

## Ideological Categories in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's Three Novels

Gebreyesus Teklu Bahta<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This study, which uses Marxist dialectical literary theory and descriptive methods of analysis and interpretation, attempts to explore the social function of Ngugi's three novels (*Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, and *Matigari*) in the light of Kenya's colonial, post-colonial and the class system of society. Literary facts are compared to historical facts. By a close critical examination of the novels, the most crucial structure of ideas and values are outlined and critiqued. Dialectical relations between the individual ideology of the author, the ideology in the novels, the ideology of the then Kenyan society, and the position of the historical forces were determined. While the textual, authorial, and aesthetic ideologies are in harmony against all forms of exploitation, subjugation, and acculturation, the hegemonic postcolonial capitalist ideology is in sharp contradiction against them. Ngugi is found to be a committed socialist realist writer in his fictional and non-fictional works.

**Keywords:** ideology, superstructure, symbolism, hegemony, novels, Marxism, colonialism

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD, Assoc. Prof. in Literature, Dept. of Foreign Languages & Literature, College of Social Sciences and Languages, Mekelle University; email: teklugebrehah@gmail.com

## **Introduction**

Many renowned critics like Eagleton (2002, 2003, 2006), Demetz (1967), Foulkes (1983), Forgacs (1986), Benjamin (1997), Jameson (1997), Haslett (2001), and Guerin (1992) consider Marxist literary Criticism as one of the most important forms of criticism in the twentieth century. Most of them support it because of the emphasis it shows on the power relations of classes. Others, especially recent critics such as Newton (1997), Ngara (1985), and Brannigan (2001a, 2001b) appreciate it for its wider contribution towards the development of other forms of literary criticism such as stylistics, historicism, post-historicism, etc. Since Africa has faced several historical, political, and economic difficulties imposed by colonizers, Eagleton (2006) Ngara (1986), and Ngugi (1987a, 1987b) recommend Marxist literary criticism as crucial for Africans. Gebryesus' (2004) Master's thesis, which is the source of this article also regards Marxist literary Criticism as the most relevant but marginalized form of literary theory and criticism for African literature.

Since Ngugi is one of the most famous leftist literary giants in Africa as a playwright, critic, novelist, and essayist, it seems worth criticizing his works from a Marxist literary perspective to understand the role of African Marxist writers in general and Kenyan writers in particular. Close analysis of his novels may offer a clear insight of social, economic and political circumstances of colonial and post-colonial Kenya. In Marxist literary criticism, the analysis of the base-spectructure model is very important. This article aims to focus on ideology, which is one of the most important components of superstructure. It attempts to interpret Ngugi's select novels in the light of a Marxist analysis of the historical conditions in which they were produced. It compares literary facts to historical facts. By close critical examination of the novels, it is found out a significant structure of ideas and values, which relate to Ngugi's colonial and post-colonial class system of society. It also forged dialectical relations between the individual ideologies of the author, the ideology in the novels, the ideology of the then Kenyan society, and the position of the historical forces to illuminate the novels themselves in a relatively new perspective. Dialectical and descriptive methods are applied in the study. The descriptive and critical surveys of the select novels are augmented

with related literature. In short, the method is a documentary analysis of fictional and non-fictional works including history and politics books about Kenya.

The philosophical theory of dialectical materialism, which has influenced much of the ideas and theories of Marxist literary critics like Eagleton (2006), holds that categories are interconnected and interdependent. They interact and interpenetrate with one another and they must be studied in their natural interdependence and interconnection. Many ideologies influence, the production, distribution, and consumption of literary texts.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

#### **Authorial and Textual Ideology**

Authorial ideology is, according to Eagleton (2006), a kind of ideology writers can have about the hegemonic ideology because of their social class, nationality, religion, region, etc. Hence, it is essential to briefly evaluate Ngugi Wa Thiong'o based on this theory. He was born and grew up in a politically unstable time --- during the Mau Mau Struggle and State of Emergency in Kenya. His father was made a squatter by British imperialism as a result of which the family was exploited. The alienation of land, the basic means of production, from his family, makes him more sensitive to the land issue, which is reflected in almost all his works. His class background motivates him to side with the working class. At his early age, he was a follower of Christianity. Later on, he perceived the 'dominance' of Christianity over the traditional religion. In his early plays, short stories, and novels, he portrays the conflict of traditional religion against Christianity and the corresponding tragedies, mostly supporting the former. His Marxist View seems to be challenged when he glorifies traditional religion though he is against Christianity. Beginning from the time he wrote his early essays and short stories while still, he was a high school student up to the time he wrote his first two novels, he did not have a class-conscious ideological stand. Theoretically, he condemns "communist" countries whereas practically his short stories and plays have communist overtones though it is covert. His early works faithfully depict the people's hopes and doubts, ambitions and frustrations, joys and agonies, courage and fears as well as virtues and vices. While doing this he showed his commitment to the people. By virtue of birth as Kenyan, as well as personal and familial experience with atrocities of British imperialism he developed a strong Kenyan nationalism, which was against the hegemonic ideology of colonialism.

After his stay in Leeds, doing his MA in Literature, he further developed another ideology, Marxism. Then he attributed almost all of Kenya's problems to the essence of imperialism and its institutions. After Kenya became an independent country in 1963, it followed the capitalist system. Then capitalism became the ideology of the state, a hegemonic ideology. Ngugi's Marxist ideology came into conflict with the capitalist ideology of the state. The conflicts between Ngugi and the state authorities, as he wrote, are not personal or private. Rather, "they are ideological. These people [authorities] saw themselves as representing certain social forces, and I as representing others" (Ngugi, 1989:1). The differences, therefore, he believes, should be perceived "as social, political and historical phenomena" (1989:1). Though his critics blame Ngugi for Kikuyu centrism, his fictional and non-fictional works including his autobiography show that he was a Kenyan nationalist with a radical communist outlook at the time he wrote the latest works.

In his autobiographical book, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1987), he exposed the exploitative nature of imperialism and recommended a solution that should be taken by Kenyan democratic forces. "Imperialism," he underlined in the book, "cannot be run on any basis other than theft and robbery" (1987). "Theft" and "robbery", terms that abound in his novels, mainly *Devil on the Cross* (2008), are attributed to British Imperialism. He also strongly believed that British imperialism and its allies at home should not be tolerated. "... Democratic-minded Kenyans, workers, peasants, students, progressive intellectuals and others," he strongly advises, should "unite on the most minimum basis of a patriotic opposition to imperialist foreign domination of our economy, politics, and culture..." (Ngugi, 1987:xv). The Textual ideology of the select novels: *Matigary*, (1989), *Petals of Blood* (2005), and *Devil on the Cross* (2008) is similar to the writer's ideology. The three novels narrate the conflict between the ideology of imperialists and their native collaborators as justified in liberal democracy and Christianity on the one hand against Marxist ideology and traditional culture and traditional religion on the other hand. The sharp conflict manifested in day to day life of the community ends up in the supremacy of the ideology of the people, which is a typical characteristic of proletarian novels. The texts unveil the hypocrisy of Christianity and the selfishness of the imperialist agents and their local collaborators. On the contrary communality, universality, selflessness, humanity, generosity, and magnanimity are reiterated as superior value systems in the fictional world as it is in the real world.

Was Ngugi an advisor and writer or one of the political champions in Kenya to change the situation? To endorse his leftist and nationalist ideologies, he not only wrote politically charged novels, short stories, and plays but also produced several articles and books having the same agenda. To fight "cultural imperialism", he championed changing the medium of instruction from English to local languages to emphasize local works of literature at the University of Nairobi when he was the chair of the department of literature. His first collection of essays, *Homecoming: Essays on Africa and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (2023), addresses nationalist and Marxist ideologies. The essays expose the ideological stand of imperialism and castrate the super-structural institutions that endorse the cultural dominance of imperialism: Christianity and foreign syllabuses. The book moreover calls for the revival of indigenous culture and corresponding institutions. It also has Marxist tendencies. His Marxist and nationalist ideology is also consistent in other books: *Writers in Politics* and *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (2021). In both books, Ngugi strongly argues that cultural imperialism has uprooted the indigenous culture and identity of the Kenyans making them vulnerable to economic exploitation and political suppression. He underlines that colonial literature is part and parcel of cultural imperialism. He also perceives language, since it is part and parcel of literature, an instrument of domination. He, therefore, seems to theorize that the literature of the colonized people written in their language must counterattack the imperialist culture. To do this, Ngugi advises that other artists should "... return to the roots of our [Kenyan's] being in the languages and cultures and heroic histories of Kenyan people..." (Ngugi, 2021:65).

Since language is an ideological battlefield where different ideologies fight each other, Ngugi underlines the fact that "African literature can only be written in African languages, the languages of the African peasantry and working class, the major alliance of classes in each of our nationalities and the agency for the coming inevitable revolutionary break with neo-colonialism" (2021:27).

Ngugi is not merely urging other writers to "return to their [Kenyan's] roots" through language in these books. He, rather, took the initiative and wrote *Devil on the Cross* (2008), *Matigari* (1987), and the play *I Will Marry When I Want* (1987) in Kikuyu for his people showing them his commitment to his people and resistance to domination. When Ngugi wrote ideological works and motivated other artists to follow him, he was conscious of the

unspeakable atrocities such as murder, torture, harassment, and detention that awaited such artists by the government that had a different hegemonic ideology. Regardless of such difficulties, the publisher wrote, "Ngugi challenges African intellectuals and Kenyans in particular to raise and speak out against oppression and domination so that the 'iron hand of the oppressors may not be strengthened by the silence of those who have refused to speak out'" (Ngugi, 1983: blurb). The authorial ideology of Ngugi as discussed above shows his Marxist and nationalist ideological zeal and commitment. If Ngugi is an ideologically and politically motivated writer, how can we detect him from other ardent non-artist politicians? How can we regard him as an artist? Responses to these questions lead us to the study of theories of literature, styles, and narrative techniques as employed in his novels. Eagleton (2002) calls these things "aesthetic ideology".

### **Aesthetic Ideology**

Language and ideology are interdependent. In a country where two or more languages are used for communicative purposes, there will, most of the time, be dominance of one by the other. In this regard, Eagleton perceives language as a zone in which the " ... ideology of an imperialist class establishes its hegemony, or by which a subordinate state, class, or region preserves and perpetuates at the ideological level a historical identity shattered or eroded at the political" (2006:55). Ngugi, Ngara and other African critics also argue that the language used by a state or dominant class or colonizer becomes dominant over the language used by subordinate people. Since language can show and consolidate power relationships, they argue, it imposes the prejudices, ideologies, and habits of the dominant class or race over the dominant ones. Ngugi, as one of the African pioneers of this view, made changes in the medium of his last novels.

His first three novels; *Weep Not, Child* (2010), *The River Between* (2008), and *Grain of Wheat* (1986) were written in the language of the colonizers, English. Under such circumstances, there seems to be a contradiction between the writer's nationalist ideology and the ideology of the English language. Ngugi's fourth novel, one of the select novels in this study, is also written in English although the writer toiled hard to relate it with the culture of Kikuyu. The last two novels *Devil on the Cross*, *Matigari*, and the play *I Will Marry When I Want* are written in Kikuyu, the local language. Here, Ngugi seems to think about the consumption of his works. He thought that by writing in English, he could not address the Kenyan workers and peasants whose plight worried him more than anything else.

The second important aesthetic ideology in Ngugi's works is the intentional juxtaposition of written and oral modes of presentation. All the three novels are pervaded with proverbs, riddles, and short fables which offer cultural and ideological implications to the broad masses (peasants and workers). To regenerate the psychological consciousness of the community, the novels and plays are pervaded with poetic songs that can be sung everywhere by peasants and workers. A technique of the juxtaposition of oral form with the written form is, therefore, of great aesthetic significance. Though *Petals of Blood* contains such juxtaposition, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* contain extensive oral traditional poems in the middle of the prose narrative. It is possible to observe, for instance, how Ngugi employs an oral style of narrative in *Devil on the Cross*: Waringa tells her story in oral style throughout her all turns; the narrator talks to himself in oral style; the writer directly addresses his audience in omniscient third person point of view.

In all the three novels, *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, and *Matigari*, aesthetic ideology is acquired by the nature of point of view, focalization, irony, symbolism, allusions, allegories, and lexis used. The dominant point of view in all the three novels is the working class's point of view. The Marxist ideology is the dominant ideology portrayed in the novels. From the beginning up to the end, *Petal of Blood* narrates the fears and hopes, joys and agonies, confusions and disillusionments as well as aspirations and frustrations of the four characters: Munira, Wanja, Karega, and Abdela, characters who symbolize Kenyan working people. Little is said about the lifestyle of the exploiters. The capitalist exploiters Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria are burned down and they are depicted in a way that readers can have no sympathy for them. The focus of the narration is the lifestyle of the working class.

Similarly, *Devil on the Cross* focuses on the descriptions of the lifestyle of the working class. The narrators narrate the story from a working class perspective, a Marxist perspective. As compared with *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross* gives relatively more emphasis on the lifestyle of the characters, which symbolizes the exploiting classes. They are, however, made to expose their evil nature in the "Cave" in the form of testimony about their skill of "theft" and "robbery". The narrators put forward a humorous but stinging satirical attack on them. In terms of emphasis, therefore, this is a working-class novel. The last novel, *Matigari*, like the other two preceding novels, focuses on the life of the poor and working class. It painstakingly mirrors Matigari's life as a character, which symbolizes the lifestyle of the working class. In

all the select novels and some short stories and plays like *A Mercedes Funeral* (1987) and *I Will Marry When I Want*, (1977) Ngugi depicts a world in which the voice of a working class is heard much louder than their exploiters.

The three novels are pervaded with literary, religious, and historical allusions. Out of these types of allusions religious allusion is the most significant in *Petals of Blood* (2005). In many parts of the novel, there is a reference to the *Bible*: to the *Book of Revelation* (p.1), the last line of Yeats' poem *Second Coming* (p.1) to two poems from *Songs of Solomon* (189), and many others. *The Second Coming* and the other poems don't symbolize the coming of "Christ" and the advent of new ages. On the contrary, they implicate the coming of Karega and Abdela with a new socialist perspective that demands severe class struggle and the eventual development of socialism. Because the religious poems are juxtaposed with the revolutionary poems of Walt Whitman (Pages 1 and 262) and Amilcar Cabral (page 262) that encourage violence and class struggle, they predict a revolutionary vision. The Biblical quotations made by characters seem to show the 'deceit' and 'hypocrisy' of Christianity and its role in lulling the minds of the people against their class interests.

The religious poems that are taken from the stanzas of *Songs of Solomon* and Blake's poems that deal with fertility, fecundity, and lovemaking precede chapter three which contains the brief love affair between Karega and Wanja. The productivity of "Wanja", a character whose name means "mother earth" in a Kikuyu language and whose mind is tormented by a fear of getting barren symbolizes the hope of Kenya that can be achieved in the future through socialist lines. The historical references such as A Luta Continua, a motto used by the ZANU party of Zimbabwe and FRELIMO of Mozambique which means the struggle must continue, his use of Amilcar Kabral of Guinea Bissau, a socialist leader, and other covert expressions have also symbolic socialist meaning. Ngugi takes advantage of synthesizing the old history with the new one, verse with prose, religion with politics, local with the foreign, Swahili with English, and Kikuyu with English to support the unity of the workers around the world against the international bourgeois. The novel is pervaded with many other things having symbolic values: *Petals of Blood* (2005) symbolizing at the beginning evil, abnormal, and chaos, later on, purity, truth, and splendid; drought symbolizes evil, hunger, and unhappiness and rain just the opposite. Movement or journey is one of the devices that appear to have very significant symbolic values. The journey of the people of Ilmorg to Nairobi symbolizes the



development of the political consciousness of the people. Before they begin the journey, they trust their leaders to some extent. After the journey, the people become aware of the corrupt nature of the state. The other meaningful and interesting symbolic pattern in the novel is related to the titles of the four chapters. When the titles of the four parts of the book are combined, we get one meaningful phrase: Wâlking (P. 1) Toward Bethlehem (P.119) To Be Born (P.189) Again.... A Luta Continua (P. 261). This phrase is equivalent to saying to be free again we have to continue fighting. All the characters have also symbolic representations.

*Devil on the Cross* (2008) is pervaded with religious and historical allusions. Religious concepts like Satan, Angels, the Cross, and Christ are allusions taken from the Bible. The references to communist China, Cuba, etc. can also be regarded as historical allusions. The most important literary device in this novel is allegory. On the surface level, it seems a fable that deals with people who discuss 'theft' and robbery, openly in public. Their meeting is called a 'Devil's Feast' and their gathering place is a "Cave". On the surface level, it has funny and ridiculous effects. At the allegorical level, the points raised have consistent implications from the beginning up to the end of the novel. The devil on the cross symbolizes imperialism under the disguise of Christianity. The "Devils' Feast" symbolizes a kind of business meeting where international businessmen mainly Kenyan tycoons, exhibit their property. The "Cave" symbolizes the auditorium where the meeting is held. The allegorical device is used to satirize the corrupt nature of the bourgeois. The Christian myth is juxtaposed with cultural myth. In this way, Christianity is trivialized and degraded. There are different types of irony: dramatic irony situational irony etc. in the novel.

As in *Petals of Blood* (2005) and *Devil on the Cross* (2008), historical, mythological, and religious allusions are intensively used in *Matigari* (1989). In many parts of the novel, historical references are made to Chinese communism and the ideologies of other capitalist countries. The most important form of allusion in the novel is religious allusion. From the beginning up to the end of the novel, Matigari is compared with Jesus Christ. The super-human qualities such as his tireless quest for truth and justice, his ability to release prisoners, and his sharing of food and drink with the other eleven individuals in the prison cell relate him to Jesus Christ. The other more significant thing that relates him to Jesus Christ is the rumors that spread like wildfire throughout the country. In historical Kenya, people were once waiting to see Jesus Christ through naked eyes. Rumors even held it that some people

had photographed him. In the same situation, some people say that Matigari is Jesus Christ Himself. Others say that he can shake the earth with his legs. Some people talk about his gigantism others about his thinness. The writer wants to show that Matigari is as trivial a myth to Kenyans as Jesus Christ is to the Jews. In doing this, he is attempting to demystify the essence of Christianity.

The most significant point of view in all the select novels is that of a third person. In all the novels, however, other minor points of view have other stylistic advantages. *Petals of Blood* (2005), for instance, alternate "we" and "you" to attain the following effects. The two personal pronouns refer to participant speakers. "We" refers to the speaker, Munira, and other working classes of Ilmorg. This creates self-involvement in readers or working-class consumers of the novel. The use of "you" to address readers makes 'consumers' feel personally and experientially involved. All the major characters Munira, Abdula, Karega, and Wanja tell their background as first-person narrators. In doing this, the writer makes the members of the working class discuss their lives. The exploiting class has no such opportunity. Ngugi denies them intentionally, thereby achieving a proletarian novel. Authorial intrusion plays another significant role that cannot be achieved by other techniques. As opposed to the earlier three novels, he offers more overt authorial commentary that helps him to communicate more with his audience (consumers). To contribute to the revolutionary struggle, Ngugi gives moral direction and a revolutionary vision of the struggle through this point of view.

To provide much more details of his character's ideas, the writer offers an interior monologue in the third person. This helps his readers (consumers) to perceive even the innermost thoughts of the characters. Much dependence on authorial omniscience and the narration by the characters seems to make the novel's narration over dependent on telling rather than showing. This however, appears to be justifiable because of the variety of points of view employed, the presence of the ironic and satiric tone of the comments, the nature of the short and dramatic dialogues as well as the epic essence of the novel.

In addition to the dominant third-person point of view, *Devil on the Cross* (2008) is pervaded with many other points of view. Though less in number as compared with the ones used in *Petals of Blood* (2005), authorial intrusions are widely used in the novel that contains the

author's view. The first-person point of view is a vital perspective in this novel. In part two of chapter one, first-person narrator "I" is employed. The characters like Waringa who symbolize the working class narrate about their previous perspectives in the form of flashbacks. As opposed to the exploiting classes in *Petals of Blood* (2005) whose voice is denied, *Devil on the Cross* (2008) gives them access to show their political and economic outlooks.

In the "cave" in Ilmorg, the characters that symbolize comprador and national bourgeois such as Gitutu Wa Gataanguru, Kihaahu Wa Gatheeca, and Miluirereri' Wa Mukirai present their testimonies that disclose their essence. In their speech, these characters are stabbed by sardonic irony and stinging satire. Interior monologues and authorial omniscience in this novel play the type of role they play in *Petals of Blood* (2005). The most important narrative technique in this novel is allegory. The allegorical technique and the variety of points of view balance the overt comments of characters and the writer's intrusions. As compared with *Petals of Blood*, (2005) this novel better "shows" incidents than "telling" them. The exploiting classes in the "cave" are described as unique 'men like monsters' attired with odd clothes. This may elicit laughter and fury from readers.

As compared with the point of view of the novels discussed above, *Matigari* has limited points of view. Almost all the story is told from the point of view of an unnamed third-person narrator that moves from the mind of one character to the other. The second important point of view is the news agent called "The Voice of Truth and Justice" which represents the point of view of the exploiters. Irony is one of the most important techniques that balance the relatively fixed point of view.

Language use in the select novels is one of the most significant issues that characterize them as working-class novels. Terms that are used in historical materialism, for instance, "class", "imperialism", "socialism", "communism", "bourgeois", "feudal", "neo-colonialism", "parasites," "comprador", "tycoon", "capital", "labor", etc are extensively used in all the novels. The words have Marxist denotations and connotations.

Ngugi's commitment as a socialist realist is much reflected in the type of characters he painted in all the novels under discussion. All the characters are "type characters". They respond to the type of society they live in. They are more important for what they symbolize

than for their identities. Their names, actions, speeches, and modes of thought have symbolic values.

To begin with the symbolic value of the names, let us see the implication of two women's names from "*Petals of Blood*" (2005): Nyakinyua and Wanja. Nyakinyua symbolizes the traditional people of Ilmorg who celebrate traditional values such as initiation ceremonies. She is regarded as a symbol of unity and spiritual purity. The term "Wanja" means mother earth in the Kikuyu language. Wanja, the female character, symbolizes the Kenyan state. Her degradation symbolizes the degradation of the country by colonialists and their allies.

*Devil on the Cross* (2008) like *Petals of Blood* (2005), contains characters having symbolic meanings. For instance, the female character Kareendi who is represented as a victimized character symbolizes all girls who have similar experiences. The character who victimizes Kareendi in this novel is Boss Kihara. This name also symbolizes all corrupt officials who employ girls as compensation for their sexual lust. Two other characters Kamoongonye and Waigoko are also characters in the traditional Kikuyu ballad. The former is, according to the traditional belief, a poor young man whereas the latter one is a rich old man. Kareendi is, according to the tradition, a young girl who prefers the young poor man to the rich old man, against the will of her father. Ngugi takes the names of these characters from the traditional ballad and makes them play the same role in the novel. They are, therefore, symbols or representatives of Kenyans having such experience. An instance of such a symbolic name in *Matigari* (1989) is the name of the protagonist - Matigari Ma Njiruungi. The literal meaning of this in Kikuyu is "the patriots who survived the bullets". This character is not only the symbol of all other patriots of Kenya. He is also the symbol of all Kenyan workers and peasants.

Having discussed so much about name symbolism in Ngugi's novels, let us move on to discuss the ideological stance of the characters. The hegemonic ideology of the dominant state is reflected in the form of social psychology in all characters except the protagonists of the novels. Ngugi like any other committed artist painted protagonists who are armed with scientific communism. These protagonists in each novel are perceived to have Ngugi's Marxist and nationalist ideology.

In *Petals of Blood* (2005), Karega is a protagonist. As a committed Marxist, Karega's political ideologies include nationalism, the centrality of the working class, the need for revolutionary struggle, and the working-class internationalism. Towards the commencement of the narrative, Karega is a mere nationalist. First, Karega, like Ngugi himself, supports Kenyan nationalism without class consciousness. Gradually through the theoretical knowledge he acquires from his shared reading materials, his discussion with many individuals, his correspondence as well and through his practical experiences as a trade union leader, he is changed to a class-conscious political activist. He perceives the fact that the working class is the producer of the material means of production and the maker of history. The interest of the exploiting class, he perceives, is irreconcilable with the interest of the working class. He, therefore, tries to raise the ideological awareness of the workers. His irreconcilable ideology with exploiters' ideology leads him to agitate that "workers are products of a system" (Ngugi, 2005: 308). He also added that "it is the system that needs to be changed... and the workers of Kenya and the peasants can do that" (Ngugi, 2005:308). Karega also learns that the exploiting classes do not yield their power easily. He, therefore, advises Kenyans to go back "to the forests and mountains" (Ngugi, 2005:344) to topple down the exploiting classes. He also finally believes that the colour of the skin should not be the most important uniting idea rather "the system [capitalist system] and its gods and its angles had to be fought consciously, consistently and resolutely by all the working people" (Ngugi, 2005:344). His political consciousness about proletarian internationalism is reflected in such assumptions: "A worker has no particular home... He belongs everywhere and nowhere" (Ngugi, 2005:30). He also has a positive vision (revolutionary romanticism) for the future as "he was so carried on the waves of this vision and the possibilities it opened up for all the Kenyan working and peasant masses..." (Ngugi, 2005:344).

In *Devil on the Cross* (2008), Ngugi painted a protagonist called Muturi who is even ideologically more conscious than Karega. At the beginning of the story, this protagonist is a nationalist who appreciates the "Haraambe" or organized unity of Mau Mau fighters against colonizers. He has also an ideology, that is against, Christianity, an institution that is, for him, an instrument of making workers passive onlookers of exploitation. His Marxist materialistic view is reflected as, "I believe that God and Satan are images of our actions in our brains as we struggle with nature in general, and with human nature in particular" (Ngugi, 2008:57).

He seems to be a class-conscious activist right from the beginning. He perceives that the economic and ideological differences between "the clan of producers" and the "clan of parasites" are irreconcilable. Another Marxist ideological perception of Muturi is strong proletarian internationalism that affirms the strong solidarity of workers around the world as it is overtly stated in his words:

*The workers have no home, village, or even country. The whole earth is our home because for us it is a matter of where we can find someone to purchase our labor so we can earn a few cents to buy a bit of flour and cheap vegetables (Ngugi, 2008:71).*

Muturi believes that workers are living a destitute life while they are the only producers of a material means of subsistence. He, therefore, calls for other workers for an armed struggle against exploiters by avoiding the fear of any kind of armed reprisals. "We must struggle and fight against the culture of fear. And there is only one cure: a strong organization of the workers and peasants of the land, together with those whose eyes and ears are now open and alert" (Ngugi, 1982:205). He also pleads with students to join the armed struggle against exploiters. So the fight must be designed, the protagonist believes, under the forefront leadership of the working class in alliance with peasants and students. He also has an optimistic vision about the future.

In the last novel, *Matigari's* protagonist is a Mau Mau nationalist fighter. He has an extremely strong Kenyan nationalism. His generous quality is also perceived in his sympathetic treatment of some other characters in the novel. For instance, he shares the food and drink in the prison cell with other details. His treatment of Guthera, the prostitute, and Muturi, the foundling, can be regarded as having communal behavior.

Since *Matigari's* speeches are highly allegorical, there are no explicit expressions that indicate Marxist ideology. It is, however, possible to deduce such ideology from practical activities. His tireless search for the lost family, his consideration of all working people as members of one family, his rigorous search for truth and justice, his decision to fight with bravery again, and some other qualities are attributed to Marxist heroes. Above all, his strong conviction and attempt to return the means of production to workers make him a Marxist. Though speaking covertly, he seems to foresee a communist society:

*He saw a vision of himself and his children entering their home together, lighting the fire together, and working together for their home .... They [the children] would build their lives anew in the unity of their common sweat. A new house. A paradise on this earth, Why not? There is nothing that a people united cannot do (Ngugi, 1989:16).*

Here the term children refers to all "children" of the working class and foundlings. If people work together for the common good, Matigari believes, they can build "a paradise on earth". This implies his leftist inclination. Matigari's conviction that imperialism kills the collective spirit also makes him an ideologically strong Marxist.

Matigari is not as mature as Muturi and Karega in the previous novels regarding proletarian internationalism. To substitute this, Ngugi tries to make the novel appeal to an international working-class movement. To do this, no specific setting is offered. Ngugi also advises readers to relate the story of the novel "with any country, any place, and any duration, of their own" (Ngugi, 1987: xv) in the introductory part of the novel.

### **Dominant (Hegemonic) Ideology**

The ideological analysis here refers to the ideology of the historical Kenyan rulers about which the select novels are concerned. I tried to identify how the historical, political, and cultural contexts of dominant ideology exert pressure on the novels, Ngugi (their author), and his audience. Now, the dominant ideology of Kenya is first discussed as it appears in history, as in real life in Kenya. Then, it is investigated how it is portrayed in the works under investigation.

Victoria Brittain, the writer of the preface of Ngugi's *The Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-colonial Kenya* (1983) discussed the political, economic, and cultural conditions of post-independent Kenya. She perceived that after the Mau Mau fighters forced British imperialism to recognize independent Kenya, its ideological ally Kenyatta came to power in 1963.

Ironically enough, Brittain perceives, the radical nationalists who had great significance during the Mau Mau struggle were put aside. The Kenyan working class, peasants, and

factory workers who fought for the return of their alienated lands were also denied both political power and economic privileges. The comprador bourgeois government of Kenyatta, Britain perceived, consolidated the ideology of international imperialism, which helped him to get economic, and military support from America, Britain, and Israel, countries that have economic and geopolitical interests in Kenya. Then, the regime began to degrade the radical nationalism of the Mau Mau as racist and established organs of suppression. Things became even worse after Moi came to power in 1978. Moi became more rightist than Kenyatta. Some poor Kenyans kept quiet. But other Kenyans from different classes: social democrats the national bourgeois, workers, peasants, and intellectuals voiced hard against the comprador government. The bourgeois suppressed such resistance with severe murder, torture, harassment, detention, and other severe atrocities. It also dismantled the cultural institutions of the opposing forces such as Kamirithu Community Education and Culture Center, a center built by peasants and workers. When resistance became serious, Britain observes, the comprador used to close even the University of Nairobi.

The regime later on began to censor, the books taught in schools and universities, search libraries for left-wing books, and ban oral history to maintain its power. It also reiterated racial discrimination among Kenyan nationalities as a means of dividing the workers and peasants. The state also inherited the capitalist ideology and Christianity as a means of enslaving the ideology of the people. As Ngugi rightfully put it in his non-fictional work, *The Barrel of a Pen ...*, the comprador bourgeois begins to label anyone as a traitor who dares to challenge its "borrowed ideologies":

*Today questioning the presence of foreign military bases and personnel (British, Israeli, and U.S) on Kenyan soil is disloyalty. Questioning colonialism is sedition. Teaching the history of the Kenyan people's resistance to colonialism is sedition. Theatrical exposure to colonial culture is sedition. Questioning the exploitation and oppression of peasants and workers is Marxism and hence treason. Questioning corruption in high places is sedition (1983:2).*



Regardless of these attempts, Brittain argues, civil servants, nationalist bourgeois, peasants, students, intellectuals and artists expressed their indictments in plays, pamphlets, books, and articles and sometimes struggled to organize themselves against the comprador.

Having discussed so much about the political and ideological setting about which Ngugi wrote, let us now discuss how this ideological atmosphere affected Ngugi, his works, and his audience in historical Kenya. After Ngugi published *Petals of Blood* in July 1977 and co-authored "*I Will Marry When I Want*" (1977) (a play) with Ngugi Wa Mirri, the government razed to ground the cultural center where the play was displayed. In December of the same year, Ngugi was detained. During detention, he wrote *Devil on the Cross* (2008) which was published in London. In 1987 shortly after the publication of *Matigari*, the Kenyan intelligence searched for a man whose name bears the title of the novel, Matigari. After they realized Matigari was a fictional hero, "the police raided all the bookshops and seized every copy of the novel" (Ngugi, 1989: viii). This shows that the exponents of the dominant ideology - the state, tried to subvert Ngugi's Marxist ideology. They tried to hinder the process of literary production, distribution, and consumption of the novel and the play mentioned above.

Now let us move on to see how dominant ideology is uncovered in the select novels. In *Petals of Blood* (2005), the dominant ideologies --capitalism and Christianity-- are revealed in the activities and ideas of Chui, Mzigo, Kimeria, and Riera. The capitalist ideology of individualism is dominated by communist ideology. Its adherents are given less chance to reiterate the validity of capitalist ideology. Rather it is portrayed as being critiqued and exposed about its vanity. The other institution of capitalists, the church, is portrayed as a tool of the exploiters. The novel mocks Ezkieli's conviction that "some [workers]... had devilish spirits which drove them to demand higher wages" (Ngugi, 2005:14). It is also exposed while persuading workers to endure hardships of this world to attain heaven. Christianity is exposed through the selfish and hypocritical activities of its leaders.

In *Devil on the Cross* (2008), the capitalist ideology is uncovered and critiqued in relation to "theft" and "robbery." Its supporters are exposed as "drinkers of human blood" and "eaters of human flesh". Christianity is also critiqued by exposing its supporters through indirect ways and direct ways mainly through offering straightforward comments on the institution. In

*Matigari*, (1989) capitalist ideology and its "servant" Christianity are exposed, critiqued, and mocked in the same way as in *Petals of Blood* (2005) and *Devil on the Cross*(2008). In all the novels, Ngugi shows that Christianity is not a solution to the problem of the people rather it is part and parcel of the problem. The dominant (hegemonic) capitalist ideology and its "servant" Christianity are marginalized ideologies in the novels though they are dominant in real-life experiences of Kenyans.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

### **The Dialectics of Ideological Categories**

We are now confronted with a situation where three kinds of ideological categories zero in their cannons on one ideological category: authorial ideology, textual ideology, and aesthetic ideology against hegemonic ideology.

The analysis of authorial ideology above shows that because of the class he belongs to, Ngugi is against the ideas of capitalism and its dominant institutions like Christianity, the court, the police, and other institutions. In short, Ngugi is convinced to support Marxist ideology and condemn the ideology of imperialism that suppresses the economic and spiritual life of his people.

To this effect, Ngugi is observed teaching his people to raise their ideological awareness about the 'evil intentions and deeds of the capitalist ideologists in Kenya and their allies abroad.' His Marxist commitment is also reflected in the non-fictional works he wrote to teach other writers in favor of true Marxism, African nationalism, and Kenyan nationalism against the false comprador bourgeois' Kenyan nationalism that makes life heavenly only to a few Kenyans and their foreign allies. Ngugi does not preach this Marxist commitment to workers and peasants putting himself on the safe side rather he does this while facing detention, harassment, death threats, and sometimes risking the hangman's noose.

Ngugi's Marxist ideological war against the capitalist hegemony is not limited to his authorial ideology. His Marxist stylistic arsenal - aesthetic ideology - which is employed in his works also shows his strong indictments against capitalist hegemonic ideology and its corrupt institutions. The type of language he chooses for writing, the connotations of words he employs, the type of literary techniques he uses such as irony, allegory, and satire, the type of

point of view he chooses, the type of focalization he prefers as well as the type of characters he portrays make him stand at the forefront of Marxist aesthetics. Using these techniques he satirizes the hegemonic ideology. The authorial Marxist ideology which is homologous or in conjunction with aesthetic ideology creates another ideological category where the two contrasting ideologies - Marxism and Capitalism - fight with each other: textual ideology. The three select novels and other plays like *I Will Mary When I Want* (1977) are ideological battlefields of Marxist and Capitalist ideologies.

In *Petals of Blood* (2005) the individualistic view of social Darwinism or the principle of 'eat or you will be eaten by others' seems to be seriously hammered down by strong Marxist views of collectivism. The voices of capitalism are represented by untrustworthy and undeveloped characters. The Marxist voice, on the contrary, is represented by well-developed and strong characters who deliver philosophical and compelling speeches and monologues in more fascinating storylines. Karega and the lawyer, who are endowed with compelling and assertive language, are armed with scientific communism.

In *Devil on the Cross* (2008), capitalism is represented by 'man-like monsters' who fatten themselves on other people's blood and flesh discussing modern "theft and robbery" attired in odd clothes. They are intentionally made to expose themselves in public in humorous but stingy situations. Marxism on the contrary is disseminated by class-conscious political activists like Muturi who are, above all, striving for proletarian internationalism, committing themselves to class struggle and having an optimist vision.

In *Matigari* (1989), the ideological struggle of imperialism and Marxism is portrayed in similar situations. The capitalists are represented by highly materialistic, egoistic, soulless, and less-developed characters. Marxist ideology is perceived by well-developed characters who are selfless, dedicated to their cause and visionary. The hegemonic capitalist ideology is attacked and defeated at the three levels of ideological categories. It only reigned over historical Kenya as dominant and strong for the time under investigation; hence, I call it hegemonic ideology.

Finally, it is reasonable to point out the success of Ngugi as a committed Marxist artist. As an African, Kenyan, and the son of a squatter, it is compelling to view him from a Marxist ideological point of view. He must be appreciated as one of the most eloquent exponents of

Marxist political ideologies and a highly articulate commentator on his goals as a writer in his fictional and non-fictional works. I, however, have slight reservations about the method he used as an artist. He could have reduced the overt political propaganda, especially in his essays and non-fictional books. I believe that such straightforward political propaganda minimizes his political commitment; because, aesthetic ideology is, at least, in my opinion, more lasting and powerful than overtly stated propaganda.

### Reference Materials

- Benjamin, W. 1997. "The Author as Producer". In K.M. Newton (ed) *Twentieth Century Literary Theory*. New York: St. Martins Press.
- Branningan, J. 2001a. "History, Power and politics in the Literary Artifact: new Historicism." In J. Wolfreys (ed) *Introducing Literary Theories: a Guide and glossary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2001b. "Conflict and Contradiction: Cultural materialism." In J. wolfreys (ed) *Introducing Literary Theories: A Gaid and Glossory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Demetz, P. 1967. *Marx, Engels and the Poets*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Eagleton, T. 2002. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. London: Methuen and Co Ltd.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2006. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*. London: NLB.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2003. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Basil Black Well Publisher Limited.
- Forgacs, D. 1986. "Marxist Literary Theories." In A. Jefferson and D. Robey (eds) *Modern Literary Theories*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd.
- Foulkes, A. P. 1983. *Literature and Propaganda*. London: Methuen.

- Gebreyesus, T.B. 2004. *The Conflict Between Social Being and Social Consciousness in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Select Novels: A Marxist Literary Perspective: A thesis submitted to the school of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Literature.* Addis Ababa
- Guerin, W.L, E.Labor, L. Morgan, J.C. Reesman and J.R. Willingham (eds) 1992. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature.* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haslett, M. 2001. "The Politics of Literature: Marxist Literary Theories." In W. Walfreys (ed) *Introducing Literary Theories: A Guide and Glossary.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jameson, F. 1997. "On Interpretation: Literature as Socially Symbolic Act." In M.K. Newton (ed) *Twentieth Century Literary Theory.* New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc.
- Newton. M.K. 1997. *Twentieth Century Theory.* New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc.
- Ngara, E. 1985. *Art and Ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influence of Marxism on African Writing.* London: Heinemann.
- Ngugi.W.T 1968. *The Black Hermit.* Ibadan: Heinemann.
- Ngugi, W.T and Ngugi W. M. 1977. *I Will Marry When I Want.* London. Heinemann.
- Ngugi, W.T 1983. *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-colonial Kenya.* Trenton: African World Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1986. *Grain of Wheat.* London: Heinemann.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1987. *A Mercedes Funeral in Secret Lives and Other Stories.* London: Heinemann.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1987a. *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary.* London: Heinemann.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1987b. *Writers in Politics: A reengagement With Issues of Literature and Society.* Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1989. *Matigari.* Berkshir: Heineman.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2008. *The River Between.* London: Heinemann.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2005. *Petals of Blood.* Suffolk: Heinemann.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2008. *Devil on the Cross.* London: Heinemann.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2010. *Weep Not, Child*. London: Heinemann.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2011. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of African Literature*. London:  
Heinemann.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2023. *Home Coming*. London: Heinemann.