. That is why he conveyed it in both his articles and his book as well as in his autobiographical writings. His works also addressed the concept of education and the elements that comprise it, which will be addressed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Three: The Language Debate and Education in *In the House of the Interpreter***

### **Introduction**

Literature has always played an important role in the evolution of its society. It is the mirror of society as it carries a great deal of social and cultural significance reflecting its dynamism, issues, and changes.

In this chapter, a presentation of the linguistic situation in Africa and the language debate in African literature, which is a fundamental issue in African literature, will be tackled in detail. An exploration of the theme of language debate in *In the House of The Interpreter* would make the presentation more understandable. Further, a discussion of the colonial education and Ngugi's thoughts about it will follow. This element has a crucial relation to language as Ngugi was taught in a colonial school: Alliance High School. So this issue of education is very important in the building of the identity of people and the colonial powers took advantage of this and inserted colonial education in the colonized countries.

## **I-The Issue of Language in African Literature :**

### **1- The Linguistic Situation in Africa :**

Africa has the world's most complicated and diverse language situation. When African countries' borders were established, European colonizers showed no attention to Africans' cultural, historical, or linguistic affinities. These borders were set arbitrarily, independently from the continent's linguistic status. As a result, Africa witnessed a remarkable linguistic variety, with African ethnic groups within every nation having their unique dialects. Consequently, Africa is a home of 2,582 languages and 1,382 dialects out of the world's estimated 6,200 languages and dialects (Lodhi 79).

Despite the fact that multilingualism has various cultural advantages, it has created a communication challenge for Africans both among themselves and with others. Abigail K. Guthrie explains this in her work *Language and Identity in Postcolonial African Literature: A Case Study of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* (2011). She claims that "hundreds of [African] spoken languages further divide the African states, with an inability to communicate with members outside of the native [speaking] community negatively affecting the sense of nationhood and belonging" (15). Furthermore, due to the colonial actions, certain languages and dialects vanished at a rapid pace, while others competed with colonial languages.

European languages were imposed on Africans because colonial powers sought to unite each colony with an official language, the colonial language, whether English, French, or Portuguese. It is argued that the European colonial effort would not have been as successful if their languages had not been imposed on the natives, whose local languages were suppressed. This is exactly what Ngugi criticizes in *Moving the Centre* (1993):

It was language which held captive [Africans/ colonized] their cultures, their values, and hence, their minds ...The first was to suppress the languages of the

captive nations...the second mode of captivation was that of elevating the language of the conqueror. It became the language of the elect (31-32).

Africans were impacted in various areas, including politics, economics, religion, and education. According to Mazrui (1998), colonial administrators were interested in "African education insofar as it could provide them with a substantial pool of potential low-level government employees" (55). The latter was a critical component of the colonial process, which the French referred to as "assimilation through education." This "assimilation policy" was based on a notion of the superiority of French culture and "civilization." As part of France's "*mission civilisatrice*," when confronted with "barbarians," it was France's responsibility to civilize and convert them to Frenchmen (Mills).

On their part, the British were promoting the advantages of European culture, especially education. Clive Whitehead argues in his article "The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy"(2011), which examines British education policy in Africa, that indigenous people were "brainwashed to discard their own cultures and embrace Western cultures that were supposedly superior," resulting in a culture of dependency and a sense of inferiority (Qtd. in ar Turul Mart 192).

Apart from the unbalanced coexistence of colonial and indigenous languages, the problem of linguistic diversity continued throughout post-colonial Africa. The subject of African literature's language arose during a meeting in Kampala in 1962, when African writers gathered to discuss "African literature." When African writers attempted to define African literature, they were met with a vivid and intense discussion.

## **2- The Language Debate in African Literature :**

Language choice in African literature has been and continues to be a source of debate among African writers. It is evident that colonization brought the imposition of European

languages as a form of oppression, and colonizers realized that only via language could they successfully impose their culture. Thus, through this imposition, African languages have been marginalized in education. African literature published throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods was therefore written in European languages, with only few writers attempting to express themselves creatively in their own tongues.

Many of the writers who attended the Kampala conference in 1962 addressed this problem in their works. Chinua Achebe, for instance, discussed this argument in his article "The African Writer and the English Language":

IN JUNE 1962, there was a writers' gathering at Makerere, impressively styled: "A Conference of African Writers of English Expression."... But there was something which we tried to do and failed that was to define "African literature" satisfactorily...and then the question of language. Should it be in indigenous African languages or should it include Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans, and so on? (Qtd. In Routledge 427).

Achebe argues in this statement that the gathering's members had competing perspectives on the language of African literature. Wole Soyinka, like many other writers, thinks that utilizing European languages promotes national unity and facilitates communication between African cultures.

Achebe, on his part, stated that European languages could be "Africanized" to convey African thoughts and experiences. He was persuaded that English could effectively reflect his African heritage. "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience," he says. "But it will have to be a new English," he added, "remaining in touch with its ancestors but adapted to its new African environment" (Qtd. in Routledge 433).

Leopold S. Senghor, a Senegalese poet, defended European languages even more strongly. As he writes in French language, he stated that if he was given the option, he would



want to write in French. Furthermore, he claims that his mother tongue reminds him of "slap and blood," while "French words send out thousands of rays like diamonds" (Qtd. in Ngugi 19). He also thinks that the greatest way to express himself is through European languages, which allow him to be creative.

Some postcolonial African writers attempt to overcome the question of whether to utilize African or European languages by presenting a better alternative that may unite both sides. They dispute over "Linguistic Hybridity," a new linguistic trend pioneered by Ghanaian Koyo B. Laing. According to the latter, "there are no self-sufficient languages, but complementary languages." He is challenging, in other words, the ideals of "authenticity, superiority, and linguistic purity" (Qtd. in Issifou 56).

Other writers, however, such as Abiola Irele, Obi Wali, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o do not share the same view. They believe that the use of European languages is a betrayal of their mother tongues, and they think that writings created by Africans in European languages are not African literature. Ngugi states in his article "The Language of African Literature":

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

Writers such as Ngugi urge for the use of African languages in order to emphasize the Africanity of their works. This is also done to demonstrate the authenticity and uniqueness of African literature and to distinguish it from other world literatures.

Furthermore, in his work *The Dead End of African Literature* (1963), Obi Wali asserts that "until African writers accepted that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would merely be pursuing a dead end" (Qtd. in wa Thiong'o 24). Obi Wali believes that African literature cannot be genuine or worth the name unless it is written in African languages, which are the languages of the peasantry and working class. Wali further

said that African languages should not be "underestimated and relegated to an irrelevant status" (Qtd. in Eme & Mbagwu 118). Based on the above debate, we conclude that African writers demonstrate determination to articulate themselves in a manner that befits their experience and context in their writings, whether published in European or African languages.

We reviewed the linguistic issue, which is the most significant subject in African literature, and highlighted the linguistic situation in Africa, which is distinguished by its diversity and complexity. Many writers and critics were involved in this discussion and offered a variety of contrasting, even contradictory, positions. Ngugi, who switched from English to Gikuyu, was a major figure in the language debate; he adopted a radical position since literature created in English, in his opinion, is not African. He argued that by writing in English or any other European language, the African writer is maintaining colonial hegemonic practices.

## **II- Ngugi wa Thiong'o on Language :**

### **1- Language for an Authentic African Literature :**

Ngugi tackles language and its constructive role in national culture, history, and identity in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), in order to give sense to an African language-based literature. This collection of essays was published at a period when Ngugi was a firm defender of linguistic decolonization, following the publication of his first book in Gikuyu, *Caitani mutharaba-Ini* (Devil on the Cross, 1982). It argues for African writers to express themselves in their native languages rather than European languages so as to create an original African literature.

Ngugi states in *Decolonising the Mind* that in order to be genuinely free of Africa's old European masters, one must write in an African language in order to get rid of the continuing imperialist control of economy, politics, and cultures ( Thiong'o 4). Hence, Ngugi raises the question of language in African literature in his article "the Language of African Literature."

He claims that the language of African literature cannot be addressed properly unless the context of the social forces from which it is derived is considered.

Ngugi thinks that Europe imposed its languages on Africa in order to effectively control it, a process acknowledged by Frantz Fanon. Thus, Ngugi claims that colonialism was more than just a physical force. The bullet, on the one hand, was a means of physical subjugation; language, on the other, was the means of spiritual subjugation (*Decolonising the Mind* 9). English was promoted as the language of education in Kenya, which is the consequence of colonization. This was catastrophic for African literature since it effectively suppressed the oral African legacy in its African languages.

As a result, only religious stories or carefully selected stories that would not inspire young Africans to question their own situation were taught. Therefore, Africans were controlled by being forced to learn European languages. By utilizing negative reinforcement, colonial authorities aimed to convince youths (future generations) that speaking English is good and local languages are bad (*Decolonising the Mind* 11).

Furthermore, Ngugi recalls the Conference of African Writers of English Expression, which consisted only of African authors who wrote in English, since those who wrote in African languages were not invited. Consequently, Ngugi invites African authors to abandon writing in colonial languages, which he refers to as "Afro European Literature," and instead write in their native languages to give African literature its own definition. He claims that "what we have created is another hybrid tradition...that can only be termed to as Afro-European literature; that is, literature written by Africans in European languages" (*Decolonising the Mind* 26-27). The quotation demonstrates that African writers, while writing in European languages, do not address themselves to the masses to whom they have committed their works.

This kamiriithu incident of 1977 was the climax in Ngugi's life. He tells the circumstances that pushed him to start writing in Gikuyu, recalling his collaboration with

Ngugi Wa Mirii in the play script of *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*. It pushed him to reconnect to his own language. Then emerged the question of audience; according to Ngugi: “the question of audience settled the problem of language choice, and the language choice settled the question of audience” (*Decolonising the Mind* 44).

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

Thus, Ngugi’s conception of African agency is not at the origin of his reversal. But it was its relation to the language issue that provoked his radical thought. According to him, the relation between these two issues is obviously the audience which consists of the African peasants and workers.

We can conclude that Ngugi contends that the African writer must address himself to African peasants and workers, who symbolize Africa and carry its culture. The African writer must utilize language to engage these peasants and workers. In doing so, he also contributes to the development of authentic African literature and to the construction of a national culture that must be legitimately African.

## **2- Exploration of the Language Debate in *In the House of the Interpreter*:**

The use of language, whether in literature or in everyday life, is certainly important in shaping one's identity, and it is evident that this has been a controversial debate, notably among postcolonial writers and scholars.

As indicated in previous sections, some of them use "colonial language(s)" to universalize their cause and preach their voices to the rest of the world, while others see it as a way to give up their identity and forget who they truly are and where they belong.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o decided to write in a colonial language but eventually switched to writing in his mother tongue. One of the main reasons behind this decision consists in the fact that he considers language as the vehicle through which a writer can transmit his culture, traditions, and, most importantly, his voice to the world, and that the mother tongue is the best way to do so because meaning is lost in translation most of the time.

In *In the House of the Interpreter*, Ngugi narrates his experiences at school and talks about his relationship with the other students and teachers in the school. He relates how his English lessons were full of questions and differing perspectives from his fellow students and how these episodes reminded him of his friend, Kenneth, a fellow pupil in primary school. He remembers: "In my first few weeks at Alliance, I had looked for someone with whom I could argue the way Kenneth and I used to do. I was convinced that Kenneth could have more than held his own with any of my fellow students" (Thiong'o 30).

At school, life is full of puzzles for him. From the different subjects that he is introduced to there is the discovery of great and important words like beakers and compounds that he learns in chemistry. He learns a great deal about table manners in his English class. There are new books, choir, drama and scouting clubs.

Ngugi recounts his early childhood language experience as he compares his village teachings with stories in Gikuyu, his native language, in which language was magical, powerful, and lyrical. He attended Alliance High School, and he was shocked that the continuity that he used to feel with his language ceased not exist. In the third section of his book *Decolonizing The Mind* 1986, Ngugi states: "And I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture" (Thiong'o 11).

As the narrative progresses, there are several instances of contrast. His use of contrasting situations assists him in providing the reader with a vivid picture of the issue at hand, as well as in providing the reader with a clear interpretation of what he means. When

describing his first English class at Alliance High School, Ngugi compares the table manners he is learning from Mr. Oades to those he learned at home: “It was all abstract, so different from my rural cuisine of Ugali and Irio that I usually ate with my fingers, certainly without anybody waiting on me; Oades was training us in the habit of being waited on” (Thiong’o 13).

Another contrasting description that demonstrates Ngugi's feelings about the curriculum being abstract to him and the other students occurs during the same English class, when the teacher leads them to his bathroom where they discover bathtubs and sinks. Ngugi comments that back at home, his bathroom is the riverbed where he washes clothes and takes a bath behind the reeds, which is a complete contrast to what he sees in the teacher's house. Thus, he vividly remembers the concrete home environment instead of the many instances of the English setting.

Ngugi's use of humor in his story to illustrate the dialogue among pupils after the first English lesson exposes his feelings towards western language and culture. Indeed, his decision to create humor through reportorial mode allows him to adequately express the emotions of the other pupils. He says:

We recited the order of a three course meal: starter, soup, main dish, fruit and dessert, which some still pronounced desert, to a general laughter... This produced more laughter; how would we eat *githeri* and *ugali* with forks and knives? The *ugali* would lose its taste, someone observed with solemn concern.  
(Thiong’o 28)

Ngugi is able to make living experiences understandable and meaningful to the reader through such humorous depictions of his early language experiences. By contrasting education and language in both English and Gikuyu settings, Ngugi shows how language, the carrier of culture, shapes youths’ minds. He also highlights the dominance of English language on literature, which explains his use of orality in *In the House of the Interpreter*, as discussed in the second chapter of this study. To use Ngugi’s words, language and literature

were taking people further and further from themselves to other selves and from their world to other worlds.

Ngugi had a great opportunity by going to school, but at the same time, he had a different feeling towards the culture and food. He yearned for the traditional life and kept comparing it to the new English concepts that he is encountering in the class. Furthermore, he always questioned the English language and terminology inclusion in relation to literature. He says:

But even Kariuki could not make me passionate about three centuries of English obsession with flowers and seasons. In Kenya there was sunshine and green life all year round, and flowers were never a thing of surprise. I could not escape the magic of literature, its endless ability to elicit laughter, tears, a whole range of emotions, but the fact that these emotions were exclusively rooted in the English experience of time and place could only add to my sense of dislocation. Not every flower in the world was one of Wordsworth's *host of golden daffodils*. Kenya's flora and fauna, and the rainy and dry seasons, could also provide images that captured the timeless relevance of art, but we did not encounter them in class.(68)

So, Africans were confronted with the language of the colonizer. Purposefully, language was a means of enslavement and a tool to devastate African traditions. Accordingly, Ngugi clarifies and exhibits the negative role of language by emphasising that “[t]he bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation” (*Decolonizing the Mind* 9). It is therefore not accidental that at the same time as English and French languages were being used as tools to forge bourgeois unities in Africa, these foreign languages were also the tools to spread the empires. In this respect, Ngugi affirms that the use as well as the teaching of English to Africans in general, and Kenyans in

particular, must be seen as a process of “safeguarding European interests in Kenya” (*Writers in Politics* 61)

Ngugi spoke a lot about Shakespeare in the memoir, and he stated that students’ performances lacked a sense of political urgency and the theme of power struggle; he says:

But though they lacked obvious political themes, the students’ efforts laid a foundation for a tradition of plays in African languages, Kiswahili in particular, and of theater as community involvement. While the English-language productions targeted school audiences and were often attended by the English-speaking colonial elite, the Kiswahili productions targeted the community as its main audience. Still, it was Shakespeare who had inspired the local tradition, one that demonstrated, in practice, that Kiswahili was an equally legitimate vehicle of creative imagination.(164)

Hence, Ngugi, convinced that foreign language is a threat, urged his fellows to ultimately reject and adopt native languages. He did, in fact, return to his origins, choosing Gikuyu as his official literary medium of expression. As mentioned in *Decolonizing the Mind*, there must be two main reasons for his rejection of English. Ngugi claims that "African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages what Spenser, Milton, and Shakespeare did for English, and Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian" (29). Ngugi therefore refutes the assumption that English is the medium of universality. Thus, African writers would carry the flame and promote African literature to the world if they wrote in indigenous languages. Second, Ngugi addresses the issue of Englishness with the following phrase: "I knew what I was writing about, but for whom was I writing?" (72). Ngugi's interest in the mother tongue appears to be motivated by the question "who is my audience?" (60). In this regard, Amoko claims that his goal is to achieve "a large popular Gikuyu audience" (92).

To conclude this section, Ngugi debates the significance of language in his literary work; he considers that choosing African languages is essential for the African writer because



it allows him to address his people in a language that they understand. According to Ngugi, the African writer must address himself to the African peasants and workers who represent Africa and the community as a whole. The African writer must utilize language to engage these peasants and workers. In doing so, he also contributes to the development of authentic African literature and to the building of a national culture that must be genuinely African.

### **III- The Concept of Education**

This part of the study aims to explore the theme of education in colonial African literature by focusing on Ngugi wa Thiong'o, one of Africa's most eminent novelists, who has expressed a strong interest in the theme of education in several of his works. His creative output has spanned nearly a quarter of a century. His fictional works are centered on specific eras in Kenyan history. Colonialism, the fight for political independence, and the transition from a colonial administration to an independent state are all themes that he explores in his work. However, one of the most recurring themes is education, which he approaches with a keen awareness of the impact it has on these historical and social events over time. Through his constant return to this theme, he has given education a special importance, which can be used to decipher his social concern. Ngugi is one of the African authors who has purposefully expanded on this theme, and each work reveals the author's perspective on education and the issues surrounding it. To fully understand the theme of education in *In the House of the Interpreter*, Ngugi's childhood and his intellectual development as discussed in the memoir will be highlighted in the section.

#### **1- Education in Colonial Literature**

According to the Encyclopedia Britanica, "education is a discipline that is concerned with methods of teaching and learning in schools or school-like environments as opposed to various non-formal and informal means of socialization"(e.g., rural development projects and education through parent-child relationships).

Exploring the impact of colonial education on colonial subjects' perspectives is a critical field of research for postcolonial researchers. It is widely acknowledged that colonial education had a key part in luring the conquered subjects into Empire. Thomas Macaulay's "Minute on Education," presented in 1836, established the stage for colonial education to spread throughout the colonies. Macaulay advocated for the education of a chosen group of colonized men. These men were supposed to be "a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern- a class of Indians in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect"(Bhabha 124-5). The publication of Macaulay's "Minute on Education" sparked educational changes across the British Empire. Their goal was to educate people who could assist the British in colonial political administration.

Several scholars have investigated the effects of internalizing and absorbing colonial discourses disseminated in schools and other colonial spaces. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon investigates how the imitating colonized subject becomes overly conscious of the Manichean binary of black and white and its associations with inferiority and superiority respectively, and identifies with the white subject in order to better himself by suppressing all native socio-cultural traits (1973). In "Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't: The Dilemmas of Colonizer-Colonized Relations," Remi Clignet extends Fanon's argument about the psychological and mental split caused by internalization of colonialist ideologies in the contentious colonial subject, and claims that colonial education produces "double alienation"(Remi 297). The activities, ideas, and philosophies imposed on him, he claims, are alien to his frame of reference and his own tradition:

His first alienation is thus caused by his exposure to educational and cultural stimuli that tend to erase the significance of his own past. His second alienation, however, is caused by the selective nature of the elements of the metropolitan culture with which he is confronted. The machinery books, the movies, the curricula, and the labor force

exported to the colonies reflect the specific needs experienced by the segments of the metropolitan society present at the local scene. As such, they offer a distorted image of the metropolitan culture. (297)

Colonial education erases the native subject's socio-cultural affiliations. Furthermore, as Clignet points out, it exposes the indigenous subject to a colonialist view of the metropole. He contends that colonial education should not be seen as a faithful replication of English educational models, but rather as the specific tailoring of English and European discourses to meet the requirements of colonialist rule. (Remi 312)

Colonial education was not limited to the colonies. Imperialist education, aimed at recruiting future officers, technicians, and teachers, was disseminated in the metropole through schools, where children learned to support Empire as English subjects. Both John MacKenzie and J.A. Mangan have written extensively about the role of the English public school in disseminating colonial discourses to British schoolchildren. According to Edward Said, the novel served as an epistemological tool in familiarizing the English masses with imperialist representations of colonized subjects and their spaces. The novel educated the English masses in some ways about their roles as imperialists and as universally superior subjects in a hierarchized global context(Said 1993).

## **2- Ngugi wa Thiong'o on Education**

The theme of education in Ngugi's works has not been thoroughly researched. Killam and Cook's limited work on this topic is aimed at emphasizing its significance to the reader and paving the way for future research. Nonetheless, their focus has not been on education in particular, but on an overall appreciation of Ngugi's work, of which education is only a small part. However, the importance of this theme to the author reflects the significant role it has played in society, particularly in certain historical and social situations. Ngugi is an African artist who has consistently and consciously portrayed education in almost all his fiction as

directly influencing society's attitudes and contributing directly to their state of well-being. He has not simply documented historical events and imposed education on them, but rather traces the evolution of education since its inception and reflects on its relationship to society, particularly social environments, through his artistic skill. Along with this, he considers society's dynamic nature, its ability to adapt to social and historical changes, and thus gives the theme a non-static nature. Through his fiction, he has depicted various perspectives on education that have evolved over the course of his writing career. His social and historical conditions have had a significant impact on his growth and shifting attitudes. These viewpoints, their evolution, and the ways in which they represent a developing aesthetic and social consciousness are of particular importance to our research.

There are several reasons why Ngugi's intense interest in education cannot be overlooked. Outside of his fictional works, he is more vocal and states the need for society to design its own educational system that is relevant to its needs and aspirations, particularly in his essays in *Writers in Politics and Homecoming*, the latter of which he sees as an integral part of the fictional world of his first three novels. In one of his recent pronouncements on education, "Education for a National Culture," he emphasizes the role of education in conveying a culture that instills the understanding that man may be in charge of his social environment and of himself.

Ngugi grew up in a society that highly valued education. This society has had a significant impact on his attitude toward education. His early novels reflect the impact of western education during the colonial period to a large extent. They are set in circumstances where only a small portion of society has received western education, as opposed to the larger society, some of whom are opposed to missionary influence in their traditional lives. His later works are set in modern African society, where a large percentage of the population has had some formal education up to a certain level. The impact of education is noticeably different

here. The author's view regarding education and society, as well as their roles in each other, is similar. The portrayal of education by Ngugi, who has also progressed both aesthetically and in terms of social vision, arouses scholarly interest in such a rapidly changing society. We will look at how the author addresses this difficult subject through an examination of his second autobiography. More precisely, we will look into the impact of this education on Ngugi, as well as the author's attitudes toward education at different points in his career and the circumstances that may have influenced these attitudes. Various personalities and some scenes depict attitudes ranging from hope to despair and disillusionment.

### **3- Education in Ngugi's *In the House of the Interpreter*:**

The term 'colonial mimicry' refers to a colonized person's ambiguous connection with their colonizer, in which components of a colonial power and its terminology are appropriated in order to oppose its discursive discrimination. According to postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, the process might produce a "third space" for the formation of new hybrid and potentially liberating forms of subjectivity that are neither "traditional" nor "colonial."

Ngugi wa Thiong'o attended a colonial public school in Kenya in the 1950s. In his autobiographical writing, he depicts public school as a space where he inherited the colonial project's identities while also gaining experiences that enabled him to transcend the roles generally allocated to young Africans who obtained an elite education during the late colonial period.

Ngugi contends that the struggle against imperialism and its colonial and neocolonial phases can only be led by African language and resistance culture. It was thus essential to confront novelists like Karen Blixen and thinkers like Hegel, whom Ngugi compared to a nineteenth-century Hitler because of his support for the transatlantic slave trade. Ngugi changed his English name in 1977 and began writing in his native tongue, Gikuyu.

This was not a case of ironic appropriation, but rather a fundamental revolt against western high culture and the colonial educational tradition that encouraged it.

Colonial education was typically sporadic in British-ruled African colonies. As a result, public schools like Alliance were viewed as a beacon of learning to which only the most brilliant could obtain admittance. This latter stemmed partially from missionary effort and partly from the paternalistic colonial government of the 1920s, which saw the necessity to support educational activities in the colonies. There were differences across the institutions, but the goal was to educate independent-thinking young Africans who were also conscious of their inferior position in the established racial hierarchy. The educational aim neatly summed up by the Alliance school's motto, 'strong to serve,' was, to say the least, a very conflicting concept.

However, when considering Ngugi's three-volume autobiography, released between 2010 and 2016, this view becomes slightly more complicated. His second memoir *In the House of the Interpreter* is perfectly suited to his time at public school. One evening in 1957, the school debating group was debating whether "western education has done more harm than good in Africa." Ngugi explains how he became involved in the heated debate: "A person comes to your house. He takes your land. In exchange, he gives you a pencil. Is this a fair exchange? I would rather he kept his pencil and I kept my land" (Thiong'o 113). At the end of the argument, the majority agreed with Ngugi. The lesson he learned from this was the importance of a well-chosen analogy in illuminating and criticizing colonialism's complicated relationships.

Ngugi's interaction with the school's leading principal, Carey Francis, a dictatorial, Cambridge don who had committed his life to the education of young East Africans, is equally instructive. At one point, Ngugi was forced to admit that his brother was fighting for the rebels in the struggle raging between the Mau Mau (or Land and Freedom) movement and

the colonial authorities. Ngugi anticipated to be expelled but was not, and subsequently found that Francis utilized the school as a safe haven for youths caught up in the conflict on both sides. This latter changed Ngugi's perception of the war, that "put more cracks in my perception of a white monolith pitted against a black monolith already challenged by the reality of many Africans, including some relatives, who fought on the colonial side" (Thiong'o 81).

Productions of Shakespearean plays, which the school made an annual event because it was persuaded of the worldwide resonance of the great dramatist's works, were also directly influential on Ngugi's intellectual growth. A performance of Shakespeare's "As You Like It" provided Ngugi with "a momentary vision of the world as a vast village of the type with numerous paths, their entries and exits beyond the horizon ... I could not help comparing the pairs of exiles in Arden to my brother, Good Wallace, wandering in the forests of Nyandarwa and Mount Kenya" (Thiong'o56). His numerous descriptions of theatrical plays are noteworthy, since he was instrumental in renewing the East African theatre culture. Because of their evident political message, the plays, written in Gikuyu, were viewed as a threat to the government, leading to Ngugi's imprisonment in 1977.

It has been stated that a fair perspective of western imperialism requires that the good impacts of colonial rule on infrastructure, health care, and higher education be included. This, however, is not a Ngugi's point of view. For him, colonialism was a uniquely oppressive concept by definition. When Ngugi discusses how the colonial education system gave him the means to oppose its structure, he continually highlights that this occurred despite the system's logic. Unintentionally, a third space was established in the encounter between pupils and teachers, with the capability to challenge colonial ideologies and systems.

Carey Francis, the Principal of Alliance High School, stands out among all the people who have an impact on Ngugi's educational development. Ngugi makes the following observation early in his narrative:

By insisting on high performance on the playing field and in the classroom, Carey Francis produced self-confident, college, prepared, intellectual minds. By the time I left Alliance, I felt that academically I could go toe to toe with the best that any European or Asian schools could produce. (Thiong'o 20)

Some of Carey Francis' ideals had an impact on Ngugi's life. When he gets angry, he delivers a thorough description of the principal that sums up his attitude. He recounts an event at assembly time when a teacher arrives late after everyone has already taken their seats on the grounds. The detailed portrayal leaves the reader in no doubt about the principal's current state. It also indicates the principal's character when it comes to time management. Ngugi states:

Suddenly Carey Francis started breathing heavily through the nose, fuming, tongue thrust into the cheek, rolling it side to side inside his closed mouth, as if moving a small ball from one side to the other, so that his left and right cheeks swelled in turn... I thought the ground underneath his feet would give way.(Thiong'o 48)

This incident shows Ngugi that Carey Francis is a no-nonsense man who wants everyone in the institution to be punctual. Ngugi embraces the spirit of being considerate of others and sharing thanks to the principal. This he learns from football, where Carey Francis stresses that scoring a goal requires teamwork and that the ball must be passed on the pitch. In a football game, it is not one individual who deserves all of the credit, but rather all of those who pass the ball to the guy who finally scores. The title of Ngugi's memoir is derived from his meeting with the principal:



Then said Christian: what means this? The interpreter answered: This parlour is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the gospel. The dust is his original sin and inward corruptions that have defiled the man. He that begun to sweep at first is the law, but she that brought the water and did sprinkle it is the gospel. (Thiong'o 48)

The title of Ngugi's *In the House of the Interpreter* is inspired by these words from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>4</sup> Ngugi could not stop admiring Carey Francis' fantastic performance in which the metaphor likening the prestigious Alliance High School to the Interpreter's house in Bunyan's book left not only Ngugi, but also the other students with a reconstructed image of the school. We may conclude from this passage that Ngugi's narrative is a testimony to the values implanted in him and the other boys who came through the institution and were moulded by Carey Francis, the "Interpreter."

The independent character of the principal shapes Ngugi into a person with an independent mind when it comes to making the right decisions in life. Ngugi's character of refusing to join others for the sake of majority ideals is obvious evidence of a noble virtue acquired from the "Interpreter." He recounts an instance when he was a dormitory prefect and had an issue: whether to punish or not punish his classmates when he saw them smoking. According to Ngugi, his predecessors would exempt their friends from punishment. He chose to do the right thing and punish them (145). According to Ngugi's reference to Carey Francis, the principal served as a father figure, disciplinarian, advisor, teacher, friend, and role model to the boys at the school, notably Ngugi.

The absence of Ngugi's brother had a negative impact on his life especially on his journey in the school. On the other side, he works hard academically to impress him, and Ngugi is continually reminded of his brother's last visit from the mountains to wish him luck

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<sup>4</sup>*The Pilgrim's Progress* is a religious allegory by the English writer John Bunyan, published in two parts in 1678 and 1684. The work is a symbolic vision of the good man's pilgrimage through life.

in his final exam before joining the Alliance High School. The risk his brother takes on this particular night strengthens his determination to keep trying for the best and not disappoint him. Ngugi's brother's absence serves as a daily reminder of hope. This later demonstrates how essential education is in Ngugi's family. His education was impacted both positively and negatively by his brother's absence.

The Alliance High School has had a significant impact on Ngugi's both educational and personality development. It is at this school that he sharpened his writing abilities. Ngugi learns to generate inconsistencies in his opponent's perspective through the debating club, a technique he maintains and applies at the end of the narrative when he is in the court to defend his innocence. He refuses to be overwhelmed by the arresting authorities and defends himself, eventually winning the case. It is the confidence he learned at Alliance High School that pays off.

Ngugi develops leadership qualities from his appointment as a school prefect, which assist him to arrange his new village at Kamirithu for voluntary work in the community. It allows him to spend more time working with people of all ages toward a similar objective. The scouting club at school aids Ngugi in life challenges in order to reap a better future. He says this towards the end of the first term: "First term was coming to a close, and I had already been changed immeasurably" (Thiong'o 40).

The books that Ngugi reads or discusses have a huge impact on his life. Ngugi is inspired to write about his own childhood after reading Tolstoy's autobiography *Childhood, Youth, and Boyhood*. He also reads Albert Schweitzer's autobiography, *Out of My Life and Thought*, in which he learns the value of service to others. He states this about the writer: "My love for volunteer work may have been inspired by the devotion to service manifested in the lives of two desperate missionaries" (Thiong'o 162).

Besides the readings, his teachers and fellow pupils at the school had an influence on his intellectual development. His interactions with pupils like as Bethuel A. Kiplagat encourages him to accept people from diverse communities. Ngugi's familiarity with the institution is immediately evident. In several places, he refers to it as Alliance rather than Alliance High School. This explains how he became fond of it and saw it as his second home.

All in all, we have closely examined Ngugi's perspective on education, which has progressed and changed significantly over the course of his literary career, and we have also identified the fact that the author's society places education in a very central position in their welfare. Education has remained the most desired component of the colonialist in this society. Also, Ngugi's engaged role as a conscious learner who is aware of colonialist ideology and, at the same time, of the necessity to acquire the skills that would aid him in decolonizing himself and his society. This shows us his active and critical agency as a subject who resists the colonial ideology transmitted at school but within and thanks, in part, to the education he received at school, paradoxically. In other words, he is an active agent who does not simply accept colonial educational ideology but confronts it within its boundaries.

## Conclusion

Ngugi adopted the debate of writing in mother tongue in order to create a sense of belonging; belonging to his own people. To reinforce this sense, he did his best to study his people's traditions and beliefs by writing about and employing songs and idiomatic phrases, which are significant features of the original language spoken by his people. He used orality to reach all layers of his people while also creating a traditional atmosphere for himself and his readers, providing a sense of belonging and enabling them to identify with his stories through his language.

Moreover, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has a strong interest in the subject of education, which is largely due to its pervasiveness and its imbrications in colonial administration and control of the colonized through the imposition of a particular form of knowledge in his society. It is deeply rooted in his society's historical and social circumstances, and it has continued to have an impact on it in a variety of ways, some of which have caused the author great concern. As a result, Ngugi's autobiographic work represents a powerful glimpse the historical and social evolution of education in his country. Furthermore, Ngugi's intentional elaboration of this theme in the autobiography depicts an artistic response to educational challenges at different points in his career.

## General Conclusion

In this dissertation, we have attempted to study Ngugi wa Thiong'o's conception of important issues in African literature and postcolonial studies, namely identity and decolonial agency as well as the debate of language and education in his memoir *In the House of the Interpreter*. Since Ngugi is considered a postcolonial writer, we relied on postcolonial theory to fully understand the themes under study.

First and foremost, as the research indicated, postcolonialism emerged before postcolonial countries obtained their independence, but this notion has remained problematic in terms of definitions since critics disagree on the meaning of this term. On the one hand, some critics argue that it portrays the historical time immediately following independence. Many others, on the other hand, claim that it incorporates everything concerning postcolonial societies from the time of colonization to the present.

We can conclude the fact that postcolonial literature and societies in general are affected by the culture of the colonizer. However, it is obvious that some postcolonial writers try hard to resist that influence while others assimilate the colonial experience. But, we also confirm that postcolonial writers find themselves strolling between their original identity and the influenced identity.

This is to say that the reality of postcolonial literature cannot be separated from that of the postcolonial society. If we deal with aspects of identity in the postcolonial society, this means we are including literature also – since literature like society has been affected by imperialism. So, postcolonial literature depicts the reality of postcolonial subjects as being in a constant search for their identity.

Despite the fact that we are living in a mobile society which embraces the multicultural feature of this new world, postcolonial writers still struggle against such notions as centre and periphery, or dominator and dominated. They claim that since we are living in a

mobile world, we have to accept that the notion of centre is also mobile. There is a multiplicity of centers in the world.

Identity is a central theme in postcolonial literature. The majority of the postcolonial writers try to identify with this world and with their own societies through their writings. Not only that, if we take as example Ngugi wa Thiong'o, he tries to communicate the African experience to the world and to show the world what is the real African identity and depicts the major features that affect it, among which is colonialism. As it is seen in his memoir, there are several scenes that affect the shaping of his identity and his quest for it, such as the destruction of his home, the sorrow that he felt after seeing that a whole culture was erased to the ground as well as his psychological situation during the emergency state that his country and his village were going through. His autobiography is a tale of his personal experience that depicts the quest for his and his people's identity that was negatively affected by the colonial system. He strongly thinks that since literature is the bearer of culture it should be true to the identity of the writer and his society. He certainly has issues with his own identity as with the identity of his people and of Africa in general. And through what has been said before, this writer considers the whole process of writing as a quest for identity.

Being taught in a colonial school, Ngugi was probably expected to be among the elite that the colonial system wished to use in order to keep control over the colonized nations. However, a third space emerged in this respect, which led Ngugi to question the history of his country and the history of his people, which was told from a western perspective. Through the memoir, we can see that Ngugi stated that his works are the result of his own experiences as well as the experiences of his people which made him an active agent of his nation in order to bear witness to the traumatic situation of his country and other postcolonial states.

Throughout the analysis of the autobiography, we encountered plenty of scenes that show how the issue of language and representation was a prominent debate for Ngugi. As the memoir runs during his school years, he always had questions regarding the English language

and especially the English literature. He always compares the local and the western ways of naming things. He was even being humorous about the English terminology, which shows his interest in the language debate. Ngugi's prominent issue was language because language for him is the carrier of culture, and for a writer whose literary goal is to tell the history of his people, especially peasants and workers class's struggle, it was a necessity to use the mother tongue. Additionally, Ngugi sees that language was/is a colonial tool to dominate colonized nations and safeguarding European interests in Africa. Therefore, the African writer must utilize language to engage these peasants and workers. In doing so, he also contributes to the development of authentic African literature and to the building of a national culture that must be genuinely African. Moreover, for Ngugi, colonialism was a uniquely oppressive concept by definition. When Ngugi discusses how the colonial education system gave him the means to oppose its structure, he continually highlights that this occurred despite the system's logic. Unintentionally, a third space was established in the encounter between pupils and teachers, with the capability to challenge colonial ideologies and systems. Ngugi emphasized the values that were implanted in him and other students by the "the interpreter," Cary Francis, at school. However, this shows us his active and critical agency as a subject who resists the colonial ideology transmitted at school but within and thanks, in part, to the education he received at school, paradoxically. In other words, he is an active agent who does not simply accept colonial educational ideology but confronts it within its boundaries.

Another feature in autobiographical writing, which was indicated throughout the study, is how difficult it is for Ngugi, as an autobiographical writer, to distance himself from the events he is writing about. Ngugi, the adult writer, appears to have difficulty distancing himself from Ngugi, the protagonist of his memoir, at times while telling his childhood story. He occasionally (and easily) slips into making remarks about his childhood experiences that are not necessarily part of his childhood story. This demonstrates how far writers can go in telling their personal stories without being influenced by the maturity of their ideas.

Because these are individualized experiences, it appears that the writers are forced to reflect on them with hindsight while remembering and narrating them. What distinguishes Ngugi, however, is the brilliant way in which he turns autobiography into a revolutionary tool, particularly when his artistry intersects with his ideological standpoint. Thus, his memoir goes beyond artistry as it privileges both history and culture and their relation to the freedom of the nation. Ngugi demonstrates that a diarist character can be perceived through the narrative strategies, formal choices as well as functioning as a vehicle for ideology, culture and history. Ngugi also uses African mythology, songs, and imitates the spoken in his written works in ways that suggest that he borrows heavily from an African orature (oral literature). His inclusion of stories that reflect the culture of the people, songs, proverbs, myths and parables reflect the oral in his personal writing which gives authenticity to his experiences.



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