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RESERVE (832)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL THOUGHT
IN THE WORKS OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O

by

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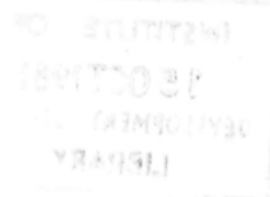
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ABSTRACT

The literature produced by Ngugi Wa Thion'go has contributed to the understanding of social, political and economic situations in Africa, and therefore to the process of development. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the development of political thought in his works, and to move towards a theoretical framework within which analysis can determine the trend and direction of African political and social thought in general.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL THOUGHT
IN THE WORKS OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O¹ *

I

This paper was originally to be entitled; "The Development of the Political Thought of Ngugi wa Thiong'o". But on a closer understanding of the matter, it appeared rather hasty to propose that a political thought could as yet be attributed to Ngugi. Political thought consists of original postulates and propositions as to the solution of fundamental problems in the organisation of society; especially as they relate to the ideology, methodology, philosophy and theory of politics. Thus, in Africa, original political thought is attributable to Leopold Sedar Senghor, Julius Nyerere, and Ahmed Sekou Toure, among others. They have proposed new ways of the organisation of society in their original theories of African Socialism. Other political thinkers on the continent, who have been mainly practising politicians,² have made a contribution by expounding on the relevance and applicability of some components of classical and neo-classical political thought to the African political environment.

Yet, there is little doubt that Ngugi now stands as a leading literary and social thinker on the continent. The purpose of this paper is to show the development of political thought in his works, especially as it parallels the development of political thought in the African environment in general. It will be shown that his thinking has followed the trend of political thought on the continent, and has at the same time contributed to the greater understanding of that trend of thought and its environment.

1. Since 1970, James Ngugi has changed his name to Ngugi wa Thiong'o. However, the name Ngugi will be used throughout this paper for ease of reference. I am grateful to Kabiru Kinyanjui for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

* This essay will be presented as a term paper in the Department of Government, University of Nairobi.

2. For a survey of these see Gideon-Cyrus Mutiso and S.W. Rohio (ed) "Readings in African Political Thought". Heinemann 1975. In this paper disagreement is expressed on their implied definition of political thought, and on their description and interpretation of the stages of Nationalism.

Another implied objective of this paper is to attempt to encourage some integration of creative literature with development studies and the social sciences. Hitherto, studies in literature have appeared predominantly in the form of literary criticism, book reviews, artistic appreciation, and so on, as much as studies in development have predominated in socio-scientific analysis around the disciplines of economics, political science and sociology. But in as far as literature and development are about society, there does not appear to be much reason why their study should remain segregated. Most creative writers, more so in Africa, select their subject-matter and themes from situations of development in their environment, which means that they too contribute to an understanding of development in their treatment of these themes. Development studies, it is proposed, should incorporate attention to literature and the arts, so as to identify their contribution to the processes of change, growth and development in society. To the extent that this proposition is acceptable, this paper could well pioneer some efforts in that direction.

II

In their introduction to "Readings In African Political Thought" Mutiso and Rohio outline the stages of nationalism as cultural, plaintive radical and ideological. That is to say, according to them, that Africans first 'started' political thought in search of a cultural personality and identity, which led to the justification, of the African culture in the eyes of the world. Having attained that goal, it then became possible to argue that since the ^{African} culture and personality was as valid as that of the coloniser, the colonised had the right to participate in the system. Hence plaintive nationalism was not seeking to change the colonial system, but to attain cultural rights such as educational opportunities and medical treatment. It was not until the Post War phenomenon of radical nationalism that nationalists started demanding Africa for the Africans; and preparing to uproot colonial imperialism. African political thought subsequent to the fulfilment of those aspirations has then been about the organisation of power and authority in the newly independent nations, and this is the stage Mutiso and Rohio refer to as that of Integral or Ideological nationalism.

This categorisation may be palatable from some points of view. But it is one-sided and incomplete in so far as it leaves out some very important theoretical and historical facts. It avoids the mention of some fundamental premises, and prefixes nationalism in a way that renders the terms fundamentally inconsistent. For example, nationalism itself is an ideology, and once that is accepted it amounts to a contradiction in terms to suggest that it develops from a stage of cultural nationalism to that of ideological nationalism. All nationalism is anti-imperialist in so far as it is "a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on the promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to these of other nations or supranational groups."³ And it is ideological in so far as it is a political belief concerning the political organisation of society and of power within that society.

Therefore cultural nationalism can be an ideology, and in fact is an ideology, which could be radical, moderate, or conservative. What results from a particular mode of nationalism then depends on what happens to that mode during the process of change, that is, during its historical development.

A concrete example of what is meant is given by the case of China before the revolution. There was a prevalent mode of nationalism. Mao Tse Tung appealed to nationalist thinking among the people, and in the same process radicalised it, thereby creating a solid socialistic state. In the same stage of history, Kai Shek appealed to nationalist thinking and moderated it, thereby creating a reactionary but cohesive state in Nationalist China. Clearly, the resultant phases in the two cases depended on the process of mobilisation of nationalism.

In Africa the stages of nationalism may well vaguely resemble those described above, but only in a rather simplistic sense. That is why, although this paper will allude to that categorisation in the discussion of Ngugi's ideas, it will not adhere closely to it. I will instead attempt to illustrate how Ngugi's ideas have developed from those ^{based} on an idealistic conception of history to those based on a materialistic conception of history; that is, from a liberal view to a socialistic view of society. In that exercise however, the repeated use of the concept of nationalism cannot be avoided, since it has been the predominant mode of thinking in the works of Ngugi and in African political thought in general.

3. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.

III

On October 20, 1976, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi,⁴ a play co-authored by Ngugi and a colleague in Nairobi's literature department, Dr. Micere Githae Mugo was staged at the Kenya National Theatre. Controversy and excitement ranged around the event. The controversy was due to friction between two main contestants at the Theatre; the conservative European elements,⁵ and a militant, emergent group of African actors and playwrights. Sometime earlier on, this controversy had actually amounted to physical confrontation, during which portraits and signatures of names in Western European theatre displayed on the wall, were smeared with paste and paint.

This confrontation reflected a collision of two cultures, the national and the foreign, which illustrates the fact that even thirteen years after Kenya's independence, national aspirations are still fighting against domination by foreign cultural interests. The struggle against this domination in Kenya - which was the embryo of the struggle against imperialism started way back in Post War World I period, and reached a peak during the years 1928-31.⁶ The beginning of the Karinga Movement manifested the height of a confrontation between the forces of Kikuyu Nationalism led by heroes like Johanna Karanja, and forces of European colonial and settler culture spearheaded by the Church of Scotland Mission. Later in 1938, the aspirations of Kikuyu cultural nationalism were strongly articulated by Jomo Kenyatta in his treatise entitled Facing Mt. Kenya.⁷ As a matter of interest, the actual issues in the cultural conflicts concerned the staging of African cultural events and rituals such as the circumcision of girls dances, cleansing ceremonies, which are akin to the staging of an African play at a settler theatre. In both instances, foreign cultural interests were aroused to anger.

4. This play is now published in Heinemann African Writers Series (1976.)

5. The Kenya National Theatre was established in 1951 to cater exclusively for foreign cultural and theatre interests. It still remains largely that, and this was the 1st African play, 13 years after independence, to be staged in it.

6. See Carl G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, "The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya", East African Publishing House 1966. Chap. 4.

7. See Jomo Kenyatta: Facing Mt. Kenya: the tribal life of the Gikuyu. London, Secker and Warburg (1938)

The excitement surrounding the play was still a deeper reflection of the need for cultural fulfilment among the people. It was about one man who had taken up the struggle for cultural independence to its militant stage. Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi Wachiuri, the ~~abandares~~ forest freedom fighter resurrected and stood on the stage, this time talking about the struggle against the imperialism of neo-colonialism one he called "against exploitation and oppression". His message was that the struggle was not over, in so far as cultural fulfilment was impossible without the total destruction of imperialism. This play, compared to his earlier works, marks the literary transition of Ngugi from a staunch cultural nationalist to a radical, Marxist critic of society.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o - formerly James Ngugi - was born on January 5, 1938, at Limuru, the son of a Muhoi. His father had four wives, but no land at all. The family lived in abject poverty, being "tenants-at-will on somebody else's land".^{3a} Young Ngugi worked in the settler plantations around Limuru for ten shillings a month, and in that way was able to help his family eke out "one meal a day - late in the evening", and to send him to school. Through toil and sweat he made entry into Alliance High School, then the best in the country. He studied at Makerere University College between 1959 and 1964 where he wrote Weep Not Child (1964), The River Between (1965) and several stories later published in a collection entitled Secret Lives (1975). His play, The Black Hermit, was produced as part of the National Celebrations in Uganda's National Theatre. He also wrote a collection of plays under the title This Time Tomorrow. Ngugi graduated in English, and obtained a scholarship for graduate studies at Leeds University, an opportunity he used to write A Grain of Wheat (1968). His political and other views are more directly expressed in a collection of essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics entitled Homecoming (1972) and in a recent discourse on Literature and Society soon to be published. Ngugi's latest published literary effort, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi (1976)^{3b} was chosen as Kenya's presentation at the 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture. His works have been

3a. Homecoming: The writer in a changing society p. 48.

3b. All of Ngugi's books are published by Heinemann, London, African Writers Series.

translated into many languages, including French, German, Hungarian, Swahili, and Russian, and have received famous awards including the Afro-Asian Prize for Literature.

In the formative years of his literary thoughts, it is said that Ngugi was influenced by D.H. Lawrence, and by Walt Whitman's concept of the brotherhood of man. It was also said that he was heavily influenced by the Holy Bible.⁹

Ngugi has been called a religious writer. But what has influenced him most, in my view, is the situation in which he grew up. His books have themes selected from the colonial situation and the period immediately preceding it; are based on settler farms where he and those close to him worked; on the lives of the peasants with whom he lived and was part of. In brief, Ngugi is influenced by the concrete situations in his background, a point which will be given its due emphasis later in the paper.

If, Ngugi has been a religious writer it has certainly been in a style different from that of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress! Nor was he a religious writer simply because he quoted the verses underlined in red in Kihika's Bible!¹⁰ Ngugi has been a religious writer in the sense and process in which he has been trying to understand himself. He himself says he tries to understand himself as an integral part of society within a given set of social reality.¹¹ This then implies the necessity of understanding one's consciousness through an understanding of ^{that of} the people in the environment. It is in that process that Ngugi lifted people from their material environment to a spiritual plane.

"Some have --- called me a religious writer. I write about people ; their fears and hopes, their loves and hates, and how the very tension in their hearts affects their daily contact with other men".¹²

Thus Ngugi saw social reality as being made up of "the emotional stream of man" in which he, as an individual, was an integral part. This, like Whitman's conception of the brotherhood of man, is at once an idealistic conception of social reality.

Ngugi's works were about conflicts stemming from man's

9. See Eddah Gachukia "The Novels of James Ngugi". mimeo.
10. In 'A Grain of Wheat'.
11. Interview.
12. Homecoming p. 31.

consciousness of himself - a part from his concrete environment, although, in contradiction as we shall see, this consciousness was a product of the concrete environment.

The conflict, for instance, between loyalty and self-awareness in Njoroge, in Weep Not Child, brings the youth to an idealistic and tragic end, and it is through ^{the} progression of individual self-consciousness in Waiyaki, in The River Between, that history is revealed to us, thus implying that the individual and his self-awareness is above all else - is even higher than history, which is immortal. This religious plane of social reality, in abstract version, is stretched even further in some instances, to the point sometimes it does not make any concrete sense. In The River Between we are told that two ridges face each other, antagonists since time immemorial, representing conflicts between mortals alive and dead of one ridge against those of the other.

It is in the exploration of the individual himself that the religious - in terms of spiritual - plane in Ngugi's works is most evident. As Gachukia says in the study quoted above.¹³ "Ngugi -- penetrates each group and sees the individual within the group, with his fears and doubts, as well as his convictions, his beliefs and his loyalties". In that premise, almost every event, every incident, and every environment in Ngugi's first three Novels were again to borrow the appropriate words of Gachukia, "testing grounds for human emotions and qualities". Thus Ngugi in his earlier times, saw the Freedom Struggle, the Emergency, and the entire colonial situation as results of mens impulses or - as Plato would call them - "appettites and elements" conflicting with each other among individuals in society. In A Grain of Wheat, to give an example, which captures the lull before independence, men pause and question themselves and those in their society weighing their deeds against their true motives. And behind those motives are found vices such as greed for land, fame, glory, power, and virtues such as commitment and conviction. These, according to Ngugi, as he then thought, are what made history!

Then, so as to arrive at a greater understanding of the individual, Ngugi had to understand the individuals environment and therefore his history. And to be certain, Ngugi displays a grass-root grasp of history in his works in a way unparalleled by other creative writers on the continent. But because of his concern with the individual as a

13 Gachukia, op.cit.

centre of existence, and his attitude that the individual modelled that existence and therefore his awareness of it, Ngugi was limited by his idealistic concept of history, through which it is impossible to understand the objective conditions of the environment.

To go back to religion, Ngugi's source is not so much the Bible as the African life in its 'purity'. Just as Prof. Mbiti argues in his pioneering work on African religion¹⁴ that women's songs during harvest were prayers of thanksgiving to God, so does Ngugi attribute sanctity to customs and beliefs in the African tradition. In that process he emerges as a staunch cultural nationalist. There is something in Ngugi's religious reverence of some traditional African ways that is akin to the contention of Blyden^{16a}, one of the intellectual pioneers of African cultural nationalism, that "Ethiopia stretches her hands unto God".

Blyden, speaking in 1839 against the domination and conceit of Anglo-Saxon culture strove to show that ^{the} culture of Africa (Ethiopia) was equally religiously ordained, and therefore not barbaric, and therefore not uncivilised!^{16b}

Speaking to a gathering of the Presbyterian Church in 1970, Ngugi proclaimed staunchly that he was not a man of God, not a Christian, not even James! In the same breath he upheld the African traditional religion to the extent of suggesting (at the fury of the Protestant Fathers) that a church Holy Communion would be acceptable to him if it served native Kikuyu liquor as the symbol of Christ's blood!¹⁷

Thus while Blyden, more than a century before, was seeking the universalisation of the African culture by showing that its ultimate source of morality was a supernatural power who was the same as God anywhere, Ngugi was saying in Nairobi that western religion could only be justified by injection into it of African cultural rituals and values. This seems to me to reflect a confusion of principles underlying Ngugi's convictions at that time, which is characteristic of a trend of thought in transition - or rather in

14. See John S. Mbiti "African Religions and Philosophy" London. Heinemann. 1969.

16a. See Edward Wilmot of Blyden: Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race; African Heritage Books.

16a. Ibid.

17. Homecoming pp. 31-36.

metamorphosis.

However, the point needs to be made that there is nothing unique in the roots of Ngugi's cultural nationalism being found in modes of thinking close to those of religion. Historically and theoretically, the connection between nationalism and religion is close. Theoretically, nationalism is a belief, or a mode of thinking, and so is religion. Both are emotive terms, in the sense that they are subjective and not objective. Culture is a way of living and thought and so is religion. Therefore, nationalism as a mode of belief, is simultaneously cultural and religious. Sometimes, as in Muslim countries the religion is the same as the culture. A most important point however, is that culture, religion, and nationalism are reflections of a prevailing stage of concrete circumstances in history.

Thus historically, religion has been a predominant reflection of the culture of a people, and vice versa. Historically too, the collision of cultures has been indicated in the conflict of religions, such as in the instance quoted above of the conflict between the Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission and the Kikuyu Independent Church. Often, this conflict is provoked by the intrusion of a foreign culture against a nationally accepted one. Thus at the advent of colonialism everywhere - and colonialism is by one definition cultural domination - imperialism was facilitated by the religion of the imperialist which invaded and opposed, and sought to destroy the local culture.

There are ample examples at various other times to illustrate the interrelationship between religion, culture and nationalism. At the peak of nationalism in Kenya, for instance, when mobilising the masses against the colonial invaders, Kenyatta taught people how to sing their political aspirations in tunes adopted from christian hymns. That showed the importance of faith in the struggle and belief in the cause for independence. The more political goals were likened to religious symbols and parables, like the longed-for independent Kenya to the Promised Land of Canaan, the more the people were gripped with enthusiasm, purpose, and confidence. Later the role of religion and belief was shown in the use and significance of the oath in the Kikuyu tradition which, according to Kenyatta,¹⁸ binds

18. Kenyatta, op.cit.

man to man, to his soil, to his ancestors, and to God. On another level the interrelationship is shown by the fact that many nationalists in the freedom struggle went back to religion as a source of inspiration and justification in their struggle much less as a source of spiritual rearmament. For example, Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi is known to have gained constant inspiration from the thinking of the Hebrew nationalists in the Old Testament.

The importance of the foregoing has been to show that predominant modes of thinking in Africa in general, and Kenya in particular, have been religious, culturalistic, and nationalist. And that these too are the modes reflected in Ngugi's literary thoughts. He started with a conception of man as a spiritual being, and because of his experience of the colonial situation, portrayed a strong culturalistic and nationalistic thinking.

But things have changed both in the nature of the literary thoughts of Ngugi, and in the trend of African political thought. To take the case of Kenya, after political independence, ideas of the previous nationalisms were shelved aside, and replaced by a material culture akin to an ideology of economic nationalism. A philosophy of socialism was proposed, but it was nothing more than licence for unbridled and disorderly acquisitiveness, institutionalised corruption and greed, and the like, leading to what could at best be described as a mediocre African capitalism. In these circumstances, there was hardly any room for the advancement of a political thought because all preoccupation was with survival acquisition.

In some other parts of Africa, whose situations are no better than those in Kenya, practising politicians struggling with their problems have come up with their "ideological stands", almost all of them under the name of African Socialism. One thing these divergent and sometimes inconsistent brands of thoughts show is that nationalism has moved to another stage. Perhaps it can now be called integral nationalism in so far as it is connected with thinking on how to integrate the newly independent nation. In this process, it has perhaps been forgotten that the prime objective of nationalism - the destruction of imperialism - has never been achieved in any quarter of the continent.

Ngugi's literary thoughts are now a reaction to this situation, particularly as it pertains in his own political environment. In that reaction we find a transition of his thoughts from what they

were - idealistic and culturalistic - to a more radical stage based on a materialist conception of social reality.

IV

I asked an acquaintance of mine the other day: "Did you go to see 'The Trial of Dedan Kimathi'?" "No!", he said emphatically; "I don't support Ngugi any longer because he is using his writing as a medium of Marxism".

Well, what would one say! In societies which uphold the principles of liberal democracy as central to the organisation of society people who stand consistently for the underdog, the underprivileged, and the oppressed are all sometimes called Marxists. Or Communists. Or even Maoists. What a joke! In many parts of Africa, it is still not impossible to appear too audacious in mentioning these terms leave alone assuming a title from one of them. There is something in the term Marxism that seems to chill the bones of these in power (and wealth) in Africa.

But to stand for the underdog and the oppressed is not the same as to be a Marxist. A Marxist, as far as I know, is someone who stands for the socialisation of the means of production as advocated by Karl Marx¹⁹ in his critical analysis of capitalist production. He believes in the liberation of the worker, in harmonisation between the individual and the state and in the liquidation of antagonistic contradictions in society. He must also understand the scientific basis of socialism and the process of its discovery from the historical development of capitalism.²⁰

Ngugi, in his first three major works, The River Between (1964), Weep Not Child (1965) and A Grain of Wheat (1968) stood consistently for the deprived and the dispossessed. But in those works he was not a Marxist. He showed a remarkable understanding of the rural peasant, up to the throb of the heart, so to speak - but he was still not a Marxist. Ngugi was concerned with the individual and his consciousness, and sometimes, like D.H. Lawrence, with "outward alliances and inner compulsions". This, to repeat again, is consistent with the

19. See Capital. Vols I, II, III.

20. See "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" by Fredrick Engels in Marx, Engels, Lenin On Historical Materialism, Progress Publishers, Moscow.

idealistic conception of reality and therefore not with Marxism.

The Marxist creative writer in Africa - as a point of comparison - has been Alex la Guma. In his books A Walk in the Night being the best example²¹, la Guma produces peoples ideas and character, that is their consciousness, from their concrete conditions of living. In that way, he indicates one of the central points in Marxian social theory:

"The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness".²²

The first three major works of Ngugi, the three novels and the plays, have reflected the reverse of that postulation. In these writings, ~~it~~ is the consciousness of men that determines their existence. That is why Ngugi gave too much emphasis to the individual, his convictions, beliefs, and emotions. Furthermore he implied that these are what make history. That is idealism.

Ngugi was an idealist until The Trial of Dedan Kimathi. In this work he is more of a Marxist than an idealist. He resurrects Dedan Kimathi, the Abberdare guerrilla strategist who was hanged in 1956 by Her Majesty's Colonial Government, to come and evaluate the independence he and his people fought for. And he does so in Marxian terms.

Incidentally, it ought to be mentioned in passing that it appears apparent that heroes of the people are being resurrected all over Africa. Once while travelling in West Africa in 1972, I met a Ghanaian fellow student and asked him, "Brother, is it true that you used to sing about Kwame when you were kids?" "Yes it is", he answered. "Every day before going in to class we paraded up and sang three times; Osajejo Never Die, Osajejo Never Die, Osajejo Never Die!" "Well, he is dead", I said. The young Ghanaian looked at me with long drawn eyes and finally solemnly said, "No, Osajejo Never Die". And truth to tell, there was right then talk of Osajejo's statue going up

21. He has also written "In the Fog of the Seasons End", and "Stone Country", all published by Heinemann, London. African Writers Series.

22. The basic dynamic of History from Marx's "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy."

in Accra, there was the formation of the All Africa Trade Unions Unity, and in schools, parliaments, conferences, and in the U.N. General Assembly, Africans have long begun openly to complain of the pangs of neo-colonialism. Osajejo is resurrected and alive, though not in person but in ideas. Now there are voices all over that Calbral never die, Lumumba never die, Fanon never die ---

Ngugi and Mugo are now saying explicitly "Kimathi never die".²³ What is all this resurrection of heroes about? It is prophesised in history! At times when the people face an adversary, they look for heroes around themselves to lead them in the struggle. If they do not find any, they turn to history and resurrect them. That is what Black Americans have been doing. In Africa, the adversary is imperialism, and when those who are supposed to be the heroes of today have joined hands with it, the people have no recourse but to turn to the past and seek inspiration from those who lived and died fighting imperialism.

But the hero whom Ngugi and Mugo resurrect in the play is no longer the Aberdare-forest militant nationalist fighting for independence from colonialism, but a staunch Marxist socialist attacking imperialism at its economic base. That Ngugi is now a Marxist is amply evident in the play particularly in the interpretation of the law.²⁴

JUDGE: There is only one law, one justice.

KIMATHI: Two laws. Two justices. One law and one justice protects the man of property, the man of wealth, the foreign exploiter. Another law, another justice, silences the poor, the hungry _____

(Jubilance and excitement among the Africans. Fury in the faces of settlers. Tension) p. 25-26.

Here, law is being seen as a class weapon and instrument. Marxists defined law as a system of judicial standards expressing the will of the ruling class and protected by the coercive power of the state²⁵. In this play, Kimathi is pointing at law as a class instrument, an instrument

23. Preface to 'The Trial'.

24. I am grateful to Willy Mutunga, Lecturer in Commercial Law, University of Nairobi for a discussion on this point.

25. See Marx & Engels: The Philosophy of Law.

In the same way, writers, like politicians, derive their thinking from material conditions. At particular times in the different stages of history, they become media of certain ideas reflecting the economic structure of that historical circumstance. That means that writers much as individual talent is important, do not create as they wish, but according to what is impressed on them by the prevailing material circumstances.

To illustrate; the ideas of Ngugi/the development of production ^{reflect} the phase of monopoly in a relations in Kenya, /capital/ colonial system of exploitation and extraction and the advanced stage of monopoly finance capital to neo-colonialism. Ngugi's literary thoughts have been produced by these situations in particular as they relate to his own political environment.

How, in fact, did the transformation of Ngugi's thoughts come about? An article written by him in tribute to the late J.M. Kariuki gives a glimpse of how Ngugi became aware of the transition in his political thinking, especially regarding the position he had now discarded:

"My colonial university education at Makerere had blinded me to the true nature of colonialism and imperialism. It had turned me into a parrot and an animated puppet mouthing out phrases prepared for me in European text books".²⁶

That kind of self-awareness, to be sure, did not come out of the blue. Again, to be sure, Ngugi did not change from an idealist to a radical, Marxist critic of society by accident, nor by having visited the Soviet Union. Or even because of the Afro-Asian Prize! On the contrary, it was the hey-day of neo-colonialism as it related to his own situation that forced him to keep thinking;

"Why should the poor die why should women loose their husbands, and sons and daughters only to see Kenya's wealth, the product of their own sweat and blood, go into the hands of a small class of haves?"²⁷

Ngugi thought about that question time and time and came to the conclusion that the answer does not lie "in the emotional stream of man". but in the objective conditions now prevailing. He therefore set himself to understanding those objective conditions.

As has been pointed out elsewhere,²⁸ the search for a systematic explanation of social processes and social structure often leads to Marx. So did it with Ngugi. He now finds Marxism a source of inspiration in his creative thoughts.

26. See the Weekly Review, March 24, 1975.

27. Ibid.

28. See Elisabeth Isichei "African Patterns of Thought" The African Review VI, No.2 Sept. 1971 p. 153.

VI

In conclusion, it has to be said that while Ngugi has offered no new philosophy or political thought, he has shown a development which could lead to new realms of original thought. We have seen that his latest views of the state, class, law, and imperialism are Marxist. He retains the concept of the brotherhood of man, which he has now transformed into the solidarity of the oppressed, starting with the unity of oppressed black races or what he calls 'unity of the black experience and the necessity of unity in the Black World'.²⁹ Thus while a Marxist, Ngugi is still going back to cultural roots. While his thoughts continue to be reactions to concrete situations in history we hope that out of the process of their development will emerge an original thought pertaining to the betterment of society and its polity.

29. Homecoming, Author's note. Also introduction to George Laming on his recent visit to Kenya, published in UMMA.

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