THE LITERARINESS OF THE PERSONAL ESSAYS OF CHINUA ACHEBE AND NGUGI WA THIONG'O

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any other university:

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DEDICATION

I have dedicated this work to Snyder, Blair, Ethan, Nancy, Jerita – as well as to Sammy and Cyrus in memoriam.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the literariness of the personal essays of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. It is the kind of literariness that is imbued with the respective artistic vision of each of essayist. By literariness, I am referring to the strategies of writing that deviate from the standard language, that rearrange the normal usage of language and that impart a degree of freshness in the text. The study is justified on account of the paucity of critical engagement with the literary aspects of this genre and it a response to claims in some quarters of Western literary scholarship that the personal essay in Anglophone Africa lacks personal intensity, is inauthentic, didactic and polemical.

The objectives of this inquiry are: to analyse the stylistic choices made by Ngugi and Achebe and how they contribute to the literariness of the essays; to interrogate the similarities and differences in both their ideological positions and artistic visions in relation to the postcolonial condition; and to evaluate the similarities and differences in the literariness of their personal essays. The methodology for conducting this study included the literature review to select the relevant essays; intensive reading and analysis to examine how the essayists respond to key postcolonial thematic issues; intensive reading and analysis to identify the literariness and aesthetic value of the essays; a comparative interrogation of the literariness of their essays; and a comparative evaluation of their artistic visions.

I have combined stylistics and selected postcolonial theories to establish not only how essayists orchestrate their stylistic choices to realise aesthetic effects but also how they articulate pertinent issues affecting the postcolonial condition. The study has revealed the divergent standpoints and contrastive tonality of Ngugi and Achebe on the use of imperial languages. While Ngugi advocates for indigenous languages, Achebe calls for the domestication of the foreign languages. The study demonstrates that Ngugi and Achebe

have appropriated the genre from the West and refashioned it with traditional African forms, resulting in a marked and deliberate stylistic deviation from the genre's European antecedent. This deviation imbues the essays with various shades of literariness.

The essayists have achieved unique literariness by appropriating the African archive from which they have adapted proverbs, fables, songs, anecdotes, allusions, metaphors, politeness, rhetorical cataloguing and the persuasive rhetorical style. The adaptation of these stylistic devices into a European genre echoes the postcolonial realities of hybridity and cosmopolitanism, pointing towards the artistic vision of the two writers. From the comparative study of the two essayists, this analysis has brought out both the contrast and similarity in the organising principles underpinning their essays, their artistic visions, and some noticeable gaps in their artistic visions. Achebe enacts accommodative resistance against the West, while Ngugi's resistance is more militant, strident and socialist. Finally, the study suggests that there is need to undertake research on African women essayists, emerging strands of this genre and its expression in new media such as the cyberspace.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

This study examines the literariness of the personal essays of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe. It analyses the textual stylistic features that define the essays and how they help to convey the essayists' reflection on the postcolonial condition. Literary texts contain stylistic features that deviate from formal or ordinary uses of language. Stylistic features are "foregrounded" (Mukarovský 25). Literariness signifies the shifting of point of view, the creation of syntactic and semantic deformations and the emergence of fresh insights on a text. Literariness envisages an artistic response from the readers, one that elevates my perception of reality towards imagined possibilities beyond the finite. Stylistic choices commonly used by personal essayists are: irony, metaphor, repetition, cataloguing, parallelism, anecdotes, allusion, symbolism, allegory, story-telling, proverbs, concessions, digressions, and the essayistic persona's first person narrative voice, among other devices. These artistic devices call attention to themselves, compelling the reader (implied audience) to reinterpret the text. With these embedded stylistic choices, the reader is invited to interpret the personal essay both as an aesthetic text (due to its defamiliarising devices) and as thematic discourse. In this study, I have syncretised two theories, where the postcolonial theory illuminates the themes while stylistics shines light on the literariness of the essays.

The personal essay has long been associated with an experimental method. The idea goes back to Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) and his endless use of the term *essai* for his writings. Montaigne, the great innovator and patron saint of personal essayists, emphasised the conversational tone of the personal essay: "in talking about myself, I am talking about all of us; every man has within himself the entire human condition" (*The Complete Essays* 57). "*To essay* is to attempt, to test, to make a run at something without

knowing whether you are going to succeed. In English, the essay first meant "a trial or an attempt and this is still an alternative meaning" (Wingard 1479).

The personal essay is also a distinct genre that has been delineated from other literary essay genres. The distinction between the personal essay and the critical or formal essay lies in the fact that the informal or personal essay is characterised by the "personal element [self-revelation, individual tastes, and a confidential manner], freshness of form, an intimate style, autobiographical content and the projection of the subjective voice of the essayist, which focalises and presents the argument to the reader" (Lopate xxiii). On the other hand, the critical, formal or impersonal essay is known for its "seriousness of purpose, logical organisation, factual writing and a stiff adherence to objective rendition" (Lopate xxiv).

It is important to demarcate the distinction between the formal essay and the personal essay. On the one hand, according to Holman Hugh, in *A Handbook to Literature*, the formal or impersonal essay is characterized by "seriousness of purpose, dignity, logical organization and length, in which literary technique is secondary to serious purpose" (348). In addition, "the writer of the formal essay is ordinarily a silent presence behind the words" (Hugh 349). In other words, the voice of the essayistic persona does not emerge strongly to assert its personal presence in the formal essay. Similarly, the tone of the formal essay "is usually impersonal and serious, and its structure is tightly controlled" (Wingard 1485). While the formal essay strives to achieve objectivity and avoids a subjective slant, the informal essay, on the other hand, is characterized by "the personal element, humour, graceful style, rumbling structure, freshness of form, freedom from stiffness, and tentative treatment of subject" (Lopate xxiii). It also has a "relaxed conversational style as the writer speaks directly to the reader, with an intimate style, some autobiographical content and an urbane conversational manner" (Hugh 348). What

emerges from the foregoing discussion is that the personal essayist makes every effort to project her/his voice to the audience, conveying a slanted perspective on a particular issue.

Bensel-Meyers and others in *Literary Culture*, hold that the personal essay is "a kind of conversation, which not only allows us to expand my own understanding of what I have discovered, but also leads others to accept my findings as valuable new knowledge" (6). Besides exploring its conversational element, Bensel-Meyers and others have pointed out the fact that the personal essay is an argument that foregrounds the "use of language in order to come to an agreement with others [or oneself]" (6). In this study, I am drawn to investigate the personal essays of Achebe and Ngugi as arguments designed to persuade the reader.

The personal essay both contrasts and compares with the personal narrative. In the words of Vivian Gornick: "The personal narrative should tell a story that is experimental, anecdotal, or personal. It provides readers with a strong voice and unique perspective of the author as an undisguised, unsurrogated narrator or persona" (3). These aspects of the personal narrative are also shared with the personal essay. There are other aspects of the personal narrative that are not necessarily embraced by personal essayists. "It is a well-detailed personal life story and can include different characters, subplots, setting, climax, and anti-climax. Its conclusion tells the readers about the lessons the writer has learned. Chronology is also necessary when you are writing a personal narrative" (Gornick 3). The personal is primarily an argument, not a story. It deviates from narrative linearity and succinct conclusion. Although it borrows heavily from story-telling, it deviates into a flamboyant free eclectic style, allowing the essayist the freedom to experiment.

One of the key concerns I am investigating in this research is the aesthetics of the personal essays written by Ngugi and Achebe. I am examining the extent to which these defining characteristic run through the personal essays of Achebe and Ngugi. Therefore, I am scrutinising how the following aspects of literary style enhance the essayists' message: the essayistic *I* narrative point of view, the conversational implicature in the essayists' direct appeal to the reader, rhetorical strategies of argumentation, irony, anecdotes, fables, songs, cataloguing and allusions.

From the postcolonial vantage point, I read the essays not only as artistic instruments in the continuing process of resistance against colonialism (and neo-colonialism), but equally as appropriation and domestication of the exotic, the alien. I note that both essayists use the language of the coloniser – English – to stage their discourses of resistance against imperial authority. As Anthony Chennels points out, "the postcolonial critic is sensitive both to colonial presences and how those presences are resisted or accommodated within a text" (111).

This study, therefore, explains how the literariness of the stylistic choices aesthetically project the ideological (thematic) positions espoused by Ngugi and Achebe. By reinforcing stylistics with Postcoloniality, the study sets out to establish a comparison between the personal essays of Ngugi and those of Achebe, the literary features that distinguish them apart and those that cut across their works, as well as how they contribute to the aesthetic reception of the writers' artistic visions.

Finally, this research is a response to the egregious claims by Lopate about the nature and status of the personal essay in Africa, thus: "the vast majority of the essays written in the postwar independence period have tended to be didactic or polemical…The preference for the public over the personal voice is certainly understandable, given the serious task of developing a new African literature in times of crisis" (lii). This study sets

out to upend this view by examining both the unique individual creativity and the adaptation of traditional African aesthetic forms by the two essayists. In this way, the research considers the extent to which the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe offer a refreshing literary aesthetic flavour to the genre, while articulating the emerging postcolonial realities from African perspectives.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe are renown authors with great literary productions, which have earned them international recognition. Ngugi's novels include: *Weep Not, Child*; *The River Between; A Grain of Wheat*; *Petals of Blood; Matigari; Devil on the Cross,* and *Wizard of the Crow*. His short stories appear in two collections: *Secret Lives and other Short Stories* and *Minutes of Glory: And Other Stories.* He has published several plays under titles *The Black Hermit, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (with Micere Mugo), *This Time Tomorrow*, and *I will Marry When I want* (with Ngugi wa Mirii). In addition to the novels and plays, Ngugi has written five memoirs: *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*; *Dreams in a Time of War; In the House of the Interpreter, Birth of a Dream Weaver* and *Wrestling with the Devil: A Prison Memoir*. He has written an epic poem with the title *Kenda Mũiyũru: Rũgano rwa Gĩkũyũ na Mũmbi*. The writer is the editor of the Gikuyu language journal, *Mutiiri* and also the author of children's stories under the *Njamba Nene* series.

Achebe's novels are *Things Fall Apart; Arrow of God; No Longer At Ease; A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah,* while his short stories are contained in *Girls at War and Other Stories*. He has published poems in *Beware, Soul Brother and Other Poems; Another Africa* (with Robert Lyons), and *Collected Poems*. Finally, in the sub-genre of children's stories, Achebe has written *Chike and the River; How the Leopard Got His Claws* (with John Iroaganachi); *The Flute,* and *The Drum*.

In this research, I have selected personal essays from the following collections of Ngugi's essays: *Writers in Politics: Essays; Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms; Decolonising the Mind: Politics of Language in African Literature; Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics; In the Name of the Mother: Reflections on Writers and Empire,* and *Secure the Base: Making Africa Visible in the Globe*. Similarly, I have drawn personal essays from the following collections by Achebe: *Morning Yet on Creation Day*; *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*; *The Trouble with Nigeria*; *Home and Exile*, and *The Education of a British Protected Child*.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The personal essay genre in Africa has not attracted as much critical attention as the novel, poetry, plays, and oral literature. It is cursorily regarded or classified simply as non-fiction prose. Its artistic or literary properties – literariness – (is)are rarely analysed. This study focuses on the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe, two great essayists from Africa whose personal essays hardly get purposeful analysis for their aesthetic quality: the few critics who have read these essays have largely engaged with thematic issues, especially how the essayists use the genre to comment on the postcolonial situation in Africa. The artistic beauty of these personal essays, as well as the individual flair of the essayists, are ordinarily left out of many studies. In this research, I have analysed the literariness of the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe and how they comment on the postcolonial situation. The study equally seeks to establish the contribution of Ngugi and Achebe to the personal essay as a genre – it delves into the question of whether their literary choices have imbued the genre with some defining markers that could be inferred as the distinguishing marks of the personal essay in Africa. The study also counters the perception that African essayists have not authentically adopted the personal essay, that

their style is rather didactic, that they are instalments in polemics, and that they display a public rather than an intensely personal confidential orientation.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the literariness of the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe from both the postcolonial and stylistics perspectives. To this end, the specific objectives of this research are:

i. To analyse the stylistic choices made by Ngugi and Achebe and how they contribute to the literariness of their personal essays.

ii. To interrogate the similarities and differences in both their ideological positions and artistic visions in relation to the postcolonial condition.

iii. To evaluate the similarities and differences in the literariness of their personal essays.

1.4 Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following key questions:

i. What are the main stylistic choices made by Ngugi and Achebe and how do they contribute to the literariness of their personal essays?

ii. What are the similarities and differences in their ideological positions and artistic visions in relation to the postcolonial condition?

iii. What are the similarities and differences in the literariness of their personal essays?

1.5 Justification of the study

Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe are profound and well established creative writers in Africa. While there is wider and deeper critical engagement with their other creative works such as novels, short stories and plays, there is a noticeable dearth of critical work on their personal essays. Indeed, Simon Gikandi has aptly lamented "the

shadows of silence that surround Achebe's non-fictional discourse" ("Chinua Achebe and the Post-colonial Esthetic" 30). Lily Saint and Bhakti Shringarpure in their article "African Literature Is a Country," reveal the findings of their survey on the teaching of African literature at the university level. They reckon that: "Of the 671 texts that were listed as most taught by instructors of African literature, the majority were novels (369) and short stories (101), while memoirs, biographies and autobiographies (46), poems (56), plays (39), essays and non-fiction books (28) and anthologies (32)." The personal essays fall in what Saint and Shringarpure broadly categorise as non-fiction books and they constitute a negligible part of the syllabi.

It is in this context that this study takes account of the orchestrated strategies of argumentation and how they project the artistic vision of the essayists. The focus on literariness is driven by the scarcity of stylistically-inspired research work on the aesthetic value of these essays. The research is equally justified by the need to analyse the unique contribution of the two essayists to the genre.

The selection of the two essayists, Achebe and Ngugi, is partly based on their prolificity in writing of personal essays. Both have a considerable number of personal essays to their credit and have also sustained essay writing over the last five decades. In choosing the two essayists, I was informed by the way they have framed their personal essays as critical mirrors that reflect the development of their respective postcolonies from direct colonial rule by the British to the post-independence era. By analysing these essays from both stylistics and postcolonial perspectives, the study seeks to establish their artistic visions.

The study is also justified by the need to examine the differences in their perspectives on key issues that concern African literature, especially the question of the language of African literature. By analysing their divergent essayistic style, the study sets

out to reveal the literariness of these personal essays. This research interrogates their ideological perspectives on the socio-economic situation in the postcolonies: from this analysis, the study seeks to make more revelations on their divergent artistic visions in relation to the challenges facing the postcolonial societies.

On account of the paucity of fused stylistic and postcolonial scholarship on the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe, driven by the need to examine their divergent standpoints with regard to the language of African literature, and due to their fairly polarised ideological positions on the role of the African writer – I find the justification for carrying out this study on the literariness of the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

In this study, I have a special interest in those personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe that display the subjective *I* perspective. This displaces, from my purview, those essays that are evidently formal, and which attempt to project an objective viewpoint. Based on this delineation, I have studied the following personal essays from Achebe's collection *Hopes and Impediments:* "An Image of Africa" (1-13); "Impediments to Dialogue Between the North and South" (14-19); "Named for Victoria, Queen of England" (20-26); "The Novelist as Teacher" (27-31); "Writer and His Community" (32-41); "Igbo World and its Art" (42-45); "Colonialist Criticism" (46-61); "Thoughts on the African Novel" (62-67); "Don't Let Him Die: A Tribute to Christopher Okigbo" (77-81); and "Postscript: James Baldwin 1924-1987" (118-121).

Achebe's *Morning Yet on Creation Day* contains these essays that are of interest to my study: "Africa and Her Writers" (19-29); "What do African Intellectuals Read?" (38-41); "Where Angels Fear to Tread" (46-48); "Tanganyika: Jottings of a Tmy ist" (71-77); "In Reply to Margery Perham" (85-86); "In Defence of English? An Open Letter to Mr Tai Solarin" (87-89); "Onitsha, Gift of the Niger" (90-92); and "Chi in Igbo Cosmology" (93-

103). Similarly, my review of *Home and Exile* yielded these personal essays: "My Home Under Imperial Fire" (1-36); "The Empire Fights Back" (37-72), and "Today, the Balance of Stories" (73-106). The other collection of Achebe's essays is *The Trouble With Nigeria*, from which I have identified the following personal essays: "Where the Problem Lies" (1-4); "Tribalism" (5-8); "False Image of My selves" (9-10); "Leadership, Nigerian-Style" (11-14); "Patriotism" (15-18); "Social Injustice and the Cult of Mediocrity" (19-26); "Indiscipline" (27-36); "Corruption" (37-44); "The Igbo Problem" (45-50), and "The Example of Aminu Kano" (51-63).

Finally, the last of Achebe's texts in this study is *The Education of a British-Protected Child*. From this collection, I picked the following personal essays for analysis: "The Education of a British-Protected Child" (1-24); "The Sweet Aroma of Zik's Kitchen" (25-34); "My Dad and Me" (35-38); "What is Nigeria to Me?" (39-46); "Travelling White" (47-53); "Spelling My Proper Name" (54-67); "My Daughters" (68-72); "Recognitions" (73-76); "Africa's Tarnished Name" (77-95); "Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature" (96-106); "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration" (107-123) "Teaching Things Fall Apart" (124 -130); Martin Luther King and Africa" (131-137); "University and the Leadership Factor in Nigerian Politics" (138-149); "Stanley Diamond" (150-154), and "Africa is People" (155-166).

I have, likewise, selected the following personal essays from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Homecoming*: "Author's Note" (xiv – xix); "Kenya: The Two Rifts" (22-25); "Church, Culture and Politics" (31-36); "The Writer in a Changing Society" (47-50) and "On the abolition of the English Department" (145-150). I picked another set of essays from *Writers in Politics* and these include: "Kenyan Culture: The National Struggle for Survival" (42-48); "Handcuffs for a Play" (49-52); "On Civilisation" (66-67); "J.M: A Writer's Tribute" (82-85); "Petals of Love" (94- 98) and "The South Korean People's

Struggle" (117-122). In *Decolonising the Mind*, I selected, "Preface" (ix-xii); "A Statement" (xiv) and "Introduction" (1-3). Similarly, the following personal essays drawn from *Moving the Centre,* fall within the ambit of this analysis: "Moving the Centre" (2-11); "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom" (12-24); "Universality of Local Knowledge" (25-29); "Imperialism of Language" (30-41); "Cultural Dialogue for a New World" (42-46); "Cultural Factor in the Neo-colonial Era" (47-57); "The Writer in a Neo-colonial State" (60-75); "Resistance to Damnation" (76-81); "The Role of the Scholar in the Development of African Literatures" (82-87); "Post-colonial Politics & Culture" (88-95); "In Moi's Kenya, History is Subversive" (96-101); "From the Corridors of Silence" (102-108); "Imperialism & Revolution" (109- 113); "The Ideology of Racism" (116-125); "Racism in Literature" (126-131); "Her Cook, her Dog: Karen Blixen's Africa" (132-135); "Biggles, Mau Mau and I" (136-141); "Black Power in Britain" (142-145); "Many Years Walk to Freedom: Welcome Home Mandela!" (146-151); "Life, Literature and a Longing for Home" (154-158), and "Matigari & the Dreams of One East Africa" (159-176).

The other text in this study is *In the Name of the Mother,* and from it, I have identified the following personal essays for this research: "Preface" (viii –x); "Heinemann, African Writers Series & I" (1-10) and "The Neocolonial in Emergent African Cinema" (67-80). Finally, I found invaluable these personal essays from *Secure the Base*: "Contempt and Self-Contempt" (1-6); "New Frontiers of Knowledge" (65-76); "Splendour in Squalor" (77-86); "The Legacy of Slavery" (87-98) and "Writing for Peace" (115-124).

1.7 Definition of Terms

Artistic Vision is the writer's metaphorical perspective or genius that allows them to create something that transcends the ordinary. Artistic vision is the fruit of the writer's reason plus the technique of communication. The vision is in the words, though, and still proper to the literary art, that is, it has meaning and beauty. But the irreducible work is the

blend, the sound and sense, the work which can never be paraphrased, never imitated, the work which can only be quoted; this is the true work of literary art (Attinasi 3).

Cohesion is a stylistic term that embraces a set of possibilities that make a literary text to hang together; in this sense, cohesion is seen as a relation in the language system. Similarly, textual elements are in a cohesive relation when they are logically dependent, when they point back (anaphora) or point forward (cataphora) to each other. According to Halliday and Hasan, in this sense of unfolding of time, directionality is built into the text, thus revealing cohesion as a process (8-19). In both cases, cohesion expresses semantic continuity between one part of the text and another (Halliday and Hasan 303). In this study, cohesion is an important analytical category because the essays embed diverse stylistic elements (anecdotes, irony, comparisons, contrasts, as well as the essayist-audience persuasive matrix), which are then woven together to make a communicative whole.

Dialogism is the potential of literary language to mean different things. Mikhail Bakhtin links it to the idea of dialogue and sees language as a two way or multiple process, a field of struggle between the centripetal or *monologic* and centrifugal or *dialogic* forces. The *dialogic* is, thus, the ability of literary language to display many voicedness or *heteroglossia* (*The Dialogic Imagination* xix). The *dialogic* underlines the very fact that the act of communication is open to at least two interpretations: that of the essayist and that of the reader. In this study, dialogism is key to my analysis of the dualism in the communication between the essayist as addresser and the audience as addressee. The essayists structure their essays in such a way as to anticipate the reader's response and in doing so, construct a dialogue situation with the reader. Ultimately, the essay is, therefore, read not as a monologic but as a dialogic text.

Discourse is understood as a linguistic communication or transaction between the writer and reader; an interpersonal activity whose form is determined by its social purpose (Leech and Short 209; Langacre *Anatomy of Speech Notions* 252; Macdonell *Theories of Discourse* 1; Handricks, *Grammars of Style* 31; and Gray *Grammatical Foundations of Rhetoric* vii). Discourse explains how a conversation works, and how speakers' contributions are connected or structured (Simpson 130). This particular function of discourse will be of great value to this inquiry, since it defines the essayistic text as dialogic discourse.

Essayistic *I* is the voice of the essayist, the subjective perception which speaks to us, pleads with us, or convinces us (Indangasi *Writers Speak* ii). It is the constructed voice which the essayist projects to speak to the reader. It is this persona that creates the aesthetic distance between the text and the writer. This is definitely the defining characteristic, the organising principle, of the personal essay, which distinguishes it from other categories of essays.

Hybridity is a term used in postcolonial studies to describe or celebrate the global state of 'in-betweenness' and 'mixedness' of cultures, identities, ethnicities, races, nations, and borders. It denotes fluidity and flux and the forging of identities in the 'third space' (Buchanan 238). In relation to this study, it is worth noting that the essayists write these essays as part of resistance to imperial domination and out of a desire to (re)create their identity, which they consider tainted by the exotic influence. The space they occupy as well as that fresh identity they endeavour to make, are decidedly influenced by their African background and by their contact with Europe. This is how hybridity comes in as an identity marker to be artistically resisted and or appropriated.

Literariness is constructed as the product of a distinctive mode of reading that is identifiable through three key components of response to literary texts: stylistic variation,

defamiliarisation, and modification or transformation of the conventional concept or feeling. David S. Miall and Don Kuiken, in their article "What is literariness? Three components of Literary Reading," have suggested a three-component model of literariness involving foregrounded textual or narrative features, readers' defamiliarising responses to them, and the consequent modification of personal meanings. They hold that "literariness is constituted when stylistic or narrative variations strikingly defamiliarise conventionally understood referents and prompt re-interpretive transformations of a conventional concept or feeling. The key to literariness is the interaction of these three component processes" (124). Therefore, literary texts contain stylistic features that deviate from formal or ordinary uses of language. Stylistic features are "foregrounded" (Mukarovský 25).

Personal Essay is defined as a composition of moderate length, usually in prose, which deals in an easy, cursory way with the external conditions of a subject and in strictness with that subject, only as it affects the writer (Edmund Goose qtd in *Writers Speak* ii). Invented by Montaigne, the personal essay is an imaginative trial, an attempt or a test of a writer's response to a subject or situation; it weighs and balances the different sides of the question in order to cajole, demand and win the sympathy of the reader (Goose qtd in *Writers Speak* ii; Cohen *Essay 9*; Read *Comparative Essays* xiii; Frame *Montaigne* v; and Frame *The Complete Essays* vi). It is a form of writing with a manifest intimacy with the reader, in which the writer seems to be speaking directly into my ears, confiding everything from gossip to wisdom (Lopate *xxiii*).

Rhetoric is a word used in stylistics to refer to a set of techniques by means of which a writer secures the acceptance of the thesis put forward. It entails strategies geared towards persuading the audience to adhere to the writer's views (Verdaasdonk qtd in Dijk *Pragmatics of Language and Literature* 191; Leech and Short 210). I have identified a

wide range of rhetorical devices and explained their function as persuasive devices in essays.

Syncretism is defined as the harmony of opposed elements into a meaningful whole: "It describes the balance and unity between complex wholes" (Eliade 219). This is a stylistic term that I have used in this study to explain relationships between the multiple (dialogic) perspectives that are embedded in the essays.

1.8 Literature Review

In this section, I have reviewed critical works on the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe with a view to establishing the place of this study in the existing archive. It suffices to note that over the years, critical attention has considerably foregrounded Achebe's novels and short stories as well as Ngugi's plays, short stories and plays: their personal essays have attracted only limited critical examination. My starting point is a review of critical works on Ngugi. One of his collections of personal essays, *Writers in Politics,* has been analysed by Simon Gikandi who notes that Ngugi is concerned with "the place occupied by literature in the educational system; the role of the writer in shaping national politics and the common bond that unites repressed people" *(Ngugi wa Thiong'o* 262). Gikandi's casts a postcolonial lens on Ngugi, but he does not examine the aesthetic pulse of these essays. In this study, I have combined both the postcolonial and stylistic perspectives on Ngugi's essays.

In his comments on *Decolonising the Mind,* Gikandi points out that the central idea in this collection is Ngugi's concern with the power of language in defining identity. Gikandi observes that Ngugi is determined to "explain how writing in the African language could enable him to represent historical change and to store the collective memories and communal identities. This becomes the rationale for his linguistic conversion to begin writing in *Gikuyu*" (*Ngugi* 270). It is evident that Gikandi has taken a

purely thematic (postcolonial) glance. In this comparative study, I go further than Gikandi's thematic analysis to embrace the stylistic features that underpin Ngugi's essays. In an article, "Traveling Theory: Ngugi's Return to English," Gikandi delves into the question of Ngugi's decision to write in Gikuyu language following his renunciation of the imperial language in *Decolonising the Mind*. Gikandi reveals that Ngugi "even made conference presentations to European and American audiences in Gikuyu and published a significant critical essay in his mother tongue in the prestigious Yale Journal of Criticism" (194). But soon after, Ngugi returned, without explanation, to English. Gikandi points out that even though Ngugi continued to edit *Mutiiri*, his effort to use Gikuyu as the language of both his fiction and critical discourse had been defeated by the reality of exile and American professional life (195). Gikandi's approach to Ngugi's personal essays is postcolonial: it explores thematic issues, including his artistic philosophy and the inherent challenges associated with his codified ideas. In this research, I have not only embraced and build on this postcolonial approach used by Gikandi, but also brought in stylistics to account for the aesthetics of the essays. Similarly, I have also contrasted the positions taken by Ngugi and Achebe on the question of language in African literature.

In *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of his Writings,* David Cook and Michael Okenimpke comment on Ngugi's Marxist leanings with a focus on *Writers in Politics.* They hold that "Ngugi has now moved much closer towards adopting the dialectics and outlook of an avowed Marxist" (224). The Marxist ideology in Ngugi takes centre stage in the foregoing critical appraisal of Ngugi as in Salituma Wamalwa's account of Ngugi's socialist vision in *Writers in Politics,* where he avers that the collection weaves together "the writer's personal historical experience and that of his people, his rejection of the dictum of *art for art's sake* and his serious concern for class consciousness" (11). The socialist vision pointed out by Wamalwa is part of Ngugi's artistic vision which I have

explored in this study while also comparing him to Achebe within stylistics and postcolonial frames of critical analysis.

In this study, my focus is two-fold: I have embarked on a stylistic and postcolonial reading of Ngugi's essays within a comparative frame with Achebe. In similar breath, Micere Mugo, while examining *Homecoming,* makes cross-textual referencing between Ngugi's novels and his essays. She emphasises that the collection of essays is an extension of Ngugi's novels: "It is an integral part of his fictional world" (188). This study by Micere is interesting since it engages the borderline issues between genres. While the Ngugi's novels assign the narrative authority to a surrogate persona, the essay is the author's unsurrogated persona – Ngugi himself. This unsurrogated essayistic persona is what this study is investigating from both a stylistic and postcolonial perspectives.

Rocha M. Chimerah, explores *Decolonising the Mind* and discusses the theme of education and Ngugi's perspective on literature and language (*Implications* 253-273). Chimerah's approach is postcolonial and it neither explores the style of Ngugi's essays nor does it draw contrasts and comparisons with Achebe – these latter concerns are key to this instant study. Angela Smith analyses *Home Coming,* and digs into Ngugi's argument that foreign languages alienate Africans from their history (*East African Writing* 137). While Smith is postcolonial in outlook, her work has no inclination towards the textual aesthetics of the essay and she does not compare or contrast the essays of Ngugi and Achebe – which are the key thrusts of this research.

Patrick William's analysis of *Decolonising the Mind, Homecoming, Writers in Politics, Moving the Centre,* and *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams* is not dissimilar to the foregoing approaches. In a wider sense, he observes that "the essayist focuses on and frequently revisits a range of important themes including culture, politics, literature,

education, language, history, colonialism and neo-colonialism"*(Ngugi wa Thiong'o* 142). Williams offers a catalogue of themes that are eye-opening to this study. His reading, however, has not exposed the stylistic features in Ngugi's essays and it does not set Ngugi and Achebe side by side for comparison in much the same way as this study does.

Ania Loomba, in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism,* revisits the dichotomy between Ngugi and Achebe over the use of language with special reference to *Decolonising the Mind*: "In replying to Achebe and explaining his own decision to write in *Gikuyu* rather than English, Ngugi invokes the multiple connections between language and culture and argues that colonialism made in-roads into the latter through the control of the former" (92). Loomba's applies a postcolonial gaze in her comparative study of the key issue of the language of African literature. Although her main focus is on Ngugi's *Decolonising the Mind*, the fact that she contrasts his position to that of Achebe is inspirational to this study. My study, however, stretches beyond a singular focus on one thematic issue and one collection of essays: it has not only embraced a broad range of ideas in various collections of essays but also reads them from both postcolonial and stylistic approaches.

Mumia Osaaji has analysed how Ngugi's *Decolonising the Mind*, *Writers in Politics, Homecoming* and *Moving the Centre* "articulate cultural resistance and reconstruction of dismembered identities" ("Re-Membering the Dismembered" 137). He applies both stylistics and postcolonial perspectives to the study. He is, however limited in scope since his work confines itself to only four of Ngugi's collections of essays. This study builds on this approach and goes further to engage Ngugi's latest collections while also conducting a comparative analysis with Achebe.

The foregoing analyses of Ngugi's personal essays by Gikandi, Loomba, Chimerah, Smith, Osaaji and William, have showed various pathways of reading his

essays. From these critics, I have recognised thematic areas that merit emphasis, those that require further consideration as well as theoretical approaches that need further exploration. From the review, I have noted that these scholars have largely engaged thematic issues in Ngugi's personal essays: questions relating to the stylistic features and the nature (literariness) of the personal essay have not been examined. It is also worth noting that only Loomba has attempted a comparative study of Ngugi and Achebe's essays. So, I have identified the need to combine both the stylistic and the postcolonial thematic approaches to the study of these essays in order to enrich scholarship. Robert Cancel says this of Ngugi's *Homecoming* and *Writers in Politics*:

> Ngugi asserts that the writer can no longer afford to be simply "transformed," "possessed," of the "medium" of creative muses, but must respond to specific social conditions that cry out for attention. Ngugi chooses to make his points in a very blunt manner. Ngugi's is a particularly disturbing voice, a direct and relentless conscience, repetitious to the point of tedium, and challenging in a most confrontational way. (26)

From Cancel's analysis, I gather that Ngugi's essays, unlike his prose, can be more direct, urgent and strident. Three main pre-occupations of Ngugi that have been explored by Cancel are: "the appraisal of the destructive forces of imperialism, the role played by the African writer-intellectuals in reversal of these negative effects, and the direct role of the African writer in instigating positive, often radical, changes in their oppressive societies" (27). Cancel's elaborate account of Ngugi's literary philosophy is, therefore, a useful guide in this analysis. Cancel, however, seems rather disturbed by Ngugi's essayistic style. This study deepens the foregoing exploration of Ngugi's style and relates it to his engagement with the postcolonial situation. My twin analytical trajectory is designed to lead us towards

establishing the literariness of the personal essays of Ngugi and at the same time, compare and contrast him with Achebe.

Concerning Achebe, Evan Mwangi has examined *Home and Exile* from both stylistic and thematic perspectives. The critic points out "how Achebe, the essayist, exploits anecdotes not only to thrill and create intimacy with the reader but to pillory both the cultural terrorism of the West as well as our valorisation of Western values" (*Sunday Nation* 13). Although Mwangi deploys a rather strong language to analyse the impact of the Western gaze on Africa, I am positively inclined towards his salutary analytical approach, which is both stylistic and postcolonial. Another critic who has examined Achebe's essays is David Muchugu Kiiru. In his reading of Achebe's *Morning Yet on Creation Day,* Kiiru observes that Achebe wrote the collection of essays in "apparent answer to Adrian Roscoe's cynical remark to the effect that weaknesses in the African novel are understandable because it is not native to the African continent" (97). Kiiru argues that Achebe's adoption of the personal essay form is an effort to directly correct what the essayist considers to be a "deliberate misinterpretation of the African novel" by the West (81). It is notable that Kiiru has tried to engage possible reasons why a fictive writer would choose the personal essay, which speaks more directly, to convey his message. To me, this is a key idea and this study pursues it further by evaluating the artistic vision of the essayist.

Simon Gikandi, in *Reading Achebe,* has examined *Morning Yet on Creation Day* and foregrounded Achebe's conception of the role of literature as "a form of compensation…for historical experience that has been written out of experience in colonialist discourse" (11). Gikandi equally establishes an "inter-textual linkage between *The Trouble with Nigeria* and the novel *Anthills of the Savannah*" (138). It is evident that Gikandi's approach is postcolonial: the critic partially illuminates Achebe's artistic vision,

but he is limited by the scope and range of essays within his purview. In *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Loomba briefly reviews Achebe's *Morning Yet on Creation Day* and puts into focus the essayist's justification of English as a language for national literatures in many an African state (91). She emphasises Achebe's view that the British novelist Joseph Conrad is a racist and that the novella, *Heart of Darkness,* is a book that portrays Africans from a racist perspective (93; 136). Loomba's account of Achebe's essays is only restricted to one collection, whereas this study has an expanded scope. In addition, I am interested in enriching scholarly debate by providing a deeper exploration of the question of Conrad's stature in postcolonial African literature.

Jideofor Adibe, in his article, "The Trouble with Nigeria," has drawn a cross-textual reference between Achebe's *The Trouble with Nigeria* and the novel, *No Longer at Ease*. He argues that although Achebe declared in 1983 that the problems afflicting Nigeria were purely related to irresponsible leaders, the real challenges facing the country go beyond governance. Adibe holds that Achebe's essays neglect the influence of environmental variables or system dynamics, which led to the destruction of Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease*. Adibe's analysis stretches my imagination towards engaging with additional factors impeding Nigeria's development. I have also noted that Adibe's study is purely concerned with *The Trouble with Nigeria*, whereas this research covers the whole spectrum of Achebe's personal essays.

Charles E. Nnolim posits that Achebe's literary works, fictive and essayistic, subsume the "Nigerian tradition," by which he means the artistic choices applied by Achebe in his works. They range from narrative techniques that highlight the Nigerian worldview in literature, to borrowing from folk culture by appropriating local proverbs, legends, folk tales, and local myths. It is in this sense that Nnolim views Achebe as the

"inaugurator of the great tradition of Nigerian literature – that which highlights the dignity of the people, their oral heritage and their cultural agency" (39).

Nnolim's analysis points me towards the artistic vision espoused by Achebe in his essays, besides explaining the stylistic borrowing and blending between the indigenous cultures and languages, on the one hand, and the English tradition, on the other. He also exposes the hybrid identity, which underlines Achebe's works. While Nnolim's analysis appears comprehensive, this study is more ambitious – it not only examines all of Achebe's personal essays, it also compares them to Ngugi's works of similar orientation.

In this section, I have explored the gaps in selected critical readings of the essays of Ngugi and Achebe. I have noted the limited scope in the preceding analyses and I set out to expand the examination of the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe by synergising stylistics and s selected postcolonial perspectives. I am satisfied that this study adds to the existing body of critical works on Ngugi and Achebe by not only engaging the texts from a fresh perspective but also generating new knowledge on a genre that is rarely studied systematically.

1.9 Theoretical Frameworks

This section engages stylistics and selected postcolonial approaches to guide the study. Stylistics takes account of the aesthetics of the essays while thematic concerns in are analysed by the selected strands of postcolonialism. I start with a brief survey of the key elements of stylistics before illustrating its merits. Predicated on the understanding that "language is the basic material of literature" (Webster 30), this study is grounded in stylistics, which is "a critical approach that aims to show how the technical linguistic features of a literary work…contribute to its overall meaning and effect" (Barry 202). Stylistics is a method of "applied language study, which uses textual analysis to make discoveries about the structure and function of language. It highlights and explains

linguistic patterns in a literary text" (Simpson 4). Stylistics also provides the "empirical and precise terminology for describing how writers uniquely expand the possibilities of language to realize aesthetic effects" (Indangasi *Stylistics* 10). Its critical method is "systematic, principled, coherent, retrievable and accessible, which aspects allow different readers to come to interpretive consensus about a text" (Simpson 6). In practice, stylistics "moves beyond sentence grammar to text grammar, considering how the text works as a whole to create suspense, to amuse or to persuade" (Barry 214).

Part of the stylistic remit is to banish imprecision, speculation and flights of fancy that have characterised traditional practical criticism. The aim of stylistics is to arrive at a consensus about a text based on a principled and systematic study procedure. In this study, I have applied descriptive models of language that are retrievable and accessible to other scholars. It is important to observe that stylistic models also provide "*a metalanguage*, a language for talking about language. It is in this sense that stylistics draws upon Linguistics – the scientific study of language" (Simpson 4). However, while stylistics does not embrace science directly, "its systematic techniques, coupled with its pursuit of conceptual rigour, make it easy to see why the status of science is often conferred upon it" (Simpson 4).

The stylistic method becomes handy in this inquiry since essayists are wont to use "classical rhetorical strategies of argumentation such as making concessions, ironic understatement, bold assertion and the use of hooks such as anecdotes" (Indangasi *Writers* ii). This study, therefore, uses stylistic terminologies and methodology to explain the "*implied dialogue* between various focalisers as well as the overall textual cohesion achieved" (Bakhtin qtd. in Webster 39). Critics have also identified rhetoric as part of literary style (Miller and Webb 2; Verdaasdonk qtd. in Djik 191; Costello *et al* 891). The essayistic voice has been interpreted as a stylistic feature, which endeavour s to persuade

and win the reader's sympathy (Yaani 1551; Indangasi ii). And though using discourse in a formalist sense, Bakhtin accepts it as stylistic choice (*The Dialogic Imagination* 426).

Besides the foregoing, there are other stylistic devices habitual unto the essay. The dialogic situation in the essay is usually built within the interaction between the essayist and the reader (Langacre 170). Likewise, essayists often deploy various forms of irony to convey important information with subtlety. Also important is the stylistic analysis of the personal essay as a rhythmic project, a cohesive text resulting from the skilful merger of the multiple voices and various focalisations. Based on the preceding information, I have, therefore, examined the essays as stylistically structured systems of speech performances.

Stylistics looks at how language can be used to create particular aesthetic effects. It helps the critic to determine how texts affect the reader and the role that language plays in this, by considering what happens in the reader's mind during the reading process and how the reader constructs meaning as a result of this (McIntyre 2). It seems reasonable to also view style as a product of individual choices and patterns of choices among linguistic possibilities. This gives rise to definitions of style as "deviation from the norm" (Chatman 30). Style is also the deliberate manipulation of language as a cultural phenomenon by either a ruling class or by an oppressed class, or which may be accepted and rejected by the same class at different phases in its development (Delany 439). This perspective on stylistics by Delany is particularly salutary in my analysis of Ngugi's rather strident and urgent revolutionary tone as well as his artistic vision.

In general terms, Ilya Romanovich Galperin argues that style should be accepted as a generic term for different concepts which are distinguished as follows: Individual style that takes into account the idiosyncrasies of a writer, including recognisable deviations from the norm; the functional style as that subsystem of the literary language characterized by a more or less recognizable arrangement of language with special compositional

devices; and practical style as the technique of expression and composition. Stylistics can be seen as a language science with the double task of investigating the linguistic nature of all the stylistic devices including those that deal with spans of utterance larger than the sentence; it must subject to a careful, synchronic and diachronic survey those functional styles which are easily discernible in the literary language (4).

Eniko Bollobas elaborates on the performative aspects of a literary text, framing the artefact as “speech acts, since a text constitutes a network of speaker-hearer relationships, the relationship between the characters in non-declarative dialogues, and the author's relationship with her/his characters and readers as expressed in the non-declaratives of narratives” (40). The study will use this perspective of stylistics to examine the rhetorical structuring of the texts to embed implied dialogue with the absent reader. Michael Kirkhood Halliday considers the same textual relationships and argues that "the speaker is using language as the means of his own intrusion into the speech event: the relationship that he sets up between himself and the listener – in particular, the communication role he adopts, of informing, questioning, greeting, persuading, and the like” (333). In the words of Bollobas, “every time a speaker utters a sentence, she/he is attempting to accomplish something with the words. In intending an utterance to constitute an act of praise, of concession, of asking a question or of giving an order, a speaker is performing a speech act, an illocutionary act” (41). Within the foregoing framework, the study approaches the essays as dialogic texts in which the essayists deliberately endeavour to influence the reader. Cues are embedded in the essays to whet the appetite of the reader, with whom the essayist engages in a kind of turn-taking dialogue.

A personal essay has conversational cues through which the essayist seeks to persuade the reader to look at things from the perspective of the essayist, the arguer. In this respect, the study is informed by this stylistic thrust that underpins the conversational pact

between the essayist and the reader, which is viewed within the prism of what Herbert Grice defines as:

> the *cooperative principle* consisting of four maxims: the maxim of quantity, which requires the speaker to make his contribution sufficiently informative; the maxim of quality, under which the speaker should make his contribution truthful and based on evidence; the maxim of relation by which the speaker makes contributions that are relevant to the aims of the conversation; and the maxim of manner, which rejects obscurity, ambiguity, wordiness and disorderliness. (46)

Works of art routinely violate the above cooperative principle. In the words of Bollobas, a certain maxim may be flouted if an author wishes to conversationally imply certain things: circumlocution, for instance, violates the maxim of manner; while irony, metaphor, understatement and exaggeration, flout the maxim of quantity. Yet, Bollobas holds that "exactly by violating such rules, figures of speech convey some new meaning. By violating the maxim of truthfulness, irony contrasts reality and appearance: it not only asserts a false proposition, but also states something which the author believes to be false, presupposing an element of detachment" (44).

In the above review, I have concerned myself with performative stylistics, which Chris Holcomb, in "Performative Stylistics and the Question of Academic Prose," frames as "a vehicle for performance, a way for speakers (and writers) not only to present a self but also to initiate, sustain, adjust, and even terminate relationships with their listeners and readers, to manage social distance and signal solidarity and hierarchical difference" (189). Along the lines established by Holcomb, I read the essays as both illocutionary and perlocutionary performative speech acts staged by the essayist (as arguer or rhetor) to influence the reader (as implied audience). As arguments, the essays perform a persuasive function, they seek to convince the reader to agree with the essayist.

The dialogic situation in the personal essays merits analysis within the stylistic context as explicated by Robert Langacre in *An Anatomy of Speech Notions*. He identifies the essayist and the audience as "*experiencers*, that is, animate entities with registering nervous systems and who can react to the environment as well as be affected" (27). I engage with this perspective in my reading of the personal essays as constituting what Langacre calls "*autistic dialogue*, a pattern in which … the same speaker is both the questioner and the answerer" (170).

Related to the performance of speech acts in the essay is the issue of verb choices. I have taken special interest in "verbs of inner action which underline internal sensation and verbs of outer action that designate external events about a person" (Hamburger 82*)*. Consequent upon the foregoing, I designate the personal essay as a speech performance: "the question is not what is said in speech, but what is done thereby, the speech act" (Levin qtd in Djik 142). This study, therefore, perceives the essayist as one who performs both "illocutionary performative acts such as questioning, requesting, pleading, or commanding, as well as perlocutionary performative acts that evoke certain emotions in the reader, such as frightening, pleasing or calming" (Levin 145).

Upon this performative carpentry of the personal essay, a "turn-taking interlocution between the essayist and the imagined addressee is evident" (Fox 10). As a result, I notice the emergence of the rhetoric structure in the essay, constructed on the premise that both the reader and the writer recognise the other's presence in spite of the fact that they are not co-present at the time of reading or writing. In the words of Dijk, "the writer must anticipate the reader's understanding of the text" (*Pragmatics* 40). Barbara Fox points to the same issue in her analysis of the rhetorical structures in essays: "the *response* structure poses a problem to be responded to with some sort of solutions" (83); while the "*opposition* structure presents two sides, one of which the writer supports and the other

that is rejected based on the 'not X but Y' format" (85); and finally, "the *concession* structure allows the writer not to reject the validity of the opposing side but to concede that both sides hold" (86). As persuasive texts, the personal essays are rhetorical in design. In stylistic terms, "rhetoric is a set of techniques or skills of effective communication by means of which a speaker tries to secure the audience acceptance of a presented argument" (Verdaasdonk 191). This is the stylistic frame within which this research treats the rhetorical essentials of the selected personal essays.

As commentators and communicators, personal essayists inevitably use irony to convey critical information with a touch of sophistication, depth and variety. In *The Compass of Irony*, Douglas Colin Muecke shares a definition of stylistic irony as a "style of writing that shows that what is intended is at variance with what the words speak. Meaning appears in multiple layers: the situation as seen by the *ironist* (writer) and as it is understood by the *alazon* (victim) of irony" (Muecke 19). In this study, I have adopted Muecke's understanding of the writers as both *ironists* and *alazons.*

To understand irony further, I examine the nature of literary works. Literary works "embody a humanistic ideal, the human pursuit for perfection and harmony" (Kiiru 70). Literature is, therefore, seen as the human effort "to create a different ordering of reality from that which is given, an inspiration to provide a second handle on existence through imagination" (Achebe *Hopes* 96). The same view is held by Edward Morgan Forster who writes that "the work of art engenders some form of movement, a combustion that allows the writer to observe himself differently and so to see his characters differently resulting in a new system of lighting" (152). The humanistic thrust of literature is also celebrated by Tony Davis in his declaration that "humanity is neither a given essence nor an achievable end, but a continuous and precarious process of becoming human, a process that entails the inescapable recognition that my humanity is on loan from others" (142).

The impulse to create works of imagination, therefore, emerges from the realization that the imperfection of the world has an alienating effect on the artist. As Robert Currie contends, "the creative artist, through imagination, assumes the status of a genius, and strives to transcend the lower order of existence for a higher transcendent realm of relief and harmony" (15). Irony, therefore, becomes a stylistic tool that writers deploy to aesthetically distance themselves (and their readers) from the world that has gone awry. An ironic stance allows the writer to aesthetically and imperceptibly point at the humanistic ideal – in this study, the artistic vision.

Stylistic focalisation in the essays is another key attribute which I have analysed in the study. From the outset, it is worth noting that by the very practice of enjoining anecdotes, the personal essay admits other voices or foci to augment the main voice of the essayist, the essayistic *I*. Similarly, digressions from the mainstream argument provide alternative foci. Mineke Schipper's analysis of multiple focalisations in *Beyond Boundaries: African Literature and Theory*, is useful to this study. Her stylistic approach is a pertinent tool to the interpretation of the essayistic first-person focalisation and the embedded focalizations found in anecdotes and digressions (103; 105). In this study, I will be examining the aesthetic rhythm created by the interplay between the multiple focalisations and their contribution to the literariness of the essays.

From the foregoing review, stylistics emerges as a veritable tool for analysing the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe. It has the tools for identifying the unique choices made by the essayists to deliberately package their messages. At the micro-level, stylistic analysis identifies the unique word choices, how they are combined into word phrases, sentences, paragraphs, whole essays and ultimately, full texts. Therefore, stylistics gives me the tools for recognising and analysing the role of aesthetic devices such as anecdotes, irony, allegory, symbolism, cohesion, tone and tempo in the overall literariness of the

essays. Through stylistics, I have pointed out the strategies of argumentation (rhetoric) and how they play a persuasive function in the essays. Stylistics has also empowered me to link the artistic vision of the essayists to the literary aesthetics of the essays.

My second theoretical approach consists of the postcolonial perspectives advocated by Anthony Kwameh Appiah, Homi K. Bhabha, Robert C. Young, Gayatri Spivak, Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, Gareth Griffiths, Ania Loomba, Zandra Kambysellis, Klohinlwele Kone, and Giridhar Mallya, amongst others. Their account of the postcolonial condition rhymes with the key thematic focus and the material topics with which Ngugi and Achebe are engaged in their personal essays. Therefore, this study creates synergy between postcolonialism and stylistics, allowing the former to articulate thematic issues while the latter examines the artistry of the essays. In this way, I am placed in a sound position to analyse the artistic wholeness of the essays, in a manner that structures their literariness as a carrier of the embedded postcolonial message.

Postcolonial studies engage a wide range of issues relating to the tensions, which were brought about by the direct Western colonisation of the Global South, political decolonisation of colonised states, continuing imperial domination and the current perpetuation of inequalities under globalisation. I am drawn to the two major perspectives offered by the foregoing proponents of postcolonialism in describing the colonial influence on former colonies. In the first instance, postcolonialism is seen to embrace "the situation unfolding after the arrival of the colonizer (hence, the temporal perspective of post-colonialism marked by a hyphen); secondly, it takes into account, the subsequent influences following the separation of the colony from the colonizer" (Mallya *Evolving Postcolonial*). It should be pointed out that postcolonialism (without a hyphen) goes beyond the restrictive time bound period between the onset of colonialism and the attainment of independence by the colonised. According to Klohinlwele Kone, the

postcolonial situation is a dynamic reality that "crosses borders of time, space, and aesthetics; one that stretches beyond the colonial era, portrays precolonial times, depicts the colonial context, and the period of independences; … one that represents the tension between the imperial center and the colonial world" (2944).

The spatial canvas of the postcolonial condition is important in this study since some of the essays draw upon the pre-colonisation, colonisation and post-independence experiences. They also adumbrate the future of the postcolony based on the past and the present. On their part, Ashcroft and others situate their approach to postcolonialism within the imperial project of dominance by Western powers over the Global South and the resultant resistance against it:

> … the immensely prestigious and powerful imperial culture found itself appropriated in projects of counter-colonial resistance which drew upon the many different indigenous local and hybrid processes of self-determination to defy, erode and sometimes supplant the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge. Post-colonial literatures are a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices. (1)

The impact of the colonial domination by the West has not been mitigated by the attainment of independence by the colonised societies. The entire corpus of the personal essays within the scope of this analysis deal with the postcolonial reality whose effects continue to manifest themselves long after independence. As offered by Ashcroft and others, "all post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle neo-colonial domination, including new élites who preside over the independent societies buttressed by neo-colonial institutions; internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations" (2). These are the issues exposed by Ngugi and Achebe in their

essays: and in addition to this, the essayists stage various forms of resistance against colonial domination.

As mentioned above, the two essayists have dedicated their artistic energies to the important entreprise of trying to come to terms with the postcolony. These experiences, to use the words of Ashcroft and others, range from "suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe" (2). These broader thematic issues form part of the key ideas with which the two essayists are concerned, hence, the need to engage them from this perspective.

Based on the preceding statements, it is worth noting that the two essayists who operate within the postcolonial realm, have rejected the essentialising, totalising and denigrating gaze of the coloniser, who has since adopted and refined new strategies of cultural, political and economic control over the postcolony. To this end, Ashcroft and others have constructed their approach to postcolonialism not in definitive terms, but in a nuanced framing that acknowledges the ever-changing face of hitherto colonised societies. They aver that postcolonial relations "may involve a wide range of activities including conceptions and actions which are, or appear to be, complicit with the imperial enterprise" (3). They also recognise "the importance of indigenous cultures and languages as well as their resistance to imperial domination" (Ashcroft *et al* 4). Another strand of postcolonialism centralises the struggle over language and holds that postcolonialism is a "formal response to the fluid sense of place, a wrestling with language towards a new eloquence appropriate to the dis-placing of place, or globalisation" (Wright *Can the Subaltern Hear?*). The two essayists in this study are acutely aware that the linguistic furniture belongs to somebody else, that the coloniser's language is tainted and that to write in it involves acquiescence in colonial structures. This is the basis on which both

Ngugi and Achebe have staged differing forms of resistance against Western linguistic imperialism.

I have found Homi K. Bhabha's conception of hybridity applicable to this study. While examining the cultural interaction between the coloniser and the colonised, Bhabha observes that the culture of the former seeks to smother that of the latter. The resultant contest between the two different cultures creates an indeterminate "state of flux through which a newness comes into the world, the unstable superfluidity, the in-between interstitial space" (*Location of Culture* 228). The originals on both sides get infused with "foreigness, leading to fragmentation or movement of meaning, translation" (Babha 228). This new identity is what Homi Bhabha refers to as hybridity. The hybrid identity of the postcolony is a serious thematic issue in the essays of Ngugi: therefore, by reading the texts within Babha's prism, I also make informed surmises not only on the question of identity cultivation but also on the projected artistic vision.

In reading the essayists as writers with double identities, I recognise that there exists a shift in which Achebe and Ngugi increasingly view themselves as innovators who blend African and European forms. This creative process involves "cross-cultural interactions whereby African writers adapt the European forms, remaking them to suit their own specifications" (Barry 194). In the words of Gail Fincham and Myrtle Hooper in *Under Postcolonial Eyes*, the postcolonial indicates a "flexible discursive repertoire rather than a homogenous atemporal category. It delineates a theoretical debate in which syncretism and hybridity may eventually replace Eurocentric perspectives…Recognising that our positioned subjects allow us to dismantle essentialist categories such as the *European mind*" (xiii). And this is the task that Ngugi and Achebe have set out to accomplish in their essays.

In effect, I am reading Ngugi and Achebe as postcolonial writers. I view their essays as works of art which put two sets of values – colonial and traditional – in conflict and by means of resolution, define the new conflict and the new postcolonial reality. According to Girindhar Mallya in her article "Evolving Postcolonial," postcolonial writers "present a range of resolutions to the conflict involving the collision of two sets of values – African and European. They try to provide the evolution of a system of values for the future and beyond" ("Evolving").

In applying the concept of hybridity on African Literature, Munashe Furusa notes that writers are aware of the deleterious impact of colonial representation and therefore, seek to reverse these effects. Noting that Western and African cultures have been antagonistic, Furusa explores modes in which African artistic representations have incorporated western cultures:

> Many African writers often present African identities as characterized by an essential, core identity which is threatened by cross-cultural contact, interactions and colonial cultural violations. They portray hybridity as an unstable product of alienation and cultural contamination. Hybridity, as an expression of ambivalence and fluidity, represents an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power. Hybridity is considered to be a major weapon against grand narratives and dominant authorities. Hybridity contests colonialist disavowal, so that the other denied knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority. ("Theorizing Hybridity through African Literature")

In this study, I have applied hybridity as an analytical frame along the same lines as Furusa. I have also deployed hybridity in my exploration of the complex cultural tensions and the resultant uncertainties in the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe.

In her expansive exegesis on subalternity, Spivak expounds on the issue of subjectivity and observes that the West has inaugurated itself as "Subject, narrativized by the totalising and essentialising law, political economy and ideology, to the exclusion of the "Other". The West is engaged in epistemic violence, orchestrated as a project to constitute the colonial subject as "Other" (66). It is this epistemic violence that the two essayists are seeking to heal. More importantly, Spivak further elaborates that the marginalised, the exploited and the colonised, have no definable self-agency with which to confront their reality: "For the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation" (80). I situate myself in this paradigm designed by Spivak by acknowledging that in their personal essays, Achebe and NgugI am staging an epistemic overhaul of the dislocated, the subjugated knowledge and the unacknowledged subjectivity of the "Other." The chief calling for these intellectuals, Achebe and Ngugi is, therefore, to rewrite the development of the consciousness of the colonised "Other." Spivak's strand of the postcolonial theory rejects the concept of the 'universality' of literature and instead, foregrounds the significance of cultural, social, regional, and national differences. The reason for this rejection lies in the fact that the 'universal' has become synonymous with Eurocentric norms and practices (Barry 191; 193). According to Zandra Kambyesellis, postcolonialism is a "continuing process of resistance and reconstruction" ("Postcolonialism: The Unconscious Changing of a Culture").

The postcolonial approaches are, however, not without controversies. For instance, Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory,* have warned of the dangers of totalising both the pre-independence and post-independence [political] experience under this term (3). A similar view is shared by Anne McClintock,

who points out the danger of "gazing back, spellbound, at the epoch behind us in a perpetual present marked only as 'post' ("The Angel of Progress" 15). Similarly, the term postcolonialism has been found to be fraught with challenges relating to its potential to exclude history from essential knowledge, the threat of depoliticising and universalising discourses (Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge 280; Leon de Kock 45; Ella Shohat 99).

Notwithstanding the ensuing controversies, I am persuaded by Linda Hutcheon's argument in her essay "Circling the Downspout of Empire: Postcolonialism and Postmodernism," that "the true priority of postcolonial discourse should be to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity" (151). In practice, postcolonial criticism begins with reclaiming one's own past which is closely followed by eroding the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued. Characteristically, postcolonial writers reject the colonial image of their countries and express an awareness of the representations of the non-European as the 'exotic' or 'immoral' "Other" (Barry 193). I have also applied the lenses framed by Ashcroft when he repositions the postcolonial perspective as a "critical conviviality and recalcitrant border-crossing in which different approaches live with each other in a condition of productive debate and intermingling" ("Introduction: A Convivial Critical Democracy" xviii). Ashcroft lists "resistance, decolonisation, hybridity, transculturality, transformation, translation, cosmopolitanism, orientalism and subalterity" ("Introduction" xix) as part of the ever-expanding range of approaches that constitute the postcolonial perspective. This conviviality of approaches as framed by Ashcroft is helpful in accounting for the multiplicity of artistic processes adopted by Ngugi and Achebe in their critical engagement with the postcolonial condition.

In summary, this research converges stylistics theory and selected postcolonial theories in order to address the twin aspects of creative artistry and thematic issues in the

personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe. In this way, the study evaluates both the literariness of these essays as well as their embedded postcolonial thematic concerns.

1.10 Methodology

In this research, besides using library resources for both primary and secondary references, I also sourced for additional information on the essays and theoretical frameworks from online data bases. The information collected allowed me to conduct critical analysis of the essays using stylistics and selected strands of the postcolonial approach and to make a comparative evaluation of the literariness of these works. I started this study by reviewing memoirs and related literature to obtain both vital biographical information on Ngugi and Achebe as well as their personal essays. This effort helped me to get the comprehensive list of their personal essays for purposes of delineating the scope of this study. I carried out preliminary reading of the collection of essays to acquaint myself with their message and style. I then read background works on the personal essay as a genre in order to distinguish it from other related forms of writing such as the formal and narrative essays. I used this information to identify specific essays, from the collections, which fall within the purview of the genre of the personal essay. The personal essays I selected within the scope of this study have the key stylistic features that define the personal essay – a foregrounded voice of the *I* persona, and a manifest effort to project rhetorical strategies of argumentation or persuasion.

Since this study involved a conceptual approach, I read theoretical literature and settled on stylistics and postcolonialism as my appropriate theoretical frameworks. I chose stylistics because it accounts for the technical aspects that define what a personal essay is. Aware that the essays are about the postcolonial condition, and that the writers are overtly engaged in acts of resistance, recuperation, healing and formation of new identities, I selected those strands of the postcolonial framework that are appropriate to the

interpretation of these artistic productions. By combining both stylistics and the selected postcolonial theories, I worked towards a theoretical synergy that explains not only the embedded thematic message but also the literariness of the essays of Ngugi and Achebe.

I structured my study into five larger chapters – the introduction, the essays of Achebe, the essays of Ngugi, the comparative literariness of their essays and the conclusion. Each chapter, save for the conclusion, had its own sub-chapters or topics dedicated to specific thematic and stylistic issues. My reading of both the primary texts and the theoretical frameworks was instrumental in generating the sub-topics for each chapter.

My analysis entailed intensive reading of both the primary and secondary texts. In the words of Douglas Brown, intensive reading "calls attention to grammatical forms, discourse markers, and other surface structure details for the purpose of understanding literal meaning, implications, rhetorical relationships, a kind of a "zoom lens" strategy" (*Teaching by Principles* 23). Brown further affirms that this form of reading is thorough, repetitive, focuses on the linguistic or semantic details, identifies key vocabulary, makes inferences, looks for relationships of thought or cohesion, is projective and requires great mental effort and focus (25). In this study, I borrowed the approach described by Brown to conduct thorough reading and rereading of the selected texts to establish their sentence and text stylistic features and how they convey the writers' message. For each essay, I focused on the micro - and macro - stylistic devices and related them to the emergent postcolonial issues. Some of the stylistic devices that I investigated are storytelling, anecdotes, irony, rhetoric, cataloguing, parallelism, juxtaposition, imagery, symbolism, allegory, allusion, understatements, exaggeration and tone.

The postcolonial reality projected in the essays led me to engage the relevant strands within the postcolonial approach. I explored the key issues in postcoloniality such

as the spatial setting of the essays (in their respective postcolonies), the multi-tier audience of the writers' message (both the imperial structures and the postcolonies), the appropriation of imperial codes, resistance against domination, and the writers' artistic visions of decolonised and empowered African societies. The tenets espoused in the selected postcolonial theories helped me to locate the two essayists within the antagonistic but rapidly evolving frame of the postcolony besides providing the terminology with which to name, describe, analyse and evaluate the postcolonial experience. The essayists, for instance, can easily be described as 'hybrids' on account of their cultural 'mixedness,' 'fluidity' and their continued occupation of the 'third space' in terms of their identity.

I synthesised the overall findings from the processes described above and made comparisons with the stated objectives and research questions to establish whether or not the research was successful. I conducted a comparative evaluation of the two essayists in relation to their distinctive individual style, their distinctive artistic visions, and their distinctive standpoints on linguistic decolonisation as well as on social justice. Similarly, I comparatively examined both the style and the message of the essays in order to point out how textual aesthetics animate thematic content. Based on the foregoing critical analytical process, I drew my conclusion about the literariness of the essays of Ngugi and Achebe.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 EMPIRE DISRUPTED: REBUTTAL, ADAPTATION AND RECONSTRUCTION IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S PERSONAL ESSAYS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I have examined the personal essays of Chinua Achebe from both stylistics and postcolonial perspectives. Stylistics helps me to describe the technical basic elements of language that feature prominently in his personal essays and how they relate to the conveyed meaning, while the selected strands of the postcolonial approach are pivotal in explaining the representation of the human condition in the postcolony. The two conceptual frameworks are critical to my evaluation of not only the literariness of Achebe's essays but also his artistic vision.

In this study, my scope of analysis is limited to five collections of Achebe's personal essays: *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, *Home and Exile* and *The Education of a British-Protected Child*. From these collections, I have selected those essays that display the basic defining elements of the personal essay. From *Hopes and Impediments,* I have picked*:* "An Image of Africa" (1-13); " Impediments to Dialogue Between the North and South" (14-19); "Named for Victoria, Queen of England" (20-26); " The Novelist as Teacher" (27-31); "Writer and His Community" (32-41); "Igbo World and its Art" (42-45); "Colonialist Criticism" (46-61); "Thoughts on the African Novel" (62-67); "Don't Let Him Die: A Tribute to Christopher Okigbo" (77-81); and "Postscript: James Baldwin 1924-1987" (118-121).

From *Morning Yet on Creation Day,* I selected: "Africa and Her Writers" (19-29); "What do African Intellectuals Read?" (38-41); "Where Angels Fear to Tread" (46-48); "Tanganyika: Jottings of a Tmy ist" (71-77); "In Reply to Margery Perham" (85-86); "In Defence of English? An Open Letter to Mr Tai Solarin" (87-89); "Onitsha, Gift of the

Niger" (90-92); and "Chi in Igbo Cosmology" (93-103). *Home and Exile* offers the following personal essays: "My Home Under Imperial Fire" (1-36); "The Empire Fights Back" (37-72), and "Today, the Balance of Stories" (73-106). *The Trouble With Nigeria*, yielded these items: "Where the Problem Lies" (1-4); "Tribalism" (5-8); "False Image of My selves" (9-10); "Leadership, Nigerian-Style" (11-14); "Patriotism" (15-18); "Social Injustice and the Cult of Mediocrity" (19-26); "Indiscipline" (27-36); "Corruption" (37-44); "The Igbo Problem" (45-50), and "The Example of Aminu Kano" (51-63).

Lastly, from *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, I chose: "The Education of a British-Protected Child" (1-24); "The Sweet Aroma of Zik's Kitchen" (25-34); "My Dad and Me" (35-38); "What is Nigeria to Me?" (39-46); "Travelling White" (47-53); "Spelling My Proper Name" (54-67); "My Daughters" (68-72); "Recognitions" (73-76); "Africa's Tarnished Name" (77-95); "Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature" (96-106); "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration" (107-123) "Teaching Things Fall Apart" (124 -130); Martin Luther King and Africa" (131-137); "University and the Leadership Factor in Nigerian Politics" (138-149); "Stanley Diamond" (150-154), and "Africa is People" (155-166).

According to Ezenwa – Ohaeto in *Chinua Achebe: A Biography*, Achebe's roots go back to "16 November 1930, when he was born as Albert Chinualumogu, fifth child of a Church Missionary Society (CMS) catechist, Isaiah Okafor Achebe and Janet Anaenechi in Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria. Chinualumogu meant a prayer for life and stability" (7). Ohaeto further reports that in 1936, Achebe joined the "St. Phillip's Central School, Ikpakaogwe, before moving to Nekede Central School in 1942, before joining Government College, Umuahia, in 1944. A prodigious child, Achebe later earned a scholarship to study at the University College, Ibadan" (34). What may baffle literary scholars is the fact that the writer was admitted at Ibadan to study medicine. However, in Ohaeto's account, "Achebe

changed his course to English, History and Religious Studies in February 1948 - this decision precipitated the loss of his college scholarship.… Achebe was soon elevated to edit the *University Journal* in 1951" (74).

In the biography, Ohaeto discloses that upon graduation with a second class honmy s degree, "Achebe briefly taught History and English in a grammar school in Ogidi before he landed a senior broadcasting position with the Nigeria Broadcasting Service (NBS) in mid-1954" (79). To sharpen his skills, the NBS, in 1956, "seconded him to undertake an advanced course in broadcasting at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in London. Meanwhile, he released *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. He dedicated his second novel, *No Longer At Ease*, to his wife, Christie Chinua" (80). He soon became "the editor of Heinemann's African Writers Series concurrently with his position as the head of external broadcasting division of the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation" (Ohaeto 87).

His third novel, "*Arrow of God*, was dedicated to his father in 1964. It was followed by *A Man of the People* in 1966, a novel whose prophetic ending in a coup appeared to predict the violent change of power in Nigeria that year" (Ohaeto 128). The turbulent political events that shook Nigeria in mid-1966 forced him to "retreat to Enugu and in the thick of the civil war, he and Okigbo established the Citadel Press while serving the breakaway Republic of Biafra as an ambassador, as chairman of the National Guidance Committee, as a publisher, and as a technocrat with the Ministry of Information" (Ohaeto 136). During this time, Achebe published several titles: "*How the Leopard Got His Claws* (with Iroaganachi), *Girls at War and other Stories, Beware Soul Brother* and *Christmas in Biafra"* (Ohaeto 140). Between 1972 and 1976, he "taught English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and from 1987 to 1988, he taught the same subject at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. He was involved in a bad road accident in 1990 that left him partially paralysed and on a wheelchair" (*Home and Exile* iii). He has received many

distinguished awards and honours from numerous institutions and governments all over the world (*Home and Exile* iii). For a period of 20 years, the writer lived in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, where he taught at Bard College. In the words of Bryan Appleyard, "Achebe's last assignment before his passing in 2013 was at Brown University on Rhode Island" (vi-vii).

In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I have examined how Achebe creatively uses the resources of the personal essay to articulate his concern for, and artistic vision of, Nigeria, Africa and the postcolonial condition in the world. I have analysed the role of the essayistic *I* persona in Achebe's personal essays; his rhetorical strategies of argumentation; his domestication of the Igbo rhetorical archive; his choice of lexicon, syntax and semantics; and his deployment of metaphors, symbols, anecdotes and irony. I have also evaluated the contribution of these stylistic strategies to the literariness of his personal essays. I have drawn upon selected postcolonial theories to explain thematic issues that Achebe articulates in his personal essays. By combining stylistics and postcolonial theories, I have explained the artistic vision of the writer.

2.2 The Literariness of the Personal Essay: An Overview

Literary writers usually deviate from the normal or standard use of language. The idea is to rearrange normal language to achieve a degree of freshness. From the choice of words, to the construction of sentences, to the creation of new meanings, literary writers aim to recreate our familiar world by making it look different. According to Ian Buchanan, literary creativity involves the use of language "to make the already familiar seem unfamiliar or strange thereby awakening in us a heightened state of perception. Since human beings are dulled by the state of affairs in their lives, literature, by power of its ability to defamiliarise the familiar, awakens us to new awareness of our reality" (*Oxford*

Dictionary of Critical Terms 295). The language of literature challenges the reader (audience) to reorder their perspectives about the world.

David S. Miall and Don Kuiken, in their article "What is literariness? Three components of Literary Reading," have suggested a three-component model of literariness involving foregrounded textual or narrative features, readers' defamiliarising responses to them, and the consequent modification of personal meanings. Literariness is constructed as the product of a distinctive mode of reading that is identifiable through three key components of response to literary texts: stylistic variation, defamiliarisation, and modification or transformation of the conventional concept or feeling. They hold that "literariness is constituted when stylistic or narrative variations strikingly defamiliarise conventionally understood referents and prompt re-interpretive transformations of a conventional concept or feeling. The key to literariness is the interaction of these three component processes" (124). According to Andrea Beltrama, literariness is the aesthetic pleasure I perceive from the literary text by engaging both the form in which the author's thoughts are clothed but also the deeper message conveyed. This pleasure is explained not only by admiring the language resources selected by the author, but also by the fact that the reader is given an opportunity to make conclusions regarding the author's message (7).

Literary texts contain stylistic features that deviate from formal or ordinary uses of language. This is why stylistic features are "foregrounded" (Mukarovský 25). Literariness, therefore, signifies the shifting of point of view, the creation of syntactic and semantic deformations and the emergence of fresh insights on a text. Literariness envisages an artistic response from the readers, one that elevates our perception of reality towards imagined possibilities beyond the finite. Stylistic choices commonly used by personal essayists are: irony, metaphor, repetition, cataloguing, parallelism, anecdotes, allusion, symbolism, allegory, story-telling, proverbs, concessions, digressions, and the essayistic

persona's first person narrative voice, among other devices. These artistic devices call attention to themselves, compelling the reader (implied audience) to reinterpret the text. With these embedded stylistic choices, the reader is invited to interpret the personal essay both as an aesthetic text (due to its defamiliarising devices) and as thematic discourse. In this study, I have syncretised two theories, where the postcolonial theory accounts for the thematic content while stylistics explains the artistic properties of the essays. Ultimately, the literariness of the personal essays is derived from the syncretism between the message and style, the holistic reading of theme and form.

2.2.1 The *I* Persona in Achebe's Essays

My reading of Achebe's essays reveals the *I* persona who projects the postcolonial reality in Nigeria [by extension, Africa], who offers alternatives ways of emancipating African arts and cultures, and who attempts to contribute to the creation of responsive governance. I have established from my literature review that the personal essay is distinguished by its strong display of the voice of the essayist. The writer is the focaliser from whose point of view I read the essays. For instance, in Achebe's essay, "Where the Problem Lies," the first person pronoun *I* dominates the rendition: "*I* (my emphasis) am not here recommending ruthlessness as a necessary qualification for Nigerian leadership...*I* am saying that Nigeria can change if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and vision" (*The Trouble* 1). This persuasive voice is also seen in the essay, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,*" where Achebe reveals that "In the fall of 1974, *I* (my emphasis) was walking one day from the English Department at the University of Massachusetts ... *I* propose to draw from these rather trivial encounters rather heavy conclusions..." (*Hopes* 1).

Achebe projects this *I* pronoun in the essay "Colonialist Criticism," where he writes: "...as anyone who has heard anything at all about *me* may know already, *I* do have

problems with universality and other concepts of that scope, being very much a down-to-earth person" (*Morning Yet* 3). In another essay, "My Home Under Imperial Fire," he continues with this style: "One of the earliest memories *I* can summon from the realm of childhood was a homecoming that was extraordinary...*I* was returning to my ancestral home for the first time" (*Home and Exile* 1). In another essay, "The Education of a British Protected Child," he states, "The title *I* have chosen for these reflections may not be immediately clear to everybody…" (*The Education* 3).

In his examination of the first person voice in literature, Wayne Booth holds that the writer who deploys this kind of stylistic device can be seen as a "dramatised narrator" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 152). I interpret Achebe as a writer who is on the steering wheel of his essays: he is not wearing the fictive garb associated with his novels or short stories. Instead, Achebe is speaking directly to the reader. In this direct address, he cultivates an engagement with me: he recognises my presence and tries to win me over to his side of the argument. This is one of the ways in which the essay is distinguished from other genres, which speak to the readers (audience) indirectly through fictive personae. This finding then reveals how the voice of the *I* persona imbues the personal essay with its literariness.

The *I* pronoun also plays the vital role of persuading the reader to agree with the opinion of the essayist. In his essay, "Impediments to Dialogue Between the North and South," Achebe engages the audience directly: "Don't get me wrong. I do not lump all these characters together [European priests, soldiers, bandits, traders, scholars, journalists, explorers, novelists] in order to dismiss them with the same wave of the hand" (*Hopes* 25). I have noted that the use of *'Don't'* is an implicit point of cognition that the writer is aware my presence as his reader. The writer makes effort to ensure that I become aware of the two sides in the argument: Achebe introduces European travellers to Africa who assert exceptional knowledge of the continent; then he tells me by way of concession that not all

of them espouse harmful views about Africa. It bears recalling that Achebe presented this essay in Berlin in 1979 after an invitation to talk about cultural exchange and partnership between the North and the South. In the essay, he hastens to clarify some pertinent matters: he is saddened that Europe and Africa have not engaged each other constructively because of the underlying issues of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. He doubts whether Europe has the willingness and capacity to cultivate beneficent relationship with Africa. This essay holds together as a communicative unit on account of the mediation of the *I* persona. In another essay, "My Home Under Imperial Fire," Achebe writes:

> Saying this the way I said it may well leave my reader with the impression that I became a sad and disillusioned old man... whose joy in reading has been battered and bruised... I am glad to reassure everyone about my abiding faith in the profession of literature... (*Home and Exile* 34)

Here, Achebe projects his words in such a manner as to suggest he 'owns' me by his use of the possessive pronoun 'my.' This essay is wide-ranging: Achebe expresses his indignation with the British for labelling the Igbo community, a tribe; he briefly describes the history of the Igbo as a nation; he narrates the spread of Christianity through his father's ministry; he divulges the value that the Igbo place on individuality and freedom; he recounts how some imperialistic reviewers received *Things Fall Apart*: he gives us a brief account of his journey through college, including the hostility of students towards Joyce Cary's novel, *Mister Johnson*; he shares his revelation that the story teller has power, hence, his decision to use his works to reconstruct the battered and murky image of Africa.

This long essay is carefully woven and presented from the first person perspective. In the words of Lopate, the essayistic first person voice "sets up a close relationship with the reader, a dialogue, a friendship based on identification, understanding, testiness and

companionship" (xl). The above citation, from *Home and Exile*, illustrates this relationship in which Achebe is not addressing some abstract reader but a concrete reader, whom he cherishes and values. It is also important to take into account the link between the essayistic *I* and the collective "we" as well as the careful effort by the essayist to directly address the reader using the second person pronoun "you." It is worth noting that this direct address enhances the symbiotic relationship between the author and audience.

On the key issue of the role of the writer in Africa, Achebe writes this in the essay, "The Novelist as Teacher": "I have learnt from Europe that a writer or an artist lives on the fringe of society… He is in revolt against society… Most of my readers are young. They are either in school or college or have only recently left. And many of them look to me as a kind of teacher" (*Hopes* 41). In this essay, Achebe confronts the question of the role of the African writer directly. He frames the issue by digressing to expose the image of the European writer, which he proceeds to criticise by illuminating the African condition. Given that this essay was written in 1965, it is safe to argue that at this point in history, Africans had not read much literature written by their own writers. As such, students were tempted to ape European writers and their characters. In this essay, Achebe also revisits the issue of the wound that colonialism inflicted on Africa: he asserts that African cultures, self-identity and self-worth were denigrated. This is why he strongly argues that as a writer he is a teacher who has espoused a revolution – to assist his people to overcome self-hate that was planted in their memory by colonialism. He avers that the writer must play the role of a teacher to revitalise the self-worth of his people. He states that: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels … did more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (*Hopes* 45). My analysis of this essay reveals that

Achebe has manipulated the stylistic artistry of the *I* persona to persuade me, the reader, to concur with his postcolonial message of resistance, reconstruction and empowerment.

Achebe's declared role is akin to the role of the intellectual as proffered by Spivak: "The question becomes,' How can I touch the consciousness of the people, even as I investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?'" (80). In this analysis, I see Achebe in this context as the intellectual speaking on behalf of the subaltern, the people whose identity, self-worth and cultures have been destroyed or vitiated by colonialism. I also contend that Achebe is reconfiguring the writer as a pedagogue. In this pedagogy, the writer is expected to help his community to repair the damage inflicted on it by imperialism and self-hate. This role which Achebe has assigned himself rhymes with Paulo Freire's pedagogic dialogics in which he frames the function of education within the prism of mental liberation. Freire declares that:

> To exist is to name the world, to change it. Dialogue is required to mediate the process of naming the world... Since dialogue is the united reflection and action of the dialoguers to the world, which is to be transformed and humanised, it cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another. (70)

The dialogic situation in Achebe's essays can also be interpreted as echoing Freire's dialogic pedagogics. I have already examined the interaction between the essayist and the implied audience and analysed the rhetorical strategies of argumentation used to create agreement between the two parties. This imaginary dialogue (autistic dialogue) between essayist and audience, in some ways, enacts aspects of the kind of canvas imagined by Paulo Freire.

In the preceding essay, Achebe is assertive and forceful. He is unequivocal. He frames himself as someone who is speaking the irrefutable truth on behalf of the

subalterns. He juxtaposes the ridiculous and socially worthless role of the quintessential European writer with the serious role he feels an African writer should play. Since there is no other alternative voice on this matter, as a reader, I am drawn into Achebe's corner and persuaded to visualise reality from there. Achebe creates a generalised assumption that applies to all European writers through this archetypal criticism. He does not concede that the European writer could be having other constructive roles in his(her) society. The essayist here does not create concessions that could allow the reader the opportunity to find out whether Achebe's argument could have some weaknesses: he, instead, states his views with finality. It is worth saying here that the absence of self-irony on the part of Achebe makes this particular personal essay somewhat weak stylistically, though its thematic content gives him high stature in African literature.

While Achebe's tone in "The Novelist as Teacher" is rather angry and one-sided, he constructs a nuanced perspective in the essay, "Where Angels Fear to Tread." In this latter essay, through cataloguing and description, Achebe audits the three different shades of European critics who engage African literature. They range from the outright hostile angry critic who applaud the role of colonialism in Africa; to the bemused critic who is rather ignorant but takes to wry celebration of Africa; and finally, the tough uncompromising critic who is keen to apply stringent rules on African Literature. Achebe wrote this instant essay to correct the impression he had earlier created that he has an acidic tongue:

> I have been a little concerned by the involuntary shrillness which has lately crept into my own voice. Only the other day, I wrote in an unworthy access of anger that Europeans can never understand us and that they ought to shut their traps. I now want to look at the matter again as cooly as possible and try to reach a few tentative conclusions. (*Morning Yet* 46)

This essay has adopted some of the defining characteristics of the personal essay. It is intensely personal, it projects Achebe's personal perspective, and weighs different options available before he offers suggestions for a possible way forward. From the above citation, I make the observation that Achebe is opting to treat the subject of criticism of African literature from a nuanced viewpoint, having vacated his earlier strident position on the matter. In so doing, he gives this essay a unique quality, what critics and theorists have described as "an imaginative trial, an attempt or a test of a writer's response to a subject or situation; weighing and balancing the different sides of the question in order to cajole, demand and win the sympathy of the reader" (Goose qtd in *Writers Speak* ii; Cohen *Essays 9*; Read xiii; Frame *Montaigne* v; Frame *The Complete Essays* vi).

The *I* persona in the extract above puts himself in an ironic position; he projects multiple personalities, one of which is outrightly acerbic towards European critics, and the other, which takes time to reflect on the matter deeply before passing a tentative judgement. This essayist is able to admit his fault, and to belittle some aspects of his character. In this respect, he seems to endear himself to the reader as a communicator who sees and weighs all sides of the issue before making an informed opinion. Achebe is engaged in the struggle to give agency and subjectivity to African works of art, which he believes have been beamed under the unsavoury light of European epistemic violence. In the words of Spivak: "the West is engaged in epistemic violence, orchestrated as a project to constitute the colonial subject as Other, which results in the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other's precarious Subjectivity" (66). Therefore, Achebe contests all the three shades of European critical perspectives on African literature in terms not dissimilar to Spivak's theoretical reflection on the construction of subaltern subjectivity.

The essay, "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration" (*The Education*), makes a kaleidoscopic scan of both African and European literatures and concludes that

the former not only celebrates humanity on the continent but is also interlocked with the worlds of other people. Starting with the precolonial Mbari celebration of Igbo gods, Achebe takes us through a detailed review of European writings on Africa by Joseph Conrad, William Shakespeare's Caliban as an allegory of black character, John Buchan, Philip Curtin, which he pits against Cheikh Hamidou Kane, an Hausa oral narrative and the Mbari celebration. The voice of Achebe's *I* persona is the glue that weaves these disparate pieces together into a communicative whole. Using the *I* persona, he divulges that the basis of this essay was his invitation to a symposium in Dublin on "Literature as Celebration." Through an anecdote, he reveals that an editorial column in one of the leading dallies had branded him as the man who invented African literature. Achebe, in characteristic essayistic style of self-irony and self-deprecation, states as follows:

> So I took the opportunity of the forum given to me at the symposium to dissociate myself from that well-meant but blasphemous characterisation. Now before anyone runs away with the idea that my disavowal was due to modesty on my part, I should declare right way that I am actually not a very modest man … (108)

The essayist implicates the reader in a conversation pact, cautioning us against making premature assumptions about him. He paints himself as a writer who is transparent, a suitable prelude to his cultivating of the collective implicature. It is safe to assert that Achebe is concerned with reclaiming Africa's precolonial past, which had been sullied by colonialism. As Linda Hutcheon argues, "the true priority of postcolonial discourse should be to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity" (151). Achebe's *I* persona is instrumental in trying to win the reader over to his side of the argument. This voice strives to cultivate a friendship and a relationship of trust between the essayist and reader.

The writer not only 'owns' the reader, he also allows the reader to 'own' him: Achebe builds such a level of unencumbered trust that he effortlessly confides in his

readers. As a rhetor, this is vital since it helps to project his image as an effective communicator. Having created a friendly alliance, Achebe is now energised to confront the issues affecting the postcolony. He names the issues as the erasure of African cultures, the malignant post-independence leadership, alienation of African languages, economic dependency, and the marginalisation of African literatures. The essayist's effort to cultivate a communication pact with the audience is both a function of the stylistic choice he makes as well as the message he is passing – the two conflate to show that the literariness of Achebe's essays is also defined by the collective implicature.

In summary, I have, in this section, illustrated how the voice of the essayistic *I* persona has been deployed as an artistic strategy by Achebe to re-educate his people, to open their minds to the deleterious vestiges of imperialism, to conscientise them about the realities of the destruction of their identity, and to engage them in meaningful dialogue that could lead to the assertion of their subjectivity and agency. These messages are artistically projected through the voice of the *I* persona, which signals the link between style and theme and which in turn underscores one of the unique features of literariness in the personal essays of Achebe.

2.3 The Principle of End-Focus

Achebe structures his arguments in such a way that general information, which he presumes to be known by the reader, precedes new information that might be unknown. In the words of Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short, "the principle that new information is reserved to the end of the tone unit will be called the principle of END-FOCUS. It is a rhetorical principle that facilitates the decoding of the message" (*Style in Fiction* 213). The tone unit in speech, is understood as "constituting a single chunk of information, such chunks depended upon the predilection of the speaker to segment" (Leech and Short 214). In the essay "Postscript: James Baldwin (1924-1987)" (*Hopes* 171-176), Achebe celebrates

Baldwin's life; recounts his personal encounters with this African American author; paints for a picture of the personality traits that define Baldwin such as his cool demeanour and level-headedness; and finally, projects what he thinks is the significance of Baldwin's work and life to humanity. Achebe clinches his argument with the following artistic construction:

> As long as injustice exists, whether it be within the American nation itself or between it and its neighbours; as long as a tiny cartel of rich, creditor nations can hold the rest in iron chains of usury; so long as one third or less of mankind eats well and often to excess while two thirds and more live perpetually with hunger – the words of James Baldwin will be there to bear witness and to inspire and elevate the struggle for human freedom. (*Hopes* 176)

This long sentence summarises Achebe's evaluation of Baldwin's contribution to humanity. It places Baldwin at the centre of global struggles against imperialism, racism and misogyny. The sentence itself is unique: it is carefully structured as a periodic sentence, defined by Leech and Short as a sentence that "saves its main clause to the end with a series of dependent, subordinate, anticipatory constituents, which are non-final preceding the main clause in the final position" (225). My analysis shows that Achebe creates suspense with the five dependent constituents that anticipate the final clause. The reader must hold all the five of them in memory until the major constituent is revealed and its meaning interpreted. This build-up of tension has a dramatic touch to it by its very nature of combining subordination of the five initial constituents to the final clause, and by the climactic principle of the end-focus by which Achebe invests the most significant information in the last constituent.

Through this principle of end-focus, the essayist tries to convince the reader that Baldwin is not just another African American writer; that he is not simply a man of refined

mannerisms; that he is not any one of those writers who have contested the dehumanisation of fellow human beings: rather, Achebe takes the discourse a notch higher by elevating Baldwin's contributions to the apex of the major struggles for human rights across the globe. It is clear that theme and style echo each other in this period construction, signalling that the reception of this critical message is embedded in an aesthetically constructed sentence.

I see a similar climactic construction by Achebe in the essay, "*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology" (*Morning Yet* 93-103). The essayist takes the reader on a journey through the Igbo Cosmology, centred around the personal god, *chi*. He reveals the role of the spiritual world represented by *chi* in protecting the individual in the material world. He also draws my attention to the hierarchical relationship between the individual, *chi* and Chukwu, the overall deity. Ultimately, the reader gets to see an author bent on making a rebuttal against the domineering Christianity, whose rampage had dispossessed the Igbo of their own indigenous religion. Achebe seeks to reclaim the centre of his people's philosophy and world view by placing the key information in the last paragraph of the essay:

> And finally, at the root of it all lies that very belief I have already seen: a belief in the fundamental worth and independence of every man … the Igbo held discussions and consensus as the highest ideals of the political process…. For as I have seen, a man may talk and bargain even with his chi. And what is more, Chukwu Himself in all His power and glory did not make the world by fiat. He held conversations with mankind. (103)

It is instructive that this last paragraph to this essay also marks the end of the book. The principle of end-focus is seen in the way Achebe builds-in critical information that is not shared elsewhere. There is the unmistakable positive attitude in Achebe's rendition of the Igbo Cosmology. For a man who was raised up as a Christian, and who benefitted from

Western Education (largely founded on Christianity), it is a mark of maturity for him to celebrate what could pass for heathen and animist among Christians. This step also underscores Achebe's resistance against Christianity: he paints favourable images of *chi* and Chukwu as approachable, listening, sensitive, and responsive spiritual entities, while subtly and implicitly juxtaposing them with Christianity, whose spiritual head is widely associated with a unilateral commandments, a fiendish temperament, and occasional feats of violence. This is an act of recuperation, of restoration and of reconstruction, which he, as a teacher, has heartily embraced.

In the essay, "The Example of Aminu Kano" (*The Trouble* 51-63), Achebe shares another essayistic construction in which the most important information is relayed in the last paragraph. This essay conveys the contrasting portrait of leading Nigerian politicians: on the one hand, the opposing political camps led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe, who were fighting for the presidency in the general elections of 1983, are painted as ethno-centric, selfish, greedy, narrow-minded and bereft of national vision; on the other hand, Mallam Aminu Kanu, who was a national political leader but who did not contest for the presidency, is presented to the reader as selfless, visionary, broadminded, circumspect, and de-ethnicised. In this long essay, the writer begins by introducing the reader to Aminu Kano, to his recent passing way, and to what he stood for in politics; there is a long digression that explores the different shades of political leaders Nigeria had to offer who are distinguished for their unsavoury political manners. It is in the last paragraph that Achebe returns to Aminu Kano, driving home the point of Aminu Kano's exceptionalism:

> The importance to society of people like Aminu Kano or Mahatma Gandhi is not that every politician can become like them … But the monumental fact which they underscore … is this: Gandhi was real; Aminu Kano was real. They were not

angels in heaven, they were human like the rest of us, in India and in Nigeria. Therefore, Nigeria cannot be the same again because Aminu Kano lived here. (63)

The above paragraph operates within the confines of the principle of end-focus. It concentrates the writer's message into very few words which bear a bigger punch. The writer, for instance, brings in Mahatma Gandhi and places Aminu Kano shoulder to shoulder with this hero of the struggle for freedom in India. This elevation of Aminu Kano to the same stature with Gandhi is a creative way of granting the former a higher status and recognition not just in Nigeria but globally. In so doing, Achebe is also imploring Nigerian politicians to embrace the higher ideals by which Gandhi lived, since a fellow Nigerian in the name of Aminu Kano also lived by the same mantra. This is suitable ending to the collection of the essays, *The Trouble with Nigeria,* in the sense that a local political hero has been identified as an exemplar of the good leadership, which Achebe has been yearning for throughout the book. I am reminded here that Achebe is decrying the malevolence that has spawned out of the colonial creature, Nigeria. In exploring ways of healing this colonial wound, the writer is subtly deconstructing the myth of colonial perfectionism and African backwardness. He is equally (re)creating a fresh way of viewing the postcolonial situation, one that conflates multiple angles and ideas, hence, the inclusion of Gandhi in visualising a new Nigeria.

The principle of end-focus, which I have examined in this section, is a structuring device. It embeds multiple layers of meaning: one meaning relates to the stated facts about the postcolonial situation; the second meaning exploits the aesthetics of this structure towards the expanded significance of the message. This aesthetic stretching of the message beyond its stated boundaries goes a long way towards underpinning the literariness of the essay.

2.4 Achebe and the Igbo Archive

Achebe draws the inspiration for his essays from both the European-style of writing and African archives. I have adopted *archive* from Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, where he designates "the collection of all material traces left behind by a particular historical period and culture, which allows one to deduce the historical *a priori* of the period as well as the episteme of the period" (103). The European archive would include the genre of the personal essay, as well as the English language in which Achebe communicates; the Igbo archive covers a wide range of items from the setting or location of some of the essays, to some of the characters covered, to the themes explored, and to the Igbo oral literary furniture – fables, proverbs, and cosmology. Achebe has also borrowed oral materials from other African communities to fortify his essays. This analysis seeks to explain both the complementary nexus between the Igbo archive and the European structural conventions of the personal essay, as well as the disruptive and recuperative acts of adaptation staged by Achebe.

As Romanus N. Egudu avers, "not only does Achebe firmly belong to this [Igbo] tradition, but also most of his anecdotes are taken from Igbo folklore or forged in the smithy of Igbo tradition and social experience" (53). To elaborate on this artistry, I refer to Finnegan's general account of typical traditional African oratory, a skill that, I am convinced, inspires Achebe's essays. Finnegan describes the typical art of rhetorical persuasion performed by the Limba community from Sierra Leone, the Ashanti of Ghana and the Barundi of Burundi. In her own words, her observation of their varied "rhetoric in the nineteenth century could be paralleled by similar remarks about the oratorical ability of many African peoples" (445). Of the Igbo oratory, indeed, Achebe himself has stated that "the finest examples of prose occur in oratory and even in the art of good conversation. Serious conversation and oratory … call for an original and individual talent and at their best belong to a higher order" (Achebe qtd. in Whiteley vii).

Achebe's essays, like his novels, borrow from Igbo oral art. He appropriates Igbo fables, proverbs and anecdotes (a rhetorical strategy) in a manner that contests the dominant colonial discourse. According to Isidore Okpewho in *African Oral Literature*, "storytellers were performers, using multiple tools like repetition, tonal variation, parallelism, piling and association, direct address, digression, imagery, hyperbole, allusion, obliqueness, stylisation and symbolism…" (70-101). This borrowing from Igbo archive, evidently brings a recognisable disruption to the standard English and to the genre itself. In the words of Mbanefo Ogene in his essay, "The Form of Rhetoric in Igbo Traditional Literature":

> Igbo rhetoric does not share the same traditional pattern with the English, Greek and Romans. Igbo traditional and political oratory is uniquely different from the English and other Western cultures and traditions. Igbo traditional literature is not only oral but has divergent connotations that call for extra caution and mastery in its interpretation. (6)

This section, therefore, explores Achebe's adaptation of traditional African art forms and rhetorical strategies and how they both shred and also enrich English as well as the personal essay as a genre. I have also analysed politeness as perfomative strategy in African oratory within the understanding offered by Maurice Bloch, who notes that "…speech is expected to adhere to conventions of politeness… Politeness is a form of social control." (297).

2.4.1 Achebe as Onye Akiko, the 'Story-Vendor'

Alongside the persuasion of the reader, the essayist strives to retain attention. This is where quotations, fables, proverbs and anecdotes play a significant role of giving what Lopate calls "authority to the author's argument. The pleasure of knowing that we are in cultivated hands, attending to a well-stocked, liberally educated mind..." (xlii). Such a

refined mind, among the Igbo, is known as the "owner of words," the *onye akiko*, the 'story-vendor' (Egudu 45).

There is a preponderance of story-telling in Achebe's essays. Even those that begin with an explicit argumentative statement sooner or later drift towards the story mode. In an essay, "Named for Victoria, Queen of England," Achebe shares the story about his birth: "I was born in Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria of devout Christian parents... I were called... "the people of the church""(*Hopes* 30). He adds: "I now know that my first book, *Things Fall Apart*, was an act of atonement with my past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son" (*Hopes* 38). The story is elaborate, it is digressive, and it ultimately subverts the acquired culture of the empire. According to Egudu, "one primary element that makes for the aesthetic appeal or sweetness in a story is the narrator's 'putting salt here and there', what the Igbo call *itinye nnu n'akiko*. Salt stands for both verisimilitude and historical detail and for fabulous or folkloric anecdotes" (44). Achebe can be analysed as an essayist who effortlessly plays the roles of what Egudu calls the 'story-vendor,' the *onye akiko*, who makes use of a large stock of anecdotes and the 'owner' of words who employs proverbs abundantly in his speech (45).

While the essays are framed as stories, Achebe also embeds narratives, myths and aetiological tales from the oral archive. Sample this fable from his personal essay, "*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology" (*Morning Yet* 93 - 103):

> ... there is a tale about *chi* involving the little bird, *nza*, who ate and drunk somewhat more than was good for him and in a fit of recklessness which inebriation alone would explain, taunted his *chi* to come and get him if he could. Whereupon a hawk swooped down from the clear sky and carried him away. Which shows the foolishness of counting on *chi*'s remoteness, for *chi* need not

come down in person or act directly, but may use one's enemy who is close by. (96)

This is a short version of an otherwise elaborate Igbo fable. It is ordinarily applied to trim human over-ambition and exuberant recklessness. It also reminds human beings that they relate to the gods in a set up that is unequal – that the infinite spiritual world is elevated above the finiteness of the material world. This, however, is mitigated by the Igbo notion of duality: "Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it. Nothing is absolute" (*Morning Yet* 94), signifying protection of the spiritual world over the world of human beings.

In the essay that embeds this fable, Achebe reflects on the place of human beings in the pantheon of Igbo gods: it is at once stable and fluid. It forces a human being to constantly navigate the treacherous landscape in which the gods are both protective and aloof. It shows that human knowledge and power is finite, hence, their reliance on the gods who may be (un)supportive. But human beings are also expected to explore the universe on their own, but with a heightened sense of circumspection, lest they wade into the territory of the gods. The godly clime is associated with knowledge, and success. The gods jealously guard it and frown upon human beings who may, in those momentary lapses, ride on the winds of pride. It appears as if human pride is a cardinal sin, which the gods are reluctant to entertain. Overall, the fable reveals the philosophical underpinnings of Igbo socialisation, character shaping and cultural upbringing, as a people who espouse freedom and who cherish dialogue as a strategy for building consensus and resolving issues.

In the collection of essays, *The Education of A British-Protected Child*, Achebe deploys yet another fable, this time from the Hausa. That specific essay is, "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration." The fable revolves around a snake who owned a horse but did not know how to ride him, whereupon a toad offered to teach him the right

way of going about it. Having observed the expertise of the toad in horse-riding, the snake laughed him off: "Then, lowering his head and looking down at the toad on the roadside, he said: "To know is very good, but to have is better. What good does superb horsemanship do to a man without a horse?" And he rode away" (122). The fable above indicts the aristocratic class that owns wealth and derides the poor. It is a precolonial indigenous story with deep significance to the current material inequalities. Achebe seems to have carefully embedded it in this essay, perhaps, to sound a warning about a possible revolution by the poor, the exploited and the marginalised, represented by the toad.

The fact that the fable is a digression from the main thrust of his argument, gives it a sense of freshness and adds to its aesthetic appeal besides reinforcing the message of the essayist. Unlike the direct personal statements I read in the essay, the fable is an oblique commentary, packing a revolutionary message in a less overt style. Achebe appears to have projected this fable as a mirror that subtly reflects on the legacy of British imperial hierarchies of exploitation, marginalisation and dispossession, the underlying message being that that such a nefarious order cannot be sustained for long, its end might come. I notice that by drawing from indigenous knowledge, Achebe re-imagines the destruction of the oppressive postcolonial socio-economic and cultural structures.

Achebe has weaved the Igbo myth on the origin of death into the essay, "Language and the Destiny of Man" (*Hopes* 30-37). In it, human beings send a dog to convey their wishes about eternal existence on earth to their deity, Chuku. The dog went to run his personal errands first; meantime, a toad, who detested human beings, had overheard this message and dashed to convey it. Arriving before the dog, the toad conveyed the wrong message, that human beings did not desire immortality. In response: "Chuku declared that he will respect those wishes, and when the dog arrived with the true message, Chuku refused to alter his decision." (136). The fable clinches Achebe's argument in the instant

essay in which the essayist argues that his ancestors already knew the dangers of defiling language. He is emphasising the role of language in creating a link between the present and the past and also sending a word of caution to the present generation against the temptations to mutilate language. Since language also defines a people's identity and culture, its destruction would mean the destruction of the people themselves. It is worth noting that this is another case in which the essayist resorts to a fable to underscore a vital message. It appears to us that the fable is a tool to contest destructive European influences on Africa. Achebe's strategy is that of the indirect counter-attack.

In this sub-section, I have examined how the Achebe's fables, myth and story-telling underpin the literariness of his essays. I have noted that he borrows, adopts, adapts and appropriates these forms, from the African archive, and artistically integrates them into the essay, a Western-style artefact. These appropriated forms not only add freshness to the essay and the English language, they also serve to fracture the imperial linguistic codes, thereby claiming some form of agency and empowerment for the 'Othered' postcolonial. Achebe's effort would have been more prominent had he fully adapted the African archive as the template for his essays. He, instead, eclectically borrows from the African archive to enrich and disrupt a European template.

2.4.2 The Anecdote

The anecdote is conceived by Lionel Gossman in *History and Theory* as a short, freestanding narrative account of a particular single detached event or incident, told as being in itself interesting. Anecdotes sometimes play the supportive role, are used as examples or illustrations or are sometimes deployed in a challenging role, as the repressed of history. Gossman avers that:

> highly structured anecdotes tend to confirm established views of history, the world, and human nature. In contrast, loosely structured anecdotes undermine established

> views and stimulate new ones, either by presenting material known to few and excluded from officially authorized histories, or presenting counter-histories, the censored underside of authorised history, or by reporting "odd" occurrences for which the established views of history do not easily account. (143)

What I take way from Gossman's rendition of the anecdote is that this artistic device can be used to discredit the heroic account of the events by "substituting an alternative, unheroic, and often petty counter-history" (*History and Theory* 154). 'Nọlue Emenanjọ's exploration of the Igbo anecdote frames it as " a short narrative, involving no more than a single incident, generally factual and authentic in content and basically uncomplicated in plot line. The Igbo have a neologism for it: *ukabidilu*." (172). With respect to Achebe's essays, I have noted that he engages in a process of retrieving new sources of truth, including oral genres and local historical incidents and documents that were hitherto viewed with contempt in mainstream Western epistemology. Anecdotes are also interpreted as playing a disruptive function: "the disruptive anecdote, in short, disturbs intellectual routines and stimulates new explorations of history. Anecdote as a disruptive device produces the effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency, by establishing an event within and yet without the framing context" (Gossman 161).

One way of reading Achebe's disruption of the established Western canons and episteme is to take into account his importation, fashioning and adaptation of the Igbo anecdote into the personal essay, an imperial genre. In his analysis of Igbo anecdotes, Emenanjo say this:

> the anecdotes are the preserve of elders, who use them in discourse not only to make their points but also to give prestige and depth to the subject of the discourse. Igbo anecdotes make their points by indirection and allusion. Their comic nature is

> brought about by their irony, wit, humour and an element of surprise, which combine to intensify the meaning of the anecdote. (175)

Emenanjo further observes that the Igbo anecdotes are used for "exhortation, to warn against indiscretion or misjudgement or against futile efforts or the evasion of responsibility. Anecdotes are also used for satirisation of foolishness" (173). These are the very functions to which Achebe applies his anecdotes in his personal essays. It is also worth noting that Achebe's anecdotes wear both Igbo (African) and European garbs: they impart an oral tonality to the written texts, cultivate an African setting, deal with African thematic concerns and are presented from an African perspective. In short, Achebe's anecdotes are heteroglots. This is again confirmed by Emenanjo in his observation that "the Igbo anecdote still exists mostly in the oral medium, it shares certain features with the English anecdote even when the latter is defined as a genre of written text. Both are short, striking, purposive narratives with a basically uncomplicated plot line" (175).

Achebe, it can be argued, locates his anecdote in the contact zone between the Igbo and English anecdote. There is a marked emergence of a hybrid anecdote, which both disrupts and recuperates its two antecedents. From Montaigne, I have seen the model Western essayistic anecdote which Achebe borrows, disrupts and then recuperates. In his evaluation of Montaigne's anecdotes, Tom Conley reveals that "to be sure, anecdotes in Montaigne's *Essais* are generally crafted to forge a space in which oppositions and contrarieties, are dissolved and neutralized. The anecdote or the tale told in passing, in the drift of conversation, would seem to be the healthy antidote to the legitimizing effects of its authority" (14).

From Conley's account of the Montaignian anecdote, I have gathered that both the oral and written are implicated. I also note that anecdote is an interpolation into the mainstream plot or story of the essay. Therefore, it introduces a new voice into the

monologic order of the essayist. The interplay between the essayistic *I* narrator and the digressive anecdotal voice(s) can be read as producing a dialogic situation, a kind of negotiation that eventually results in the disruption and displacement of authorised voices, perceptions and ideas. This is the sense within which I read Achebe's anecdotes. Achebe, it has been established, retools the anecdote to reinforce his wide range of arguments. According to Egudu, Achebe's anecdotes "are employed for mitigating the intensity of gloom in a sorrowful situation, besides being used to add colour to a conversation, to enhance communal rapport during a conversation" (46).

In the essay "Tribalism," (*The Trouble*), Achebe draws on his personal experience to demonstrate how lack of national vision among leaders has plunged Nigeria into the ills of tribalism: "As a student in Ibadan, I was an eye witness to that momentous occasion when Chief Obafemi Awolowo 'stole' the leadership of Western Nigeria from Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in broad daylight on the floor of the Western House of Assembly and sent the great Zik scampering back to the Niger "where [he] came" (*The Trouble* 5). With this anecdote, Achebe decries the erosion of national integration in Nigeria by the elected leaders in whom the people have vested their hopes. This eye-witness account of a real historical national event is a strategy by Achebe to make his essay credible to the reader. He cuts the image of a trustworthy writer whose side of the argument, the reader could join. The anecdote also lends the essay a sense of freshness, through the digression to the eye-witness account. In this regard, it is safe to argue that the anecdote is a strategy used by the essayist to expose the reader not only to his expansive stock of knowledge about governance in post-independence Nigeria but also to expose the inability of its leaders to mobilise political support beyond their ethnic bastions.

The conversational tone of the personal essay assures the writer of the reader's potential agreement. Therefore, the anecdote expands the reader's understanding of the

issue of tribalism in Nigeria and the role Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe played in burgeoning it. This anecdote further shines light on the decadence of the postcolonial condition in Nigeria, which is emblematic of the chaotic failure of British imperialism to create cohesive and sustainable nation-states. As Tom Conley avers, "the anecdote or tale told in passing, in the drift of conversation, would seem to be the healthy antidote to the legitimizing effects of authority" (14). Though Britain and colonialism are not mentioned in this essay, the existence of Nigeria as a state and the failure of both military and elected civilian leaders to make it work, is a serious indictment of Britain's dysfunctional imperial project. In this respect, I read the symbolic efficacity of the anecdote as a delegitimising rhetorical device, which aesthetically expands the possibilities of meaning.

In another personal essay, "The Empire Fights Back," drawn from the collection *Home and Exile*, Achebe quotes the reaction of Elspeth Huxley to Amos Tutuola's first novel, *The Palm Wine Drinkard*. Huxley's words run like this: "*The Palm Wine Drinkard* is a folk tale, full of the queer, distorted poetry, the deep and dreadful fears, the cruelty, the obsession with death and spirits, the macabre humour, the grotesque imagery of the African mind. African art is never comfortable, noble or serene" (56). There is a sense in which these cited remarks help me to appreciate the background to Achebe's rebuttal. In his response to Huxley, Achebe contrasts her with more balanced reviewers such as Dylan Thomas and draws from her other writings to demonstrate that she could be racist. He writes as follows: "She was engaged in spinning stories to validate the transfer of African land to white settlers" (*Home* 68). The foregoing anecdote not only provides additional material for the writer's argument but also functions as a marker of maturity on the part of the essayist. An essayist who employs this artistic device judiciously emerges as a fine story teller. The above anecdote serves a disruptive role: "the anecdote attempts to break through categories that have become conventions facilitating the production of a particular

kind of institutionalized discourse, allowing itself to act as a kind of reconnaissance flare illuminating a darkened landscape" (Gossman 154).

If I borrow Gossman's logic, then Huxley's account of Tutuola's novels is displaced by Achebe's artistic deployment of the anecdote in a disruptive mode. Huxley's critique of Tutuola is emblematic of the dominant reception of African literature by the centre: Achebe's anecdote emerges as a new way of seeing literature from what the centre regards as the dark world. Playing on conjunction (both Achebe and Huxley have read Tutuola's novels), Achebe inaugurates contrariety by rejecting Huxley's standpoint. He stages this coup by means of an anecdote.

I have observed that as an *onye akiko,* Achebe demonstrates his ability to turn a dry true story into a refreshing account, and this marks him out as a wonderful storyteller. In the essay, "False Image of My selves," Achebe's anecdotes deflate the bloated and pompous image of Nigeria that politicians have constructed. He juxtaposes two statements, one by the former West Germany Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt and the other by former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo. The two statements captured as anecdotes were issued in 1979 when both were still in power in their respective countries. Chancellor Schmidt is quoted as having said that "Germany is not a world power; it does not wish to become a world power" (*The Trouble* 9). President Obasanjo asserted that "Nigeria will become one of the ten leading nations in the world by the end of the century" (9). There is sharp contrast in the semantic import of the first clauses of each of the speech acts above: "Germany is not a world power…" is juxtaposed with "Nigeria will become one of the ten leading nations in the world…." These words are spoken by two leaders with differing leadership skills and in charge of two countries with significant differences in economic development. This contrast is equally emphasised by the parallelism in the syntactic structure of the two speech acts: Germany and its Chancellor are pitted against Nigeria and

its president. I should mention the iconicity that this juxtaposition structure evokes using the words of Leech and Short: "literary expression tends to have not only a PRESENTATIONAL function but a REPRESENTATIONAL function. It is in the nature of literature to exploit these iconic possibilities: to bring out association between form and meaning which are ordinarily dormant" (233).

I get the impression that the juxtaposition being canvassed here achieves iconicity in the sense that the mention of Germany brings to my minds the image of a country with a fairly advanced economy. The name of Chancellor Schmidt also brings to my senses refined leadership qualities that have sustained Germany in the higher echelons of developed countries. Conversely, Nigeria conjures unfavourable images of a country wracked by coups, violence, poverty and abuse of human freedoms. In the same vein, too, president Obasanjo is associated with violence against the Igbo (*My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*), high handedness, intolerance and bad leadership. The contrast could not be more graphic: while the leader of a developed country speaks with humility about its status and aspirations in the world, the opposing one from a poor state is voluptuous with a pompous sense of achievement. The lack of honest self-reflection on the part of president Obasanjo appears to be a drawback to Nigeria's vision of developing into an advanced country. There an implied absence of serious, meticulous, long-term and thoughtful planning for greatness on the part of Nigeria. The two contrasting anecdotes are stark.

From an evaluative frame, the irony of Achebe's juxtaposition of a colonial power, Germany, against a colonised state, Nigeria, is inescapable. I know that the organising principle in his essays is his anti-colonial and anti-imperial stance. I also know that Germany colonised Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and Namibia (then South West Africa), and did all the wrong things that other colonial powers (Britain, France, Portugal and

Belgium) did to Africans. Therefore, in raising Germany as a gold standard against Nigeria's infamy and in implying that the latter could emulate the former, Achebe imperceptibly sounds like a writer who is playing into self-irony. This self-irony also compels the reader to ask whether the essayist is complicit in the colonial project; whether he is only selective in his long-running quarrel with the colonial powers (taking umbrage to their oppressive acts on Africans but embracing the glitter of their advanced economies); why Achebe could not have contrasted Nigeria with a better option among former colonies (South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuwait, or Brunei). Or perhaps, it may be argued, he wrote out of anger and frustration. This can easily be gleaned from the underlying angry tone in all the essays under *The Trouble with Nigeria*.

In the foregoing sub-section, I have evaluated Achebe's borrowing from both European and Igbo (African) archive, how he creates aesthetic freshness and the ultimate disruption produced by this hybridised writing. This is evident in my analysis of Achebe's anecdotes. I have seen that his mastery of sifting anecdotes enhances the aesthetic and thematic projection of his arguments. The overall disruption and displacement of European perspectives and the cultivation of new perception opens alternative ways of writing that create agency for hitherto marginalised communities in Africa. The forthcoming sub-section takes this discussion further by analysing the appropriation of proverbs by Achebe.

2.4.3 Proverbs

Proverbs are used by successful orators/writers to illuminate their speeches or texts and as markers of wisdom or status in their communities. Proverbs pack a persuasive force when used skilfully in an argument. According to Wanjiku Kabira and Karega Mutahi, "proverbs are metaphorical statements that summarise a cultural context, event or experience. They are used to warn, advise, inform, or clarify. They are usually reserved for serious business" (37). In Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the omniscient narrator

reveals that "among the Ibo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (5). I note that the proverb is expressed in terms of palm wine; the essayist draws semantic equivalence between two lexical items from different semantic fields using the indicative verb *are*. This metaphoric linkage transports the proverb from its semantic field to that of palm oil. Once safely in this realm, the proverbs become edible. The significance of 'eaten' can be found in the digestive process, which leads to healthy human beings. The wider implication of this proverb is that proverbs are important ingredients in the performance of speech acts, and especially as markers of refinement. As a communicator, Achebe is wont to draft proverbs from the Igbo archive to mark him out as an effective, mature, well-informed and solid essayist. As a postcolonial writer, the proverb is also a tool for his contestation of the epistemic violence of the West on African epistemology.

In the essay, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," Achebe includes the following proverb: "Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it" *(Morning Yet* 98). This proverb refers to the Igbo belief system in which every individual is said to have a personal god (chi) for guidance and protection. It speaks to the duality of human existence, with a presence in both the physical and spiritual world. I feel that this elaborate essay is indirectly meant as a response to European cultural domination over the Igbo, especially in matters religion. Achebe has divulged in the essay, "My Dad and Me," (*The Education*) that his father was a Christian church minister, working to evangelise fellow Igbos. The weight of European religion on Achebe started right at home. His self-identity was, therefore, distorted by Christianity and other British socio-cultural and economic influences. My argument here is that the essay under review could be Achebe's way of coming to terms with the loss or distortion of traditional Igbo gods. It is a recuperative act. The proverb decentres the Christin deity (God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit) and

replaces them with the Igbo *chi*. Achebe makes the *chi* more accessible than the Christian spiritual beings. The proverb equally reinforces the logic of the Igbo cosmology which is dependent upon the Almighty Chukwu, with his medium, chi, and who have established a dialogic and consensus building relationship with human beings. It is not fortuitous that this proverb appears in this essay and at the denouement of the book: I can read this deliberate artistry as Achebe's way of stringing together the thrust of his argument – that he is playing his role as a teacher to reconnect the Igbo with their indigenous spiritual cosmology. It appears to me that Achebe is seeking a connection between self-agency of the Igbo with their spiritual liberation.

I have read the essay, "Colonialist Criticism" (*Morning Yet* 3-18) and analysed this proverb: "A man who does not lick his lips, can he blame the harmattan for drying them?" This is as condensed as proverbs come. It packs so much in just a few words. To unpackage this proverb, I note that it is weaved on the principle of self-agency. It highlights the fact that an individual must endeavour to solve their own challenges. It cautions that external forces cannot be used as an excuse for individual failures. I notice that the proverb has a parallel structure, which pits a human being (a man) against forces of nature (the harmattan). The human being is endowed with a tongue, which metaphorically stands for individual ability that ought to be used to wet his dry lips. It is instructive here that the dry lips are metaphorical, referring to challenges in life such as scarcity or adversity.

I recall that the essay containing this proverb happens to be Achebe's response to what he calls the erroneous attitude and assumptions by European critics towards African literature crystallised in the "Immoral dictum" of Albert Schweitzer that, "the African is indeed my brother, but my junior brother" (*Hopes* 65). Achebe is averse to this attitude that reduces the African writer (literature) to a lower rank of inferiority. He rejects the

framing of European literature as universal and superior. It is on this basis that Achebe coins the term "colonialist criticism," which espouses an unhealthy mental frame that exhibits limited understanding of African writing but still seeks to control it. Achebe urges European critics to cultivate humility commensurate with their limited experience of the African world.

Having mounted the preceding arguments, Achebe then turns to the African writer and argues that, "Most African writers write out of an African experience and of commitment to an African destiny" (*Hopes* 74). He cautions African critics against being swayed by colonialist critics, against being oblivious to the past and ensuing cultural, economic and political atrocities committed by Europeans (the West) against Africans. He laments that African writers have fallen back in the field of criticism, leaving room for foreigners to dominate. He encourages African writers to do their part by bringing "their gifts to the great festival of the world's cultural harvest" (*Hopes* 89). This is where the above proverb comes in to clinch Achebe's argument. "A man who does not lick his lips, can he blame the harmattan for drying them?" is a rallying cry to African writers to engage a higher gear, to reconnect with their communities and to recuperate their past as the foundation of the present. In relation to the foregoing, I paraphrase Bill Ashcroft and others, who hold the view that the post-colonial writer recognises the continuation of the vestiges of colonialism on societies that were once colonised, and tries to represent the continuing process of imperial suppressions. The postcolonial writer, therefore, "rejects the egregious classification of 'First' and 'Third' World" (3). I have seen that Achebe is committed to emboldening the postcolonial writer to take up the role of resistance and reconstruction.

The personal essay, "Language and the Destiny of Man" (*Hopes 127* - 137), offers this proverb, "when a man addresses his fellows, they already know whether he is one with

whose words something can be done" (131). The proverb is situated within the context in which Achebe recounts the power of the spoken word in precolonial African societies, where good command of words and effective communication, marked one as a leader. He cautions against forces that debase or devalue language. He clinches his argument with the Igbo myth on the origin of death, which recounts how the malicious misrepresentation by the toad to the god Chukwu, led to the withdrawal of the gift of mortality to human beings. I am tempted to look at this issue in terms of the larger picture of identity, where those who have the ability to control or manipulate language, could also destroy the identities and self-worth of others.

It might even be argued beyond the confines of this essay that weaker societies are in serious danger of destruction by those who exercise power over the myriad of modern communication channels. The above proverb, like the preceding ones, can be said to have allusive, reflective normative function (Miruka 44). The instant proverb uses the subject *man* to allude to institutions, agencies or powerful individuals who wield considerable power in matters relating to the use of language. It can be safely argued that Achebe is alluding to imperial cultural institutions such as the mass media, education systems, publishing houses and others that decide on which languages to promote and which to devalue. The reflective and normative functions at once point to the specific society at the centre of the discourse situation as well as to the value of the message to the intended audience.

Achebe shares with the reader yet another proverb, "It is clear to me that 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 a proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames" (*Morning Yet* 78). This proverb is embedded in the essay "The African Writer and the Biafran

Cause," and it is part of Achebe's caution to African creative writers. The salient part that conveys the proverbial intent is "the absurd man who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames." Before commencing the analysis, I will review the wider context within which Achebe uses the proverb. He gives a sketch of the events leading to the civil war between the secessionist Biafra state and the federal government of Nigeria. He paints a gloomy picture of the genocidal violence against Igbos perpetrated by both civilians in northern Nigeria and the federal army. Amidst these lachrymal events, he pitches the case for committed creative writers. This is why he valorises these writers who were committed to the Biafran revolutionary struggle: Gabriel Okara, Cyprian Ekwensi, Omora Nzekwu, Nkem Nwankwo, John Munonye, V.C Ike, Flora Nwapa, and Christopher Okigbo. He puts them within the frame of an artist as "a human being with heightened sensitivities; he must be aware of the faintest nuances of injustice in human relations. The African writer cannot, therefore, be unaware of, or indifferent to, the monumental injustice which his people suffer" (*Morning Yet* 78).

In placing the instant proverb in the instant context, Achebe creates a metaphorical link between the non-committed writer and the absurd man in a proverb; at the same time, he equates the big social and political issues of the day with a house burning; and creates equivalence between shirking of responsibility with the pursuit of a rat fleeing from the flames. It is worth noting that while the absurd man exists in a proverb (fictive world), the African writers (including Achebe) inhabit the tangible world. Achebe's tone is understandably angry: he was himself a victim of wanton violence when the federal army razed his home in Ogidi besides killing his personal friend, the poet, Okigbo. His call on African creative writers to join in the chorus of condemnation of human rights violations is, therefore, understandable.

Achebe's condemnation of the main players in the disastrous events that set Nigeria on a sloppy gradient seems to depart from his usual nuanced approach. There is a remarkable effort by the writer to pile more blame on the Hausa-Fulani from the north and the Yoruba from the west, than on the Igbo from the east. I know that the Federal Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa and the Premier of the Northern region, Ahmedu Beloh, were murdered in cold blood by the 1966 coup plotters, who were mainly Igbo, yet Achebe hardly mentions them in his successive essays. Their horrendous murders set Nigeria on the precipitous road of successive coups, the civil war and misrule. I see how the essayist foregrounds the complicity and duplicity of the federal government in the bloody pogroms against Igbos and how he quickly brandishes the Biafra cause as a revolution against imperialism, ethnicity and violation of human rights. He frames Biafra's struggle as an emblem of true independence in Africa. It is, however, known that Biafra was not entirely free of imperial influence since there were marked Western capitalist interests in the petroleum reserves within the Niger Delta, which underlined the military support given by various powers to both parties in the conflict.

It is worth reflecting on the words of Chinweizu and others with regard to Achebe's engagement with Igbo archive:

> African orature is important to the entreprise of decolonising African literature, for the important reason that it is the incontestable reservoir of the values, sensibilities, aesthetics and achievements of traditional African thought and imagination outside the plastic arts. Thus, it must serve as the ultimate foundation, guidepost and point of departure for a modern liberated African literature. It is the root from which modern African literature must draw sustenance. (2)

The argument by Chinweizu and others sums up the purpose of this section – that Achebe deploys proverbs in selected personal essays to recuperate the erased Igbo episteme, to

mould a fresh aesthetic that speaks to both the Igbo and Western antecedents, and to blaze the trail in (re)creating new agency for African creative arts. In summary, Achebe engages the proverb as a multi-edged sword: its wit imparts aesthetic pleasure into the serious thrust of the essay; while its brevity invites the reader to conjure meanings beyond the denoted text. I am also alive to the function of the oral forms in the disruption of the privileged hierarchy of the borrowed English language. I am invited to read the proverb as an artistic device that levels the ground by inserting African wisdom into a discourse that ordinarily marginalises such peripheral voices. In using proverbs, Achebe emerges as an accomplished writer, as an elder and as a reliable communicator whose arguments carry serious weight. The next section transitions from Igbo archive to general aesthetic choices like metaphor, which animate Achebe's essays.

2.5 Achebe's Metaphors

2.5.1 The Child as an Extended Metaphor

I have examined how Achebe berates Nigeria – for want of leadership, decadent morality, corruption, ethnicity, indiscipline and dearth of progress in human development. As part of his artistic engagement with the conversation on the fate of Nigeria, Achebe discursively and metaphorically casts his country in the image of a child. This is a fairly angry reaction to (or rejection of) the postcolonial state, a creature of colonialism and its lingering legacy, which falls within the scope of what Emmanuel Yewah considers the disillusioned African writers who "have turned their creative endeavors into weapons to challenge, indeed to deconstruct … 'any signified that could correspond to the nation.' These are subversive activities of de-centering the nation, of questioning established national boundaries" (45). The preceding view sheds light on Achebe's essay, "What is Nigeria to Me?" (*The Education)* in which he points out the serious flaws in Nigeria's governance, especially its crude, rugged and discordant ethnic cartography that the British

drew as part of their imperial expansion: "The final consequence of this failure of the state to fulfil its primary obligation to its citizens was the secession of Eastern Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra" (44). Achebe reminds us that he was compelled to renounce his Nigerian citizenship during the civil war. He justifies his renunciation of Nigeria not only on account of its bestiality towards the Igbo during the war, but also on failed leadership. After the internecine war, he makes up his mind to reclaim his Nigerian identity: "Nigeria is neither my mother nor father. Nigeria is a child. Nigeria needs help. Nigerians have their work cut out for them – to coax this unruly child along the path of useful creative development" (45). The noun phrase "Nigeria is a child" sits at the centre of this metaphorical construction. To get to the depth of this metaphor, let us reflect on the words of Donald Davidson:

> A metaphor makes us attend to some likeness, often surprising likeness, between two or more things … The idea is that in metaphor, certain words take on new or 'extended' meanings. Perhaps, I can explain a metaphor as a kind of ambiguity: the force of the metaphor depends on my uncertainty as I waver between the two meanings… A plausible approach would be to consider the words of the metaphor as having, at once, a literal and figurative meaning. (*On Metaphor* 31)

I am drawn to the surprising re-imagination of Nigeria as a human child. I ordinarily conceive a nation-state or country as a collectivity of people governed by internationally recognisable institutions. But in his re-definition of Nigeria, Achebe brings together two divergent images – Nigeria and child – into sharp relief. I agree with Karsten Harries that "metaphor joins dissimilarities not so much to let us perceive in them some previously hidden similarity but to create something altogether new" (71). The idea here is that readers are forced to establish certain relationships between the nation-state known as Nigeria and a child. In so doing, I engage in the following interpretive process established

by Ted Cohen: "(1) The speaker issues a kind of concealed invitation; (2) the hearer expends a special effort to accept the invitation; and (3) this transaction constitutes the acknowledgement of a community" (*On Metaphor* 6). The relationship between the essayist and the reader can be interpreted as consisting of construction and construal, which brings intimacy, resulting from the cognitivity of the metaphor.

I hasten to add that on the one hand, a child is associated with the attributes of weakness, inadequate knowledge, lack of agency, dependency, and small stature. On the other hand, Nigeria as a nation-state is widely expected to embody and demonstrate positive attributes such as responsible leadership, protection of the rights of all her citizens, and serious commitment towards the promotion of economic advancement of all her people. In Achebe's assessment, Nigeria has failed to perform its core duties as a nation-state. Achebe holds that this failure is largely deliberate. Consequently, the essayist lowers Nigeria's stature to the diminutive level of a child through the artistic convention of a metaphor. A new, if fresh, image of Nigeria is conjured up in my mind and it is not a favourable one. This is why, in frustration, Achebe's tone is rather angry.

It should, however, be noted that this diminution of Nigeria, somewhat contradicts Achebe's view of Nigeria in the essay "False Image of My selves" in which he appears to celebrate the Nigerian identity: "You could always find idealistic people from every part of Nigeria who were prepared to do battle if anyone (especially European or American) should ask them: What is your tribe? … They would proclaim their Nigerianness haughtily, drawing themselves to their full height" (*The Trouble* 6). In the essay, "Social Injustice and the Cult of Mediocrity," Achebe addresses the reader: "My dear reader, you may think I overdraw the picture. Let me assure you that I have only sketched in the tip of the iceberg. As a class, you and I and my friends who comprise the elite are incredibly blind. I refuse to see what I do not want to see" (*The Trouble* 25). He directly addresses the

Nigerian leadership as "*you* and *I* and *my* friends who comprise the elite" (*The Trouble* 25) – this is a rhetorical strategy aimed at appealing to their conscience. In the following utterance, Achebe uses rhetorical questions while addressing the same elite:

> Does it ever worry us that history, which neither personal wealth nor power can pre-empt, will pass terrible judgment on us, pronounce anathema on our names when I have accomplished our betrayal and passed on? I have lost the twentieth century; are I bent on seeing that our children also lose the twenty-first? (*The Trouble* 3)

The writer can be read as pushing the leaders into a corner where they inevitably have little room to wriggle out because of the stark reality that nobody wants "our children also lose the twenty-first century" (*The Trouble* 3). The latter is structured as a rhetorical question, which is meant to prick the conscience of those in charge of making policy decisions in Nigeria, and perhaps, prod them towards a positive direction.

The big question concerning failed leadership in Nigeria can be summed up in the following words of Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith in *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behaviour is Almost Always Good Politics*:

> When addressing politics, I must accustom my selves to think and speak about the actions and interests of specific, named leaders. Once I think about what helps leaders come to and stay in power, I will also begin to see how to fix politics. Politics, just like all of life, is about individuals, each motivated to do what is good for them, not what is good for others. (xix)

From the above citation, I get the impression that there is a more fundamental and deep-rooted issue contributing to bad leadership – selfishness. Mesquita and Smith point towards self-interest as the key inspiration behind the hunger for leadership. They dispute

any suggestions that leaders seek power to serve the people. It is in this revelation that I contextualise Achebe's angst with the leadership in Nigeria: the inability of those in power to serve their citizens is directly proportional to their selfishness and greed.

In some essays, I encounter a writer keen to paint a balanced picture of the Igbo as seen in the essay, "The Igbo Problem" (*The Trouble* 45-50). The essay gives credit to some of their positive character traits and also points out those aspects of their behaviour found repulsive to other Nigerians. Given that the essay was published long after the civil war, Achebe seems to have mellowed down considerably on his scotching attack on the federal republic over its treatment of the Igbo. The author appears to suggest that some people who could have given Nigeria the distinguished national guidance it deserves were deliberately overlooked in the country's formative years. In the essay, "The Sweet Aroma of Zik's Kitchen" (*The Education* 25-34), he singles out Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's first African governor general, as a man who packed the relevant skills and temperament to lead the country to greater heights. I get this feeling that the writer is regretting the missed opportunity to tap into the resourcefulness of this great man and this is marked by an angry tone. In this respect, I can read Achebe within the context of Edward Said's declaration of the cardinal obligation assigned to intellectuals, which is "to speak against power, to question structures of coercion, injustice, and silencing, to create alternative readings of history and culture … through the processes of demythologising and demystifying … the illusions and myths of empire and other systems of silencing" ("Public Role of Writers" 193). One salient issue emerges from this account by Said: the complicity of the empire in the decadent leadership of the postcolony, especially the divide and rule policy by which the British pitted indigenous communities against each other to guarantee the continuation of the exploitative imperial project. The civil war, and the resultant exclusion of the Igbo

from the mainstream state can be attributed to the tensions, which the British actively created and nurtured.

In an essay, "Under Imperial Fire" (*Home and Exile*), Achebe disputes reference to the Igbo as a tribe and corrects this imposed label by asserting that the Igbo are a nation: "Conventional practice calls them [Igbo] a tribe, but I no longer follow that convention. I call them a nation" (4). He also celebrates Igbo art in the essay, 'Igbo World and its Art" (*Hopes* 62-7) and extends the same privileges to their cosmology in the essay, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology" (*Morning Yet* 93-103). There is a heavy indulgence by the essayist in the fate of the Igbo people. Ever since the succession of bloody coups in 1966, followed by the civil war of 1967 – 1970, Igbos have felt marginalised. Their suffering before, during and after the civil war, has provided data for Achebe's essays (*Morning Yet* 84). It is evident that Achebe has endeavoured to take the reader on an exploratory journey through the Igbo experience: from this, I encounter his furious rebellious and separatist streak; I see his ambivalence towards Nigeria; and lastly, I encounter his reconciliation with his Nigerian identity, albeit cautiously.

In the foregoing section, I have evaluated Achebe's metaphorical (de)construction of Nigeria as a child. It has been established that the child image is both a direct result of Britain's imperial experimentation and as a malignancy inflicted by successive post-independence regimes. The unmistakeable fact in the ensuing discussion is that the child metaphor not only applies to Nigeria, it also implicates Achebe himself: both the writer and his country have been inferiorised and infantalised by the legacy of British colonialism. To unpackage this multi-layered metaphor, I interpret Nigeria's continued hierarchical, unequal and exploitative relationship with the colonial master (Britain), long after independence, as one axis of the child metaphor. The other axis of this image is Achebe's condition as a colonial subject in both pre- and post-independence Nigeria, as a

child of the empire. The idea here is that both Nigeria and Achebe have the same ignominious identity – they occupy the lower rung of a child, usually associated with the dearth of agency. There is another layer of the child metaphor, one in which Achebe perceives himself and fellow Nigerians as disillusioned victims of a rogue state, reduced to helplessness and anguish. In this evaluation, Achebe's essays are read as artefacts geared towards exposing, naming and shaming this malady: by speaking out against this ignominious situation, the essayist is working towards the deconstruction of the chains that inhibit both him and Nigeria from realising full agency. Besides the metaphor of Nigeria as a child, Achebe has also included *Mbari* festival in his essays, which I read as a metaphorical construction in the forthcoming sub-section.

2.5.2 Mbari as an Extended Metaphor

Achebe has appropriated the *Mbari* festival of his Igbo community to counter the dominance of Christianity as well as to prefigure his hybrid identity. This is his description of the *Mbari* festival in the essay, "Africa and her Writers":

> *Mbari* was performed at the behest of the earth goddess, *Ala*, the most powerful deity in the Igbo pantheon… Every so many years, *Ala* would instruct the community through her priest to prepare a festival of images in her honour … Besides the goddess *Ala* occupying the central place often with a child on her knee, alongside other divinities, the celebration captured the total day to day life of the community: on display were men, women, beasts and birds. These were celebrated on a special holiday in honour of the goddess. (*Morning Yet* 22)

The *Mbari* celebrations constitute an expanding metaphor in Achebe's works. The celebrations serve as a countervailing force not only against the dominance of Christianity but also against the totality of Western denigration, exploitation and violence. Much the same strain is echoed in the essay, "The Writer and His Community" (*Hopes*), in which

Achebe asserts that his artistic productions are influenced by the *Mbari* tradition. He is particularly inspired by the unique cultural values under which the *Mbari* artists "create solid objects of art yet make no attempts to claim them, even going to great lengths to deny personal ownership of what they have created" (*Hopes* 48). These artistic creators, who design and produce a spectacular home of images for the earth goddess, *Ala*, are referred to as "*ndimgbe* (singular: *onyemgbe*), and they are no more than vessels in which the gods place their gifts of creativity to mankind" (*Hopes* 48). Through this humility, the *Onyemgbe* traditional artist shares some traits with the typical essayist who, as Lopate avers, "claims access to the small, humble things in life... [hence] the taste for the miniature becomes a strong suit for the [personal essay] form" (xxviii). This is the sense in which I read Achebe's essayistic persona as one whose voice delves into artistic self-deprecation in order to win over the reader through acts of rhetorical persuasion.

It is instructive that Achebe rides on the platform offered by *Mbari* to engage with the larger question of the role of the writer in Africa. The essayist, in fact, deploys *Mbari* to cast a metaphorical shadow on the African writer: "Certainly, no artist reared within the *Mbari* culture could aspire to humiliate his community" (*Morning Yet* 23). It is Achebe's view that the African writer should, like the *Mbari* artist, be engaged with the traditions of her/his community, not alienated from it.

Although Achebe is casting his glance back at the erased religious festivities of his people, he has not renounced the lingering influence of Christianity and the allied Western cultural world view. He is easily identified as a cultural hybrid, a term defined by Brian Stross as "a person who represents the blending of traits from diverse cultures or traditions, or even more broadly it can be a culture, or element of culture, derived from unlike sources; that is, something heterogeneous in origin or composition" (254). Based on this definition, I proceed to examine traces of hybrid identity in Achebe's essays, taking

into account what Robert C. Young calls "translation, a process that produces a copy of the original, a clone... Translation … could mean the transformation of a colonised people to ape the culture of the coloniser; it could also mean self-translation acts by the colonised to grasp at self-agency" (*Postcolonialism* 146).

On this basis, I shall be examining translation and how it relates to hybridity and otherness in Achebe's essays. Stross defines the "Other" as a "perception, a construct in the West of anything that is likely to be seen as a threat, an alter ego, and an enigma" (265). He holds that "cultural hybrids are created through such processes as diffusion (or borrowing), invention, learning, cultural assimilation, and construction, among others" (257). I need to examine Achebe's identity in the light of the ensuing discussion. In his essay, "The Education of a British-Protected Child," he acknowledges, more tacitly, his dual upbringing as both an Igbo and a British-Protected Child. He appears to accept this duality, and also attributes the duality of his mental disposition to the Igbo cosmology that espouses "not singularity but duality. Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it" (*The Education* 6). The essayist, therefore, finds himself in the middle ground between the two cultural persuasions on his life.

It is apparent that Achebe straddles two knowledge systems. Although the proverb above has already been examined in a preceding section, it is worth pointing out its parallel structure, which is both split and unified. The spiritual and physical world are constructed as inseparable. This proverb has been used by Achebe, both to illustrate the epistemological and spiritual anchors of the Igbo, and to contest Western perception of spiritual vacuity or crudity among African societies. In this ensuing context, it prefigures the merger of what Young calls:

> … the informal knowledge that he learned from the family and environment, and the formal knowledge learned from someone else [the British]… When an original

> culture is superimposed with a colonial or a dominant culture through education, it produces a nervous condition of ambivalence, uncertainty, the blurring of cultural boundaries, an otherness within. (Young; 14;23)

So, in a way, Achebe is aware of his marginality, his "Otherness," his sub-alternity – the latter term refers to "the condition of being or belonging to the subordinated classes or peoples, to live as the person who is always in the margins, to be the person who never qualifies as the norm, the person who is not authorized to speak" (Young 6).

Edward Said, while describing Salman Rushdie as a hybrid in an interview titled "Overlapping Territories: The World, the text and Critic", notes that:

> ... he [Rushdie] is (an) in-between and occupying more than two cultural spaces; someone who is engaged in double critique; using the metropolitan to articulate Third World (sic) condition. Rushdie, then, is really part of something much bigger than just one individual. He can write in a world language and turn that language against its own sources of authority and consolidation... he consciously mixes the discourse of the West and makes it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories. (Said 64-65)

There is a way in which Achebe's multiple heritage mirrors Rushdie's. By the very act of consciously inserting Igbo orality (lexicon, metaphors, fables, songs and proverbs) into the 'coloniser's' language, Achebe bridges two different worlds. What emerges in his personal essays, novels, short stories and poems is not a picture of him as a traditional Igbo, unaffected by the West, but that of a writer striking a balance between these two remarkably different worlds. He claims a stake in both worlds – a veritable hybrid.

In the essay, "My Home Under Imperial Fire," Achebe acknowledges the influence of two religious worlds on his identity – the Christian faith professed by his Anglican

missionary father, and the Igbo traditional religious beliefs and practices, which his extended family venerated. He asserts: "Igbo things did not vanish from our lives; they were present but taken for granted, unacknowledged" (*Home and Exile* 20). In the case of this argument, Achebe faults Ayi Kwei Armah's novel, the *Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and the poetry of Christopher Okigbo. His quarrel with both writers is that they have declared separately that they write about the human condition, not their communities. It is my view that Achebe did not make a nuanced weighing of his foregoing assertion against the contribution of both Armah's novel and Okigbos's poetry to African literature. The former has a solid grasp of imagery and succeeds in exposing corruption in post-independence Ghana; while the latter takes us on a journey of self-discovery (repairs back to the river goddess, *Idoto*, for poetic inspiration), emancipation and acquisition of artistic agency.

It is worth adding that Achebe expects the African writer to also appropriate Western tools of artistic creativity, including, language. To this end, he suggests that the work of African writers should be hybrid. According to Stross, hybridised works of art contain heterosis, which he defines as "the empirically observed phenomenon of increased vigor or capacity for growth often displayed by hybrid animals or plants. Hybrids, therefore, mediate categories to which the parents belong" (263). Therefore, Achebe's essayistic persona is molded in the crucible of hybridity and translation, which are conceptualised here as artistic victory. Consequently, the essayist straddles two cultural frontiers, which he spells out in these terms: "This middle ground is neither the origin of things nor the last things; it is aware of the future to head into and a past to fall back on; it is the home of doubt and indecision, of suspension of disbelief, of make-believe, of playfulness, of the unpredictable, of irony" (*The Education* 6). As Alex Wanjala argues: "an African gnosis in literature should incorporate elements of hybridity in which aspects

of realism bring out the authentic while some controlled supernatural elements would bring out the African imagination, all in an endeavour to fit into a future global culture" (58).

Although I have already discussed the function of proverbs, fables, and other rhetorical (oratorical) stylistic choices, I can as well read their relevance to the instant analysis. These rhetorical devices can be seen as Achebe's way of creating balance in his perspective; their multi-facetedness can be interpreted as serving to steer the essays from possible one-sided polemical tone. The essays appeal to the reader due to the foregoing qualities.

More significantly, in his essay, "Travelling White," Achebe, through an anecdote, relays his encounter with direct discrimination by colonial establishments while on an eye-opening tour of East and Southern Africa courtesy of the Rockefeller Foundation. The "immigration forms ranked people according to their races beginning with Europeans at the top of the hierarchy, followed by Asians and Arabs in the order of decreasing value. Lastly, came the place of the 'Other' where Africans are lumped, without even the benefit of direct reference" (*The Education* 48). Besides his 'Othering' by the convention of the formal paperwork, he was also surprised to observe open discrimination against the first president of Tanganyika (now Tanzania) by a white-controlled social club in Dar-es-salaam on account of his skin colour! He also encountered the unnerving "strict separation of blacks from whites on buses in Zimbabwe, which exposure was revolting…. I had to cut my planned journey to South Africa, the then heartland of racism" (*The Education* 48). It is against this 'Othering' that I locate Achebe's appropriation of the Igbo *Mbari* tradition as the organizing principle in his arguments. Therefore, I may analyse *Mbari* as an extended metaphor through which Achebe artistically recuperates the impugned agency of

his people. In the next sub-section, I have examined the issues of metaphor, hybridity and language in Achebe's essays.

2.5.3 Language, Hybridity and Metaphor

Achebe's position on the question of language in African creative writing can be framed as an extended metaphor of the essayist's dual identity, ambivalence and resistance. In the essay "The African Writer and the English Language," Achebe holds out the view that "the language of the national literature of Nigeria and of many other African countries is, and will be, written in English... There are not many countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility of mutual communication" (*Morning Yet* 57). In this essay, Achebe presents his reflections on the varied positions around the question of language in African literature. He argues that those who have embraced indigenous languages as vehicles of their creative writings, have actually entrapped themselves in ethnic literature, which has a limited audience. He also states that the British and other colonial powers arbitrarily demarcated borders across Africa, lumping different linguistic groups to create nation-states. Nigeria was concocted from three big linguistic groups – Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo – plus a host of others whose disparate languages are not mutually intelligible. With this in mind, he avers that any writer, keen on reaching a national audience, would have to embrace the language of the coloniser, its imperial vestiges notwithstanding. This is how he renders the verdict: "But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it… I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of any African experience. But it will have to be a new English, altered to suit its new African surroundings" (*Morning Yet* 62).

The essayist is talking about transference of linguistic items from one language into another; he is referring to a process of translating African idiom into English; he is

celebrating the new linguistic heteroglot that emerges from his artistic intervention. Achebe's artistic intervention in Standard English can be considered a metaphrasis. In the words of Kwesi Yankah, it is "a reframing of what is conventional into another mode, a permeation of everyday speech with other people's words" (5). This then defines both the translated language (Igbo) and a translated writer (Achebe), both of whom emerge as new products, sharing aspects of English and Igbo linguistic systems. Achebe, in the essay, "Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature" (*The Education* 96-106), comes out strongly in rebuttal against fellow African writers who have accused him of duplicity and complicity in the imperial project. One such writer is Ngugi, to whom Achebe responds thus: "the difference between Ngugi and myself on the issue of indigenous or European languages for African writers is that while Ngugi believes it is *either/or*, I have always thought it was *both*" (104). By embracing English, a language of the erstwhile colonial master, Achebe is, in the words of Anthonia Kalu, showing his resourcefulness in "claiming African literature for Africans ... by applying the technique of the oral narrative to assert and insert [into English] his Igbo society and its rhetorical practices" (53). From the postcolonial perspective, Achebe is engaged in what Barry calls "cross-cultural interactions, 'adapting' European forms, and remaking them to suit African (Igbo) specifications" (Barry 194).

According to Robert Kaplan's model of contrastive rhetoric, in his article, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education," "Writers using English as a Second Language often transfer their indigenous conventions into Standard English, thus causing interference. In contrastive rhetoric, the interference manifests itself in the writer's choice of rhetorical strategies and content" (4; qtd. in Ulla Connor 494). Achebe has transferred indigenous Igbo (African) proverbs, fables, African setting, characterisation and metaphors into the Standard English, thus undermining the authority of this imperial language as a

tool for artistic domination by the Empire. This is why I agree with Kalu's observation that what concerns the African writer is not full entry into a contemporary reality but "a conscious effort to increase the match between the oral tradition and Western scriptocentric incursions into existing African temporal and spatial realities through arguments and postures that sustain African literature" (56).

The metaphorical imaginary here partly resides in the fact that Achebe has not only embraced English but refashioned it anew to produce fresh settings, weaved in non-European characters, articulated African concerns, and animated it with rhetorical devices drawn from African languages. This appropriation of English language marks Achebe the essayist as a linguistic hybrid just as it produces a hybridised discourse. The duality of language and identity produces both a fresh language (slightly different from the Standard English) as well as a writer whose identity is neither British nor Igbo. The fluidity of Achebe's identity and the indeterminacy of the kind of English he has created, combine to conjure new imaginaries – hybrids.

Chinweizu and others recognise the new hybrid identity of the African writer in their statement that the writer's "cultural task demands a deliberate and calculated process of syncretism: one which emphasizes valuable continuities with my pre-colonial culture, welcomes vitalising contributions from other cultures, and exercises inventive genius in making distinguished synthesis from them all" (239). So, Achebe's syncretism can be seen as a kind of experimentation, which can be easily described as "modernising and revitalising the tradition. African literature should not be a transplanted fossil of European literature: it needs to find more ways of incorporating forms, treatments and devices taken from the African oral tradition" (Chinweizu *et al* 239). The point which the critics are posing is that African literature should be markedly different from other literatures, especially that of the coloniser, its appropriation of the imperialist's medium

notwithstanding. In brief, the linguistic heteroglot and hybrid identity of the essayist are metaphorically prefigured by the act of appropriating Standard English and infusing it with Igbo (African) stylistic devices resulting in a new fresh discourse that speaks the local to the global. It is also instructive that both the writer and the essays are metaphorically implicated in the hybrid condition. To complete my analysis of the metaphorical constructs in Achebe's essays, I have analysed metaphor of Joseph Conrad as a straw man in the immediate sub-section.

2.5.4 Metaphor of Joseph Conrad, the Straw Man

In this section, I have framed Joseph Conrad as a metaphor, a kind of straw man, through whom Achebe directs his attack on the wider European conspiracy against Africa. It is in his role as educator that Achebe takes a swipe at Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a novella he considers to be steeped in the logic of racism. This issue appears to be so weighty that Achebe has argued it thrice: first, in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (*Hopes* 1-13), secondly, in "Africa's Tarnished Name" (*The Education* 77-95) and thirdly, in "My Home Under Imperial Fire" (*Home and Exile* 1-36).

The words of Young suffice here: "when Western people look at the non-Western world, what they see is more often a mirror of themselves and their own assumptions than the reality of what is actually there" (2). In Achebe's perception, Conrad represents the West or the kind of imperialism described by Young above. Conrad's crime, as framed by Achebe, revolves around the unfavourable image he constructs of Africa and her people in his *Heart of Darkness*. The redeeming facts about Conrad's multi-layered focalisation do not assuage Achebe's indignation. This is because Achebe has reconfigured Conrad as an embodiment of the harmful deeds committed by imperialists against Africa. It is in this manner of interpretation that Conrad becomes a straw man, a representation, a metaphorical bogeyman. This is how Conrad once described the first black man he saw in

his memoir: “A certain enormous buck nigger I encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger, I used to dream for years afterwards” (*The Education* 159). This conceptualisation of black people is presented by Achebe as typical among certain Europeans with a certain mind set. Unfortunately, Achebe does not do anything to draw a line between Conrad and his artistic characters: he subsumes the novelist and his art, denies him the benefit of ironic hindsight, and holds him up for strenuous pillorying. It appears as if Achebe derives some relief from hitting back at one of the novelists from the colonial empire.

A reading of Conrad’s novella reveals Charlie Marlow, the narrator, who reveals one of the scenes in this manner: “Six black men advanced in a file toiling up the path… these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were dying slowly… They were not enemies, they were not criminals” (*Heart of Darkness* 22 - 24). The confusion in the narrator’s mind about his limited knowledge of Africans is further captured in these words: “The [Africans/blacks] howled and leaped, and spun and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity, like yours, the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly” (Conrad 53). I notice the continuation of the same strain in Marlow’s description of his close encounter with the Africans: “They [blacks] passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages” (23). He also gives away some aspect of his thinking about the continent in these words: “I penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness…” (50). There is more description of Africans by Marlow: “a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling…The pre-historic man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming

us – who could tell? … I were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone" (51).

These illustrations of Conrad's image in Achebe's essays can easily be attributed to the then prevalent attitude by the privileged powerful Europe towards the "Others." In arts and culture, it was manifested in narratives and stories that sought to describe and control "Others." This advantage, which has been perfected over a long period of time, is also responsible for normalising European attitudes towards such ills as slave trade, colonialism and the inferiority of the black race.

In holding this critical standpoint against Conrad, Achebe seems to be aware of the comparable writings by Europeans, which upheld negative stereotypes about Africans. Hegel, for instance, spun his epochal story of Universal History in which he argued that "indigenous Americans and Africans lacked history altogether. Without writing their concrete manifestation of collective consciousness, they remained 'peoples without history… they would either disappear or assimilate themselves to the rising West" (qtd. in Klein "In Search of Narrative Mastery*"* 276). These revelations about Europeans' regard of the 'Other' is, in Achebe's view, concretised in Conrad.

It appears to me that Achebe could have taken a keen interest in what the French structuralist, Claude Levi-Straus, hypothesised about the dichotomy between the literate and orate societies:

> The primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery. Writing is not only the precondition of the artificial memory I call history, it is also the instrument of human enslavement. The imposition of literate Western reason on the mythic innocence of orality lies at the very heart of the historic loss of cultural difference, the great modern tragedy. (278)

The foregoing analysis leads me to reflect on how the literate societies, to which Conrad belongs, assert their version of reality, their meta-narrative, over the orate 'Other.' As Jean- Francois Lyotard argues:

> Metanarrative is institutionalized, canonical, and legitimizing. It is in a position of intellectual mastery. It ignores the obvious truism that stories refer to other stories. Instead it pretends to represent an external object and then pretends not to be a narrative. Local narrative, on the other hand, is told by the subaltern. It is never omniscient, but always aware of its own narrative debts. It cannot easily be "inserted" into a master narrative. It is artistic and imaginative. (qtd. in Klein 282)

There is a way in which Achebe would assume Conrad is a participant in the construction of the exclusivist meta-narrative mentioned above, as a representative of the oppressor. He takes umbrage to the typical perception of the African in European mind-set as offered in these words of Janheinz Jahn that: "A real African lives in the bush...goes naked and tells fairy stories about the crocodile and the elephant. The most primitive, the more really African. But an African who is enlightened and cosmopolitan ...who makes political speeches or writes novels, no longer counts as a real African" (*Hopes 27*). Achebe holds that Jahn's view of the relationship between the African and the European is more or less that of a horse and its rider, which also denies agency, humanity and testimony to the African. I hasten to add that Achebe attributes similar views about Africans to Conrad.

Achebe further claims that Conrad did not bother to study the existence of earlier civilisations on the Congo, especially the exploits of one, Dom Afonso 1, the King of the Bakongo (1506-1543): "Here was a man more civilised than the civilising mission sent to him by Europe" (*The Education* 65).

I am compelled to reflect on the extent to which Achebe's views against Conrad are nuanced within the conventional context of the essay as a persuasive argument. Some scholars have pointed out the limitations in Achebe's argument against Conrad. Fincham and Hooper, for instance, hold the view that "Conrad's fiction has an anomalous capacity to interrogate and undermine the discourses constituted around the idea of colony and empire. Conrad makes a complex and ambiguous representation of the historically parasitic relationship between Europe and the colonies and this complicates the reductionist mapping of the centre versus periphery" (xi). Other critics have pointed out that Conrad was ahead of his time in seeking to break free from racism and for exercising fair-mindedness (Robert Hammer, 108; Ponthurai Sarvan 285). These views that run counter to Achebe's could also rhyme with my argument that Conrad is a straw man, a metaphorical representation of the exploitative Europe, which Achebe is keen to expose and flog.

Paul Armstrong in an article "*Heart of Darkness* and the Epistemology of Cultural Differences," asserts: "*Heart of Darkness* is ambiguous and inherently double…It dramatises the impossibility of capturing the *Other* in writing, whether univocal or polysemic. The novella points towards the yet unrealised horizon of reciprocal and dialogical understanding of the *Other"* (22). Therefore "*Heart of Darkness* both affirms and denies that Africans are linguistic beings. In this respect, dialogue cannot occur between Marlow and Africans because he feels their language is pre-linguistic and rudimentary. The only significant dialogue in the text is between Marlow and the Intended" (Armstrong 36).

In an article "Darkening the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism and *Heart of Darkness*," Adena Rosmarin exhorts readers to consider Conrad's novel as "an incomplete work of sculpture with pieces missing, which readers are invited to figure out and finish in

their imagination. Readers must go back and re-read it, filling in the gaps, and thus enrich their experience of the text. Conrad is engaged in Darkening the Reader" (161). In my view, Rosmarin brings out a refreshing view of *Heart of Darkness,* the kind of nuanced perspective that is untraceable in Achebe's reception of the text. From the forgoing, I can surmise that Achebe's reconfiguration of Conrad is rather metaphorical: Conrad represents the whole range of negative effects of colonial experience, a metaphor of the imperial dominance that continues to loom over the postcolony.

In summary, this section has analysed the image of Conrad in Achebe's essays. The section has demonstrated that while Achebe held the view that Conrad was a racist writer, there are other writers who refute these claims; they, instead, read Conrad's novella as a text with multi-layered meanings, which potentially undermine the surface meaning. In this regard, my analysis has constructed Conrad in metaphorical terms, as an extended representation of the negative portrayal, framing and perception of Africans in European racist literature. My reading recognises metaphor as a device that stretches meanings beyond the demarcated boundaries. After this concluding section in my analysis of Achebe's essays, I will summarise findings in the next section.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the stylistic (and rhetorical) choices appropriated by Achebe in his personal essays. These include Achebe's argumentative strategies, proverbs, fables, anecdotes, and the metaphorical extension of Conrad and Nigeria. I have analysed the significance of these stylistic choices as aesthetic and thematic strategies, from the combined postcolonial and stylistic perspectives. From this analysis, I have established that Achebe defamiliarises Standard English by infusing it with Igbo proverbs, fables, and anecdotes. This results in the artistic wrestling with the colonial language towards postcolonial articulations of resistance and agency, hitherto denied. But this agency is

paradoxical: it disrupts the very imperial language in which it is expressed. I have metaphorically analysed Achebe's reception of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and noted that the essayist has raised the European novelist up as a straw man for ridicule. The chapter has revealed that Achebe's essays stage cultural resistance against the asphyxiating encroachment of Christianity through the *Mbari* traditional religious festival, a countervailing cultural identity. I have also metaphorically analysed Achebe's construction of Nigeria as a child, whom the essayist opts to participate in nursing to maturity, owing to the country's bloody civil strife, marginalisation of the Igbo and the decadent leadership.

In my critique of Achebe, I have noted that he is largely selective in apportioning culpability for the role played by the key actors in Nigeria's civil war. He glosses over the contribution of the Igbos to this conflict, which destroyed the realisation of the envisaged Nigerian dream. I have also noted that his stridency against Conrad could have been tempered with a hint of irony, while his linguistic and religious resistance against English and Christianity is paradoxical. I concede that this debate on the place of foreign languages in African literature remains unsettled. Similarly, I see a contradiction in Achebe's appropriation of the Western genre as the template for his essays, while eclectically borrowing from the African archive. In my view, his mission could have been more credible had he adapted African forms as his palimpsest.

Achebe's defining vision is that art has a pride of place in communal cultural recuperation and recreation of agency. In Achebe's world view, the writer has a key role in shaping leadership of the postcolony. A writer is also a mediator between the foreign and the community: the artist is a sensitive crucible who digests and distils that which is foreign, then reconfigures it to suit the local needs. In this respect, the African writer cannot be univocal, uni-focal, and single-minded. The creative writer in Africa must look

beyond the local; the writer is called upon to elevate her/his vision beyond the horizon. Only then can a writer prove useful to the community.

In the next chapter, I have analysed the literariness of the personal essays of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. I have examined his unique style, especially his stridency, not only within the broader framework of the stylistics/rhetorical analysis, but also in tandem with selected postcolonial theories. I have attempted to establish the salient characteristics of his essays with a view to expounding on their artistic contribution to the decolonisation of Africa through the subversion of imperial discourses.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE ART OF SUBVERSION IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S PERSONAL ESSAYS

3.1 Introduction

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose original name was James Thiong'o Ngugi, is arguably one of the most important writers in Africa and the foremost from Kenya. He has, in the words of Reinhard Sanders and Bernth Lindfors, earned international reputation as an articulate spokesman, and his works "rooted in historical and material realities, have always been politically engaged, arguing the case for the poor and the oppressed who are victims of economic exploitation and cultural domination by the West" (xi). Sanders and Lindfors also note that Ngugi's writings champion resistance, liberation, justice, freedom and human rights of the downtrodden people around the world, making him a global public intellectual (xi). On this same note, Simon Gikandi in *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature*, observes that Ngugi is engaged in the criticism of wider cultural issues such as nation and narration, power and performance, language and identity, empire and postcoloniality (i).

Gikandi offers a detailed account of Ngugi's life and intellectual journey, noting that the essayist was born at Limuru, Kenya, on 5th of January 1938. He attended the Church of Scotland Mission school at Kamandura and the Manguu Kikuyu Independent School before joining Alliance High School, where he graduated in 1959 and went to the then Makerere University College in Uganda. This detail is confirmed by Ngugi himself in his memoir *Birth of a Dream Weaver* (xi). In 1964, upon graduation with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, he was admitted to pursue a Masters degree at Leeds University, England. As reported by Gikandi, Ngugi left Leeds without completing his thesis on Caribbean literature. In 1967, Ngugi became an English lecturer at the University of Nairobi, a position he resigned from in 1969 and served for a brief spell as a visiting

associate professor at Northwestern University in the USA, before taking it up again in 1971. Gikandi further reveals that Ngugi was promoted to the position of senior lecturer and head of the Department of Literature in 1973 and soon afterwards, associate professor in 1976. In 1977, Ngugi was detained at Kamiti Maximum Security prison following the performance of his play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I will Marry when I want*) at Kamiriithu Cultural Centre. It is reported by Gikandi that the writer was released from prison in 1978, and realizing that he had been prevented from resuming his position at the University of Nairobi and with his theatrical productions banned, he went into exile in Britain in 1982. Between 1990 and 1992, he was a visiting professor at Yale University and then moved to New York University as a Professor of Comparative Literature in 1993. Most recently, he accepted a similar position at the University of California at Irvine (xix).

Ngugi is a prolific writer, with a significant footprint in the novel, personal essays, plays, children's literature and memoirs. His novels include: *Weep Not, Child*; *The River Between; A Grain of Wheat*; *Petals of Blood; Matigari; Devil on the Cross,* and *Wizard of the Crow*. The short stories of Ngugi appear in two collections; *Secret Lives and other Short Stories,* and *Minutes of Glory: And Other Stories.* Ngugi's plays include *The Black Hermit*; *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (with Micere Mugo); *This Time Tomorrow*, and *I will Marry When I want* (with Ngugi wa Mirii). Besides his novels and plays, Ngugi has written five memoirs: *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*; *Dreams in a Time of War; In the House of the Interpreter, Birth of a Dream Weaver* and *Wrestling with the Devil: A Prison Memoir*. His epic poem appears under the title *Kenda Mũiyũru: Rũgano rwa Gĩkũyũ na Mũmbi*. He is the editor of the Gikuyu language Journal, *Mutiiri* and has also written children's stories under the *Njamba Nene* series.

In this study, I have selected personal essays from the following collections: *Writers in Politics: Essays; Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms;*

Decolonising the Mind: Politics of Language in African Literature; Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics; Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: The Performance of Literature and Power in Postcolonial Africa; *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (first published as *Remembering Africa*)*;* and *Secure the Base: Making Africa Visible in the Globe*.

In specific terms, I have selected the following personal essays from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Homecoming*: "Author's Note" (xv-xix); "Kenya: The Two Rifts" (22-25); "Church, Culture and Politics" (31-36); "The Writer in a Changing Society" (47-50); and "On the Abolition of the English Department" (145-150). The essays drawn from *Writers in Politics* are "Kenyan Culture: The National Struggle for Survival" (42-48); "Handcuffs for a Play" (49-52); "On Civilisation" (66-67); "J.M: A Writer's Tribute" (82-85); and "The South Korean People's Struggle" (117-122). In *Decolonising the Mind*, I have selected "Preface" (ix - xii); "A Statement" (xiv); and "Introduction" (1 - 3). My reading of *Moving the Centre* yielded these essays for my analysis: "Preface" (xiii-xviii); "Moving the Centre" (2-11); "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom" (12-24); "Universality of Local Knowledge" (25-29); "Imperialism of Language" (30-41); "Cultural Dialogue for a New World" (42-46); "Cultural Factor in the Neo-colonial Era" (47-57); "Resistance to Damnation" (76-81); "The Role of the Scholar in the Development of African Literatures" (82-87); "From the Corridors of Silence" (102-108); "Her Cook, her Dog: Karen Blixen's Africa" (132-135); "Biggles, Mau Mau and I" (136-141); "Life, Literature and a Longing for Home" (154-158), and "Matigari & the Dreams of One East Africa" (159-176).

Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams offered these personal essays to us: "Preface" (vii - xi); and "Introduction" (1-6). From *Remembering Africa* (first printed as *Something Torn and New*) and *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, there were no

personal essays meeting the Essayistic self-reflexive principle. The essays drawn from *In the Name of the Mother*, are "Preface" (viii-x); "Heinemann, African Writers Series & I" (1-10); and "The Neocolonial in Emergent African Cinema" (67-80). Finally, I have identified these personal essays from *Secure the Base*: "Preface" (ix - xvii); "Contempt and Self-Contempt" (1-6); "New Frontiers of Knowledge" (65-76); and "The Legacy of Squalor: The Global responsibility to Protect Humanity" (79 - 86). I have examined the foregoing selected personal essays using the twin approaches of stylistics and postcolonial criticism.

In this chapter, I have evaluated the subversive function of the essayistic first person *I* persona in Ngugi's essays as well as the realisation of aesthetic effects in anecdotes, extended metaphors, essayistic allusions, argumentative structure, persuasive juxtaposition, concession structure and irony. By analysing the aesthetic value of these artistic choices, I have defined the features underpinning the literariness of Ngugi's essays. Selected theories of postcoloniality and stylistics, are the key conceptual tools guiding this study. My investigation is pitched in the premise that Ngugi writes subversively from the margins as the "Other" against the domineering empire.

3.2 Alterity, Resistance and the Essayistic Persona

I begin this analysis with a reflection on Ngugi's essayistic persona in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of language in African Literature (*herein after, *Decolonising the Mind).* The reader is immediately drawn to the essayist's personal statement at the outset of this collection: "This book *Decolonising the Mind,* is my farewell to English as a vehicle of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way" (xiv). In this statement, Ngugi sets the tone and the leitmotif that runs through many of his personal essays; he announces his recognition that English is an imperial language and his continued engagement with it is a mark of acquiescence in the whole range of

cultural, political, technological and economic domination that this foreign language brought to bear on the colonised societies. The possessive determiner *my* pre-modifies the noun *farewell* and it underscores the seriousness of his action in rejecting English. It locates the essayist, Ngugi, right at the heart of this action through his self-assertion. Ngugi deploys a similar narrative projection when he writes these words:

> Inevitably, essays of this nature may carry a holier-than-thou attitude or tone. I would like to make it clear that I am writing as much about myself as about anybody else. The present predicaments of Africa are often not a matter of personal choice: they arise from an historical situation. Their solutions are not so much a matter of personal decision as that of a fundamental social transformation … a real break with imperialism and its internal ruling allies. (*Decolonising the Mind*, xii)

The *I* persona in the above citation is identified by the personal pronoun *I*, which is repeated twice in the same sentence. The reflexive pronoun *myself* is also used in the same sentence. The density of these personal pronouns referring to the same essayistic voice intensifies the assertion of the essayistic self besides indirectly signaling that we, the audience, are reading the words of the essayist directly from himself. There is also a hint of endearment towards the reader as well as a feeling that the essayist is in control of his message. His reference to the reader or audience is rather cursory: "…I am writing as much about myself as about anybody else." By means of the two components in the structure of his message, the essayistic self-assertion and the indirect invitation of the reader, Ngugi consciously prepares the ground for collective class action against imperialism. He believes that the reader will take the side of the "resistance" and inflict a series of blows against imperialism. I should mention here that the essayist interprets the society about which he is writing in Marxist terms, and he is aware of the binary struggle for societal control, pitting two forces against each other: "the international bourgeoisie

aligned to local compradors, and the working people aided by patriotic students, intellectuals, soldiers and progressive elements in the petty middle class" (2). In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi is engaged in the struggle against what he calls the imperial "cultural bomb" (3) and he is sanguine that his readers will rise up to action, when he opines "I hope that some of the issues in this book will find echoes in your hearts" (3). Other than the assertive first person voice of the essayist, I also notice the possessive adjective *my*, in reference to the reader.

There is some muted politeness in this recognition of the reader and it serves to solidify the conversational pact, to create empathy for, and to persuade the reader to agree with, the envisaged struggle against imperialism. To this end, Ngugi can be said to be wrestling with the challenges facing the postcolonial writer. According to Helen Tiffin "African critics and writers, in particular, have rejected assimilative models and opted instead for the national or the pan-African" ("Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse" 97). This revolutionary thrust constitutes one axis in Ngugi's artistic ideology as it aspires to replace the imperial with the indigenous; the other axis is a cautious recognition of the hybrid condition, of the in-between world of the postcolonial African writer. As argued by Anthony Appiah: "even when these writers seek to escape the West, their theories are irreducibly informed by their Euro-American formation. Ngugi's conception of the writer's potential in politics is essentially that of the avant-garde; of left modernism" ("The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" 120). Appiah also acknowledges the challenges facing the cultural hybrid, whom he calls the cosmopolitan, an individual who respects differences "because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, I neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life" (*Cosmopolitanism* xv). I read Ngugi as writer who is pursuing the ideals of cosmopolitanism by rejecting the deleterious impact of imperial exploitation but not

entirely disavowing everything associated with the same imperial centre. This is the anxiety that both defines the postcolonial condition and afflicts the postcolonial writer who confronts it. I will pursue this idea in subsequent sections of this chapter. But first, I need to critique Ngugi's essayistic voice. Alfred Upham writes this in reference to the personal essayist's voice:

> The charm of the modern personal essay is the exposition of the personality of the essayist. The essayist reveals himself to the readers in the following respects – the subtlety, delicacy, whimsicality, and buoyancy of spirit. The essayist appears to be a man of richer emotional possibilities, and takes greater pains to explain to the reader all the finer shades of feeling that have entered into his experience – impressionistic. (140)

I see recognizable essayistic subtlety in Ngugi's words cited in the preceding quotation from *Decolonising the Mind*: "Inevitably, essays of this nature may carry a holier-than-thou attitude or tone" (xii); I also read essayistic whimsicality and imaginative buoyancy in "I would like to make it clear that I am writing as much about myself as about anybody else" (xii). Ngugi has, therefore, deployed the typical conventional essayistic voice in the referred essay. This finding confirms that Ngugi's style of writing the essay is, to some extent, influenced by the Western-style o the genre.

In the essay "J.M. – A Writer's Tribute" (*Writers in Politics*), the writer is not only mourning the assassination of, but also celebrating the fruitful life and personal contributions to the nation by, Josiah Mwangi (J.M) Kariuki. The deceased was the former Member of Parliament for Nyandarua North constituency in Kenya, who was brutally murdered and his decomposing body discovered on 2 March 1975 on the foothills of Ngong Hills, near Nairobi. In this essay, I notice that Ngugi is engaging the reader through the essayistic first person *I* narrator. He recalls his personal friendly encounters with

Kariuki, his fascination with Kariuki's book, *Mau Mau Detainee*, the struggle Kariuki was waging within government against exploitation and oppression of the poor, the macabre assassination, the public reaction against Kariuki's killing, and the legacy Kariuki left behind.

From the essay, I encounter the *I* persona at the beginning of every paragraph, in the middle of each paragraph and at the end of the essay. Sample this: "I first met him in 1963. His book *Mau Mau Detainee* had just come out. … Later in 1964, I met him in his office in Nairobi near the law courts … My colonial university education at Makerere had blinded me to the true nature of colonialism and imperialism" (82-83). In the above citation, Ngugi whets the appetite of the reader by employing a flash-forward: "I first met him in 1963." My attention is first drawn to the third-person personal pronoun *him*, which is a cataphor referring us to the postcedent referent, Kariuki. Besides holding the reader's attention by way of delayed gratification, Ngugi cultivates a friendship, empathy, sympathy and mutual agreement with us through his repeated use of the collective pronoun *we*, in its subjective sense, to implicate both the reader and essayist in the argument. I read a litany of lamentations by Ngugi in the essay: "For it was *we*, *I* who have kept silent and propped up an unjust oppressive system… So *I* kept quiet when Gama Pinto was killed; when Mboya was murdered; when Kung'u Karumba disappeared… *I* kept quiet saying it was not really my *shauri*" (85). This collective implicature is designed to prick the reader's conscience, to question the reader's complacency, to spur the reader into action. I also note that the title "J.M – A Writer's Tribute" has a popular touch as it is resonant with the common abbreviation by which the people knew the slain legislator, a man who was widely acknowledged as the hero and potential liberator of the poor, the workers and the marginalised. It is also evident that the title of this essay is artistically constructed not only as an oblique commentary to conceal its sting but also in the open-ended rambling style of

the typical Western-style personal essay. By means of this essay, Ngugi rises up to the occasion to indict the deviant postcolonial regime of the then President Jomo Kenyatta, which he believes could have been complicit in the assassination of Kariuki. In this way, he conforms to Okot p'Bitek's mantra that: "the artist's thoughts and actions are guided by the philosophy of life which is instilled in him from childhood. The question is from where do these fundamental ideas come? … The artist is, therefore, both a product and commentator—hence producer of his society" (*Artist the Ruler* 38).

Ngugi is speaking on behalf of the silenced Kariuki, on behalf of the silenced citizens and on behalf of the whole country which could not rise up to call for justice. He writes much in the mould of p'Bitek's artist by mustering the language to speak amidst the fear and danger from the state. I get a sense that the writer is re-imagining an alternative political order, one which demands that the state must serve the interests of the people and which also uproots the imperial architecture. I also notice the code switching from English to Kiswahili in the word *shauri* (something worthwhile). One can safely say that this Kiswahili word is intended for the Kenyan audience, and therein lies Ngugi's aim – to create intimacy with Kenyan proletariat and students, to implore and exhort them into action against the exploitative, oppressive and destructive foreign capitalist (imperial) interests and their local collaborators. He has categorized the country into two classes: those who are collaborating with foreign capital to perpetuate neo-colonialism (the comprador bourgeois), and those who are bearing the burden of exploitation and oppression from the former (the proletariat). Ngugi sides with the latter and constructs structural allusions to other struggles against Western imperialism around the world, by the Palestinians against Zionist Israel, and by Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, who was betrayed and murdered. He also draws us to empathise with the selfless struggles against imperialism by local heroes who were betrayed such as Waiyaki and Dedan Kimathi.

There is an effort by the essayist to inspire the readers by elevating their vision to worldwide anti-imperial campaigns, and by energizing them to take liberation and revolutionary action in the same way local heroes did. He augments his angry tone with rhetorical questions: "Who betrayed J.M Kariuki? Who killed him?" (85). These questions are directed at the reader, and not the powerful political establishment responsible for the bloody murder. The interesting thing here is that Ngugi is angry with his readers: in my view, this is an effort at catalysing the readers' political conscience with a view to stoking resistance against global imperialism and its local surrogates, which conspire to violate the human rights of the people.

Unlike Achebe who directly and unflinchingly calls out the Nigerian leaders in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Ngugi only indirectly points fingers at the culpable political leadership in Kenya. The essay ends with a description of defiant demonstrations by university students and Ngugi believes that the youth have finally taken up the mantle to liberate their country. The essayist carries the same message that is also found in an article "Born Again: Mau Mau Unchained" (*Writers in Politics* 86 – 94); this latter piece, however, is not a personal essay for purposes of this study. To this end, it is notable that the communicative strength of the analysed essay resides in the essayistic assertion by Ngugi through his *I* persona, as well as in his attempt to cultivate a conversational pact with the reader.

Concerning the stylistic properties of the personal essay, Alfred Upham, in *The Typical Forms of English Literature*, considers this genre as one that creates difficulties for the reader: "The difficulty of the personal essay lies in its very familiarity and rambling construction; the infusing of personality; the creation of an impression or idea that sparkles with novelty or originality; and a grace of expression such as belongs to an artist in words" (141). I am drawn to Ngugi's impressionistic account of his personal relationship with

Kariuki; to the essayist's effusive whimsical fascination with Kariuki's book, *Mau Mau Detainee*; to the digressive linkages between local and international struggles; to the elaborate litany of rhetorical questions; and to the clincher that the youth could be picking up the call to resist international and local imperialists. I get the impression that Ngugi has elevated the historical to the artistic by infusing his essayistic voice, and by stylistically embellishing this account.

Two things, however, stick out for criticism in this foregoing essay. First, it is sad that the nationalistic vision Ngugi espouses in the essay has not come to fruition in Kenya. The cohesive existence of Kenya as a nation-state was put to test in December 2007 and early 2008, following the disputed general elections that led to ethnic strife and bloodletting. The fabric of the nation-state almost came apart, and it is still unstable largely on account of the subsequent electoral malpractices of 2013 and 2017. In this regard, Ngugi's tribute to Kariuki is arguably salutary: the slain politician was not only popular, but he also epitomised the general aspirations of the common people. And the manner in which he was butchered raises serious concerns about the vision of the political leadership in Kenya. His assassination beamed negative light on a promising country potentially slipping precipitously towards the abyss.

The second issue is that Ngugi celebrates the Mau Mau movement without conceding that its status as a nationalist freedom movement has been contested by some scholars on account of its limited spatial scope and the dearth of national representation. John Lonsdale, for instance, argues in a rather irreverent tone that:

> Mau Mau was an embarrassment to the notion of nationhood. At one level, it was an internal Kikuyu civil war between the guerrillas and the British-led Kikuyu 'Home Guards'. At another level, the emergency was a war between the Kikuyu and the other African peoples of Kenya who were enlisted against them in the police

> and army, and who also filled the jobs left vacant by the detention of thousands of Kikuyu workers. Historians have yet to agree on whether the Mau Mau rebellion was a nationalist movement to which Kenya owes her independence, or whether it was merely an internecine struggle amongst the Kikuyu community of the Central and Rift Valley provinces of the country. (19)

The elevation of Mau Mau to the lofty heights of the quintessential nationalist liberation movement appears exaggerated – Ngugi overlooks some issues belying the Mau Mau struggle, which grate against his narrative. It needs clarifying that this view I have expressed here neither vitiates the gallant bravery and personal sacrifice of the Mau Mau cadre, nor does it overlook the overall impact of the Mau Mau struggle in giving impetus to the political negotiations that eventually led to the Kenya's independence.

In the essay "Kenyan Culture: The National Struggle for Survival" (*Writers* 42-48), it is noticeable that the essayist is using the voice of the *I* persona. This essay was commissioned as a column by a British newspaper to commemorate the visit by then President Daniel arap Moi to Britain in 1979. In it, Ngugi laments the domination of Kenya's cultural scene by foreign plays, foreign movies, foreign language, media houses owned by foreign interests, foreign music, and foreign-owned book publishers. He creates an imaginary observer and takes him on a tour of the cultural landscape in Kenya. I encounter the *I* persona when I read: "Now our visitor might visit schools;" and "If our visitor should want to see book publishing houses in Kenya…" (43). The possessive determiner *our,* implicates the reader/audience in the essayist's construction of his argument.

Ngugi is not directly showing the reader what the cultural scene looks like; instead, he allows the reader to experience this journey vicariously through the disguised visitor. The absence of markers of politeness is evident in the very fact that the essayist neither

makes effort to win the reader over, nor does he invest in verbs of politeness or persuasion. Although this is a personal essay, the stiffness of the voice of the *I* persona and its sense of urgency in conveying factual information lends it a hint of formality. Herein lies the irony of a writer who at once implicates the reader in the argument but in the same instance, creates a chasm through the absence of intimacy. Ngugi is both illuminating and resisting what Spivak defines as 'epistemic violence' by the West on the postcolony: "The West is engaged in epistemic violence, orchestrated as a project to constitute the colonial subject as "Other", which results in the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that "Other's" precarious Subjectivity" (66). What constitute the "Other" in this instant essay are the local Kenyan Plays, which had been unfairly denied ample time and space at the Kenya National Theatre, unlike their European counterparts. Ngugi also decries the lower rank occupied by Kenyan media houses, Kenyan music, and Kenyan book publishers who have no financial muscle to compete with the dominant ones owned by the Western capitalist establishment. I can see the clear juxtaposition in contrasting power relations between the foreign and the local, underscoring the graphic reality of neocolonial domination.

The other irony I see in this discourse resides in Ngugi's claim to national culture and the absence of such illustration in the essay. At the outset, I read this: "A central fact of Kenyan life today is the fierce struggle between the cultural forces representing foreign interests and those representing patriotic national interests" (43). Granted, he identifies and celebrates some theatre groups that have been able to offer effective challenge to imperialistic domination in Kenya, among them, "the Schools and Colleges Drama Festival, the University of Nairobi Free Travelling Theatre and the Festac 1977 Drama Group" (47). These performance groups had a national outlook and transacted their business in either English and or Kiswahili – the two official languages in Kenya. To these, Ngugi adds Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre's enactment of

Ngaahika Ndeenda. a play that allowed peasants to "break away from the Bar or the Church…They smashed the racialist view of peasants as uncultured recipients of cultures from beneficent foreigners. Kamiriithu's example provided the first meaningful challenge to imperialist cultural domination in Kenya" (47).

I see a writer who, both promotes the national ideals but also encourages local communities to build their capacities to revitalize their linguistic heritage, which the colonialists tried to erase. It is, therefore, necessary to offer a postcolonial reading of the Kamiriithu project that Ngugi highlights above as a countervailing force against imperial domination. In this regard, I refer to Spivak's conceptualisation of the subaltern and hasten to concede that Ngugi is working towards voicing the subaltern. While grappling with the question of whether the subaltern could speak, Spivak holds out that: "there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself;… The question becomes, how can I touch the consciousness of the people, even as I investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?" (80). Through the Kamiriithu project, Ngugi seems to have picked the challenge posed by Spivak: he appears to be speaking for the subaltern whose agency has been eroded by colonialism and subsequent post-independence governments. This view finds anchorage in Wanjala's assertion that: "in Kamirithu theatre project, Ngugi sees himself as a member of the petty-bourgeoisie class – displaying a cosmopolitan ethic by going out of his way to empower members of his local community through including them in the development of a play" (62).

In a brief essay appearing under the title "Author's Note" (*Homecoming* xv - xix), Ngugi's narrative persona speaks to the reader using the personal pronoun *we*, which carries a collective conversational consciousness: "Do I think that Western capitalism and the classes that run it have suddenly changed their motives and interests in Africa?…I

would be deceiving my selves if I thought that indigenous capitalism… would produce a society where a few do not live on the blood of others" (xvii). I note that the essayist has carefully avoided the first person essayistic *I* narrative voice and instead, he has elected the communal voice *we*. This is a conversational style designed to endear the writer to the reader, while also presenting the argument as if it were a collective project jointly created by the two parties who are, ironically, separated in space and time. In this short introductory essay to *Homecoming*, Ngugi sets the tone for the rest of the essays in the collection. He makes a beeline for capitalism and calls it out for its opprobrious and deleterious effect on African cultures, identities, nationalism, languages and economy. I encounter the rhetorical question: "Do I think that Western capitalism and the classes that run it have suddenly changed their motives and interests in Africa?" (xviii). This is a rhetorical device; it recognises the presence of the reader whom the essayist is determined to persuade and subtly influence. I am not given the answer to this question, since it is not necessary: the question achieves a rhetorical effect – it emphasises the sad reality about the real intentions of Western capitalism, forcing the audience to deeply reflect on the matter.

The personal essay "Kenya: The Two Rifts" (*Homecoming* 22-25), is woven around the essayistic first person *I* narrator. I read this: "I do not propose a solution to such a vast problem. I have said that the solution lies with the people of Kenya" (25). The context of this discourse is Ngugi's argument for national unity and national healing. He identifies vertical rifts between Europeans, Asians and Africans on account of their races as well as the horizontal divide between 'tribes,' which he considers a creature of colonialism's nefarious policy of divide and rule. He also singles out another horizontal rift between the rich and poor, the educated and the uneducated across all the races. The essay came out in 1962 just before Kenya's independence, and it was quite prophetic: it makes a profound observation that "In Kenya then, there is really no concept of a nation"

(23). Many things, especially of a political nature, have come to manifest that indeed Kenya has not gelled as a nation-state. I have in mind the political anarchy and ethnic blood-letting that have been embedded in successive general elections, but especially, the one held in 2007. I find this essay quite relevant to both national conversation and practical efforts aimed at forging a solid nation. Indeed, what Ngugi observed in 1962 is still evident. Indeed, columnist Macharia Gaitho writes about the same issue as late as 2019: "We all know that heading to 56 years of independence, Kenya has still never become a nation. It is a mere geographical entity; an unwieldy collection of competing ethnic sub-nations" (14). There is a worrying dearth of commitment to higher ideals by the leaders who have ruled Kenya since independence. It appears their aspirations and those of the common citizen are incongruous. The citizens hope for a conducive environment in which to do business, work and realise their dreams; but their political leaders are enmeshed in schemes designed to exploit citizens' gullibility in order to grab state power and use it for selfish gain.

Going back to the instant essay, a stylistic reading reveals Ngugi's self-assertion through the repetition of the first person *I* in the two sentences cited above. The two sentences mentioned are constructed on a concessive structure. Having discussed the rifts holding Kenya back from developing as a cohesive nation-state, Ngugi concedes that he cannot offer the solutions, instead, he urges the people to explore the answers to these challenges. This is in keeping with the essayistic form he has chosen to communicate his message, whose relativism has been identified by Theodor Adorno in his suggestion that the personal essay: "resists the idea of a masterpiece and totality. Its form complies with the critical philosophy that the human being is not a creator and that nothing human is a creation. It is directed at something already created, and it does not present itself as creation" (17). Ngugi's concession to the reader is part of his argumentative strategy: he

admits his human limitations, and allows the readers to embrace a collective approach to finding solutions.

The essayist also asserts himself using the first person voice in the essay "Creating Space for A Hundred Flowers to Bloom" (*Moving the Centre* 12-24). He argues as follows:

> To illustrate my point, I shall choose texts which fall quite easily into a canonized tradition of English Literature. I am of course aware of the limitations of drawing a general conclusion from selected texts but the few texts are quite tempting because of the centrality of the figure of the colonised as perceived by the coloniser. Further, I merely want to illustrate a tendency and not make a literary evaluation. (14-15)

In the preceding extract, the texts that Ngugi is evaluating are William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and John Maxwell Coetzee's *Foe*. The essayist avers that unlike Caliban in *The Tempest*, who displays full linguistic agency and self-assertion, Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* is barely articulate, while the crowd of Africans in *Heart of Darkness* are bereft of speech acts, a sad reality that is taken to new heights in *Foe*, where Friday hardly communicates. Ngugi rides on these contrasts to make the call for writing in African languages and articulation of African cultures as a way of energizing these marginalised forms.

I notice a series of assertions by the essayistic persona signaled by the first person subjective *I*. Ngugi has used the possessive determiner *my* to illuminate the fact that the issues raised are coming from the point of view of the writer himself. He also uses the present simple tense of the verb *am* to deepen the reader's awareness of his presence. Having said that, Ngugi's first person rhetor applies the concession structure, admitting

that there are epistemological limitations to using only a few texts to arrive at a conclusion. The phrase *of course* is both an indirect reference to the audience/reader, and an assertion that what is being said is obvious, shared and common knowledge. Ngugi is trying to create a conversational implicature, but a weak one, with the aim of achieving concurrence. The irony here is that the reader is not co-present with the writer and may not have the liberty to offer or withdraw concurrence. Through juxtaposition, Ngugi contrasts this concession with an admission that the few texts are suitable illustrations of how the colonised people are framed by the coloniser. He further qualifies the contrast by offering the view that he is only demonstrating a tendency, an inclination, a predilection, not an evaluation of the few texts. It is apparent that the contrast between the two juxtaposed ideas is emphasised stylistically by the coordinating conjunction *but*, which links the two disparate semantic items into a communicative whole.

The essayist is, therefore, enacting resistance against imperial cultural and linguistic domination, as well as against what Homi Bhabha calls *Enstellung*, by which he implies a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, and repetition. This is the realm of resistance, the inevitable terrain within which postcolonial writers operate. Consequently, the postcolonial discourse is, according to Bhabha, an embodiment of "ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses — hierarchy, normalization, and marginalization, produced through the strategy of disavowal, and discrimination, which is a process of splitting the mother culture from its bastards" ("Signs taken for Wonder" 33). Ngugi's instant essay can also be read as a counter-discourse against the canonical Western literature that disavowed African agency, creating the "Other." As Tiffin argues:

> Understandably, then, it has become the project of post-colonial literatures to investigate the European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-

> colonial space and to intervene in that originary and continuing containment… One particular counter-discursive post-colonial field is canonical counter-discourse. This strategy is one in which a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes. (97)

The link between Tiffin's proposal and what Ngugi is doing in the above essay is simple: the essayist is exposing the codes by which the postcolonial subject has been objectified, denied agency and "Othered" in some of the epoch - defining canons of European literature.

To this end, it is worth noting that the *I* persona is the organizing principle in the personal essay genre. It is the focaliser, the experiencer and the speaking subject. The voice of the essayistic persona in Ngugi's essays varies from that of displaying close intimacy with the reader in some essays, to a fairly detached narrator with limited projected intimacy in others. Ngugi is good at using the collective implicature *we*, perhaps inspired by the Marxist perspective that influenced some of his essays. He sees society as bifurcated between various socio-economic categories, which ineluctably give rise to resistance and the struggle for dominance. In some essays, I have seen that he deploys a series of questions to invite the reader to embrace his perspective. In others, he cuts the image of a strident essayist, desirous of passing on the factual message rather than cultivating a persuasive pact with the reader. There is a note of stridency, urgency and impatience in many of his essays. Overall, the essays I have evaluated above show that Ngugi's essayistic voice is audible; that he can manipulate the essayistic conventions of fragmentation, instability, abruptness and the unconventional eclectic style, giving most of his essays the rumbling structure – the iconic marker of the personal essay. I have noted, however, that at the level of themes, Ngugi has not been honest with some aspects of

Kenya's history, and he comes across as a writer who is not quite nuanced over some issues such as the Mau Mau struggle. Finally, his essays offer Ngugi's arguments against imperial domination over African cultures and languages and these artistic items can be read as enacting resistance, while adumbrating a revolution.

3.3 Anecdotes and Extended Metaphors

In the preceding chapter, I defined and explained both the anecdote and metaphor, so I will proceed with this knowledge at the back of my mind to engage the literariness of Ngugi's anecdotes as extended metaphors. In the essay, "The South Korean People's Struggle," (*Writers* 117 -122), Ngugi writes:

> Yesterday, I was moved to tears by the testimony of the Korean composer Yun I Sang when he described his experiences in the cages of Park Chung Hee. I was impressed with his statement that he gained strength to compose opera in prison from the knowledge that he was speaking for many gagged voices, for many whose bodies were being tortured. (118)

Ngugi was speaking in 1976 at an international emergency conference on Korea held in Tokyo, Japan. I hear his strong essayistic first person voice as he navigates the terrain of his argument. His pitch is that the Global South (present and former colonies of the Western European ruling classes in Africa, Middle East, South America and Asia) has a shared history: a history steeped in exploitation and oppression, a history in which European bourgeois rose to splendour on the blood and corpses of their murdered victims; a history that evolved from slavery through direct classical colonialism to present day neocolonialism; a history of the enduring struggle by the oppressed people to liberate themselves; and a history of the betrayal of the aspirations of freedom fighters by the native comprador class that serves the interest of the neocolonial masters. He ends the

essay with the prediction of Marxist revolutions by all the oppressed people across the whole world.

The extended metaphor in the above anecdote rides on the double imagery of the cages of Park Chung Hee and the Korean composer Yun I Sang who endured them and who found inspiration in them to compose opera while still incarcerated. The image of Park Chung Hee's cages is an extended metaphor for the exploitative and oppressive relationship between the colonizer and the colonised around the world. Korean composer Yun I Sang metaphorically represents the freedom fighters who continue to struggle against the colonial and neocolonial forces. The anecdote metaphorically prefigures a deeper message, the message of a Marxist revolution enveloping the whole world. A postcolonial reading of the essay attributes the oppression of Korean people to the western imperial control over the economic and cultural affairs of their country through their local surrogate, dictator Park Chung Hee. As Linda Hutcheon argues, "the true priority of postcolonial discourse should be to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity" (151). This is where I situate this essay – that it is part of the effort aimed at reclaiming the freedom of the people of Korea, closely followed by the erosion of the colonialist ideology by which their freedom and identity had been devalued.

I read another anecdote in the essay "Moving the Centre: Towards a Pluralism of Cultures," (*Moving 2 -11)*:

> Sometime in 1965, I handed a piece of prose to Professor Arthur Ravenscroft of a carpenter-artist at work on wood. Later this became part of a larger evocation of life in a village in colonial Kenya between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Mau Mau armed struggle… In the copy of my novel, *A Grain of Wheat,* which I signed for Arthur Ravenscroft I was happy to draw his attention to the chapter containing the exercise. (2)

The writer takes the reader through his long reflection on the issue of the deliberate exclusion of literatures, languages and cultures of Africa, Asia and South America from the syllabi of American and European universities, as well as from those of universities in the newly independent countries. In it, he endorses the struggles by youthful African scholars to conscientise themselves followed by a process of revolutionising such syllabi. He makes repeated allusion to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, extolling its revolutionary effect on African scholars studying in Europe. According to Ngugi, it is Fanon who opens their eyes to search for writers from the Global South such as George Lamming, Peter Abrahams, Aime Caesare, Nana Tagore as well as African American writers, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. He contrasts these writers with Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, T.S Elliot, and Wilfred Owen who dominated the syllabi of English departments both in Europe and the (post)colonies. The resultant effect of this arrangement was that "Europe was the centre of the universe" (*Moving* 8).

Against this domination by foreign literature, Ngugi, in 1968, led other colleagues – Taban lo Liyong and Owuor Anyumba – to call for the abolition of the Department of English at the University of Nairobi and its replacement with the Department of Literature. The organising idea was to give African students a base upon which to look at the world. Ultimately, this revolution would open up the cultural landscape so that "there could never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world would have their culture and environment at the centre (*Moving* 9).

This issue is further illustrated in the anecdote recounting his encounter with Professor Arthur Ravenscroft and the writing of the novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, while studying at Leeds University. It reads like a metaphorical juxtaposition of two cultural polarities while also underscoring the passing of the button from the colonial master to the African student. Ngugi takes up the same message in his essay "Creating Space for a

Hundred Flowers to Bloom" (*Moving* 12-24), in which he calls for a universal garden of many-coloured cultural and linguistic flowers, while looking forward to cross fertilisation across these frontiers as the new horizon. This is a metaphorical construction just like this one in which he conceives "local knowledge not as an island unto itself, but as part of the main, part of the sea" (29). This latter metaphor is adopted from John Donne's poem, "For Whom the Bell Tolls." These two metaphors emphasise Ngugi's concern for a new world of cross-cultural harmony, a world build on cross-cultural respect, and a world in which cultural hierarchies are erased. The preceding postcolonial discussion opens us to two ideas: first, I encounter Ngugi's resistance to Western imperial domination of both Africa's cultural landscape as well as the economic tier; the second idea is a gesture towards a global cultural melting pot in which all cultures are mutually respecting and respected. Appiah has alluded to this in his argument that:

> POSTCOLONIALITY is the condition of … 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 at 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. (120)

His irreverent tone notwithstanding, Appiah is having to grapple with the question of the African writer as a navigator of the postcolonial terrain, balancing the African pull and the Western push. Perhaps, this is the way in which I could see the cultural melting pot that Ngugi is offering.

Ngugi's essay, "Imperialism of Language: English, a Language for the World?" (*Moving* 30-41), contains an anecdote that illustrates the imperial power of English language:

> You may think that I am talking about some attitudes to the English language that prevailed thirty years ago. Well, you are very wrong. Recently on my way to Berlin, I chanced to open the London *Evening Standard* of 7 October 1988, and came across an article concerning the British Education Secretary Kenneth Baker's visit to the Soviet Union… Baker had been amazed to find English being spoken in a part of the Soviet Union. (34)

I quickly take note of the reader-centred conversational implicature in the above citation. The second person subjective pronoun *you* is repeated twice in the essayist's attempt to endear himself to the reader. This is a suitable prelude to establishing a conversational pact through which the reader is expected to agree with the perspective of the essayist. In specific terms, this anecdote is a metaphor signifying the dominance of English language across many cultural divides, even penetrating the former iron curtain that divided the Capitalist West from the Communist East, as well as colonised and neo-colonised Africa. While it is a literal illustration of the yearning by Russians to escape to the West and its glittering capitalist material world, it also metaphorically stages the same conditions in which Africans are socialised to accept the social advancement that the English language offers. It is this denigration of African languages that Ngugi criticises in this essay. He pillories the colonial imprint and violence that English inflicted on the indigenous languages and the elevation of this dominant language as the official mode of transacting business in a colonial state. In his view, African and European languages relate within the context of inequality, dependence, and distortion. Ngugi's argument seems to accord with Chinweizu and others, who, in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, assert that: "At this point in time, Africa's mission is to intensify its decolonisation and liberation… The cultural task at hand is to end all foreign domination of African culture, to systematically destroy all encrustations of colonial and slave mentality" (1). Ngugi's

artistic action here involves illuminating the suffocating weight of English not only on colonised societies but also its insidious encroachment on a [then] superpower, the Soviet Union. The anecdote embeds allusive power that magnifies the spectre of English's domination by invoking Soviet Union. This danger is also acknowledged by Robert Phillipson in his contention that "Hegemonic ideas tend to be internalised by the dominated, even though they are not objectively in their interest" (8).

This struggle for Africa's soul is metaphorically framed in Ngugi's collection of critical essays *Re-Membering Africa*, in which he expands the debate on how colonialism dismembered Africa's memory ("Dismembering Practices: Planting European Memory in Africa"); the ways in which Africa might restore its degraded memory ("Re-Membering Visions,"; "Memory, Restoration and African Renaissance"); and the efforts by South Africa to restore Black people's identity and cultural awareness after apartheid ("From Colour to Social Consciousness: South Africa in the Black Imagination"). It is instructive that Ngugi plays with the verb, 'Re-Membering.' It is framed as a present participle verb, referring to the active process of bringing back into memory that which had either disappeared or had been forgotten. There is a conscious process involved in the insertion of a hyphen between the prefix 'Re-' and the countable noun 'Member' to produce 'Re-Membering.' The prefix 'Re-' is used here to refer both to the repetitive as well as to the regenerative actions, the latter embedding steps that bring the past into the present. Therefore, the present participle verb 'Re-Membering' when used in a word phrase with the noun 'Africa,' signals the active regeneration of the African people, especially their cultural heritage, artistic wealth and identity.

The "Preface" to *In the Name of the Mother*, offers the reader an anecdote in which Ngugi says this:

> On 12 December 1978, the Moi Dictatorship, in response to internal and international pressure, released me from a one-year imprisonment at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison. But the regime ensured that I would not resume my job as a professor of Literature at the University of Nairobi. The imprisonment without trial, had been a punitive act because of my novel, *Petals of Blood*, but more immediately, my community based theatre work that produced *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I will Marry when I want*). The denial of a job was driven by the same motives: to keep me away from contact with students and regular working people. (viii)

I take special notice of the essayist's determination to reinforce the weight of what he considers a predatory reign of president Moi so much so that he renders its name in capital letters – 'Moi *D*ictatorship.' The capital '*D*' in Dictatorship stands out. The essayist projects to us the abrupt loss of his job and the callous incarceration as two broad images of painful savagery by two successive regimes. The Kenyatta and Moi regimes in quick succession assailed Ngugi by their egregious violations of his right to expression, to individual liberty, to fair trial and to earn a livelihood. The reader is compelled to vicariously sympathise with Ngugi and to condemn the two presidents [now deceased] for their rugged crudity. I am, however, baffled by Ngugi's creation of the impression that it is only President Moi who bears the brunt of all the ills Ngugi endured, yet it is in public knowledge that it was the then president Kenyatta who threw Ngugi into prison without trial as detailed by the author himself in his memoir, *Ngugi Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. In this reframing of events, there is an inescapable hint of the author's infidelity to historical fact. The instant anecdote packs allusive power in its structural linkages with Ngugi's other works, and in so doing, expanding the epistemological horizons on the gravity of the writer's detention.

My study of the essay "New Frontiers of Knowledge: The Challenge of the Pan-Africanist Social Scientist," (*Secure* 65-76) reveals another anecdote in which the essayist illuminates his own struggle to write in Gikuyu language while in unlawful custody in 1978. He holds that in so doing, he was enriching an African culture and history and throws a challenge to African social scientists to do likewise. He advocates for self-evaluation by African producers of knowledge *vis a vis* European cultures and languages, and calls for casting away of colonial heritage. He takes himself, his personal experience, as a metaphor that ought to extend to all African researchers.

From the essay "Splendour in Squalor: The Global Responsibility to Protect Humanity" (*Secure* 77-86), the essayist strings together several anecdotes relating to the inter-ethnic fighting that ensued in 2007 to early 2008. In the first one, Ngugi recalls the image of an innocent child fleeing from the flames of a burning church near Eldoret only to be grabbed by his attackers and thrown back into the blaze. In the second, he divulges his helplessness and mortal fear as he watched the developments on television from California. He finally gives us a graphic portrait of his visit to the slave Castle at the Cape Coast in Ghana, where he observed the sharp contrast between the graves of the slaves beneath a church structure and the opulent palatial residence on top:

> So, while the enslaving wealthy were singing in gratitude to the Almighty and later moaning in the joy of bodily love in bed, the enslaved moaned in pain and groaned for deliverance. Splendour above was erected on the squalor below. The global palace today is built on a global prison. Splendour in squalor – there lies the basis of global instability. (79 - 86)

These anecdotes convey macabre experiences: they separately and collectively reinforce Ngugi's message against violence. The victims of violence, whether ordinary peasants and lowly workers in Kenya or slaves in Ghana, are united by one crude reality – their anguish

benefited the middle class puppeteers who make political capital and profits. He avers that the schisms between the rich and poor nations, as well as between the rich and the poor classes of people sit at the core of the violent crimes against humanity. This is why Ngugi is using this platform to appeal to the United Nations to urgently and proactively implement its protocol on the responsibility to protect victims of various forms of armed violence such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The latter anecdote is a graphic extended metaphor: it unblinkingly sheds light across time and space, while also exposing the ravages of the exploitation of one class by the other. In my view, Ngugi's criticism of the middle class incitement of the poor classes to violence for narrow political gain raises two concerns: first, through this essay, he has finally put to rest the widespread criticism that he had kept studiously silent while the mayhem ensued; second, he has not come out clearly to name those who were culpable for the violence.

Ngugi might have used this essay to share his personal impression of, or thoughts on, the cases that went to International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague, while equally addressing the pesky issue of the longstanding ethno-centric struggles over the control of state power in Kenya. While Ngugi avoids discussing ethnicisation of politics, I have seen in the preceding chapter that his counterpart, Achebe, does not shy away from naming ethnic balkanisation, primitive inter-ethnic competitions and ethno-centric exclusion as part of the existential threats facing post-independence Nigeria.

In this section, I have evaluated the function of anecdotes noting that these stylistic devices are short stories relaying personal experiences, but they are carefully (artistically) selected for aesthetic effect by the essayist. The anecdote not only expands the horizons of artistic imagination; it widens the credibility and depth of the message; and also serves as an extended metaphor, which establishes broader epistemological relationships between the discourse and other phenomena spatially removed from the physical presence of the

instant essay. It is an apt stylistic device that Ngugi deploys to shred the dominant imperial hierarchies by opening up space for alternative voices that were hitherto marginalised.

3.4 Essayistic Allusion

I have observed that Ngugi has deployed allusion in several of his personal essays. Chris Baldick's *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* offers the definition of allusion as a literary device through which a writer or artist makes: "an indirect or passing reference to some event, person, place or artistic work the nature of which is not explained but relies on the reader's familiarity with what is thus mentioned" (9). In this analysis, I stretch this definition by drawing on John Peck and Martin Coyle, who argue that allusions "add to the complexity of the meaning of the work I am reading by making it more interesting or instructive" (129). In the essay, "Imperialism of Language: English, a Language for the World?" (*Moving* 30 - 41), Ngugi refers the reader to his other collection of essays, *Decolonising the Mind*, in which he laments the unequal power relations between English and the languages of colonised people, and calls for their empowerment of the latter to articulate the alternative world view from the perspective of Africa. He writes: "In *Decolonising the Mind* I have described the process of alienation from my own languages… I have told of instances of children being punished if they were caught speaking their African languages" (32). The citation above draws us to the essayistic first person *I* who is speaking to the reader. I notice the self-assertion by the essayist: "I have described…" followed by "I have told of instances…" There is emphasis underscoring the determination of the essayist to paint the picture vividly in the eye of the reader. The allusion to Ngugi's other collection of essays presupposes that the reader is already acquainted with the referenced text. It is an indirect way of building himself as a credible essayist, who is well stocked. This allusion also serves to reinforce the bond between the essayist and reader. But it merits mentioning here that Ngugi appears to over-dramatise the

contents of the text alluded to, instead of just mentioning it. His style somewhat overloads the reader with more information.

The thrust of the ensuing essay is that Ngugi is rooting for mutual respectability, equality and cross-fertlisation between world languages. He argues that English, Portuguese and French are tainted by "racism, sexism, national chauvinism, and negative images of other nationalities" (40). As a corollary to the foregoing, these European languages, in Ngugi's view, cannot pass muster as worldwide languages, unless they rid themselves of these embedded limitations. He proposes Kiswahili as a world language since it does not come with any nefarious baggage. Ngugi's worries about the English language have also been raised by Robert Phillipson in his observation that "whereas once Britannia ruled the waves, now it is English which rules them. The British empire has given way to the empire of English" (1). Two things stand out here. First, Ngugi is patently right in arguing for the empowerment of indigenous languages and cultures; he is within his rights to call for the adoption of Kiswahili as a global *lingua franca*. Second, Ngugi may be making a long shot in his call for the globalisation of Kiswahili. I know that the global spread of English has taken centuries: it has been subtended by colonialism, imperialism, trade, wars, conquests, foreign aid, robust diplomacy, modern technological advances especially in the World Wide Web and internet, as well as by the emergence of the hegemony of the United States of America on the world stage. It is worth noting that the East African countries using Kiswahili as a national language do not have the wherewithal (technological, economic, diplomatic, military and cultural resources) to mount serious campaigns to spread the language around the globe. To this end, I note that Ngugi's argument has not shown us an elaborate illustration of how Kiswahili could achieve a global spread.

The essayist also deploys a series of allusions in the personal essay "Creating Space for Hundred Flowers to Bloom" (*Moving* 12-24). This essay revolves around Ngugi's vision of a new transnational conversation of languages and cultures. He argues that indigenous languages and cultures must be recuperated from domination by their European counterparts. He holds that the world would be a culturally richer place if oral and written literatures were transmitted through people's indigenous languages: in his view, no language or culture should be allowed to die on account of domination by others. His first allusion is to Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, in which Caliban and Prospero duel on the issue of language. Ngugi writes: "The main thing is that Shakespeare does give Caliban the capacity or voice to say 'no' (to linguistic domination). Caliban is invested with energy" (15). The essayist celebrates the fact that a European writer belonging to the seventeenth century, had such a grand vision of other languages and cultures. Ngugi conceives Caliban as the quintessential metaphor of linguistic and cultural liberation. The second allusion is to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, on which he remarks that:

> Defoe has the usual images of cannibalism, tribal wars, and savagery; but Friday is also given a voice; he is, for instance, made to doubt some of Crusoe's explanation of the origins of the universe. But there is no language of revolt, nothing closely resembling the energy of the seventeenth century Caliban. (16)

In this foregoing citation, I notice double allusion: there is essayistic digression from the essayistic narration to include *Robinson Crusoe;* and I have the allusion, which contrasts the character of Friday to Shakespeare's character, Caliban. The two heroes have different traits: the latter has linguistic agency while the former is denied it. I am, therefore, offered a glimpse into the essayistic argument whose dynamic forward movement pulsates with similarities and contrasts.

The third allusion refers to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Ngugi asserts that Conrad "debunks all the do-goodness associated with the nineteenth century European colonial entreprise in Africa. In the text [*Heart of Darkness*], there is no Caliban. Conrad assumes the collective figure of those Africans who accompany MarloI into the interior of the continent. They are not given voice …" (17). This last allusion stands between the preceding two: it points to Conrad's overall deconstruction of the imperial entreprise in Africa, while also exposing the lack of linguistic agency among the black characters. The fourth allusion is to Coetzee's novel, *Foe*. About this novel, Ngugi laments that:

> Friday's tongue is actually pulled out. He has no tongue, no voice, no language and hardly any energy. Coetzee's twentieth-century Friday, written on the eve of South African people's fierce determination to get rid of the European domination, is a far cry from the energy of protest and self-affirmation in Shakespeare's seventeenth-century Caliban. (17)

In this allusion, Ngugi notes that Coetzee's *Foe* is a rework of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. While Friday made some speech acts in the latter novel, Coetzee deprives Foe of such agency. The contrast is extended to Shakespeare's Caliban. Again, Ngugi allows his argument to evolve with multiple allusions, each referring back to the preceding. By means of these series of allusions, Ngugi creates cohesiveness in the essay.

3.5 Juxtaposition in Ngugi's Essays

I have already explained how the personal essay is interpreted as an argument in chapter two. In this section, I am illustrating Ngugi's application of juxtaposition in his arguments as well as its artistic function. In the essay "Birth of a Literature" (*In the Name* 1-10), Ngugi creates a dialogic conversation between himself and his audience in which he justifies his decision to publish his books with a British (capitalist/imperialist) firm. Here is a brief extract from the essay:

> I have sometimes been accused of being a living contradiction for publishing with Heinemann in the African Writers Series. How can you, while denouncing imperialism, make a deal with a London-based Publishing house that manufactures words harvested from Africa and African hands and then sells the finished product, the book, back to Africa at a profit? (1)

There are two voices here: Ngugi's essayistic *I* persona and the voice of some unnamed person(s) assumed to have posed the profound question. The essayist proceeds to arrange the elements of the essay in a parallel structure: on the one hand, I have issues relating to the criticism of imperialism and of foreign publishers; on the other, I see positive commentary on, especially, Heinemann. Through a series of personal anecdotes, Ngugi divulges the numerous hurdles he had to surmount to get his works published. They range from typing the manuscript of *The River Between* under a fireside light; to being accosted by an angry Korean diplomat who abhorred Ngugi's articles that praised jailed writers in Korea; to the painful episode in which his publisher, Henry Chakava, was attacked and severely injured for publishing *Caitaani Mutaharabaini* (*Devil on the Cross*); to Ngugi's survival of a fresh round of political persecution after the attempted coup in 1982; and to the charge that Heinemann's African Writers Series was part of the neo-colonial entreprise to ghettoise African writers.

These views and incidents are counter-balanced by Ngugi's open celebration of the fruitful relationship he has enjoyed with Heinemann going back to 1962. He discloses that with Achebe as its General Editor, Heinemann published two of his novels – *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* – before he even graduated from Makerere with an undergraduate honours degree. Since then, Ngugi avers, the publisher has published and marketed many of his other titles. Then he reveals that Heinemann's invitation to launch his books in London in 1982 turned out to have been a master stroke of luck, since it kept

him away from arrest by the jittery regime of then president Moi. He discloses that Heinemann agreed to continue paying for his upkeep in London during those moments of tension. I note that Ngugi creates a parallelism between his journey to attend the life-changing 1962 Makerere Literature Conference, which opened his doors to the publishing world, and his invitation to London by Heinemann in 1982 that saved him from trouble. I also read a hint of irony in Ngugi's celebration of Heinemann's achievements in Africa as captured in these words:

> I have said before in some of my writings that African Literature in European languages is the nearest thing I have to a pan-African literary inheritance. The African Writers Series has published writers from virtually every country in Africa thus enabling a dialogue among readers and writers from the three main colonial traditions: Portuguese, French and English. (8)

The above declaration by Ngugi on the language of African literature contradicts his well cultivated standpoint on the subject. I am compelled to wonder whether the voice of Ngugi in this essay is not the same one that has been foregrounding liberation of African literatures from European languages in several personal essays, formal essays and other publications. I am also left wondering whether this is the very Ngugi who has bifurcated his view of the world into two classes – the capitalist bourgeois (and its comprador acolytes), against the working class and peasants! True, Ngugi has come a long way with Heinemann and perhaps, he feels an obligation to pay respect to a firm that propped him up; but in this essay, there is an unmistakable irony, which he himself grudgingly admits.

In the essay "Voices and Icons: The Neocolonial in Emergent African Cinema" (*In the name* 67-80), Ngugi has juxtaposed several film traditions that have dominated Africa: the colonial film, the resistance film by Africans, the tradition of accommodation and compromise, the middle ground film and the indigenous film. He uses the cataloguing

style, first, to identify the broad film traditions and their creators; and second, to explain the selected films in each category. Under the colonial film tradition, he places *King Solomon's Mines* based on Rider Haggard's novel bearing the same title; *Mister Johnson* based on the novel by the same title by Joyce Cary; *The Flame Trees of Thika* based on Elspeth Huxley's novel bearing a similar title; and *Out of Africa* based on Karen Blixen's memoir appearing under an equivalent title. Ngugi argues that these films misshaped Africa's history by portraying the continent and its people as barbaric, savage, infantile, docile, dirty, dark and as the uncivilised 'Other.' In such films, Ngugi declares: "the white adventurer is always at the centre: light spreads from him (sic) to the outer darkness. The African crowds are usually merged with the shadows" (68). This happens to be the basis upon which postcolonial literature is build: to correct the disfigured image of Africa, the "Other."

The preceding image is contrasted with that of the resistance tradition, which takes into its ambit those films directed, written and acted by Africans. Here, Ngugi includes Sembene Ousmanae's *The Black Girl to Gelwaar*, and Haile Gerima's *Sankofa*. This resistance tradition is further contrasted with films falling under the accommodation and compromise tradition where I find *Heritage* by Kwaw Ansah and *Saikati* by Anne Mungai. There are also postcolonial African films seen by Ngugi as falling between the above two broad categories and these are *Neria* by Godwin Mawuru and *Gito, the Ungrateful* by Leonce Ngabo. Then I have the Nollywood productions, especially those rendered in indigenous languages. Ngugi is particularly passionate about this latter category and reinterprets it as a significant plank in the resistance tradition:

> In the area of African languages, the vibrant Nollywood film and video industry have taken the lead over African literature… Hollywood screens had degraded African languages. By making African characters speak in African languages with

> English or French subtitles, African cinema is subverting the tradition of Europhone African literature and theatre, which create characters who speak perfect English and French. It also undermines the negative representation of African languages on the Hollywood screen. (79)

The above extract plays two juxtapositional functions: on the one hand, I have the explicit contrast that negates the negative image of African languages in western film; on the other hand, I have the embedded contrast between the postcolonial African literature in foreign languages and the postcolonial African film in African languages. This double juxtaposition adds weight to Ngugi's argument for resistance against the paucity of Africa's presence in film as well as for its liberation from the insidious neocolonialism of foreign languages. I am, however, uncomfortable with two issues in this essay. First, Ngugi makes a citation from a group of Kenyans who saw the film, *Out of Africa*, in Sweden and who wrote this protest:

> Nowhere in the film are Kenyans depicted as showing any resistance to colonialism. They are shown as being happy with the colonial set up. They sing happily as they work for Karen Blixen on the very land taken away from them by the colonial state and given to Blixen for a pittance. A colonial appointed chief, actually a traitor to his people, a Chief Kinyanjui, is depicted as an authentic African chief. Was there not even a single African who was unhappy about working on the land that had been taken from his own people? (73)

Ngugi is a realist who knows that in such an exploitative set up, there could be disgruntled workers as well as angry community members whose land was forcefully appropriated. In this respect, he is right in taking issue with the seemingly one-sided view of reality that the referred film projects. I, however, note that Ngugi has not shared with the reader the material source of the above cited write up by some angry Kenyans. As a successful

essayist, he could have, perhaps, framed it as an anecdote by preferably placing himself in a vantage position of having witnessed or read the petition by the referred angry Kenyans in Sweden. The author does not even disclose to us whether the petition by the angry Kenyans was in the form of a letter or an email or any other textual form. He displays no interest in disclosing the recipient of the protest note: I am, therefore, left wondering whether this protest was directed at the producers of the movie or at the film houses that aired it or at media houses that advertised it. In my view, the protest by Kenyans in Sweden bears the hallmarks of the typical style enamoured of Ngugi: it is concomitant with his direct strident tone noticeable in many of his essays. I am also left wondering whether Ngugi might have put these words in the mouths of these unnamed Kenyans in Sweden.

Another weak point in this essay is the blanket assertion by Ngugi that African films are hardly screened on national television, and that such media houses prefer items from the west. He asserts that "African cinema has no slot in the national television networks" (80). This view could have been true in the 1960s-1990s. But things have since changed. Considering that Ngugi wrote this current essay relatively recently in 2014 when the Nollywood film had spread its tentacles across Africa, then his claim has little merit. Indeed, across Africa, Nollywood films have virtually replaced Hollywood. Thanks to Africa Magic channels that are all over my televisions, Nollywood is a 24-hour entertainment craze across Africa.

Juxtaposition is also evident in *Secure the Base*, whose "Preface" sets the tone for the other essays in the collection. Ngugi pits the important struggles for self-determination by Africans against the crimes inflicted by Africans on fellow Africans. He singles out the middle class for his rancour, terming this social category as collaborators who work against the deepest interest of their own people by serving exploitative foreign capital. He

asks a series of questions about this middle class in Africa: "Does it see itself as accountable to the people or to the external centres of imperial power? Does it see itself as rentiers of their resources or a maker of things from their resources?" (x). These questions are directed not at the culpable middle class but at the audience, whom Ngugi assumes are on his side of the argument. I have noticed the repetition of the irregular verb '*Does,*' in its present simple third person singular form, at the beginning of the two successive sentences. It is artfully deployed for rhetorical emphasis. It also adds weight to Ngugi's view that the indicted middle class is sold out to foreign masters and it has no allegiance to fellow Africans.

In the same essay, Ngugi takes issue with 'tribe' in Africa, especially with the negative attributes associated with its referent. He does not hide his angst at its pejorative use against non-Europeans, on the one hand, and its warm non-reflective acceptance by the denigrated people, on the other. He writes: "It still baffles me why 40 million Yorubas are a tribe and 5 million Danes a nation! Or why non-European peoples should have the name tribesmen attached to their communities and leaders. Every community has a name. Call them by that name" (xii). Ngugi artistically frames his criticism of the western denigration of African communities through tribal naming. I see that '*why*' is repeated twice in two contiguous sentences and it carries conjunctive and adverbial significance. It emphasises the contrast between the European definition of European cultural communities as nations and their disavowal of non-Europeans, the "Others." There is a sense of unequal power in naming communities – tribe signifies inferiority and lack of civilization, while nation carries the weight of civilization and advancement. Ngugi reinforces his criticism against this denigration through a series of apostrophes, directly addressing hypothetical Europeans or their institutions, whom he commands: "*Call* them by their name"; "*Accord* the same to all communities." The imperative tone in the two consecutive verbs '*Call*' and

'*Accord*' allow us to detect impatience and anger in the essayistic persona. This tone is in keeping with his standpoint on western imperialism: he is operating in the resistance tradition, which is determined to liberate the oppressed people.

Ngugi delves deeper into the issue of the tribe in his essay "Contempt and Self-Contempt: How the Word 'Tribe' Obscures the Reality of African Politics" (*Secure the Base* 1-16). Here, he structurally constructs the juxtaposition at two levels: on the one hand, I have the contrast between the definition of African communities as 'tribes' ("Othering"), while Europeans cultivate the title 'nation' for themselves; on the other hand, I get to see Ngugi's (re)conceptualization of socio-economic tribes that are pitted against each other in unequal relations of dominance and power. Ngugi puts politics at the centre of this tribe-making and tribe (de)construction, blaming slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism and the greed embedded in the middle class, as the fulcrums organizing the continued survival of the negative label, 'tribe.' It is worth emphasising that the difference between European 'nations' and African 'tribe' are external labels, imposed for purposes of power and control: the so-called African 'tribes' and European 'nations' have comparable characteristics such as shared history, geography, economic life, language and culture. In addition, in this essay, Ngugi conjoins an allusion and an illustration to expose what he terms as the hypocrisy and double-standards used by Europeans to denigrate Africans on account of 'tribe':

> To European analysts, tribe is like a genetic stamp on every African character … The print and electronic media also use the same template of Tribe X versus Tribe Y… This is like looking at John McCain, seeing that he was born in a naval base in Panama; then looking at Barack Obama, seeing that he was born in Hawaii; and then concluding that their political differences are rooted in an assumed traditional enmity between the naval base and the island. (7)

The illustration "Tribe X versus Tribe Y" is attributed to some hypothetical European analysts. It is essentialist in nature. There is a manifest adamant refusal by the European analysts to admit the possibility of syncretism or rapprochement between the European self and the "Othered" Africans represented as Tribe X and Tribe Y. As Abdul Janmohamed argues that: "the colonial imaginary operates by substituting natural or generic categories for those that are socially or ideologically determined…. Thus, African natives can be collapsed into African animals" (20).

Ngugi has, therefore, revealed this dichotomy in the coloniser's mindset, which is projected on the colonised. He stages juxtaposition by illustration by making allusion to the Barack Obama versus John McCain presidential contest in 2008 to debunk the myths and fetish around 'tribe.' He creates artistic association between spatially and historically different systems – postcolonial Africa and America – to expand the thrust of his argument. On a different note, Ngugi is wont to attribute nefarious attitude and behaviour to an unspecified general category. This is both a weakness and a strength: as a rhetorical strategy of argumentation, it embeds the collective implicature and saves him the trouble of producing factual evidence; but it also weakens his essayistic finesse and credibility.

3.6 Rhetorical Cataloguing

Catalogue is a literary device commonly used in poetry but also in some prose works and it consists of "a list of things, thoughts, people, places or ideas to create a rhetorical effect. Writers use it randomly but to create a unified form. The list is deliberately inserted to make the audience enjoy the work of art. It often involves repetition" (*Oxford Dictionary* 49). In the essay "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom," (*Moving* 12-24), Ngugi lists the different areas of the world from which resistance literature has emerged against domination by imperial European literature: "This resistance is often reflected in the literature of the Third World (sic) and it is an integral part of the

modern world. They come from Asia. They come from South America. They come from Africa. And they come from the oppressed in North America, Australia, and Europe" (18). Here, Ngugi laments the distortions that European literature has imposed on the rest of the world, thereby justifying the emergence of resistance to these false imaginaries. To this end, he lists those parts of the world that have dared to produce literature that counters that of what he calls 'imperialist adventurism.' The listing of these sources of resistance literature is presented in fragmented syntactic structures: 'They come from Asia' is a sentence fragment. It deviates from the well-known English syntactical structure of Subject – Verb – Object. Instead, it elides the subject (the literatures of resistance) and foregrounds the verb *come* and the object *Asia*. This deviation is repeated over the next three sentences. In a way, this syntactic deviation, when augmented by repetition of similar syntactic constructions, achieves a rhetorical effect – that of emphasising the message that resistance literature is growing rapidly around the world. It makes a good argument when a writer amplifies his message stylistically.

While urging the necessity for writing in African languages, Ngugi deploys the cataloguing style in the cited preceding essay:

> Many more people are facing up to the creative necessity of writing in African languages and to do for African languages what Spencer, Shakespeare and Milton did for English; what Cervantes did for Spanish; what Rabelais did for French; what Martin Luther, Goethe and Schiller did for the German language; what Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy did for Russian; what Elias Lonntot of the Finnish classic, *The Kalevala*, did for the Finnish… (22)

Ngugi has not only listed the writers who have contributed immensely to strengthen and grow their respective national languages, but also used punctuation marks (semi-colons) to graphologically segment the listed units of communication, progressively building them up

into a full complex sentence, preceded by one independent clause and followed by a series of dependent ones. The complex paratactic syntactic construction consists of an independent clause: "Many more people are facing up to the creative necessity of writing in African languages"; and several dependent clauses such as "what Cervantes did for Spanish." In the words of Leech and Short, the main clause is followed by the subordinate clauses as "trailing constituents, like a train with linked wagons moving along a railway" (*Style in Fiction* 228). The paratactic sentence above is associated with what Leech and Short posit as "easiness, relaxation, informality, natural simplicity, and directness rather than rhetorical effect" (230). The list of the linguistic achievers presented by Ngugi serves a definite purpose, that of inspiring African writers to emulate these great writers in "creating a new and great tradition with two great reservoirs: the heritage of orature and of world literature and culture" (22). I can aver here that the central thesis that Ngugi holds up in this essay is resistance to European linguistic domination, which is followed by reconstruction of the "Othered" languages to enable them play their rightful function.

In this section, I have examined the function of cataloguing as a rhetorical strategy. I have explained how it helps the essayist to intensify his message by focusing the reader's attention to the stylistic uniqueness of the message. In this way, style echoes theme. It is also noteworthy that as well as intensifying the appeal of the message to the reader, cataloguing can equally give the essayist away as a strident and impatient.

3.7 The Rhetorical Structure of Ngugi's Essays

I begin this section by sharing Adorno's thoughts on the structure of the personal essay: "the essay suspends the traditional concept of method. Depth of thought depends on how it penetrates its object. It posits immediacy and mediation, hence, it is fragmentary in character…Through violation of the orthodoxy of thought, something in the object becomes visible" (12). My reading of Ngugi's essays reveals essayistic fragmentation that

Adorno has identified but also the syncretism of variegated parts by the voice of the essayistic persona. In brief, the structure of the personal essay is determined by the whim of the essayist; the manner in which the essayist augments the message (anecdotes, illustrations, digressions, flashbacks and flash-forwards); and the effect that the essayist wishes to have on the reader. The unifying voice of the *I* persona notwithstanding, the personal essay, for the foregoing reasons, wears an aspect of fragmentation.

To illustrate the fragmentary character of this genre, I refer to the essay "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom." (*Moving* 12-24). In the first paragraph of this essay, Ngugi takes an omniscient vantage point and paints a vivid image of the world oscillating between two polarities – unsolvable conflicts and problems, on the one hand; and on the other, several forces working to create convergence of the world into one unit. The second paragraph elaborates on these economic forces of convergence, driven largely by Western transnational corporations and multi-national institutions, which Ngugi criticises for their dominance of the rest of the world. The third paragraph brings out the forces that facilitate cultural linkages across the globe. Then, in the fourth paragraph, Ngugi takes us into the thesis of his essay – that resistance and revolt are growing against the domination of the West. In the fifth paragraph, Ngugi zeroes in on literature as one of the cultural processes building a multinational shared tradition. He lists several literary characters from both the ancient and modern literary traditions, alongside writers from the same historical epochs and declares that they constitute a global inheritance.

The sixth paragraph is a brief review of what he calls the "humanistic tradition" (14) of European literature, which he exemplifies with Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Julius Caesar* as well as Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But in the seventh paragraph, he blames the same European literature for its "ambivalence, collaboration, and silence" in the wake of slavery, slave trade, colonialism and neocolonialism. It is in the eighth to the thirteenth

paragraphs that Ngugi illustrates how European literature has vacated its humanistic ideal to embrace silence, ambivalence and collaboration with slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism. He demonstrates this view by examining Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Coetzee's *Foe*.

The fourteenth paragraph is a concession by Ngugi that the four referred European writers abhorred the European colonial enterprise. However, Ngugi argues that "they carry in themselves a collaborationist tendency even though they were writing outside the central stream of consciously collaborationist letters" (18). The fifteenth paragraph explains collaborationist literature as downright racist, which is a suitable prelude to paragraph nineteen in which Ngugi delves into the resistance tradition in Third World (sic) literature. In the twentieth paragraph, he singles out African oral tradition before expounding Africa's other strands of literature in European languages, captured in the twenty first and twenty second paragraphs. From the twenty third to the twenty sixth paragraphs, Ngugi argues the case for writing in African languages. The twenty seventh paragraph pays homage to great writers who wrote in their national languages and helped to grow them. In the twenty eighth and twenty ninth paragraphs, the essayist encmy ages African languages to borrow from the rest of the world and from each other, respectively. The thirtieth paragraph calls for the development of critical scholarship in African languages. The thirty first paragraph looks towards the future with true African languages, "revitalised and rooting for themselves in traditions of orature and written African literature" (23). In the penultimate paragraph, Ngugi celebrates the ideal world in which the literatures from all the different parts of the world converge to create "a multi-colour ed reality of the human creative stream" (24). The ultimate paragraph is a metaphor that wraps it all in the futuristic image of "a universal garden with many-coloured flowers" (24).

At the beginning of this personal essay, Ngugi does not give us a hint of where his journey will take the reader. The direction of his thought is revealed progressively. He begins with general information before laying nuclear stress on the penultimate paragraph, which carries the thesis of his essay – a vision of a new world in which all people's languages and cultures flourish without domination of one over the other. The essay comes across as heterogenous: it embeds citations from European literature; from Mohamed Ismail Garce's poem; and from Bakhtin. These embedded voices are not only digressions from the main stream of the essayist's message, but they are also dialogic – that is, they create an inter-textual conversation. In this way, the essay is both fragmented and unified: fragmented by the intrusion of new voices that are not from the essayistic persona, but also unified by the same persona into a communicative unit.

Ngugi's allusive style is realised in the references to eleven literary texts and authors from Europe, America, South America, Asia and Africa. These allusions are presented through the rhetorical structure of cataloguing and serve to fortify his argument through intensification of the similarities and contrasts between the progressive literature and the retrogressive type. Overall, this essay reads like a rhythmic project, pulsating between the repeated and the variable, where the variable consists of the embedded stylistic devices and cross-references; while the repeated is the essayistic persona's voice. Ngugi has artistically decentred European literature and European authors by subordinating them in this essay as minor objects; instead, he foregrounds the idea of progressive literary spaces that are open and welcoming to all forms of creative expression.

The essay, "Petals of Love" (*Writers in Politics* 94-98) relays Ngugi's speech during the launch of his novel, *Petals of Blood* in July 1977. Woven around his favourite revolutionary message, the essay pulsates between variegated personal experiences and the

mainstream thrust of the novel. It starts with an introduction of his Mother, a quintessential peasant, the archetype in his revolutionary novel. Then he wonders what was expected of his speech on that occasion, before delving into the six-year journey between 1970 and 1976 that produced the novel. He also recalls the childhood days of story-telling as well as his school days at Alliance and college years at Makerere where he read serious literary works that shaped his mind.

Ngugi discloses the quarrel that Alliance headmaster had with Economics, which advice he defied and took interest in the subject. At this point, he discloses his encounter with Mwai Kibaki as a lecturer in Economics at Makerere and how the questions Kibaki set turned Ngugi away from the subject. His escape was short-lived as his writings brought him full circle into the realm of economics, the system of production, control and distribution of wealth, which determines every aspect of life. Going deeper into the relationship between literature and economics, he notes that the former is part of culture and it reflects the material realities of imperial domination. He asserts that his writing has driven him to discover that Kenya was poor because the wealth produced by the country's hard-working people was siphoned off to the developed Western world. He then intones that this revelation is what has convinced him that imperialism will not develop Kenya. He amplifies this message by quoting Bertolt Brecht's poem "Questions from a Worker who reads," in which the protagonist points out that empires and civilisations have only been built by the sweat and blood of common people, not the kings and emperors who live in opulence. In his final paragraph, Ngugi sides with the suffering peasants and hopes that the novel, *Petals of Blood*, will catalyse revolutionary petals of love.

The structure of this essay is such that it has flashbacks to Ngugi's previous experiences and how they shaped his life – the past having echoes in the present. It also plays on the irony of rejecting Economics only to embrace its significance in his literary

works. The heterogeneity of voices is also notable in the cited poem from Brecht. Ngugi asks rhetorical questions designed to indirectly enjoin the reader: "What anyway can writers say about what they have already written? … How did I ever come to be involved in this madness of putting words together to form stories?" (95). Evidently, these questions do not require answers from the audience: they constitute the essayist's rhetorical strategy of indulging the audience to agree with his perspective.

But what is important here is the structure of the essay. The essay juxtaposes the present and the past; gives us Ngugi's earlier rejection and later acceptance of Economics; creates tension between imperialism and revolution; and makes a cross-textual reference to Brecht's poem, embedding its voice into the essayistic discourse. One feels a kind of rhythmic pulse as I read on. Peck and Coyle hold that "rhythm and meaning cannot be separated. Rhythm matches and reinforces the sense of the words. Thus, I talk of slow or fast rhythm; chatty or relaxed rhythm; dreamy or troubled rhythm" (62). I get the impression that the essayist is not happy from the contrast he presents between the peasants (symbolically represented by his own mother) and Western imperialists. The two stand on opposed polarities in relations of material realities that define one as the exploited, the other as the oppressor. To resolve this chasm, Ngugi advocates a revolution. The image of 'blood' in his novel adumbrates the struggle and victory of the proletariat. There is a touch of the troubled rhythm, anxiously pulsating forward, accreting evidence from multiple sources to justify the envisaged revolution. The organizing principle is the essayistic voice, which holds the disparate strands that create rhythmic pulse, into a communicative whole.

3.8 Strategies of Cohesion

The essay as a form is largely held together as a communicative unit by the overarching voice of the essayist. In addition to this essayistic persona, there are other

stylistic strategies that are in-built to help hold it together. To paraphrase Leech and Short, cohesion is the sum total of the semantic and syntactic relations in a text enabling it to hold together as a communicative unit. It begins at the sentence level, to paragraph, to chapter to the entire text (79; 82;107; 244). A more elaborate account is offered by Halliday and Hassan, who, in *Cohesion in English*, view cohesion as "the range of possibilities that exist for linking something with what has gone before, enabling a text to hang together. One item points to another, while one item provides the source for the interpretation of another. Elements that are structurally unrelated are linked together through the dependence of one on the other for its interpretation" (18). I have identified the essayistic persona, allusions, cross references, conversational implicature, communicative pact, and the title as some of the conventional strategies of cohesion in Ngugi's essays. In this section, I will examine how these elements function as cohesive devices in the stylistic frame offered by Halliday and Hassan as well as by Leech and Short.

3.8.1 The *I* Persona

The personal essay is, by its very nature, rendered by the voice of the *I* persona. Leech and Short say this of the *I* persona: "In the *I* narrator story, the *I* voice is also the primary character who produces a personal relationship with the reader, which inevitably tends to bias the reader in favour of the narrator/character" (265). In this analysis, I have applied the above conceptualization of the *I* persona by substituting *story* for *essay*. But I also recognise that the personal essay deploys storytelling as part of its rhetorical strategies. I wish to elaborate on the singular controlling voice of the essayist by reflecting on these words from Lopate: "The personal essay is unified by a strong *I* perspective. The essay is an enactment of the creation of the self: the writing of personal essays not only monitors the self but helps it gel" (xliv). There are arguably two discourse situations in the personal essay: one in which the essayist takes him(her)self as both addresser and

addressee, and the other in which the addressee is the reader. Ultimately, the personal essay is a self-reflexive genre, which reveals the essayist's private impressions on an issue. The interesting turn in the personal essay lies in its conversational tone, with the author working to not only recognise the reader but also cultivate a communicative pact in which both parties are assumed to have jointly owned the message.

In the essay "Petals of Love" (*Writers* 94-98), cohesion in its discourse structure is achieved through the essayistic the voice of the *I* persona voice. Ngugi invites us by his personal voice, "I would like to start by introducing to this audience the woman who has all along inspired me …" (94). This is in reference to his mother. I observe that throughout the essay, his voice plays the role of the dominant glue that binds all its parts together. The essay ends with Ngugi asserting himself, "If *Petals of Blood* can convey at least that message to us Kenyan readers, I shall be satisfied" (98). I note that the modal verb *shall* is used in its formal sense to stress the futuristic imperative, the desired vision of the essayist, whose *I* persona is speaking in this essay. In addition, the essayist has made several self-assertions in the essay: "Imperialism, I came to realise, can never develop a country or a people"; "I was, therefore, horrified when I came to realise that Kenya was poor not because of anything internal but because the wealth produced by Kenyans ended in developing the western world" (96). These two citations, presented in the first person essayistic *I* perspective, help to pivot Ngugi's central idea – the desirability of a revolution by the exploited peasants and proletariat against the exploitative Western imperial bourgeoisie. In this, there is the unmistakeable sense that the essayist is constantly discovering for us what Cleanth Brooks aptly describes as "a pattern in what I see as confusion; something exciting in what I had thought banal" (47). All these lead to a complex weighing up of one attitude against another, as the essayist navigates his argument.

Ngugi's voice is demonstrably vivid in the essay "The Frontiers of Knowledge: The Challenge of the Pan-Africanist Social Scientist" (*Secure 65-76*). This is an essay in which Ngugi takes us through his reflections on the question of language and African social sciences. He argues that time has come to break away from the chains of transacting African research in foreign languages. The anecdote in the first paragraph sets us off into his personal experience as a detainee, who decided to write back at his jailer, to protest the injustice meted out on him. To achieve these twin objectives, he opted to write in his mother tongue, Gikuyu: "I wrote defiantly to my jailers, asserting that African intellectuals must do for their languages what all other intellectuals in history have done for theirs" (67). The essayistic self-assertion is noticeable in Ngugi's the voice of the *I* persona voice, which tells us that I am engaged in discourse with the essayist. Soon after, Ngugi elects to embrace the reader through the collective implicature: "Since our very mandate as African producers of knowledge is to connect with the continent, it behoves us to continually re-examine our colonial heritage … This means, in effect, my having to continually examine my relationship to European memory" (69). The repeated possessive determiner *our* and the object pronoun *us*, used only once in the paragraph, suggest the unity of purpose between the reader and essayist.

While such unity is desirable for the success of the essay as a communicative unit, it is equally desirable that the essayist invests some invitational gestures of politeness towards the reader. From the above extract, Ngugi has simply plunged us into the middle of the communicative pact without serving us any prior notice. This is the trend throughout the essay: Ngugi assumes he has the reader's attention and feels no pressure to cultivate friendship. At some point, I get a sense that the message Ngugi is passing on appears to be more important than the art of conveying it. If the essayist succeeds in creating a cohesive pact with the reader, it is in spite of any effort on his part to seriously cultivate endearment.

3.8.2 Allusions and Cross-References

Allusions and cross-references can play the unique function of unifying the essay. I have observed that allusions and cross-references, by exerting centrifugal pull, bring an aspect of fragmentation into the essayistic discourse. Here, I am holding the view that the essayist selects relevant allusions and references, which he strings into his essay by way of centripetal pull. The central idea in the essay, like a skeleton, is enriched when fleshed up by allusions and cross-references. In the essay "Petals of Love," Ngugi makes allusion to "a small book titled *Teach Myself Economics* or *Economics Made Easy*" (95), which he raises up for sarcasm, given its distortion of the real meaning of economics. He also makes extensive allusion to *Petals of Blood*, the very novel he was launching. There is a serious contrast in the different approaches taken by the two texts to conceptualise economics. Ngugi sees the former as deviant and the latter as truthful and illuminating. The pull between the two concepts of economics unifies Ngugi's message.

Ngugi also makes reference to Brecht's poem, "Questions from a worker who reads," which he quotes extensively. The poem is a litany of questions by a worker, who laments that Kings and emperors enslave workers to build the wealth of empires and kingdoms, yet these workers remain impoverished and miserable amidst the opulence enjoyed by their tormentors. The poem is cited by Ngugi towards the end of the essay, perhaps as a clincher to drive home the revolutionary message. In the poem, the central thesis of the essay is amplified: Ngugi seems to be suggesting that workers and peasants have nothing to look forward to under an imperialistic system. So, by aligning a similarly themed text to the dominant idea in the essay, Ngugi creates cohesion. Consequently, the centrifugal force inherent in the allusions and cross references is controlled by the centripetal force of the essayistic persona – and the two are syncretized into a harmonious whole to communicate the enriched revolutionary message of the essayist.

Ngugi makes a concession in the "Preface" to *Decolonising the Mind* using the *I* persona: "Inevitably, essays of this nature may carry a holier-than-thou attitude or tone. I would like to make it clear that I am writing as much about myself as about anybody else" (xii). The plea for an anti-imperialist revolution is the organising theme around which this essay is woven. He sees himself as part of a larger revolutionary movement resisting European cultural domination – especially the asphyxiating use of English, French and Portuguese in Africa – which he also considers to be a grandiose theft of African talents and genius. He is quick to link linguistic domination to Economic exploitation.

In the above citation, the sentence "Inevitably, essays of this nature may carry a holier-than-thou attitude or tone," signals both an anticipation and acknowledgment of the reader's possible response. To this, Ngugi responds with "I would like to make it clear that I am writing as much about myself as about anybody else," which embeds an implied collective conversational implicature, bringing together the essayist and reader into a communicative pact. I notice how two opinions have been syncretized, without leaving wounds on either side – all feel dignified that their opinion has been acknowledged. From this concession, Ngugi emerges as a mature writer who considers an issue from all sides: the unity of opposites in this essay beams the light on a writer who is not only logical but also fair-minded. The concession structure not only cements the argument of the essayist by navigating a common ground between the writer and his audience, but it also contributes towards the cohesion of the essay.

The same concession arrangement is found in the following citation from "Introduction" to *Decolonising the Mind*: "For those who have read my books *Homecoming, Writers in Politics, Barrel of a Pen* and *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary,* there may be a feeling of déjà vu. Such a reaction may not be far from the truth" (1). The first sentence recognises the misgivings that readers could have towards his instant

collection of essays, *Decolonising the Mind*: it raises the possibility of readers regarding this current book as a repetition of what has already been said in Ngugi's other works. The essayist, therefore, steers the reader away from potential resistance to the ensuing essay by deploying the art of concession through politeness: "Such a reaction may not be far from the truth." The reader who is addressed with decorum is likely to drop her/his guard and continue reading on. The fact that this concession appears in the first paragraph of the essay demonstrates a keen focus by the writer to win over the reader early enough. Ngugi holds that the current collection of essays, *Decolonising the Mind*, is justified on account of pulling together in a logical and coherent way, the gist of the earlier essays on the question of the language of literature in Africa. To this end, what I am saying in this instant analysis is that the essayist unifies his perception with that of the reader and in doing this, creates a unified front between the two sides as the essay moves on. In addition, he unifies the ensuing thought with concomitant thoughts resident in his antecedent works. Readers are, therefore, invited to engage with the concentric circles of thoughts and ideas working consciously towards a unifying vortex.

There is another application of allusion in the essay "New Frontiers of Knowledge: The Challenge of the Pan-Africanist Social Scientist" (*Secure* 65-76). Since I have analysed this essay elsewhere, I will focus purely on the issue at hand. The essay makes allusion to Ngugi's collection of essays appearing the title *Something Torn and New* (*Re-Membering Africa*). He blames all colonialist cultures, practices, systems and languages for replacing, displacing, destroying and altering Africa in a fundamental way. He sums up the effect of colonialism using the metaphor of planting of European memory on Africa:

> In my book *Something Torn and New*, I have written extensively and intensively about how Europe planted its memory on Africa's landscape … naming the land as a claim of discovery and ownership, The planting was extended to the African

> body: Western Christianity became a vast renaming ritual reminiscent of that horror scene in Sembene Ousmane's film *Ceddo* (1977) where this ownership is branded on the body of the enslaved with a hot iron. (69)

The thrust of Ngugi's argument, therefore, is that African social scientists must cast away the chains of this European memory and reconnect with their own indigenous African memory. Like the preceding analysis, the essayist creates linkages between the instant essay and his other books that packing a similar message. Some of his personal essays wear a distinctive texture and tone that bears resemblance to other essays within the same collection or sister collections. We, therefore, notice a structural continuum, an internal cohesion and an external unity, between his personal essays on the one hand, and his critical essays on the other. The inescapable idea here is that Ngugi's writing is aimed at disturbing the fossilised but distorting layer of foreign identity that colonialism, capitalism and the continued imperial linkages have imposed on all facets of life in Africa.

To this end, I am compelled to point out that Ngugi has over-repeated himself several times over in successive essays. For instance, he makes allusion to the revolutionary character, Caliban, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a symbol of resistance with loaded lessons for African social scientists (70). It bears noting that the symbolic significance of this same character is extensively illuminated in the essay "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom" (*Moving* 15-17; 19). Besides the foregoing, Ngugi has also repeated himself over the question of writing in African (indigenous languages). He considers this as the ultimate achievement of liberation and freedom of all cultures that had the misfortune of being colonised.

In this instant essay, "New Frontiers of Knowledge," Ngugi urges social scientists to reject European languages and revert to their African languages as their linguistic vessels and archival repositories (71-76). He holds the same view in "Imperialism of

Language: English, a Language for the World?" (*Moving* 30-41); "The Role of the Scholar in Development of African Literatures" (*Moving* 82-87); "From the Corridors of Silence: The Exile Writes Back" (*Moving* 102-108); "Life, Literature & a Longing for Home" (*Moving* 154-58); "Matigari & the Dreams of One East Africa" (*Moving* 159-176); "The Neo-Colonial Emergent in African Cinema" (*In the Name* 67-80); and "Contempt and Self-Contempt: How the Word 'Tribe' Obscures the Reality of African Politics" (*Secure* 1-16). Ngugi extends this same thread of tentacles into his formal and critical essays in *Writers in Politics, Penpoints, Gunpoints & Dreams, Barrel of a Pen, Homecoming, Decolonising the Mind, Re-Membering Africa* and *Globalectics*. I get the impression that Ngugi has overdone his message; that he has lingered too much on the same topic, using the same illustrations. On this issue of African languages, Chinweizu and others have endorsed a different view from Ngugi's:

> Ideally, African literatures should be written in African languages. But the same historical circumstances that presently compel African nations to use Western languages as their official languages also compel African writers to write in them. Until those historical circumstances are changed, it is pointless debating whether or not to use these Western languages in our literature. A more immediate issue is how to write well in those languages. (242)

Chinweizu and others share the same view on the issue of the language in African scholarship with Achebe, but which Ngugi has rejected. Ngugi's rejection of the European languages is part of his struggle to promote agency among the submerged indigenous African languages. It also falls within his artistic vision in which he adumbrates an accommodative future that allows all languages to cross-translate their messages on an equal platform. But the Chinweizu-Achebe axis appear to address the immediate challenge, which is the stark reality of writing for minority readers: such effort runs into

the wall of economic challenges and the danger of peripheralising the writer from the national, regional and global visibility.

3.8.3 Self-Irony

The essayist talks to the reader from the first-person *I* narrative voice, and often takes himself as the object of narrative observation. This is where I see the essay as a highly self-conscious, self-reflexive genre. Personal essayists are adept at "interrogating their own [perceived] ignorance, limitations, their cul-de-sac, and the borders of the self" (Lopate xxviii). In other words, they observe the world, digest it and present it to us from their impressionistic perspective, while taking a keen interest to unveil to us how their minds are working to create the essay. In so doing, they are left with no option but to tag the reader along as a partner. Nicholas Delbanco defines the self-reflexive writer as one "who holds not the mirror to nature, but who invites us readers to examine the mirror itself" (53). To Wayne Booth, such a narrator is "self-conscious" (155). In their element, essayists often project their apparent weaknesses or ignorance – their human side – to the reader, hoping to endear themselves and their perspective. It is at this point that irony emerges.

According to Leech and Short, irony involves a double signification associated with two different points of view (278). The essayistic *I* objectifies himself by splitting the self of his essayistic persona into *object* and *subject* parts. This is what I see in this extract from Ngugi's essay "Petals of Love" (*Writers* 94-98): "Now I really don't know what a writer is supposed to say on an occasion like this … What anyway, can writers say about what they have already written?" (94). These rhetorical questions are directed both at the audience and at the essayist himself; in both instances, I notice a sense of irony. In the first instance, the audience would expect the writer to say as much as possible about his book since it is his creation. Such questions, presumably exposing the writer's ignorance, would

puzzle the audience. In the second instance, the writer implicitly objectifies himself as a third-person by creating some distance between the speaking *subject* and the *object*. To get an insight into this binary-split of the self, I profit from Muecke's view that:

> Self-irony… implies a splitting of the ego and hence an ability to present oneself as an innocent – the victim who is unaware of the existence of an upper level or point of view. Self-irony can also allow the alazon or victim to be the ironical observer or ironist and not necessarily the innocent. (20)

The essayist, in this case, juxtaposes his mind with that of the third-person "writer" (addressee), allowing for a level of psychological triumph over his singular, limited first-person *I* perspective. It underlines the condition of alienation, in which Robert Currie avers that "the self exists in a condition where it and the world are foreign to itself… where man's humanity is fragmented and lost" (10). The fragmented world (both within and without) is the goldmine from which the essayist draws his material. It is important to note that the dynamism of the essays rest on the fusion of the two levels (addresser/addressee) into one. This is what Leech and Short call the symmetry between the attitude of the writer and the attitude of the reader/addressee (280). By playing on the two attitudes, the essayist gives us a broader picture, a complexity informed by the realization that events are not as simple as they seem.

In the essay "Heinemann, African Writers Series &I" (*In the Name* 1-10), Ngugi engages in self-irony by splitting his persona into the subjective questioner and the objectified recipient of his question. I read: "How can you, while denouncing imperialism, make a deal with a London-based publishing house that manufactures words harvested from Africa and African hands and then sells the finished product, the book, back to Africa at a profit?" (1). The objectified part of Ngugi, the essayist, is signalled by the second person pronoun *you*; the other part of Ngugi assumes the side of the accusers who appear

to be blaming him for displaying this contradiction. But the interesting bit about this structure is that the objectified second person *you* soon switches sides and becomes the first person essayistic *I* persona. It is in this switching or mutation that I see the irony of the same persona splitting into two, with one questioning the other. Two things stand out: it appears as if Ngugi used this split personality to demonstrate to the reader that he is well grounded in the matter and can weigh the two sides of the issue before making a decision; it is also apparent that the essayist has deployed the self-irony to endear himself to the readers by projecting the image of a polite, self-reflexive writer. The essay itself revolves around Ngugi's relationship with his main publisher, Heinemann. It is constructed in the nature of the quintessential personal essay: it deals with a writer's unveiling of his inner self in relation to this imponderable issue. On the one hand, he is an avowed anti-imperialist and virtually all his writings have assailed colonialism and its imperialist vestiges in Africa; on the other hand, he is a beneficiary of Heinemann, an imperialist investment. Navigating himself between these two polarities is the journeyNgugi undertakes in this essay.

As an ironical character, the personal essayist, "having confessed his sins and submitted to the reader's censuring handcuffs, suddenly slips them off with malicious ease by claiming, *I am more than the perpetrator of that shameful act; I am the knower and commentator as well*" (Lopate xxviii). In this way, the personal essay, with its ironic deflations, and its insistence on human frailty, tilts towards the comic. I see this artistic performance in Ngugi's essay under review: shortly after confessing the challenges he faced as a writer who is compelled to comment on his literary work, Ngugi turns around to contrast, on the one hand, the economics books he read at Alliance and Economics as a cmy se he studied at Makerere with, on the other hand, his own discovery of the economic inequalities through literary writing, which gave rise to the novel, *Petals of Blood*. I feel as

if the essayist has deceived us, but I forgive him because I am in a conversational pact with him. Irony is, therefore, a unifying device.

3.8.4 Title as Unifying Principle

The title that an essayist selects has structural linkages to the content of the discourse. Elements within the essay refer back to the title in much the same way that the title makes forward reference to these elements. The resultant discourse is a cohesive communicative unit or argument. In the essay "Voices and Icons: The Neocolonial in Emergent African Cinema" (*In the Name* 67-80), I see Ngugi's definition of African cinema in these words "African cinema, by which I mean cinema written, directed and acted by Africans, is strictly speaking a post-colonial phenomena" (70). This sentence makes an anaphoric reference to the title by giving us distinguishing beacon markers for this strand of cinema. In a way, the title also adumbrates this definition by cataphoric reference. Reading the title, therefore, makes the reader to look forward to making the discovery, which when I read it, I am reminded of the title. This way, the title plays a unique role in securing the unity of the essay. The title of the foregoing essay is similarly echoed in Ngugi's account of the neocolonial situation: "Neocolonialism is a situation in which a country is formally politically independent but whose economy is controlled by the bourgeoisie of another state. The regimes of a neocolonial state see their role as that of guarding the economic interests of the West" (70).

The reader is invited by the title of the essay to make an exploration of the content, in this case, to find out what the essayist has to say about the neocolonial in emergent African cinema. When I get the detailed explanation of this concept, I recall the title; in so doing, I establish backward and forward semantic linkages, which enable us to interpret the essay as a whole. In the essay "The South Korean People's Struggle" (*Writers* 117-122), Ngugi repeatedly refers to the title as he takes us through the various strands of his

thought. There is not a page that fails to mention the struggle by the people of South Korea for their fundamental freedoms and democracy. In the middle of the first paragraph, I read "I want to carry home something about the Korean People's struggle for national liberation" (117); in the fifteenth paragraph: "That is why the Korean Peoples struggle for democracy and unity is the struggle of all oppressed people" (121); and in the eighteenth: "Thus it is more than obvious why I in Asia, Africa, and Latin America must support the Korean people's struggle for national unity and democracy;" "Long live the Korean people's struggle!" (122). These multiple references to the title, through flashbacks and the forwards constitute semantic unity. This essay, however, skews towards stridency courtesy of these interlocking back and forward references to the title, especially in the last (nineteenth) paragraph, which unfolds as an urgent appeal to revolutionary action.

Ngugi's essay, "From the Corridors of Silence: The Exile Writes Back" (*Moving* 102-108), contains the same strategy by means of which the title echoes content and is itself echoed in the content. For example, the first paragraph refers back to the title by way of allusion: "But the book that first caught my eye on entering a London bookshop was a slim volume titled *Writers in Exile*, by Andrew Gurr" (102). While the title of Gurr's book suggests a sense of helplessness on the part of the exiled writers, the title of Ngugi's essay, however, twists it, makes it proactive, and allows it to bear a measure of energy and dynamic forward movement. More reference to the title is found in this sentence: "The twentieth century has seen many an African writer confined by the colonial and neocolonial state to corridors of silence" (104). Ngugi gives us a catalogue of these writers: Dennis Brutus, Alex La Guma, Abdulatif Abdallah, Al Amin Mazrui, Sherif Hetata, Kofi Awoonor, Jack Mapanje, Wole Soyinka and Gekaria wa Wanjau (104). He makes another reference to the essay's title with these words: "Kimani Gecau and Ngugi wa Mirii had become part of the community of African writers in exile" (105); before

concluding that "A universal sense of exile, of not fully belonging, still haunts humankind" (108). I can see that the title of the ensuing essay is intertwined with the content; it points forward to the content, which in turn points back to the title. This creates unity of the disparate parts of the essay, while also broadening its thematic thrust.

In addition to its focus on the anguish of forced dislocation from home, the above essay raises new realities in postcolonial African writing. I am referring to what Tina Steiner defines as translation, by which concept she denotes "the multiple interactions of living and writing in an intercultural and interlinguistic space. It encompasses the adaptations and adjustments… The source cultures and languages are consciously incorporated with those of the host country to produce … the cross-cultural character of the text" (3). The postcolonial writer figured by Steiner is not singularly working to illuminate tensions between Western and colonised cultures and languages, but is rather interested in exploring points of contact in which the two sides borrow and gain from each other. Therefore, a postcolonial writer is highly unlikely to conjure their world from one dominant cultural and linguistic perspective. In the essay "From the Corridors of Silence: The Exile Writes Back," Ngugi, a Kenyan scholar, is writing back to Kenya from England, using the English language, and as a guest of the English people. The painful note in his voice can be attributed to the forceful displacement from his home by a neocolonial comprador dictatorship, a client of the same British who have provided a new home for him. The irony of this situation cannot be sharper: here is an avowed, strident, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist writer being sheltered in, and by, the same metropole with which he is on a collision course. The resultant essay is tempered with this unique reality of a writer who has to negotiate the two warring polarities that shape his identity. In his nostalgic longing for home, Ngugi is equally acknowledging the favours my s of the empire with which he is at loggerheads.

3.9 The Principle of End-Focus and Stridency

In literature, I ordinarily discover the most important information at the end of the text. This is where the author offers the resolution. Leech and Short have argued that successful writers or speakers tend to "start with information assumed to be shared with the hearer, before sharing information which is assumed to be 'news' to the hearer. The principle that new information is reserved to the end of the tone unit will be called the principle of END – FOCUS" (212). Although Leech and Short were referring to the context of a sentence structure, they also implied the use of this principle as a rhetorical device to larger chunks of discourse. It is this latter sense that allows us to apply the 'principle of end-focus' on Ngugi's essays. In the essay "Voices and Icons: The Neocolonial in the Emergent African Cinema" (*In the Name* 67-80), the last paragraph can be interpreted as containing the 'nuclear stress.' First, unlike the other paragraphs, it displays the voice of the *I* persona where Ngugi asserts himself: "I am however convinced that … its greatest strengths will come from its conscious alliance with struggles for survival and from its being faithful to its primary audiences in Africa" (80).

The foregrounding of his voice suggests that the essayist could be pointing the reader to the most significant point in his message. Ngugi expresses his belief that African cinema is on the path towards greatness: "its greatest strength will come…"; "It will become alive …"; "That day is coming!" These successive sentences referring to African cinema, inaugurate its success in Ngugi's futuristic outlook. Ngugi clinches his argument by pointing at the role played by emerging affordable video and digital cameras and makes an allusion to the success of these technologies in Nollywood. Earlier in the essay, Ngugi had lamented the distortion of Africa in European movies; he had explained the key trends in the production of African cinema by Africans; and had called for the use of African languages in African cinema. Therefore, it can be argued that the ultimate paragraph of this essay contains something new, some fresh idea that had not been relayed in the

preceding pages. In my evaluation, his essayistic persona is not well pronounced in the instant essay. I hear his the voice of the I persona voice sparingly in the preceding paragraphs; I also note the essayist's rather muted conversational implicature with the reader; and I am alive to the dearth of self-irony and deictics of politeness in the foregoing text.

The essay "Contempt and Self-Contempt: How the Word 'Tribe' Obscures the Reality of African Politics" (*Secure* 1-16) ends on a note that suggests the erasure of the vexatious problem of 'tribe.' Ngugi attributes the aggravation of the negative connotations associated with tribe to colonialism and the creation of negative images by the Western media. He contrasts the framing of European linguistic communities as 'nations', while their African counterparts, though bigger, are labelled as 'tribes'. He also decries the framing of the struggle over control of state power in Kenya long tribal lines, which often results in periodic violence. Ngugi blames the middle class in African states for internalizing the philosophy of tribalism from the colonial state. He, therefore, redefines 'tribe' by pointing out that Africa has the 'Haves,' 'Have-nots,' and the 'Corporate Tribe of the West.' With his argument framed as such, Ngugi zeroes in on the clincher: "My contention is that these rifts within and between nations constitute the roots of great instability in today's world. Progress and development need to be measured from the standpoint of the quality of life of those at the bottom of the mountain" (15). A critical point to note here is that unlike the other personal essays I have already analysed, here the essayist does not refer to the title in the nuclear stress of the last paragraph. A close reading of the title of this essay, "Contempt and Self-Contempt: How the Word 'Tribe' Obscures the Reality of African Politics," suggests that Ngugi is deconstructing this edifice 'tribe.' He traces its political instrumentation back to the opprobrious regime of colonialism; the various post-independence dictatorships; the neocolonial economic

domination by the Western capital and its cultural practices; and to the violent divisions and tensions among African communities. This could be the reason why the clincher excludes mention of the ignominious word 'tribe': instead, Ngugi shifts the debate to the most appropriate theatre of real struggles – the vertical material divisions among nation states and the horizontal divisions within nations. He also roots for democratic practices that protect people's rights. The above clincher is expressed in a rather subdued rhythm and a manifestly measured tone: it lacks the strong strident and urgent punch I have seen in other essays. It also misses a touch of the verbs of politeness widely associated with essayistic conversational implicature.

Reading the final part of the essay "New Frontiers of Knowledge: The Challenge of the Pan-Africanist Social Scientist" (*Secure* 65-77), I notice that this essay adds to the growing list of Ngugi's arguments for strengthening of African languages in research and teaching – only this time, he has foregrounded social sciences. It is evidently a veritable broadening of his traditional call for writing of African literature in African languages. I can already see how this essay rhymes with the title of the collection of essays in which it is contained: *Secure the Base*. In the ensuing essay, Ngugi makes a plea for African producers of knowledge to reexamine their relationship with, and overreliance on, European memory; he lists cases wherein African researchers have demonstrated the lexical adequacy of African languages; and he draws contrasts with relatively smaller European linguistic communities that already have countless publications, yet the much larger African linguistic groups have not.

The author, therefore, lays nuclear stress on the summative part, which gels these ideas into a unified whole. The two sentences above, cited from the last paragraph, constitute the salient part of the essay: they play a communicative function of relaying important information. But stylistically, they do not gel seamlessly with the principles that

govern the personal essay. “I cannot afford…” and “I must reconnect with…” are rather strident, urgent, impatient and angry in tone and rhythm. I observe that the strident tone does not lent the essay the politeness, concessions and self-irony associated with the effortless rhetoric of the Western personal essay. Ngugi appears to command us to vacate what he considers to be the untenable ‘outsider’ linkages in order to embrace my own African heritage.

Ngugi’s stridency is quite pronounced in the essay “The South Korean People’s Struggle” (*Writers* 117-122), which I have analysed extensively in a separate section. I refer to it here purely on account of its strident and urgent ending. I read this: “Long live the Korean peoples’ struggle! Long live the struggle of all the peasants and workers in the world! Long live the unity of all the peoples in the world struggling against imperialism and all forms of foreign domination!” (122). Ngugi’s artistic performance in these sentences offer a rather high voltage ending to an otherwise well-constructed personal essay, embellished with anecdotes, allusions, self-assertions, and some traces of concessions. *Long live* is repeated thrice in as many consecutive sentences. The adjective *long* is combined with the verb *live* to create the idiom *long live*, which Ngugi artfully appropriates to presage sustained struggles by South Korean people, by all peasants and workers across the world, as well as the creation of unity among all people fighting imperialism.

The essayist constructs an enchanted image of himself: as a reader, one cannot help visualizing him pumping his fists in the air at every pronunciation of the idiom *long live*. I can feel the energy and the powerful intonation he brings to bear on these last three lines. I get the sense that this small paragraph is rendered in a higher pitch than the preceding ones. It sounds like a triumphant chant, like a call to war! The last three sentences are exclamatory, ending with the exclamation mark ‘*!*’This suggests excitement on the part of

the essayist. He is envisaging revolutions and victory. In my evaluation of this ending, I feel that it is rather aggressive. I am persuaded that Ngugi could have explored a more temperate and measured tone to convey his revolutionary message, a tone that is more in step with the beacons that demarcate the style of the personal essay. From the interview he held in Vancouver, Ngugi gave us hints as to why his voice is strident. He disclosed that the task confronting a writer is enormous and urgent, that it does not require niceties, that the truth must be spoken out loud and clear and that the class struggle must be made to succeed.

The essay "Heinemann, African Writers Series & I" (*In the Name* 1-10), displays a similar strategy in which the rhetor clinches his argument with new information. The essay itself presents Ngugi's dilemma in sticking with Heinemann as his publishers, yet at the same time going on a warpath against imperialism, the very dominion represented by Heinemann. It is clear to us, long before I read the long sentence that contains the clincher, that Ngugi has a soft spot for his publishers, Heinemann. By the time I get to the nuclear stress, I only anticipate the depth and breadth of his positive appraisal of Heinemann. And I read this: "I am grateful that the books, the writers and the series are there to provoke debate and I am glad to be part of the celebration of the forty years of its existence, which also coincides with forty years of my writing career" (10). The tone is that of happiness and the rhythm is rather excited. Two things emerge in this clincher: first, Ngugi's adoration of the role of Heinemann in Africa; and second, the coincidence of the fortieth anniversary for both the writer and the publisher. The fact that this information is captured in a long complex sentence, adds to its weight, reinforces the message and makes it memorable.

While the above clincher sentence is evidently soft and within the bounds of polite expression, the one in the essay "Splendour in Squalor" (*Secure* 77-86) is arguably

strident. It reads this way: “Pull down the grand global palace erected on global poverty and build the foundations of a new earth, a new world. End the global philosophy of splendour in squalor” (85). Here, Ngugi is responding to the post-election violence in Kenya (2007-2008). Rather than express his gut feelings about the situation, Ngugi carefully weaves his argument around and within the United Nations Declaration of 2005 on the Responsibility to Protect, which calls for the timely response in times of crises to prevent loss of human lives. He reviews what he calls the two key fault-lines in the world that create tensions and violence: the gulf between the wealthy and the poor nation states; and that between wealthy and poor individuals. He also laments the exploitation of the poor (nation states and people) by the wealthy states and the bmy geoisie. In the cited clincher above, the verb *pull* is a command that Ngugi directs at the United Nations and other duty bearers. It packs a harsh tone and a sense of urgency.

The referred clincher needs to be analysed in juxtaposition with the power hierarchy within the Slave Castle Ngugi visited in Ghana, in which both the governor’s palace and the church sat atop the prison cells holding slaves awaiting their sale and shipment. There is a sharp contrast between the callous wealthy power wielders and their helpless victims. In Ngugi’s view, these ancient schisms have now metamorphosed into the unequal power and material relations in our times. The writer, therefore, stridently commands those with responsibility to act swiftly to dismantle these hierarchies, which he blames for manipulating divisions and violence between innocent poor people. The other verb *end* is an imperative command following up on the preceding one: it is compelling the responsible actors to ensure that there is no class structure dividing the rich and the poor. The line containing this verb *end* also ties up with the title of the essay – an excellent cohesive strategy. Nevertheless, Ngugi cuts the image of a passionate writer on a warpath, which I understand and place within the macabre events he has explored.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have, first, analysed the literariness of the *I* persona in Ngugi's essays, noting that the personal essay is by its nature a rendition in the first person voice that allows readers to access the writer's impressionistic reflections on issues. My selection of the analysed personal essays from several collections was, therefore, guided by the definitive articulation of the essayistic persona's voice. In this evaluation, I revealed that some of the essays begin with a definitively essayistic first person narrative voice which goes forth to deliberately cultivate a communicative pact with the reader, aided by concessions and self-irony. In other essays, however, the essayist sparingly asserts the voice of the first person *I* narrator. Yet in others, the voice of the essayist pays little attention to the construction of polite gestures towards the reader. In my examination of the broad spectrum of Ngugi's personal essays, I have pointed out that the essayist takes into account the traditional defining features of the personal essay; then he artistically modifies the genre to speak to his unique message – resistance and revolution by peasants, workers and all marginalised linguistic communities and cultures against capitalism and imperialism.

My second item of analysis is the literariness of anecdotes and extended metaphors: about these, I have observed that they play an important role of reinforcing the writer's message while also projecting the essayist as a well-informed, reasonable and reliable communicator. From a stylistic perspective, I have concluded that anecdotes exert a centrifugal pull through their extended metaphorical strength that allows the essay to radiate beyond its limited semantic scope. As a postcolonial writer, Ngugi's anecdotes and extended metaphors offer him the global platform for his cultural, linguistic and economic struggles against western imperialism. A third item in my analysis is stylistic allusion, which Ngugi applies to widen his vision to embrace other works that either share in his outlook or which are in contrast. I evaluated juxtaposition and parallelism, as the fourth

and fifth items, which are part of Ngugi's rhetorical strategies by means of which he weighs different options and multiple sides of his argument before he arrives at an informed perspective.

Stylistic cataloguing is the sixth item in this analysis. In my observation, cataloguing illuminates the depth of experience and breadth of information in the hands of the essayist. I have also noted that Ngugi has adopted the typical rhetorical structure of the traditional rambling and fragmentary personal essay characterised by digressions, anecdotes, cross-references, allusions, metaphors, juxtapositions, concessions, and self-irony. These rhetorical devices exact a centrifugal pull on the essay, while the centripetal voice of the essayist seeks to hold these diverse strands of information together. My analysis has identified two broad strands of literariness in Ngugi's personal essays. First, there is the strand that inclines itself somewhat towards stridency and urgency, which underlines Ngugi's resistance and revolutionary stance against imperialism. The second strand has a manifest display of the defining characteristics of the conventional personal essay by foregrounding the voice of the personal essayist, revealing the personal impressions of the essayist, adhering to a rambling and fragmented form; and cultivating a communication pact with the reader.

The other item of concern in this chapter is cohesion and how the essayist realises semantic unity of the disparate components within the text. I have read the essayistic persona as a unifying factor in the essays; I have examined allusion and cross-references as strategies of cohesion; I have looked at self-irony as a cohesive device, and I have examined the role of titles as unifying tools.

The possible downside of Ngugi's personal essays can be seen in several ways. In the first instance, I established that he has warmly embraced the role of the Mau Mau in the struggle for self-determination in Kenya. This is, however, without a hint of nuance as

would ordinarily be expected of the personal essay. The second drawback is his skewed appraisal of former presidents Kenyatta and Moi, yet both of them inflicted pain on Ngugi under their successive tyrannical regimes. The third area of my concern relates to Ngugi's struggle for the empowerment of indigenous languages: Ngugi scarcely exhibits the typical nuance and self-irony in this advocacy. It has also emerged from this study that in some essays, Ngugi scantily pays attention to both the essayistic self-revelation, one of the very key defining characteristics of the genre. In other essays, Ngugi sparingly engages the rhetorical techniques that define a relaxed, polite, persuasive tone: indeed, most of his essays are strident and urgent in tone.

Overall, Ngugi's personal essays offer a manifest aesthetic remit which underlines his revolutionary message of resistance and subversion of the imperial empire. I have observed that Ngugi pivots his revolutionary streak in the Marxist perspective, which bifurcates society into two principal antagonistic camps – the bourgeoisie and proletariat – which are struggling over control of the material levers of society. I have also explained Ngugi's ideological position on the liberation of colonised and distorted cultures and languages. In the end, I reveal an essayist oscillating between his traditional Gikuyu (African/Kenyan) and Western identities, a hybrid frame. In the next chapter, I shall examine the points of convergence and divergence in the literariness of the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE LITERARINESS OF THE PERSONAL ESSAYS OF ACHEBE AND NGUGI

4.1 Introduction

The preceding two chapters have separately evaluated the personal essays of Achebe and Ngugi from both stylistics and postcolonial perspectives. In these foregoing chapters, I have not only revealed the distinctive style of writing associated with each essayist but also their contrastive framing of the issues affecting the postcolony. I have also illustrated that the differences in their style and ideology notwithstanding, there are some themes and strategies of argumentation that cut across their essays.

In this instant chapter, I have set out to conduct a comparative reading of the literariness of their essays. This chapter is informed by my earlier adoption of literariness as the aesthetic beauty that is derived from the writers' creative deviation from the standard use of language. This artistic flavouring of normal language creates freshness, shifts meanings, and defamiliarises the familiar world by making it look strange (Buchanan 295). In my view, the resultant strangeness unsettles old meanings, gestures towards new ones and offers a glimpse of the writers' artistic vision.

This chapter comparatively examines the stylistic and thematic re-imagination of the postcolonial reality from the perspective of Ngugi and Achebe. The stylistic re-imagination is explained in terms of the writers' stylistic resources, which are: the voice of the *I* persona, strategies of argumentation, the rhetorical structure of the essays, anecdotes, fables, irony, cataloguing, proverbs, concessions, digressions, the art of polite gesture, stridency, and the collective conversational implicature. The chapter sets to point out the comparative literariness that emerges from the deployment of these artistic devices, as aesthetic units, by Ngugi and Achebe. In other words, it seeks to identify and explain the

defining literary artistry that either contrasts and/or points at similarities between the essays of these two acclaimed postcolonial writers.

In the context of the personal essay, the voice of the *I* persona plays a fairly distinct role from that encountered in, for instance, the first person narrative novel or the lyrical poem. In these latter genres of literature, the *I* persona is fictive: the author relinquishes the authority of presenting the story or message to another entity. In these fictive genres, the author is hidden and does not play an active role as a character in the text. For illustration, Achebe's novel, *A Man of the People*, has Odili Samalu who plays the twin roles of the first person *I* narrator and a protagonist. Achebe is neither a character in this very novel he created nor is he the first person narrator. The artistic conventions of the novel as a fictive genre do not allow the reader to conflate the author and the *I* narrator, or to erase the artistic space between the novelist and his narrator/protagonist.

In the personal essay, the author throws off the fictivity garb and becomes both the creator of, and character, in the text. This is why the reader hears Achebe and Ngugi directly addressing her/him without these writers hiding behind surrogate authorities or artistic messengers. And yet the reader unquestioningly receives this genre as literature. Why? This is because the essayist deploys the first person voice artistically. As seen in chapter one, the personal essay is an argument, presented to the reader by the essayist who is also the protagonist in the text. Defining it as an argument is not reason enough to confer literariness on the personal essay. There are arguments in real life which cannot be appreciated as personal essays. For example, well researched arguments are regularly canvassed in courts by legal experts; and academic work is largely defined by arguments in the form of academic papers or books.

To delineate the literariness of the *I* persona in the personal essay, it is important to read the essayistic persona's voice as one that presents an artistic argument to the reader.

This is a voice that takes the reader through a journey of creatively selecting, gathering and distilling evidence from multiple sources. The persona picks appropriate anecdotes, citations, proverbs, songs and fables as aesthetic categories, which are carefully integrated into the body of the essay to illustrate, elaborate or justify the argument. This artistic work by the persona in selecting these devices, rearranging and placing them strategically in the text, goes a long way towards maximising their aesthetic effect. It is this realisation of aesthetic effect that separates the personal essay as a literary genre, from the other arguments.

Besides this refreshing aesthetic role, the devices deployed by the essayist also serve the argumentative function of persuading the reader. The art of directly persuading the reader using multiple stylistic devices imparts the essay with new aesthetic fragrance, its literariness. Other conventions of persuasion used by the *I* persona are: irony, cataloguing, concessions, digressions, the art of polite gesture, stridency, and the collective conversational implicature. Separately and collectively, these artistic choices contribute to the literariness of the personal essay.

This comparative chapter takes for its second level of analysis, the thematic re-imagination of the postcolonial condition. I have comparatively explored the contribution of the key elements in postcoloniality to the artistic literariness of the essays. These postcolonial elements are: the essayists' construction of resistance, their appropriation of imperial cultures, their exploitation of metaphors of connection to the metropole, and their projection of an ambivalent complex nature in relation to the imperial relations. By comparing and contrasting the artistic response by Ngugi and Achebe to the postcolonial realities, this chapter seeks to reveal not only the literariness but also the artistic visions of their essays. Finally, this comparative reading evaluates literariness as a product of the synergy between the blended application of stylistics and selected postcolonial theories.

4.2 The Literariness of the I Persona

This section examines the voice of the essayistic persona and its contribution towards the literariness of the personal essays. The aspects of this voice that stand out include conversational indulgence with the reader, self-revelation, irony and function of the essayistic voice as a cohesive device holding disparate strands of the essay together. The personal essay is, by its very nature, a personal attempt by the essayist to come to terms with a certain condition or issue. Conveyed from the subjective point of view of the writer, the personal essay does not seek to hide the writer's personality or foibles. It is a self-revelation in which the essayist shares whimsical thoughts and personal impressions. A successful essayist selects a topic, looks at it from multiple angles, each time drawing the reader to share the writer's perspective, ultimately coming to a rather abrupt ending, having unveiled not only her(him)self but also the numerous layers of viewing the issue at hand. The idea here is that the essayist conveys information to us by way of the first person voice. Lopate speaks of the essayist's first person voice, its confidential manner of conveying secrets into the reader's ear, and its friendly conversational dialogue (xxiii). For Upham, the personal essay exposes the personality of the essayist, reveals the subtlety of her(his) feeling, the delicacy and whimsicality of her(his) imagination, and the buoyancy of her(his) spirit (140). On his part, Adorno avers that the essay is a highly self-conscious mode of presentation (x). These are the hallmarks of the traditional Western essayist: I have used them to draw comparison and contrast between the essays of Achebe and Ngugi.

From Achebe's *Home and Exile*, I have selected the essay "My Home Under Imperial Fire," an extract from which reads: "Saying this the way I said it may well leave my reader with the impression that I became a sad and disillusioned old man... I am glad to reassure everyone about my abiding faith in the profession of literature..." (34). The essay that embeds this citation is an exploratory journey of self-discovery in which Achebe takes liberty to synthesise variegated information sources to enrich it. The author is reviled by

the British naming of the Igbo people as a tribe; he proudly recalls the history of the Igbo as a nation including their individuality and value of freedom; he takes us through the growth of his father's Christian ministry; he expresses disgust with the imperialistic review of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*; traces his journey through college; describes the rebellion by college students against the image of Africa in Joyce Cary's novel, *Mister Johnson*; reveals how he came to realise the power of the story teller; and finally, conveys to us his decision to use the power of the pen to restore the tainted image of Africa.

In the referred essay, Achebe 'owns' the reader with the possessive pronoun *my,* which is emphasised by the nominative first person pronoun *I*. It is apparent from the citation that Achebe is engaged in propitiating the reader through what Leech and Short call "ceremonies of respectful address" (312). I have noticed that Achebe also applies hedging in this sentence: "*I am glad to reassure everyone about my abiding faith in the profession of literature,*" to politely counter the implied suspicion among his readers that he (Achebe) " *... became a sad and disillusioned old man... whose joy in reading has been battered and bruised."* Through contrast by juxtaposition, Achebe constructs anxiety in the reader, which he effortlessly calms down by projecting politeness. In this long essay, Achebe's first person voice sets up a close relationship with the reader. He demonstrates that he is not addressing some abstract entity but a concrete reader, whom he cherishes and valorises. It is also important to take into account the careful effort by the essayist to directly address the reader using the second person pronoun *you*. Evidently, this direct address enhances the symbiosis between the essayist and the reader besides adding weight to Achebe's message – that he still possesses abiding faith in professing literature and that he is not a sad and disillusioned old man who has lost joy in reading. This analysis has shown that the voice of the *I* persona is not only at the centre of the literariness of the

personal essay but it packs the force of persuasion – a key defining characteristic of the genre.

There is an essay by Ngugi under the heading "Creating Space for A Hundred Flowers to Bloom" (*Moving* 12-24), which I have brought into comparison with Achebe's "My Home Under Imperial Fire" (*Home and Exile).* It is appropriate to compare these two essays because they both share similar sentiments about the distortions created by colonialist literature. This is part of what is written by Ngugi in his essay: "I shall choose four texts which fall quite easily into a canonized tradition of English Literature. I am of course aware of the limitations of drawing a general conclusion from selected texts... Further, I merely want to illustrate a tendency and not make a literary evaluation" (14). In this immediate extract, Ngugi is referring to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Coetzee's *Foe*. The gist of the essay revolves around Ngugi's averment that the character Caliban in *The Tempest,* displays full linguistic agency and self-assertion, on the benevolent side, while in *Foe,* on the other extreme, the character Friday hardly communicates. In between, there are rather feeble gestures towards speech acts, with Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* barely articulate, whereas the crowd of Africans in *Heart of Darkness* are denied speech acts. This is the background that Ngugi constructs to wrap up his argument on the necessity of fortifying African cultures and writing in African languages. At this point, I will not delve into the divergent arguments by the two essayists for and against writing in African languages – this will come later. At this point, I am concerned with the comparative evaluation of how the two essayists consciously make stylistic choices to realise aesthetic effects.

In the cited essay above, Ngugi asserts himself using the first person subjective voice, which is augmented by the possessive determiner *my*, to reinforce the fact that the issues raised are coming from the point of view of the writer himself. He employs the

present simple tense of the verb *am* to deepen my awareness of his presence. I am also drawn to his concession that there are epistemological limitations to using only four texts to arrive at a conclusion. The phrase *of course* is both an indirect reference to the audience/reader, and an assertion that what he is saying is simply shared common knowledge. Although Ngugi is trying to create a conversational implicature, it is easier to observe that his efforts are rather weak. The author offers another concession by informing the reader that he is only demonstrating a tendency, an inclination, a predilection, not an evaluation of the four texts.

Unlike Achebe, Ngugi's rhetorical structure in the referred essay avoids overt endearment with the reader: the essayist assumes that his reader is present and eager, therefore, he does not invest robustly in cultivating politeness, a collective implicature and a communicative pact. I am, therefore, invited to read a noticeable contrast between the two essayists on account of their engagement with the reader. Given that one of the defining hallmarks of the personal essay is the principle of persuasion, I am persuaded to surmise that Achebe's engagement with the reader is more persuasive than Ngugi's. This finding leads me to suggest that one of the defining features of the personal essay by Ngugi is his limited engagement with the reader; this is unlike Achebe, who goes the whole length to recognise, invite and placate his reader. Considering that the conventional personal essay is traditionally constructed as a persuasive genre, Ngugi's style seems to either demonstrate irreverence to the tradition, and therefore, a continuation of his resistance against the codes of imperialism; or it is simply a marker of an essayist who has not sufficiently mastered the art of the genre.

In the essay, "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration" (*The Education* 107-123), Achebe addresses the same issue of the image of Africans in colonialist literature. He scans selected African and European literatures and contrasts their

celebration of humanity. From this scan, Achebe reasons that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* paints black people in negative tropes unlike Shakespeare's hero, Caliban, in *The Tempest*, who displays remarkable agency. In this same essay, Achebe deploys stylistic juxtaposition to allow the reader to visualise the positive rendition of African humanity in Hausa oral narrative and the *Mbari* celebration by the Igbo community. Moving from traditional arts, he singles out the writer Cheikh Hamidou Kane as one whose works could possibly constitute a suitable answer to European artistic distortion of African identities. The essay's disparate strands are held together by Achebe's first person voice. He deploys an anecdote to disclose that one of the leading dailies in Dublin had branded him as the man who invented African literature, to which he responds in these self-deprecation terms: "Now before anyone runs away with the idea that my disavowal was due to modesty on my part, I should declare right way that I am actually not a very modest man" (108).

The reader is implicated in the implied conversation pact in which Achebe takes liberty to caution his audience against making premature assumptions about him. He empties himself to the audience, constructing the image of a writer who is transparent. The first person pronoun *I*, the intensive *myself*, and the possessive *my,* signal an intensely personal rendition. The essayist splits his persona into two: the first person voice that conveys the message, and the recipient of his message (the reader/audience). The essayist plants some aspects of his own thought in the reader – that Achebe is the man who invented African literature and that his disavowal of the said claim was a mark of modesty. Against this, Achebe then lines up a rebuttal: that he is not actually a very modest man. To this end, I take note of the stylistic juxtaposition, polite concession, and rebuttal as evident rhetorical choices in Achebe's argument. Through these rhetorical strategies, Achebe not only achieves essayistic humility but also endears himself to the reader; he cuts the image of a credible communicator whose message is acceptable. This is an effective

argumentative strategy in the writing of good personal essays. Achebe's stylistic artistry persuades the reader to move along with his argument. The literariness of his essays can be easily identified with his effective artistic persuasion of the reader. On persuasiveness as an aesthetic feature that defines the literariness of the personal essay, it is noticeable that Achebe is more endearing to the reader than Ngugi.

Based on the emerging evidence above, two tentative trajectories or pathways of writing the personal essay have emerged: on the one hand, Achebe's style foregrounds a strong personal intensity and a conscious effort at persuading the reader; Ngugi's style, on the other hand, is less intense and applies persuasion sparingly. This finding, therefore, leads me to suggest that the literariness of the personal essays of NgugI am largely underpinned by both moderate self-revelation and modest persuasiveness; those of Achebe are not only persuasive but are also prominent in self-revelation.

In another comparative reading of the essayistic persona, and still within the thematic frame of the troubled relationship between Africa and its erstwhile colonisers, Achebe offers fresh insights in the essay "Where Angels Fear to Tread" (*Morning Yet*). Through cataloguing and description, he audits the three different shades of European critics who have engaged with African literature. In their ranks, he lists the outright hostile angry critic who applauds the colonisation of Africa; the bemused critic who is rather ignorant but takes to wry celebration of Africa; and the tough uncompromising critic who is keen to apply stringent rules on African Literature. Achebe's essayistic voice is clearly manifest: "Only the other day, I wrote in an unworthy access of anger that Europeans can never understand us and that they ought to shut their traps. I now want to look at the matter again as coolly as possible and try to reach a few tentative conclusions" (46). This essay parades some of the defining characteristics of the personal essay as a genre. It is intensely personal, it projects Achebe's personal whims, and it weighs different options available

before he offers suggestions for a possible way forward. From the above citation, I see Achebe as a writer who opts to treat the subject of criticism of African literature from a nuanced viewpoint, having vacated his earlier strident position on the matter. He had earlier asserted that Europeans can never understand Africans. In his latter perspective, Achebe considers the earlier viewpoint to have been rather totalising and indiscriminate. By admitting his weakness in judgment, he gives this essay a unique quality.

Achebe's first person voice who speaks to the audience in the above extract presents a heterogenous multifocal personality: one side of him goes ballistic against European critics, while the other reflects on the matter before passing a tentative judgement. The essayist also concedes his fault and goes ahead to belittle some aspects of his own character, further revealing himself to the reader. I am persuaded that Achebe is aiming at objectivity, at presenting himself as a credible communicator, and at persuading the reader to accept his standpoint. It is also worth emphasising that Achebe's message about the postcolonial condition is intertwined with his style of presentation, his strategies of argumentation. From the ensuing analysis, I am convinced that the concession structure is another defining feature of the literariness of Achebe's essays.

The preceding evaluation of Achebe's essayistic persona compares favourably with the essayistic focalisation that Ngugi deploys in response to the postcolonial situation associated with imperial linguistic domination. In the essay, "Imperialism of Language: English, a Language for the World?" (*Moving* 30-41), Ngugi's persona offers an anecdote: "You may think that I am talking about some attitudes to the English language that prevailed thirty years ago. Well, you are very wrong. Recently on my way to Berlin, I chanced to open the London *Evening Standard* of 7 October 1988" (34). From this anecdotal extract, I notice that Ngugi has foregrounded the reader-centred conversational implicature. I am also drawn to Ngugi's double repetition of the second person subjective

pronoun *you* as he tries to win the reader's empathy. The writer appears to 'bribe' the reader by dropping hints of politeness, signalled by the invitational direct address to the reader as a second person: "You may think that..." The cited utterance is supposedly located in the mind of the reader, who has already been acknowledged and welcomed to the conversation. This stylistic interiorisation allows Ngugi to politely access the reader's mind. However, soon after and by way of a polite rejoinder, the essayist refutes the above concession using these words: "Well, you are very wrong." The manifest style here is that of structural contrast by juxtaposition, pitting the reader and the essayist in an implied rhetorical conversation. From the ensuing analysis, I take the view that, like Achebe, Ngugi has succeeded in constructing politeness between himself and the reader. I do here concede that this is one of the rare essays in Ngugi's oeuvre that employs the conventional aesthetics of the genre: concession, a rambling style, politeness, conversational implicature, and the anecdote.

The above comparative engagement with the literariness of the essayistic voices of Ngugi and Achebe reveals that they have both invested in a conversational style of writing. A contrastive reading of the same selected essays, however, points out that Ngugi's cultivation of a friendly conversational pact with the audience is not quite as solid as Achebe's. Between them, Achebe comes across as a more relaxed, comfortable figure who is communicating effortlessly; the literariness of Ngugi's essays is defined by a rather hurried and forceful style. It is my opinion that these varying styles of writing also mirror the different shades of literariness that define their respective essays.

4.3 Literariness and the appropriation of the African Archive

In this section, I make a comparative exploration into how indigenous African art forms have influenced the literariness of the essays of Ngugi and Achebe. The two writers operate in hybridised or transnational artistic environments in which their own identities

and those of the societies they write about are "Othered." Writing from the margins and gazing back at the empire requires artistic recuperation – a fall back to indigenous forms. This is the basis upon which I have analysed their borrowing, adaptation and appropriation of selected indigenous art forms. From a stylistic standpoint, I am also investigating the level of intensification in this appropriation of traditional genres. Beltrama, in "Bridging the Gap: Intensifiers Between Semantic and Social Meaning, defines intensification as lexical and non-lexical. At the lexical level, Beltrama avers that "linguistic devices boost the meaning of a property upwards from an assumed norm" (7). And at the non-lexical level, "aesthetic boosting is derived from the effect of larger linguistic units on a scalar dimension. It [non-lexical intensification] relies on semantic relationships in the text, such as cohesion, irony, metaphor and symbolism, among others" (7). This comparative section investigates not only the contrastive appropriation of traditional forms by Achebe and Ngugi but also the contribution of intensification to the literariness of the essays.

4.3.1 The Literariness of Appropriated Fables

This sub-section undertakes a comparative analysis of the borrowing, adaptation and appropriation of fables by Ngugi and Achebe and the resultant effect on the literariness of the essays. My starting point is Achebe's appropriation of Igbo story-telling tradition in the essay, "*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology" (*Morning Yet*). The writer embeds the story of the little bird, *nza*, who is said to have violated the cardinal rule of not confronting his *chi,* and the outcome was a swift destructive revenge by the deity on the transgressor. This fable underscores not just the finiteness of human abilities, but the inseparability of the spiritual and the physical worlds. The essay itself reflects on the place of human beings in the fluid pantheon of Igbo gods. It unveils the condition of human life as both dependent on the gods and as free agents, a delicate navigation of a treacherous landscape that needs circumspection and humility. In my stylistic reading of this essay, I am persuaded that the

embedded fable serves several purposes: it enriches the essay with a new indigenous epistemological perspective, it widens the reader's imagination by constructing a metaphorical relationship between *nza*, the bird, and fallen human nature, and it adds aesthetic freshness to the essay. And from a postcolonial perspective, I see a new artistic horizon emerging from this essay: one that contests the dominant Western way of writing personal essays, one that inserts and amplifies the "Othered" voices and cultures into the genre, and one that reimagines new hybrid identities in the postcolony. My application of both stylistics and postcolonial perspectives on this essay yields aesthetic freshness and points towards another defining characteristic of literariness of Achebe's personal essays.

Achebe plucks another fable from the Hausa community and integrates it into the essay, "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration" (*The Education*). In this fable, a snake who owned a horse but did not have horse-riding skills, and a toad who had such skills but did not own a horse, have an encounter. Having demonstrated his expertise in horse riding, the toad only gets a sarcastic dress-down by the horse's owner, the snake, who chides him for not having a horse of his own in spite of having quality horse-riding skills. In my view, this precolonial tale is an indictment of the traditional aristocrats who deride the poor; it also casts a metaphorical shadow on the postcolonial material inequalities, perhaps sounding a warning about the potential of such dysfunctional material hierarchies in stoking intra-communal hatred and disharmony. I am also inclined to interpret this Hausa fable as Achebe's use of the underdog, the "Other," to prick the conscience of those who are materially endowed, who parade their wealth ostentatiously, and who deride the poor. In postcolonial Nigeria as well as in much of Africa, such conspicuous materialism and obscene capitalistic consumption is associated with the corrupt ruling elite. Therefore, I read the Achebe's deployment of fable as an artistic effort towards social justice for all human beings, their social stature notwithstanding. The

foregoing analysis leads me to infer that Achebe's fable is an artistic strategy that displaces the European perspective from the centre while creating space for the flourish of African world views. In postcolonial terms, this stylistic feat performs a recuperative act of elevating an African world view from marginality. Within the foregoing frame of interpretation, I am of the opinion that the literariness of this personal essay by Achebe is as much a function of style as of theme.

In the essay, "Language and the Destiny of Man" (*Hopes*), Achebe uses a myth to relay the origin of death among the Igbo. In this myth, the dog fails to convey the correct message bearing a prayer for immortality by human beings to the supreme Igbo deity, Chuku. This prayer was intercepted by the ever devious, opportunistic and vengeful toad. Running to Chuku well ahead of the careless dog, toad instead substituted the prayer for human immortality with a tragic one for human mortality. Even after realising the calamitous deceit, Chuku could not countermand his grant of human mortality, hence, the inevitability of death as part of the human condition (*Hopes* 136). This myth underlines the fact that Igbo ancestors already knew the dangers of defiling language. Since language also defines a people's identity and culture, its destruction would consequently mean the destruction of the people themselves.

I take note of the fact that dog and toad are animal characters outside the realm of humanity, but their acts of omission and commission have wreaked the painful mortality on human beings. In my view, these animals are symbolic representations of the imperial linguistic dominance over the indigenous languages in the postcolony. The human mortality resulting from the distorted communication by toad might symbolise the deaths of African languages, cultures and identities due to colonial and imperial rapacity. I hasten to note here that this is another case in which the essayist resorts to a fable to underscore a vital message. It appears to me that the fable is a tool to counter the destructive European

linguistic influences on African languages, cultures and identities. Critically, this myth of the origin of death also challenges the Christian position on the same subject. I have a feeling that by foregrounding this Igbo myth on the origin of mortality, Achebe is attempting to displace the ascendancy and hallowed status of Christianity among his people. The inseparable mix of style and theme in the above text also underlines the literariness of this essay. The findings above suggest that one of the key defining features of literariness of the personal essays of Achebe is their adaptation of African forms into a Western genre. The result is a hybrid aesthetic category, an artistic polyglot that traverses African and European boundaries. In its transgression, it enacts yearning for new meanings and new identities. In this way, it is not only refreshing but empowering.

This brings me to Soraya Roberts's article "The Personal Essay Isn't Dead. It's Just No Longer White" (*The Walrus*), in which she writes about the place of women of colour in the personal essay as a genre. Roberts asserts that the personal essay is no longer white, by which she appears to suggest its shift away from the straight jacket of European conventions, those traditional literary standards, largely defined by white authors. Roberts celebrates the innovation that women of colour and other minorities have brought onto the genre, thereby expanding its length, breadth and depth. She notes that the personal essay has been adopted and fashioned by women writers of colour and although they did not own the genre, what matters is that the genre imparts on them a power and an authority they have for so long been denied. She argues that:

> … this genre was the one place non-white points of view seemed allowed to exist. For the most part, many of us have been trained to invoke the voices of dead white writers. Now, we have the opportunity to recognize and examine our own voices through our lens at our own individual paces. (*The Walrus*)

I am inclined to borrow this logic by Roberts in reading Achebe's essays as adaptations of the Western personal essay. I find that the literariness of Achebe's essays is actually the aesthetic freshness derived from his creative syncretism of the Western genre with selected African forms. This cross-border, cross-genre conflation expands the boundaries of the conventional essay. In other words, the literariness of Achebe's essays is defined, in part, by the expanded horizons that the essayist has wrought.

While Achebe is elaborate and intense in his artistic integration of the Igbo archive in his essays, Ngugi is rather sparing in borrowing, appropriating and adapting indigenous African art forms. In this study, I have noted that unlike Achebe, very few of Ngugi's essays engage with African artistic categories. There is one essay, "Matigari & the Dreams of One East Africa" (*Moving the Centre*), which illustrates Ngugi's selective borrowing of some aspects of African indigenous story-telling. The organising principle in this essay is the brutal fate that befell Ngugi's novel, *Matigari*, which had been banned by the government of President Daniel arap Moi in February 1987. The reasons for this action were that the main character, Matigari, was travelling around the country asking tough questions relating to social justice, in a country where lies were rewarded and truth punished. That Moi ordered police to arrest the imaginary character/protagonist, Matigari, comes out as a sword of sarcasm, exposing a regime known for its brutal criminality than for promoting justice and human development.

Ngugi's essay is long-winding: it begins with his arrival in Zanzibar in 1987 at the invitation of his friends just months after the novel had been taken off the shelves; it takes the reader back to his childhood days in Limuru and his first encounter with the Ramadhani feast; it shares reminiscences on his detention without trial in 1978; it takes the audience through the history of fishing in Zanzibar; it uses a fishing expedition with his hosts and other guests to imaginatively create an inclusive map of East Africa without

artificial boundaries; it recalls Ngugi's days at Makarere University; it reveals his feelings as Tanzania gained independence under first president, Julius Nyerere; it traces the history of various attempts and failures to create a United East Africa; it celebrates the uniting role of Kiswahili in East Africa; it laments the circumstances leading to his forced exile in 1982; and it expresses optimism that Matigari shall return to Kenya, both as an idea and as a text.

The writer ends the long essay by describing the return journey from the fishing expedition, which event has afforded him space to reflect on himself and share these reflections with the reader. I should hasten to add here that in this rendition, Ngugi is not following the formula of a typical traditional African narrative, which contains an opening formula, riddling, salutation of the audience, integration of songs and proverbs, involvement of the audience in question and answer repartee, drawing of lessons learned and a concluding formula. Rather, he borrows some aspects of the traditional African narrative such as the stringing together of multiple sub-plots, incorporation of songs and engaging the reader/audience. Overall, the essayist retains the main defining characteristics of the personal essay – the projection of the first person voice and the effort to persuade the reader.

In the above essay, Ngugi has taken artistic liberty to enjoin other genres into this essay. As noted earlier, this is a rare stylistic feat in Ngugi's oeuvre of personal essays. For instance, the essayist has embedded a children's song performed by the young to mimic passing trains. The song runs like this: "Nda-thii-u-ganda/ Nda-thii-u-ganda/ (I-am-go-ing-to-u-ganda/ I-am-go-ing-to-u-ganda)" (164). Ngugi also deploys another song performed by the youth in Tanzania in 1960 urging Nyerere to speed up efforts of uniting East Africa. This second song goes like this: "Tulimtuma Nyerere/Kwa Uhuru/Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika/Sisi twasaidiana (I sent Nyerere/On a mission for freedom/Kenya,

Uganda/Tanganyika/I support one another") (168). It is instructive that the songs are performed by the youth, the very ones to whom the torch is customarily handed over once the elders retire.

The first song enacts a transnational imaginary linking Kenya and Uganda, riding on a colonial creature – the railway. The emergent hybrid identity is unmistakable. The second song not only imagines transnational unity, but also creates the optimistic image of freedom from direct colonial rule. The genre-synthesis achieved by Ngugi here speaks to the multi-vocal or heteroglosia associated with the typical personal essay. The retention and foregrounding of both Gikuyu and Kiswahili versions of the foregoing songs signals the high premium that Ngugi has placed on African languages. I have noted that the writer has displaced and subordinated the English translation of the two songs by means of brackets: this is despite the fact that he is writing the essay primarily in English – a clever subversive style. The foregoing stylistic and postcolonial analysis of Ngugi's essay confirms that, like Achebe, he has domesticated the African archive. In my view, this appropriation serves the same functions for Ngugi as for Achebe – that of displacing and undermining the power of the imperial language, that of rehabilitating Africa's "Othered" religious and cultural identities, and that of reconfiguring a new hybrid identity for African communities. It is also important to note that this ensuing analysis reveals some aspects of Ngugi's artistic vision, besides pointing to the multi-generic thrust in the literariness of some of his personal essays. I made similar findings from my analysis of Achebe's adaptation of the Igbo archive. This is to say that one aspect that defines the literariness of Ngugi's essays is his adaptation of songs and some elements of the traditional narrative frame.

I will revisit Roberts claims on the uniqueness of the personal essay genre which emerges from the oppressed, marginalised and minority groups. The foregoing analysis of

Ngugi's essay reveals that the essayist has purposefully and artistically refashioned the Western essay so as to articulate resistance against imperial oppression. I hold that Ngugi achieves this through selective adherence to the European conventions governing the genre and by discarding some of the conventions that require politeness, constant persuasive engagement with the audience, and a sense of relaxed conversation. From this analysis, I am convinced that Ngugi has wrought a fresh approach to writing the personal essay, and opened new frontiers in defining its literariness. In addition, Ngugi's manipulation of the essay underscores his artistic vision: the search for a multi-vocal and heterogenous future in which all shades of perspectives, languages, cultures, and genres find space for expression.

In this sub-section, it has been revealed that one of the defining features of literariness of the essays of both Achebe and Ngugi is their appropriation of some aspects of African traditional archive. In my analysis, I have observed that the artistic integration of these indigenous forms is a conscious stylistic choice designed to displace and subvert the hegemony of English, thereby inaugurating freshness and hybridity in the personal essay as a genre. I further note that the resultant essays, by both writers, stand out as artistic polyglots: this echoes the artistic vision of the essayists – a future condition in which neither the colonised nor the colonising culture holds hegemonic sway over the other. Therefore, the literariness of these essays embeds not just the artistic form of their presentation but the message as well. This comparative sub-section also established that unlike Ngugi, Achebe comes out as a more prolific user of the African traditional forms.

4.3.2 Proverbs and Literariness

In this section, I have focused on the literariness of the appropriated proverbs. The proverb, as a traditional aesthetic category, served as a marker of wisdom and refinement in many African communities. Beginning with Achebe, I note that he has cultivated a

predilection for proverbs largely drawn from the Igbo archive, marking him out as an effective communicator, mature, well-informed and wise. In the essay "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," (*Morning Yet*), he includes the following proverb: "Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it" (94). This proverb underscores the Igbo belief system in which the individual is believed to have a personal god (*chi*) for guidance and protection, underpinning the duality of the spiritual and physical existence. From a stylistic perspective, the proverb anchors the constitutive essay in that it carries metaphorical depth: it invites the reader to make external inferences to establish what the proverb refers to as "Something" and "Something Else." In its succinctness, this proverb constructs the material human being in terms of "Something" and the invisible personal god, *chi*, as the "Something Else." There is both immanence and remoteness in the *chi*, signifying not only the *chi's* power to provide close protection over the individual human being but also the spiritual distance between the physical and the ethereal worlds. My postcolonial reading of this proverb reveals that Achebe is constructing visibility for Igbo indigenous religion, the Igbo world view and the distinct Igbo identity. This reading further allows me to draw a surmise that the essay is an indirect response to Christian religious imperialism. I hold the view that in proudly and effortlessly projecting Igbo cosmology as normal, Achebe is engaged in an act of reconstructing the disfigured cultural heritage of his community. Therefore, the appropriation of the proverb into this text adds to its unique literariness as an essay. In other words, by creatively integrating the proverb, the essayist has expanded the possibilities of language to create aesthetic freshness, to question the established centrality of Christianity and to reimagine a new future in which the indigenous Igbo cosmology is neither shunned nor ostracized.

In another essay, "Colonialist Criticism," I read this proverb: "A man who does not lick his lips, can he blame the harmattan for drying them?" (*Hopes 89*). The proverb is

metaphorically constructed to describe the effort by an individual to solve challenges in terms of "licking his lips." It also brings in the imponderable natural force of the harmattan as a twin metaphor to point at the external forces that could be potentially harmful. This stylistic interpretation highlights the fact that an individual must endeavour to solve her/his own challenges and external forces cannot be used as an excuse for individual failures.

The essay embedding this proverb is Achebe's response to what he calls the denigrating assumptions by European critics towards African literature. Achebe rejects the framing of European literature as universal and superior by colonialist criticism, which espouses an unhealthy mental frame, while also displaying limited understanding of African writing. He takes umbrage against colonialist critics for seeking to take control over creative works by Africans. Achebe juxtaposes the foregoing colonialist criticism with writings that emerge out of an African experience and out of commitment to an African destiny. Evidently, Achebe's proverb is a plea to African writers and critics to confront the reality of unfavourable and dismissive commentary on African literature by scholars wearing blinkered imperial lenses. The writer is calling on African scholars to do more for African literature because if they do not, colonialist critics are already at work dismantling the products of creative energies from the continent. I am persuaded that the metaphorical re-imagination of colonialist critics as the harmattan is a more forceful and effective strategy of warning African critics. This foregoing analysis reveals both the stylistic rendition and postcolonial thematic content in the proverb, and how its integration in the essay amplifies its literariness.

From the essay "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause" (*Morning Yet*), Achebe offers this proverb: "It is clear to me that 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 a proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat

fleeing from the flames" (78). The salient part that conveys Achebe's proverbial intent is "the absurd man who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames." The essay containing this proverb reviews the wider context and real events surrounding the Nigerian civil war. In relation to this struggle, Achebe praises those African writers who took courage and were committed to the Biafran cause, describing them as having heightened human sensitivities required of the African writer.

In my reading of this proverb, I am convinced that it has allusive power: it creates a tight semantic relationship between those timid, escapist and uncommitted African writers with the absurd man who runs from his burning house to chase after an escaping rat. By contrasting the importance of one's house and an escaping rat, the proverb equates the artistic pursuits of the uncommitted writers with absurdity and irrelevance. I hold that the proverb is a semantic intensifier, which magnifies the message of the writer. This message is the postcolonial reality facing Nigeria – a creature of crude imperial cartography, a chaotic mix of competing indigenous nations, a victim of both neocolonial economic exploitation and political corruption by the elite.

The proverb, as a compressed stylistic device, expands and deepens Achebe's indictment of the painful ravages of Nigeria's civil war, as a consequence of unforgivable British imperialism. This is what drives him to call upon fellow writers to rise up and condemn the violence. The ensuing analysis is another illustration of how style echoes meaning, of how an indigenous African art form has been adapted to explain the postcolonial condition, and of how the literariness of the analysed essay should be understood as a hybrid between the indigenous African art forms and the European genre.

Achebe's counterpart, Ngugi, is not known to apply proverbs in his essays. None of Ngugi's essays in the scope of this research carries a proverb!

In this sub-section, I have examined the contribution of fables and proverbs to the literariness of the essays of Ngugi and Achebe. My finding is that Achebe is more adept at domesticating the proverb and the fable than Ngugi. My reading confirms that unlike Ngugi, Achebe exploits these oral forms intensively. It is evident that some of Ngugi's essays wear the storytelling aura, but eschew the formulaic strictures associated with the African traditional oral narrative. I have also established that only one of Ngugi's essays draws on popular African songs - one from Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and another one from the Gikuyu community. This could suggest that the literariness of Ngugi's personal essays is not defined by his intensification of traditional African artistic forms.

4.4 The Language of African Literature: Contrastive Rhetorics

This section covers the contrastive aesthetics underlying the positions taken by Ngugi and Achebe on the status of African languages in literature. The question of language is a central theme to the foundational definition of African literature. Achebe states his position rather unambiguously in the essay "The African Writer and the English Language" (*Morning Yet*), where he contends that the languages of the erstwhile coloniser still have a role to play as the medium of communicating African literature across different linguistic groups. I read this, "I had indicated somewhat off-handedly that the national literature of Nigeria and of many other countries of Africa, is or will be, written in English" (57). Stylistically, this is a bold assertion, to justify which, Achebe embarks on building up evidence. First, through a question he poses both to his audience and to himself, Achebe seeks to establish the factors which conspired to place English in the position of national language across many parts of Africa. He then responds to this question by politely stating that the affected countries were created by the British. Achebe is also keen to draw a line between the geographical cartography of these countries

(created by the British), and the nations themselves, which predate the arbitrary establishment of colonial boundaries.

The second reason advanced by Achebe is that this colonial cartography, with all its attendant faults, did "create big political units where there were small, scattered ones before. Nigeria had hundreds of autonomous communities ranging in size … Today, it is one Country" (57). Achebe uses the catalogue style to list the big and small communities in Nigeria, giving additional weight to his claim. He also applies stylistic concession to admit his awareness that colonialism also arbitrarily divided up some ethnic communities between different imperial powers. By way of concession, too, Achebe clinches his argument in these words:

> But on the whole, it [colonialism] gave them [different Nigerian communities] a language with which to talk to one another… There are not many countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication. Therefore, those African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecs… They are by-products of the same process that made the new nation states of Africa. (*Morning Yet* 57)

The voice of the *I* persona in this essay structures the argument in favour of English using an assertion or claim, buttresses the claim with evidence, embeds a concession in recognition of alternative facts, and ends with a clincher that captures the key message Achebe is offering. I have noted that the essayist frames the identity of the African writer in cosmopolitan terms, as one who identifies with her/his difference or singularity while acknowledging her/his sameness with others. In other words, the African writer writing in English or French or Portuguese manifests "a high level of mutual respect for the rights of

others and a generalized tolerance of ethnic, cultural, political and national differences" (Buchanan *Critical Theory* 99).

Achebe uses juxtaposition to weigh the two sides to the argument on the question of which language should be used in African literature. From the side that supports African languages, Achebe cites Obi Wali's averment that African literature written in non-African languages is simply a dead-end, sterile and uncreative (*Morning Yet* 60). To counter this view, Achebe celebrates as inspirational, the exciting use of African imagery and metaphor in the poetry of Christopher Okigbo and John Pepper Clark, which is written in English. To convince the reader, the essayist constructs an argument here laced with questions and answers. In the first instance, it is Achebe asking the reader: *"Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?"* Then he responds: *"certainly yes."* Then it is the turn of the audience to ask Achebe: *"Can he [African writer] ever learn to use it* [English language] *like a native speaker?"* To which Achebe responds: *"I should say, I hope not*" (*Morning Yet* 61). I note that Achebe has italicized the conversation between the *I* persona and the audience. The italicized portion of the essay falls within the borders of autistic dialogue style, an imagined repartee between the essayist and his audience, even though the two parties are spatially apart. It is clear that the essayist has foregrounded the conversation – probably for emphasis. I have also observed that there is a turn-taking, claim/rebuttal structure in this debate, which allows the analyst to see both sides of the argument. The overall conversational style in the essay projects Achebe as an objective thinker, whose balanced advocacy for the use of foreign languages in Africa literature, is likely to find wider acceptance.

This argument is further strengthened by Achebe's resolve to continue writing in a suitably altered English that carries the weight of its new African surroundings. This is how he puts it: "The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to

many different kinds of use… But for me there is no choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it" (*Morning Yet* 61). This is another use of bold assertion, a rhetorical device that is pegged on evidence and sound judgment.

Achebe pursues this ideology on language in the essay "Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature" (*The Education*), where he comes out strongly to assert that those African writers using African languages are like people entrapped in ethnic literature, with the attendant serious challenge of limited audience. He reiterates his commitment to the appropriation of English to clothe his Igbo idiom, unlike Ngugi who frames the matter in Manichean categories of either African or European (97). This view is contained in an essay "Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature" (*The Education* 96 – 106), in which Achebe takes on Ngugi in a rather no-holds-barred fashion.

The structure of Achebe's argument is essayistic, fluid. He claims that the title of his essay, "Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature," is indeed a mischievous rendering of Ngugi's collection of essays *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. From the outset, Achebe frames this essay as a rebuttal against Ngugi's ideological position on language. So, it follows the rhetorical structure of juxtaposition. To set the tone for the argument, the author takes the reader through two anecdotes that define the essay – the 1962 Makerere Conference on African Literature and the decision by Heinemann Publishers to launch the African Writers Series that same year. The two events prompt Achebe to ask both himself and the reader:

> What was African literature?… This question is created by the anomaly of Africans writing in European languages… When people say to you, "Europeans write in European languages; why don't Africans write in African languages?" they are indulging in perhaps well-meaning but quite ignorant and meaningless comparison. (*The Education* 99)

There is noticeable autistic dialogue between the essayist and the reader, addressed by the second person pronoun you. The essayist is the *I* persona holding the argument together as the rhetor/arguer. The essayist makes an assertion that:

> I write in English. English is a world language. But I do *not* write in English *because* it is a world language… One characteristic of Nigeria is that it transacts a considerable portion of its daily business in the English language. As long as Nigeria wishes to exist as a nation, it has no choice in the foreseeable future but to hold its more than two hundred component nationalities together through an alien language, English. (*The Education* 101)

Achebe lays emphasis on his decision to write in English by stylistically negating any perceived notion that he might have been influenced by the commanding status of this language in the world. The graphological presentation of the adverb *not* and the subordinating conjunction *because* in italics re-emphasise the weight and solidity of Achebe's declared decision. The evidence Achebe adduces here for his decision is that English is the language that cuts across all Nigeria. Similarly, he takes umbrage at Obi Wali for failing to live up to personal example by following through with his own exhortation of African writers to write in African languages.

Achebe further consolidates his argument for English by pointing at the errors in Ngugi's advocacy for African languages. He asserts that Ngugi has made a factual error by "filing the totally untenable report that imperialists imposed the English language on the patriotic peasants of Kenya as recently as 1952! What about the inconvenient fact that already in the 1920s and 1930s, the Kikuyu Independent schools … ***taught in English*** [Achebe's italics] instead of vernacular" (*The Education* 101). It is evident from this citation that Achebe has a dim view of Ngugi's ideology on the language of African literature. While Achebe holds himself together as a scholar who makes effort to balance

between the pleasant and unpleasant facts in every situation, he sees Ngugi as one who is single-minded: he structures the question of the language of African literature in the terms of a brutal struggle between the imperialist tradition and the resistance tradition. This is why Achebe does not want Ngugi to get away with the fatal re-writing of the history of English in Kenya. Indeed, Achebe corrects this error using bold italics in the phrase "***taught in English"*** in the preceding citation.

To clinch this argument, Achebe posits a counter view to that of Ngugi: "It would seem, then, that the culprit in Africa's language difficulties was not imperialism, as Ngugi would have us believe, but the linguistic pluralism of modern African states." (*The Education* 106). By juxtaposition, this ending to the essay introduces new information, that the imperialists are not necessarily to blame for the challenges encountered in defining the language of African literature. Instead, this ending to the essay points fingers at the internal ethno-linguistic diversity in Africa as a possible reason for the admissibility of European languages as carriers of African literature.

The English in which Achebe communicates has been refashioned anew to produce fresh settings, new images and new idiom. This appropriation of English marks Achebe's language as a linguistic hybrid. In these terms, the new English he has created conjures new artistic imaginaries (hybrids) as well as a hybrid personality of Achebe himself. This study perceives Achebe's essays as artistic productions that effortlessly saddle the two traditions, Igbo (African) and European (English), marking the writer out as one of those who ably craft a new artistic vision for African writers. This artistic vision revolves around the careful syncretism of the local with the foreign, while aware of the potential of the latter to overrun the former. I am of the view that this fluidity defines the literariness of Achebe's personal essays – it is a transgressive aesthetic that expands the boundaries of the traditional European genre.

It is worth refreshing that the preceding argument by Achebe is a direct response to Ngugi's argument on the same issue in *Decolonising the Mind.* In this collection of essays, Ngugi blames the Berlin Conference that partitioned Africa into separate imperial enclaves, for the present linguistic challenges of the continent. He observes: "Unfortunately writers who should have been mapping paths out of that linguistic encirclement of their continent also came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of Europe: English-speaking, French-speaking, or Portuguese-speaking" (*Decolonising the Mind* 5*)*. Here, Ngugi is pointing at the possible transgressive bout that the foreign languages have unleashed on African languages, cultures and African identities.

But Ngugi also concedes that these imperial languages, culpable as they are, had a unifying force on disparate African communities. Citing Sedar Senghor and Ezekiel Mphahlele, the essayist states that: "In some instances, these European languages were seen as having a capacity to unite African people against divisive tendencies inherent in the multiplicity of African languages within the same geographic state" (*Decolonising the Mind* 7).

To this end, I am compelled to note certain similarities between the two essayists: through juxtaposition, they both acknowledge the domineering power of the imperial languages; they are aware of the capacity of English, French and Portuguese languages to unify and create a wider communication platform for many African communities; and they have both expressed support for African literature written in indigenous languages by such writers like Chief Fagunwa (Yoruba) and Shaban Robert (Kiswahili).

Their ideological differences, however, emerge in the practical choices they make with regard to the choice of language for their artistic works. I have shown in the previous section that as a postcolonial writer, Achebe has embraced English as a practical solution

to the challenge posed by linguistic plurality in the postcolony. But he goes ahead to remake this English: he has arrested the linguistic tool of the coloniser and re-fashioned it to articulate the concerns of his Igbo people, Nigeria and Africa. The kind of subtle resistance Achebe is enacting in his works can be explained in terms of hybridity and cosmopolitanism. This resistant conviviality also defines the literary aesthetics of his personal essays.

Ngugi's ideological split from Achebe is seen in his averment that the imperial language is contaminated; that the best way to resist linguistic imperialism is by writing in African languages and allowing the translation of such works into other languages, including those of the imperialists. Ngugi uses formal satire to express his indignation with Achebe's ideological position. He blames Achebe for openly accepting with gratitude the flawed logic that European languages were "the unsolicited gifts that had come to my rescue" (*Decolonising the Mind* 7). Further, he derides Achebe by pointing out the supposed weakness in Achebe's adoption of English as a medium of his creative writing: "See the paradox: the possibility of using mother-tongues provokes a tone of levity in phrases like 'a dreadful betrayal' and 'a guilty feeling'; but that of foreign languages produces a categorical positive embrace" (*Decolonising the Mind* 7). Ngugi is using a loose paratactic sentence structure to tackle Achebe. I note that "See the paradox" is the main clause of the sentence and it is deliberately set apart from its trailing constituents by the graphological marker of a full colon (:). Stylistically, Ngugi appears to subordinate Achebe's position by relegating it to the dependent segment of the sentence. This amplifies Ngugi's message by elevating it, by giving it more weight, by foregrounding it – at the expense of Achebe's claims.

Going back to what Achebe wrote, and which is the subject of Ngugi's response, I get the feeling that Ngugi might have deliberately misread Achebe. I would reproduce the

citation from Achebe here for illustration: “Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else’s? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it” (*Morning Yet* 62). These are the actual words that Achebe wrote in the essay “The African Writer and the English Language” in 1964 (*Morning Yet* 55-64). It is clear that Achebe is using the fluid style associated with the personal essay, which allows an essayist to wander from one thought to another, while drawing connections, identifying gaps, making discoveries, learning from these discoveries, and exposing himself to the reader. The ebb and flow of Achebe’s thoughts invites the reader to perceive or access the writer’s inner thoughts, how his mind works and how he arrives at the decisions he makes. To the percipient reader of the personal essay, the flow of the essay is as important as the message it conveys.

It might have escaped Ngugi’s analytical mind that Achebe has used the coordinating conjunction ‘*But*’ to contrast this burden of guilt and the dreadful betrayal he feels for abandoning his mother tongue for English, and his decision to adapt this imperial language as his medium of writing. This stylistic construction of juxtaposition allows Achebe to come out as a writer who deeply reflects on issues before he makes decisions; and his decision to write in English is justified in the eyes of the reader because the essayist took trouble to pour his soul out.

The same style of essayistic argumentation is unmistakable in the “Preface” to *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, which was published in 1974, ten years after Achebe’s declared adoption of English. In this referred preface, which Ngugi is quarrelling with, Achebe writes:

> On re-reading one or two of the earlier pieces I have felt uneasy in places. For example the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in my literature

> leaves me more cold now than it did when I first spoke about it in the auditorium of the University of Ghana… And yet I am unable to see a significantly different or a more emotionally comfortable resolution of that problem. (*Morning Yet* xiv)

In his attack on Achebe, Ngugi seems not to have taken into account that the former was writing essayistically, that is, weighing formidably warring views, while allowing the reader to participate in this rather difficult journey of working towards a favourable decision. Ngugi seems to be averse to Achebe's burden of making a choice between mother tongues and English. Ngugi appears estranged from the aesthetics of Achebe's artistic efforts to carry the reader along on his exploratory journey: evidently, Achebe sets up a juxtaposition between opposed views, makes a concession, and finally uses rebuttal to state his opinion. This stylistic construction, in my view, is another key marker of the literariness of Achebe's typical personal essay – and this sets his essays apart from Ngugi's.

In a short essay titled "A Statement," Ngugi makes this declaration: "This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way" (*Decolonising the Mind* xiv). This defiant statement published in 1986 appears to be directed not only at English as a world language but also at its apologists like Achebe. Prior to this declaration, Ngugi makes a concession that some of his works, especially essays, will be written in English. It reads like a typical concession but it is quickly weakened by the fact that although Ngugi has written many works in Gikuyu language and translated them into English, there is no evidence that he has written any creative work in Kiswahili – a language he celebrates in the foregoing statement.

In the essay, "Introduction" (*Decolonising the Mind* 1-3), Ngugi frames the challenges facing African languages in Manichean terms – the oppressive imperialist

forces versus the resistance by the exploited workers, peasants and indigenous languages. In Ngugi's perception, capitalism succeeds in controlling the (neo)colonised people largely on account of "the cultural bomb, which is designed to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage, in their unity and in their capacities" (3). Against these overarching and domineering forces, Ngugi juxtaposes the struggle by the oppressed categories:

> These [oppressed] classes have to confront this threat with the higher and more creative culture of resolute struggle… They have to speak the united language of struggle contained in each of their languages. They must discover their various tongues to sing the song: 'A people united can never be defeated.' (*Decolonising the Mind* 3)

Unlike Achebe whose rhetorical strategies of argumentation are inclined towards balancing the different sides of this issue, Ngugi's style overtly, and from the outset, leans on the side of the oppressed communities. He sounds like a judge who has already made up his mind on a case right at the outset, long before the contending parties complete their submissions. This style of argumentation runs through much of Ngugi's oeuvre of personal essays; it easily stands out as a defining characteristic of the literariness of his essays.

While Achebe calmly argues his position on the language of African literature, Ngugi's engagement with this question is rather emphatic and repetitive. Ngugi's advocacy for writing in indigenous languages is either the main issue or the subsidiary subject in nearly all his personal essays I have studied in this research. I have read this much in "New Frontiers of Knowledge" (*Secure*); in "Imperialism of Language: English, a Language for the World?"; in "The Role of the Scholar in Development of African Literatures"; in "From the Corridors of Silence: The Exile Writes Back"; in "Life, Literature & a Longing for Home"; in "Matigari & the Dreams of One East Africa"

(*Moving*); in "The Neo-Colonial Emergent in African Cinema" (*In the Name*); and as much in "Contempt and Self-Contempt: How the Word 'Tribe' Obscures the Reality of African Politics" (*Secure the Base*). Ngugi has pursued this same theme in his formal and critical essays published in *Writers in Politics*; *Penpoints, Gunpoints & Dreams*; *Barrel of a Pen*; *Homecoming*; *Decolonising the Mind*; *Re-Membering Africa*; and *Globalectics*.

In this foregoing section, I have analysed both the literary aesthetics and the ideological polarity in the contending arguments for or against writing literature in African languages by Ngugi and Achebe, respectively. The underlying thread in this analysis is the aesthetic strategies deployed by the two writers to articulate their message and how they reflect on the literariness of the essays. Ngugi's resistance against the European imperial languages is framed in direct unalloyed declarations; he comes across as an essayist with a fixed mind, who is keen to navigate the reader through selective evidence to buttress his ideological position, sometimes erring on facts. There is a marked dearth of essayistic nuance and artistic irony in most of his essays. On his part, Achebe constructs a position on African literature that is diametrically opposed to Ngugi's. Achebe's style is accommodative, and this explains his adoption and adaptation of English, an imperial language, as his medium. Unlike Ngugi, his tone is nuanced and he goes to great lengths to unveil the inner workings of his mind to the reader. His decisions do not bear the hallmarks of a fixed mind; rather, he works the reader through a journey of discovery that eventually builds up to the denouement, where he points towards his opinion. He cultivates an atmosphere of honesty and objectivity. The contrastive style of engagement with the question of language of African literature also mirrors the respective literariness of their personal essays.

There are some notable similarities in the way both writers deploy stylistic juxtaposition and parallelism while weighing different argumentative positions; they spice

up their essays with anecdotes and digressions; they demonstrate a knack for accumulating evidence to convince the reader; and by way of concession, they acknowledge those African writers who write in African languages. Like Achebe, Ngugi also makes an appeal on African writers to follow him in his unique strand of resistance. It is their contrastive style of staging their arguments that speaks to the unique literariness of their essays: Achebe's accommodative, balanced and calm style undermines the imperial linguistic hegemony of English in a more subtle way than Ngugi's rather abrasive, belligerent, combative and strident style of advocacy for writing in Gikuyu and other African languages.

4.5 Stridency and Politeness

In this section, I have analysed the cultivation of stylistic stridency and politeness as markers of literariness in the essays of Ngugi and Achebe. I have examined the extent to which the essayists either adopt the known defining markers of polite conversation or indulge in stylistic stridency. The term stridency is characterised "by harsh, insistent, and discordant voice that commands attention in a loud obtrusive way. Its other synonyms range from intense volume, undue vehemence, clamorous demands, intensive and aggressive loudness" (Merriam-Webster). This term is commonly used to refer to speech acts or discourses that "sound harsh or unpleasant and to describe the tone of expressing opinions or criticism in a very forceful and often annoying way" (Merriam-Webster). Since the term 'stridency' is wide, this study restricts itself to those attributes of this term that closely relate to the essays of Ngugi and Achebe. It is equally important to note that stridency sits on the polar opposite of politeness, which has the attributes of courteous conduct, tact, deference, and being accustomed to refined cultural interests. Politeness is also synonymous with civility, genteel mannerisms, graceful behaviour and being well-bred" (Merriam-Webster).

In the essay "New Frontiers of Knowledge: The Challenge of the Pan-Africanist Social Scientist" (*Secure*), Ngugi declares: "We cannot afford to be intellectual outsiders in our own land. We must reconnect with the buried alluvium of African memory" (76). It is notable that the two sentences cited here from the nuclear paragraph manifest a rather urgent and impatient tone. Similarly, the collective implicature seen in the collective pronoun *We* is not clearly displaying politeness, or offering a concession or communicating self-irony. Ngugi seems to be literally commanding the African reader to vacate what Ngugi considers as links to the Western world in order to engage meaningfully with the African cultural and linguistic base. This stridency is a recurring marker of Ngugi's essayistic style and increasingly a defining tone of the literariness of his essays.

In the essay "The South Korean People's Struggle" (*Writers*), Ngugi writes, "Long live the Korean peoples' struggle! Long live the struggle of all the peasants and workers in the world!"(122). The above citation marks a tangible high voltage ending to an otherwise well-constructed, easy flowing personal essay, which is embellished with anecdotes, allusions, self-assertions, and some traces of concessions. The phrase *Long live* is repeated thrice – this lexical intensification invites the reader to visualize the essayist as rather agitated in his call for a revolution. Ngugi deploys a higher pitch, sounds triumphant and chants a war cry. The fact that the cited sentences are exclamatory suggests an excited and aggressive tone. There is a marked absence of the temperate and measured tone in Ngugi's revolutionary message. In my view, it might appear as if such a revolutionary message requires this mode of presentation, this strand of the personal essay, and this form of literariness adopted by Ngugi.

There is more evidence of stridency in Ngugi's essay "Splendour in Squalor" (*Secure*), whose nuclear stress reads: "Pull down the grand global palace erected on global

poverty and build the foundations of a new earth. End the global philosophy of splendour in squalor" (85). The verb *Pull* is a command, packing an imperious tone and a sense of urgency, and it is directed at the United Nations and other duty bearers to rise up to their responsibility and duty to protect and preserve the human rights and freedoms of the vulnerable and the weak. Ngugi stridently commands those vested with responsibility to act swiftly to dismantle the hierarchies constructed on material, cultural and linguistic inequalities, which he blames for catalysing the violence between innocent poor people following the disputed general elections of 2007 in Kenya. The other verb *End* is also an imperative command, which places a mandate on the responsible actors to ensure that there is no class structure dividing the rich and the poor. Ngugi's angry and strident tone can be understood within the context of the notably avoidable macabre events that nearly tore Kenya apart at the end of 2007and early 2008. This stridency also defines the literariness of many of Ngugi's personal essays.

Whereas stridency is one of the markers of the literariness of Ngugi's essays, Achebe's are imbued with nuance and are projected in measured tones. This is despite the fact that the two essayists write about equally troubling events in their respective countries, regions, Africa and the world. In the essay "Where the Problem Lies" (*The Trouble*), I see these stylistic performatives: "we have lost the twentieth century… are we bent on seeing that our children also lose the twenty-first?"; and "History will pass terrible judgment on us, pronounce anathema on my name when I have accomplished my betrayal" (*The Trouble* 3). In the first case, Achebe is pleading with the elite; in the second case, he conveys an ominous vision of the future. It comes out that there is a collective implicature in the collective pronouns *we* and *us*. This is designed to prick the readers' conscience, not to command us. Achebe's tone is angry but he tries to express himself in a somewhat

measured tone. This is a key defining feature of literariness that runs through the majority of his essays.

Achebe's *I* persona is relatively distinct from Ngugi's especially in the way the former uses his essayistic voice to engage the reader. In the essay "Impediments to Dialogue Between the North and South" *(Hopes),* Achebe writes: "Don't get me wrong. I do not lump all these characters together … in order to dismiss them with the same wave of the hand" (25). The essayist explicitly recognises the reader in the auxiliary verb *'Don't',* which also embeds an imperative commanding thrust – signalling both polite and strident tones. This brief analysis points to the fact that there is a notable effort on the part of Achebe to blunt the sharp edges of his style so as to achieve some measured tone. His style is, therefore, not as strident as Ngugi's. Therefore, the literariness of this essay is defined more by the measured tone than by stridency.

There is also a marked contrast with Ngugi's tone in the essay, "My Home Under Imperial Fire" (*Home*), where Achebe writes: "Saying this the way I said it may well leave my reader with the impression that I became a sad and disillusioned old man" (34). It stands out that the essayist is keen on using the possessive 'my' in reference to the reader. With this simple adjective, the essayist offers a polite gesture of friendship to his audience, which implicitly prepares the ground for possible concurrence of the two parties over the key message of the essay. The essayist takes the reader on an exploratory journey that discovers the power of the story, which, in turn, justifies Achebe's decision to reconstruct the sullied mage of Africa.

In this section, I have examined stridency and politeness as defining characteristics of the literariness of the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe. The foregoing analysis reveals that while Ngugi's essays are largely identified with stridency, Achebe's are more inclined towards politeness and nuance. It has also emerged that stridency is not

necessarily a defect in essayistic writing; instead, it is a stylistic resource that Ngugi draws upon to address difficult and challenging issues. Overall, the analysis illustrates that stridency and politeness mirror the differences in the literariness of their respective essays.

4.6 Anecdotes, Juxtaposition and Cataloguing

In this section, I have analysed the literariness of juxtaposition, stylistic cataloguing and anecdotes in the essays of Ngugi and Achebe. The two writers have used these devices to expand the possibilities of language, as well as to stretch and create new meanings. This section is comparative in the sense that most of its findings are based on points of convergence or similarities between the essays of the two writers.

My reading reveals that both writers are enamoured of stylistic cataloguing, a rhetorical strategy that intensifies their messages by adding stridency and urgency to the essayistic tone. This is evident in Ngugi's essay, "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom," (*Moving*), in which the essayist takes liberty to offer the reader an elaborate list of those parts of the world with demonstrable traditions of resistance literature against foreign domination. Ngugi uses sentence fragments to present the list of the areas of the world from where he has traced resistance literature. The rhetorical repetition of these fragments adds more emphasis to his assertion that resistance literature is gaining traction around the world. The same stylistic cataloguing is seen in Achebe's essay "Where the Problem Lies" (*The Trouble*), under which the essayist lists the corrupt channels through which Nigeria has lost its national revenue. Achebe, like Ngugi, deploys sentence fragments, creating a loose paratactic sentence structure, which stylistically enacts the image of Nigeria out of joint, without leadership, and in need of true leadership. The message in the catalogue structures used by both writers is revolutionary in that it enacts an artistic fracture of the painful realities on the ground, allowing the writer to vicariously claim a higher vision. For Ngugi, stylistic cataloguing adumbrates a revolution against Western influence in the

literatures of the Global South; while in the illustrated Achebe's essay, this device allows the writer to see beyond the declivities of failed political and military leadership in Nigeria. Within the context of this research, stylistic cataloguing contributes to the realisation of literary aesthetics and thematic depth of essays. Cataloguing, therefore, is a stylistic choice that illustrates the artistic capabilities of the two essayists to project messages in multiple layers, while also revealing that part of the literariness of these essays is their capacity to convey embedded meanings.

Rhetorical juxtaposition is another aesthetic strategy that allows the reader to enjoy the literariness of the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe. The two essayists have constructed the cultural contest between Africa and its erstwhile colonisers in Manichean terms. They both abhor the distortion of African identities and artistic cultures by the imperial influences, lasting into the present day. They have also taken umbrage to the continued economic exploitation of the periphery by the metropole. While Ngugi envisages a Marxist revolution to correct the resultant economic imbalances, Achebe has sparingly addressed himself to this revolutionary theme. In this analysis, it is foregrounded that juxtaposition plays a critical role of fracturing and deconstructing the seemingly impenetrable imperial and postcolonial codes.

There is evidence of stylistic juxtapositioning in Ngugi's essay "Contempt and Self-Contempt: How the Word 'Tribe' Obscures the Reality of African Politics" (*Secure*). Reading this essay, I take note of the juxtaposition between the European definition of African communities as 'tribes' and the converse naming of equivalent or even numerically smaller Europeans communities as 'nations.' The underlying logic here is that of the power of definition, the power of inferiorizing the "Other", the power of denigrating the "Other", which creates two centres – one of dominance and the other of exclusion. To counter this "Othering" of African communities, Ngugi's essay (re)conceptualizes and

delineates Africa along the lines of socio-economic tribes that are differentiated on account of their unequal material relations, which then results in two economic tribes – the tribe that controls socio-economic power and that which is marginalised by or from it. Through this juxtaposition, Ngugi displaces the European derogative term 'tribe' and (re)assigns it a new meaning. The literariness of juxtaposition, therefore, resides in its function as an artistic device for deconstructing negative assumptions and for empowering the disempowered.

Stylistic juxtaposition is also found in Achebe's essay "False Image of My selves," (*The Trouble*). The writer draws my attention to two contrasting speech acts, one by the former West Germany Chancellor, Schmidt, and the other by the former President of Nigeria, Obasanjo. While the former West Germany Chancellor talks in self-deprecating terms about the power of his country, former President Obasanjo pompously asserts an imaginary super power status for Nigeria. The material realities of the two countries tell a different story: the true image of Nigeria is one of bad governance, corruption and other social ills; while the image of the then West Germany is associated with technological advancement, good governance and economic development of its citizens. The irony in this juxtaposition is that whereas a leader of an advanced European country finds refuge in humility, his counterpart from a less developed African state hogs the limelight in pretentious and non-existent greatness. The other irony emerges from the stark reality that Germany, a former colonial master and a country that caused two destructive world wars, should be the one with which Nigeria is contrasted. The weight of this juxtaposition might also reside in the suggestion that the essayist was playing with the stark reality facing Nigeria – the country has sunk so low that it was perhaps heading to the abyss, if a revolutionary approach to its leadership is not found. The reader is invited to the deeper meaning of this essay by the juxtaposition used by Achebe. To summarise, juxtaposition is

another device underpinning the literariness of the personal essays of both Ngugi and Achebe. Its literariness is found in its capacity to imperceptibly enact resistance, appropriation and empowerment by allowing the surface and inner meanings to subsist in a text.

Anecdotes are critical artistic devices deployed by both Ngugi and Achebe in their arguments. The two writers creatively structure anecdotes as short stories relaying on personal experiences, with a view to expanding the reader's imagination, while also solidifying their credibility as writers. The first illustration of anecdote is with reference to Ngugi's essay "Imperialism of Language: English, a Language for the World?" (*Moving*). The writer, through an anecdote, draws the reader's attention to the dominance of English language as a symbol of imperial power. He recalls his journey to Berlin and a chance encounter with a newspaper article. In the said piece, the then British Education Secretary Baker was on a visit to the then Soviet Union and was reported to have been amazed on learning that the English language was being spoken in that country and that the Russians associated English with progress. With this anecdote, Ngugi sets the tone for his lament against the cultural-linguistic asphyxiation that English has inflicted on other languages. The anecdote also creates a platform for Ngugi to metaphorically expose the use of English outside Britain as a weapon for economic imperialism and to pillory the denigration of African identities. The essayist artfully deploys this anecdote because of the power of its multiple signification. It bears remembering that at the core of Ngugi's revolutionary message is the question of language imperialism, hence, he artistically exposes for condemnation, its deleterious impact on (neo)colonised societies. If Ngugi had argued his case against the imperial outreach of English without the anecdote, I doubt that this essay would have had the kind of aesthetic appeal it possesses. The literariness of the

anecdote as an artistic device resides in its imperceptible capacity to generate freshness, expand the horizons of perception, and deepen meaning.

Like Ngugi, Achebe exploits anecdotes in his essays for artistic purposes. In the essay "The Empire Fights Back" (*Home),* he captures Elspeth Huxley's account of Amos Tutuola's first novel, *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and reveals a series of unsavoury remarks attributed to Huxley. The anecdote discloses Huxley's assertion that *The Palm Wine Drinkard* is not a novel but a queer folk tale; that it is a book obsessed with death and dreadful spirits; that it is replete with macabre humour and grotesque imagery; and that it reflects the epitome of the African mind and African art, which cannot attain Western levels of artistic refinement.

In the preceding anecdote, Achebe casts the writings of this white settler as typical of the colonialist literature and artistic thought. He rebuts Huxley by contrasting his troublesome views with those of fairly nuanced and more balanced Western writers such as Dylan Thomas. The anecdote is a site under which Achebe enacts a battle of stories between Huxley, an agent of imperialism, on the one hand, and the resistance and liberation tradition, on the other, represented by Achebe and other level-minded scholars from Europe. Achebe comments himself and his message to the reader as refreshing, well-informed and credible on account of the anecdote. It is also one of those stylistic devices that set Achebe apart as a unique essayist. To this end, both Ngugi and Achebe use anecdotes in their essayistic arguments, which are largely geared towards the socio-cultural and economic liberation of Africa from (neo)imperial domination.

In this section, I have analysed the literariness of selected stylistic choices made by Achebe and Ngugi in their essays. These devices are juxtaposition, cataloguing and anecdotes. The analysed aesthetic devices carry the message of resistance against imperial domination, as well as the reconstruction and empowerment of African communities. The

literariness of these devices resides in their subtlety, their power to embed multi-layered meanings, and their capacity to communicate critical messages indirectly. This is why imperial codes are aesthetically fractured imperceptibly using juxtaposition and cataloguing. The first person voice is used as an organising force that holds the essay as a self-contained communicative unit capable of confronting the postcolonial realities. Finally, anecdotes stretch the limited boundaries of the essay by integrating freshness and new evidence to strengthen the mission of the essayists. Therefore, this research understands that literariness is an aesthetic force that stretches the possibilities of meaning in the essays.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made a contrastive and comparative analysis of the literariness in the essays of Ngugi and Achebe. I have framed literariness as the artistic manipulation of language to realise aesthetic effects and to expand the horizons of meaning. I have examined how the two writers creatively stretch the possibilities of the English language, compelling the reader to visualise the world in fresh terms, thereby, creating new meanings or undermining the existing ones. I have organically examined both the stylistic and thematic levels of artistic re-imagination or representation of the postcolonial condition. At the stylistic level, I have explored the voice of the *I* persona, the strategies of argumentation, the rhetorical structure of the essays, anecdotes, fables, irony, cataloguing, proverbs, concessions, the art of polite gesture, stridency, and the collective conversational implicature.

One of the glaring gaps in these essays is the apparent reluctance of the essayists to use as their canvas, the African oral narrative or traditional oratory. These traditional performances have some features that are comparable to the Western style personal essay. These include the distinctive voice of the *I* persona, the presentation of an argument

persuasively, polite engagement with the audience, self-revelation (on the part of the court oratory); as well as salutations to the audience, opening and closing formulae, integration of multiple genres, question and answer repartee with the audience, irony, drawing of lessons learned and riddling (on the part of the oral narrative). This gap is glaring because the two essayists are avowedly enacting resistance against imperialism, as well as the reconstruction and empowerment of their communities. In my view, the most appropriate template for their essays would have been these traditional African artistic forms. Instead, Ngugi and Achebe chose an eclectic approach by cherry-picking a few traditional forms to illustrate their essays.

At the thematic tier, I have carried out a comparative study of the construction of resistance by the two essayists, their appropriation of imperial cultures, their exploitation of metaphors of connection to the metropole, and their projection of an ambivalent complex nature in relation to the imperial relations. Therefore, I have interpreted literariness as a product of the synergy between the stylistics theory and selected postcolonial conceptual frameworks. This points me towards the artistic vision of the essayists: I look at their decolonising oeuvre as one that provides liberationist knowledge to question and replace the hegemony of Western knowledge systems imposed on Africa. I read their essays as text that critically examine the silencing and exclusion of subalterns in global knowledge production, pedagogy and policy. As noted by Toyin Falola, "global power is concentrated in the global north where Eurocentrism and white supremacy validate the monopoly of knowledge and its centrality and universality. Therefore, African perspectives continue to be marginalized or excluded in research, creating the problem of misrepresentation of the continent" (*Decolonizing African Studies – Knowledge Production, Agency, And Voice* ix). I have examined how the essays of Ngugi and Achebe have responded to this challenge, including the urgent need to eliminate the vestiges of

colonialism in the academy and research. Towards this end, I am persuaded to locate the artistic vision of Ngugi and Achebe within the realm of African futurism, defined by Falola as "the advanced stage of decolonisation involving the application of "traditional" (indigenous) instruments of articulation and cohesion such as Afro-spirituality, myths, folklore, and indigenous techno-scientific innovations, deployed in their capacity to drive, harness, and actualize future possibilities" (612). This African futurism, with Africa as its base, is a syncretism between African archives, the European essayistic template, and the European linguistic vehicle.

One of the literary characteristic of the personal essay is its rambling style, its predisposition to self-irony and politeness (prominently displayed by Achebe) and its deliberate effort to cultivate a communicative pact with the reader. My evaluation has revealed that although Ngugi presents a strong essayistic first person narrative voice, his self-irony, cultivation of a communicative pact with, and essayistic concessions to, the reader – are not well developed. Unlike Achebe, Ngugi sparingly asserts himself prominently and elaborately in the voice of the *I* persona voice. He also comes across as a writer who is not keen to indulge himself in serious self-revelatory impressionism across the broad spectrum of his essays. Self-revelation and personal assertion are artistic devices that are used by essayists to persuade the reader. Therefore, the finding that Achebe is more adept than Ngugi at using these persuasive conventions signals me to suggest that the literariness of Achebe's personal essays is underpinned by the predominance of persuasive codes.

I have noted that in some essays, Ngugi's narrative persona sharply contrasts with Achebe's. Whereas the latter invests artistic energies in polite gestures towards the reader, Ngugi often assumes that he has a captive audience to which he simply conveys the message. From this finding, it is apparent that most of Ngugi's essays tend to incline

themselves towards stridency and urgency. Therefore, Ngugi's works take on the general conventional form of the European personal essay but he artfully modifies the inner architecture so as to suit the urgency of his message, the message of revolution and resistance against economic, socio-cultural and linguistic domination by the West. This brings me to the issue of the kind of literariness associated with Ngugi's style of argumentation: I should say here that the literariness of Ngugi's essays is one that pulsates with stridency and urgency.

My evaluation of anecdotes and metaphors has revealed that both essayists deploy them as rhetorical devices. I have established that Ngugi and Achebe use anecdotes centrifugally and with an extended metaphorical strength, widening the reader's vision, while extending the epistemological horizon to embrace other works, which either share or contrast with the instant message. Besides anecdotes, the essayists employ juxtaposition to weigh different options and multiple sides of the same idea before arriving at informed perspectives. Juxtaposition is a veritable resource for fracturing imperial power codes, for destabilising received meanings/identities, and for empowering the 'Othered.' Another literary device used by both essayists is stylistic cataloguing, which plays aesthetic functions, illuminates the essayists' intellectual depth and solidity, while also reinforcing and intensifying messages. These findings draw me towards reading literariness as the representation of the postcolonial reality as multi-layered, fluid and unstable.

This chapter has analysed the literariness of the personal essays of Achebe and Ngugi comparatively by pointing out the areas of convergence and divergence. It has been noted that one of the defining characteristics of literariness of Ngugi's essays is his expansion of the artistic scope of conventional essay to embrace intensified stridency and urgency. This is partly accounted for by the resistance and revolutionary message he is conveying against Western cultural and economic imperialism. Another unique

characteristic of literariness in his essays is the modification of the inner logic of the personal essay: the net effect is that the typical personal essay by Ngugi de-emphasises conventional politeness, self-irony, concession structure, and the relaxed leisurely approach to issues. Instead, its tone sounds preachy and impatient. One way of reading Ngugi's essays is to appreciate his expansion of the essay tradition by allowing it to carry the painful weight a writer bears in a traumatized postcolonial society. This preachy, impatient, strident and urgent tone that defines the literariness of Ngugi's essays can also be a weakness: it transgresses some of the traditional conventions of politeness, self-irony, self-revelation, concession and effortlessness associated with the genre. Overall, Ngugi's essays are deliberately meant to convey the urgent tasks that he feels need to be carried out – resistance, appropriation and reconstruction. In my view, this projected function of the personal essay also doubles up as Ngugi's artistic vision.

Another observation that has come out of this chapter is that unlike Ngugi, Achebe borrows more from the Western conventions of the personal essay. He is polite, strives to connect with the reader, strikes a relaxed tone, articulates himself in measured tones, plays self-irony on himself, and makes efforts to weigh varied perspectives. There are, however, a few exceptions such as the notable absence of self-irony in his strident denunciation of European colonial writers whom he feels hold Africa in derogatory terms. I should add that Achebe's concept of English language defines his approach to the personal essay as a genre – and its literariness. He has embraced English as his medium of communication in much the same way that he has done the personal essay as a genre: both are foreign, but he domesticates them to convey his message. Achebe's domestication of the conventional Western personal essay markedly differs from Ngugi's: whereas the latter infuses urgency and revolutionary stridency as new markers of the genre, the former brings in Igbo idiom to flavour the genre. I hold the view that Ngugi and Achebe have both expanded the

boundaries of the personal essay as a genre by enriching it with their individual artistic flair. This artistic flair defines the literariness of their respective personal essays, which is unique unto each essayist.

Finally, this chapter has responded to the rather unhealthy assumption within some literary circles in the West, as seen in chapter one, that there is a remarkable paucity in the culture of writing Western-style canonical personal essays by African essayists and that whatever falls under this ambit is either didactic, polemical or simple public statements. My analysis has revealed that both writers have avoided the temptation to ape the Western conventions of writing the personal essay. Instead, they have adapted the genre to suit both their different styles of writing and their ideological positions. The literariness of their essays is a unique aesthetic, one that appropriates the Western-style personal essay, one that expands the boundaries of this genre, one that undermines some of the defining literariness of this genre, and one that introduces fresh trajectories to the art of writing the personal essay. I would adopt the position taken by Roberts and map it unto the personal essays of Achebe and Ngugi: in doing this, I hold the position that they do not have to conform to the traditional conventions of the Western-style personal essay. Instead, the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe have reworked the Western genre to articulate the painful postcolonial realities facing Africa. In the next chapter, I will consolidate all the findings from the preceding chapters and draw conclusions. I shall, ultimately, seek to confirm whether the study has achieved its stated objectives and answered the guiding questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

In Africa, the personal essay is a genre that has only received limited attention in literary criticism, unlike poetry, drama, the novel, the short story and oral literature. This has resulted in a dearth of purposeful investigation into the aesthetics of this genre as well as its contribution towards the conversation on the human condition in Africa. There is also an unhealthy assumption within some literary circles in the West that there is a remarkable paucity in the culture of writing Western-style canonical personal essays by African essayists, and that whatever falls under this ambit is either didactic, polemical or simple public statements. This comparative study responds to these epistemic challenges using the personal essays of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe, two of Africa's leading and prolific essayists.

This study has is contextualised within literary stylistics and selected strands of the postcolonial framework. At the stylistic level, I have not only examined the literariness associated with the foregrounding of the essayistic *I* persona as the organising principle in the essays, but also the literariness in the artistic appropriation of anecdotes, proverbs, fables and songs from the African archive. At the thematic level, I have evaluated the depiction of the postcolonial landscape and how the future of the postcolony is re-imagined.

I set out to examine the main stylistic choices made by Ngugi and Achebe and how they contribute to the literariness of their personal essays; to analyse the similarities and differences in their ideological positions and artistic visions in relation to the postcolonial condition; and to examine the similarities and differences in the literariness of their personal essays.

I understood the term 'literariness' not only to refer to the artistic deviation from standard use of language, but also to mean the creative rearrangement of the conventional perception of reality in order to achieve some degree of freshness – in other words, making the familiar world unfamiliar. This would, therefore, mean that literariness involves the shifting of the point of view, the creation of syntactic and semantic deformations and the emergence of fresh insights on a text and the reality represented by the text. In this study, I have evaluated the conscious deployment of stylistic choices – irony, metaphor, repetition, cataloguing, parallelism, anecdotes, allusion, juxtaposition, symbolism, story-telling, proverbs, concessions, digressions, as well as the essayistic persona's first person *I* narrative voice. I have analysed the contribution of these stylistic artefacts to the messages of the texts, including the artistic vision that the essayists are offering. I have examined how these aesthetic devices not only stand out against the background of familiar linguistic elements of the text, but also how they invite the reader to reinterpret the message. From this analysis, I have established that the stylistic choices made by the essayists offer the reader the opportunity to (re)interpret the discourse in these texts both aesthetically (by paying attention to the range of defamiliarising devices) and thematically (by exposing and commenting on the postcolonial condition in Africa).

From my analysis, I have identified the points of convergence and divergence between the Ngugi and Achebe on the issue of the essayistic *I* persona, offered insights into how the essayists self-reveal, how they make rhetorical concessions, how they liberally weave in personal whims, how they create subjective impressions, and how they indulge in self-irony. I have evaluated the polite gestures of the essayistic rhetor, the essayistic dialogism, the collective implicature, the communicative pact, and textual syncretism. I have critiqued the integration of anecdotes, allusions, digressions, juxtaposition, cross-references as well as aesthetic devices from traditional African artistic

archives into their essays. I have also examined the argumentative structure of the essays, the artistic vision of the writers and their overall contribution to the development of the genre in Africa.

I have noted that Ngugi and Achebe have deployed the personal essay in their attempts to come to terms with the big but vexatious issues of being and belonging to the postcolony. I have noted that the genre is a tool that the essayists consciously employ to enact resistance against imperial domination of African cultures, languages and economy. It has emerged from this analysis that the writers have structured their essays in such ways as to generate structural linkages between diverse cultures and people experiencing similar postcolonial pressures and anxieties around the world. I have pointed how the subversive potential of the essay has been harvested to engage with the big contemporary issues of the day – especially, the governance deficit crudely displayed by successive predatory regimes in postcolonial Africa.

This evaluation has revealed that the essayists have exhibited varying degrees of self-revelation. Achebe, for instance, does not shy away from openly projecting his anger with the British, his difficult relations with consecutive Nigerian governments, his disagreement with a wide range of European writers' account of Africa (colonial gaze), and his indignation with ordinary Nigerians who indulge in deviant behaviour. Indeed, Achebe does not hesitate to divulge his intimate personal weaknesses and occasional errors in judgement. It is evident that Achebe gets the confidence to pour out his soul after stylistically cultivating a communication pact with the reader. This 'ownership' of the reader is quite noticeable in the repeated use of the possessive pronoun *my,* which is emphasised by the nominative first person pronoun *I*; in the use of the intensive *myself;* in the artistic split of the essayistic persona into the first person *I* narrator and the audience; in the direct address to the reader using the second person pronoun *you;* in propitiating the

reader through polite ceremonies of respectful address; and in setting up a close dialogic friendship with the audience. This foregoing catalogue constitutes the defining characteristics of the literariness of Achebe's personal essays. The literariness stretches the structural, aesthetic and thematic boundaries of the genre, imbuing it with freshness and a hybrid identity that transgresses the genre's Western-style conventions.

Ngugi's essays largely foreground his first person subjective *I*, which is augmented by the possessive determiner *my*, to reinforce the fact that the issues raised are coming from the point of view of the writer himself. He also deploys the present simple tense of the verb *am* to deepen the reader's awareness of his presence. I am drawn to his concession that there are epistemological limitations to his conclusions, one of the very few that the reader encounters in Ngugi's essays. When I read this phrase, *of course*, in one of his essay, I am drawn to its rhetorical function of indirectly referring to the reader as well as to shared common knowledge. Ngugi's conversational implicature with the reader is rather weak, even though he makes fairly noticeable attempts at enticing the reader through conceding some of his personal limitations. It is, therefore, worth noting that his essays do not expressly, deliberately and consistently demonstrate the rhetor's consciousness of the reader. Unlike Achebe's construction of an active and vibrant audience, Ngugi creates a rather passive audience, which is wholesomely receptive; therefore, the essayist feels no compulsion to robustly invest in politeness, collective implicature and the conscious cultivation of a communicative pact with his reader. Again, the preceding analysis reveals the key features in Ngugi's style of writing, which in turn define the literariness of his essays.

Comparatively, both essayists have cultivated a conversational style with the reader. However, a close reading of Ngugi's essays shows that his friendship with his reader, and his attempt at creating a conversational pact, are not very prominent.

Conversely, Achebe allows the reader to see through him by confessing his own personal transgressions and failings: in a way, he tries to paint an honest image of himself, an image of a writer whom the reader can trust. Between them, Achebe cuts a more relaxed, comfortable figure who is communicating effortlessly; while Ngugi sounds rather uneasy, hurried and keen to forcefully pass on his message with a sense of urgency. These differences in the persuasive strategies of Ngugi and Achebe also mirror the differences in the literariness of their essays.

I have also analysed the archival borrowing from, adoption and adaptation of, traditional African artistic forms by the two essayists. On this score, Achebe's essays borrow heavily from the Igbo oral art. His appropriation of the Igbo fables, proverbs and anecdotes is part of an artistic effort to contest the purity of the colonial language, English; in so doing, Achebe adds freshness (newness) to this foreign language, empowering it with the capacity to articulate the concerns of the 'Other.' The proverb creates a fresh centre of aesthetic appreciation, marking Achebe out as a distinguished communicator.

In Ngugi's essays, I see a wider canvas on which he either adopts or appropriates the African story-telling tradition. In one particular essay I have analysed, Ngugi embeds other genres: he embellishes the essay with a children's song as well a freedom song. The genre-synthesis the reader encounters in the referred essay speaks to the multi-vocal or heteroglosia associated with the typical personal essay. Whereas Achebe is adept at appropriating the proverb and the fable, Ngugi, instead, does the simple borrowing of the story-telling structure and weaves some African songs into the essay. This appropriation of songs performs the same role like that of the oral forms in Achebe's essays. But unlike Achebe, Ngugi's embedded forms are neither wholly contextualized within the traditional reservoir of his people nor are they widely used in his essays. It is my finding that the

above materials borrowed from African archives add artistic freshness to the essays and a unique literariness that gives them a distinct identity from the conventional Western genre.

Another aspect that I investigated in this study is the contrasting positions taken by the two essayists on the question of the language of African literature. Achebe has opted to adopt and adapt English, by refashioning it anew to articulate African concerns. This appropriation of English marks Achebe's language as a linguistic hybrid, which in turn beams back the same fluid identity on the essayist himself, perhaps a metaphor for the new hybridised future for the postcolony. Much the same can be said on the aesthetic front, where Achebe's hybridised English can easily be read as epitomizing the literariness of his essays. While Achebe has not overdramatized his advocacy for the use of European languages in African literature, Ngugi has repeated his ideological standpoint, in support of African languages, in almost all his essays. The latter holds the position that writing in African languages is the ultimate marker of liberation and freedom of all cultures that were (or are still) colonised. And he has penned many creative works in Gikuyu language – holding this out as part of his resistance, his decolonisation and his liberation. Although Ngugi's essays are not written in Gikuyu language, the intensity, stridency and urgency of his advocacy stand out as unique markers of the literariness of his essays written in English.

Although there is a noticeable tendency towards urgency, intensity and stridency by both essayists, Ngugi is particularly enamoured of this tone than Achebe. In some of Ngugi's essays, the sense of intensified urgency, impatience, and anger overtakes the relaxed, leisurely essayistic tone and rhythm customarily habitual onto the traditional Western personal essay. In most of Ngugi's essays, markers of polite conversation between the essayist and the reader somewhat recede to the background; and in those instances where Ngugi applies the collective implicature using the pronoun *we*, the codes

of elegant politeness, concession and self-irony are muted. The essayist appears to be commanding and instructing the reader rather than working towards persuasion. A comparable tone of anger is also manifest in some of Achebe's essays, in which he is either responding to the racist representation of Africa or upbraiding the decadent post-independence leadership. Overall, it is evident that Ngugi's essayistic rhetoric is marked with more stridency and urgency than Achebe's – and this is one of the features that draw my attention to the differences in the literariness of their essays.

It is also revealed that the essays of Ngugi and Achebe manifest artistic strategies of cohesion. The unifying voice of the first person narrator, allusions, cross references, self-irony, concessions to the reader, and the chosen title of the essay – serve to create a network of concentric layers that underline their semantic value. There is also the heteroglot underscoring the otherwise fragmentary nature of the essay, and both essayists are adept at exploiting this structuring device. They use the rhetorical strategy of juxtaposition, easily discernible in their construction of the cultural contest between Africa and its erstwhile colonisers in Manichean terms. Ngugi and Achebe abhor the distortion of African identities and artistic cultures by the imperial influences; this is why they have expressed their condemnation of the continued economic exploitation of the periphery by the metropole. Beyond here, Ngugi takes a turn towards admiring a Marxist revolution as the preferred means of correcting the economic imbalances in the postcolony; on his part, Achebe appears coy about addressing economic issues in such strategic ideological terms. They also deploy anecdotes and allusions artistically structured as short stories relaying personal experiences that eventually expand the reader's imagination, while also solidifying the essayists as credible and solid communicators. These rich mixture of stylistic devices lends unique literariness to the essays by projecting them as aesthetic heteroglots.

I have pointed out some weaknesses in the personal essays of Ngugi and Achebe. For instance, I have noticed that both writers exhibit some biases towards their ethno-nations. Achebe, in particular, has not hinted at the possible culpability of the Igbo people in the civil strife that gripped Nigeria between 1966 and 1970. Instead, the writer has blamed the international community and the alliance of communities from northern and western Nigeria for the woes that befell the Igbo. Similarly, Ngugi appears to shy away from explicitly naming former president Kenyatta as an accomplice in the gruesome assassination of Ngugi's own friend, Kariuki. There is, however, no such ambivalence in Ngugi's condemnation of the excesses directly associated with the regime of former president, Moi. These noticeable biases could be attributed to the conventional nature of the Western-style genre as a platform through which a writer conveys unalloyed feelings about pressing issues. But the biases might also undermine the stature of these writers as national and global intellectuals, who are expected to play above divisive schisms.

One more gap in these personal essays is that they are built on a Western-style template, which has the structural conventions elaborated in chapter one. The appropriation of the African archive by Ngugi and Achebe has been rather eclectic. This research has revealed that the essayists did not adopt traditional African narratives or oratory as templates. In my view, their avowed artistic struggle to decolonise African writings, to resist imperial influences and to empower African cultures, could have been more successful if the two essayists had used the traditional African forms as their palimpsests, their backdrop and their main templates.

Finally, my analysis reveals that the two essayists have used contrasting organising principles in their essays: by this, I mean the predominant idea(s) that form the key reference points of their writing. The first organising principle in Ngugi's essays is social-economic justice, which he envisages will be realised through a revolution by the

proletariat. His second organising principle is cultural agency to attain which he calls for the strengthening of vernacular languages. His third organising principle relates to the protection of human rights. Achebe shares Ngugi's vision on the cultivation of Africa's cultural agency; however, his point of departure on the same issue is twofold: unlike Ngugi, he has appropriated English, and dedicated himself towards building the visibility of the Igbo cosmology as enshrined in the *Mbari* tradition. On the same note, the other contrasting feature setting them apart is their attitude to Christianity. I have noted that after renouncing this foreign religion, Ngugi has not followed through with a logically ordered alternative religious programme. The second organising principle in Achebe's essays is the question of nationhood: the Biafra war of secession, and the failed leadership in Nigeria have continued to tax Achebe's mind, leading to his conclusion that Nigeria is but a child who needs to be helped to grow.

From a thematic standpoint, Ngugi and Achebe traverse two noticeable trajectories in African literature. First, in some of their essays, especially the earlier ones, both writers offer a refreshingly critical look at Africa; they celebrate African culture, heritage and history; and they project the continent's existential claim by standing up against the negative images of Africa in Western Literature. In doing this, they present Africa in a more realistic frame. This is probably the context within which I may read the genre-synthesis between a European form and eclectic selection from the African archive. While such genre-synthesis as a strategy of presenting Africa positively is well pronounced in Achebe's essays, Ngugi sparingly relies on such stylistic innovation. It is also worth mentioning that both writers claim and expand the space for Africa's humanity and celebrate the abilities of the Black race. While constructing the contrast between the "Othered" and dehumanised African character, on the one hand, and the inhumane conduct

by Europeans, on the other hand, Achebe and Ngugi have somewhat avoided the declivity of romanticising Africa.

The unromantic perception of Africa is quite evident in the second trajectory, where they engage Africa's contemporary politics. Both essayists have come out, guns blazing, to express disillusionment with the successive post-independence regimes that have perfected the art of oppression, violation of human rights, corruption, and incompetence. They have not shied away from calling out the unequal exploitative economic relationships between Africa and the West. Of particular concern to Ngugi and Achebe, is the capitalist juggernaut's structural linkages with African political and economic elite to perpetuate the neo-colonial exploitation of the poor masses. While this economic malady is Ngugi's pet topic, which he discerns in Marxist terms, Achebe's pen picks on the rampant corruption and ethnic marginalisation in the postcolony. It is, therefore, important to view these two trajectories as harmonised and not discordant: the two writers share an artistic vision of a new Africa, rooted in, and proud of, its diverse cultures and nations, and shepherded by competent leadership. This artistic vision is mirrored in the literariness of their essays, an aesthetic that is both refreshing and empowering.

The two essayists have evidently made contributions to the growth of the genre in Africa. They have adopted the traditional European personal essay in much the same way they did with the novel, short stories, drama, poetry and children's literature. They have accepted the essay as a foreign literary form, but gone ahead to innovate with it. The study has shown that the postcolonial realities have not offered any cosy spaces or luxuries for these Anglophone African writers to simply copy and paste European conventions. Instead, I have read their essays as serious investments in resistance, liberation and reconstruction both in style and theme. The traditional Western personal essay is wrestled

and domesticated by Ngugi and Achebe. The resultant essays are, therefore, fresh: they ambivalently wear the borrowed generic garb and are also energised to articulate resistance, liberation and reconstruction of postcolonial identities. It is heartening that this study reveals how the two essayists are solidly committed to experimenting with decentered, non-canonical, and decolonial frameworks and literary practices. My analysis reveals that Ngugi and Achebe have made some remarkable contributions to the writing of the personal essay in Africa. The emergent genre is both old and new, Western and African, and it is unashamedly proud to parade this hybrid identity, its literariness.

In summary, the study reveals the contrasting literariness of the essays of Ngugi and Achebe. Their essayistic aesthetic is defined by varying levels of borrowing and appropriation of African traditional literary archive, as well as their converging and diverging thematic perspectives on the postcolonial condition in Africa. Based on their contrasting rhetorical strategies, I tentatively offer the view that the two essayists have inaugurated their respective schools of writing personal essays. By syncretising stylistics and postcolonial approaches, this research has taken into account both the literary aesthetics and the thematic concerns that Ngugi and Achebe have explored in their personal essays. It is, therefore, clear to me that by engaging their works from this multi-focal perspective, this study has made a contribution to literary criticism: the literariness of the personal essays of Achebe and Ngugi is now a visible instalment on the canvass of literary scholarship.

One of the objectives of this study was to examine the main stylistic choices made by Ngugi and Achebe and how do they contribute to the literariness of their personal essays. This analysis has, indeed, revealed that the range of stylistic choices deployed by the essayists underpin the literariness of the essays. Another objective was to analyse the similarities and differences in their ideological positions and their artistic visions. In

relation to this objective, the study established that there were specific differences and similarities in their advocacy for African languages and their socio-economic vision in the postcolonies. The final objective was to examine the similarities and differences in the literariness of their personal essays. From the findings of the study, it has emerged that there is divergence and convergence in the literariness of their essays.

The evidence emerging from the foregoing claims opens up the possibilities for additional research on the personal essay in Africa. The genre could do with further investigation to establish whether it has spawned more strands: here, I suggest further systematic studies to confirm the solidity of the two emergent schools of essay-writing in Africa. Scholars might also take interest in alternative platforms that could be hosting the personal essay as well as in the kind of messages expressed through such modes. And harking back to its highly subjective voice and self-revelation, it might be helpful to carry out an investigation into why women writers in Anglophone Africa have not appropriated the space offered by this genre, yet it is coincidentally viewed as a veritable liberating platform by women of colour and other marginalised groups in North America. This study, therefore, opens up the possibility of channelling more critical and intellectual energies into this less taught and less researched genre.

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