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Maina wa Mũtonya
Pwani University, Kilifi County, Kenya

Language as a Liberation Aesthetic: Ngũgĩ's Use of Gĩkũyũ in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* [*Wizard of the Crow*] and Other Works

Abstract: This paper examined the aesthetics and politics of writing African literature in local vernaculars as opposed to writing in what proponents of this discourse have termed as colonial languages, like English and French, amongst others. The focus of this article is on the writings of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the most vocal critic of 'imperial languages', and also an ardent advocate for African languages as well as a practitioner of his vernacular language, where most of his published fictional works are in his native Gĩkũyũ language of Kenya. This paper then critically examines Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's application of the Gĩkũyũ language in his novel *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* (2006), translated as *Wizard of the Crow,* and his other works in the language. This paper inevitably engages with the writer's stance on the use of vernaculars in increasingly globalizing cultures.

Keywords: Gĩkũyũ language; decolonising; exile; cultural identity; liberation aesthetics.

Introduction

A striking feature in all his fictional works written in prison and exile is that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has been involved in the process of recreating or imagining the space that we can call home. For Ngũgĩ, imagining home is achieved by writing in his vernacular language, Gĩkũyũ. The language has been a way of recreating the space that is home to him, that is Kenya, a home that has been so treacherous to him.

Choosing to write in Gĩkũyũ, Ngũgĩ is involved in the politics and poetics of the representations of the concept of home, and to a wider perspective, the nation. This paper problematizes Ngũgĩ's choice and use of the language and the complexities that arise from this action, especially where his fiction has been written while he has been in exile. The main argument here is that for the writer in exile, whether enforced or self-exile, choosing to write in Gĩkũyũ but while embracing global citizenship, becomes an interesting research inquiry.

Thoughts of home are ever-present in an exiled writer's mind. While languishing in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison in Kenya, Ngũgĩ quickly resolved to write a novel but realized the enormity of the project, given the lack of creative impetus in

*Author contact information: mutonya@gmail.com

prison. In his prison memoirs *Detained*, he recalls his despair and near panic in longing for contact with his subject.

> A writer needs people around him. He needs live struggles of active life […] For me, in writing a novel, I love to hear the voices of the people work, forging metal in a factory […] I need the vibrant voices of beautiful women: their touch, their sighs, their tears, their laughter. I like the presence of children prancing about, fighting, laughing, and crying. I need life to write about life.[1]

However, an extended stay away from home turns the idea of home into a dream since one is obviously out of touch with the place where s/he came from. Ngũgĩ has not escaped from these heady, nostalgic passions, thoughts, and dreams of the homeland.

One way in which Ngũgĩ captures this nostalgia is in his characters, Gatuĩria and Matigari, in his first two novels in Gĩkũyũ language, *Caitani Mũtharabainĩ* (*Devil on the Cross*) and *Matigari* respectively. But it is a longing for re-defining the space they call home that these characters also point out to the contradictions, in a way that 'not being home is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety... the repression of differences even within oneself.[2]

In his collection of essays, Ngũgĩ states:

> If you take the more inclusive notion of the people as the working majority, or as all the people in the nation where equality is numerical rather than functional, then it is clear that there can be no democracy where a whole people have been denied the use of their languages, where they have been turned strangers in their own country.[3]

He further sees the link between the issue of language inequalities to the inequalities between Africa and the West. In the same vein, Ngũgĩ sees intellectuals who are supposed to be interpreters of societies as slaves of Western imperialism because they use the language of the oppressor.

Ngũgĩ has little sympathy for intellectuals who have not mastered their local languages. His description of Gatuĩria in *Devil on the Cross* as the representative of the modern-day intellectual shows this problematic situation:

> Gatuĩria spoke Gĩkũyũ like many educated people in Kenya; people who stutter like babies when speaking their national languages but conduct fluent conversations in foreign languages.[4]

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[1] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981), 8–9.

[2] Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 197.

[3] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 92.

[4] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1982), 56.

This, however, is not a blanket condemnation of Gatuiria, because as we are told, he was "at least aware that the slavery of the language is the slavery of the mind".[5] Outside the realm of his fictional oeuvres, Ngũgĩ declares that he is not against the European languages, in their wholeness. In *Moving the Centre,* he avers:

> I have nothing against English, French, Portuguese, or any other language for that matter. They are all valid in as far as they are languages, and in so far as they do not seek to oppress other nations, nationalities and languages.[6]

Neither is Ngũgĩ against Western concepts, but he feels that these concepts should be expressed in the languages that the masses can comprehend. He feels intellectuals should be exposed to the languages of the world and cultures from other regions of the world. This will help them translate and interpret foreign ideas and developments into local languages. This has been the driving motive behind the publishing of the journal, *Mũtiiri*, which Ngũgĩ says will keep readers informed about any new knowledge that comes up. "Translating the information written in other languages into Gĩkũyũ will do this."[7]

Ngũgĩ's initiative in language has led to the growth of his mother tongue. This is an achievement he has so far accomplished. He has done this by incorporating and introducing lexical items into the ordinary vocabulary of Gĩkũyũ from other languages, especially English. However, the Gĩkũyũ language remains one that can be understood by anybody using it. The use of Gĩkũyũ words alongside English words without italicizing them, for example, Gĩcaandĩ player at the beginning of *Devil on the Cross***,** shows that the language is as noble as all others. It can be used alongside other languages without causing any irrelevancies. The novel is told from the narrative point of view of the Gĩcaandĩ player, a traditional Gĩkũyũ singer. This is narrative style Ngũgĩ uses to emphasize the "common ground between oral and written narratives."[8]

In this way, Ngũgĩ is giving voice to the subaltern other; the languages of the Third World. The whole issue is, therefore, a postcolonial project seeking to debunk and deconstruct the colonizers' language superiority. From another perspective, the linguistic hybridity**,** which is the cross-fertilization of languages in a single text**,** puts Ngũgĩ's works on a postmodernist plane.

In a newspaper interview, Ngũgĩ has argued that African languages express human feeling with more richness than in any other language:

> The main thing in writing in Gĩkũyũ is that we need a model in one of the African languages, which I know best and this is the Gĩkũyũ language.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993), 41.

[7] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Preface. *Mũtiiri* 1, 1 (1994): 7. Translated by the author of this article from Gĩkũyũ.

[8] James Ogude, *Ngũgĩ's Novels and African History* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 95.

> I want people to feel that what can be done in one African language can be done in all others.[9]

Writing in his mother tongue has remained the major way of retaining contacts with his people and his motherland. The cycle continues. It is the politics of language that led Ngũgĩ into exile. In exile, it is the continued writing in his mother tongue that has kept Ngũgĩ in psychological contact with his motherland. Writing in Gĩkũyũ resuscitates thoughts of home, a home he is so far removed from.

Mũrogi wa Kagogo and aesthetics of Gĩkũyũ language

His novel Mũrogi wa Kagogo is a thought-provoking satirical work that gives a surgical examination of the cult of dictatorship in an imaginary country called Aburĩria, under the leadership of His Excellency the Second. It surveys postcolonial Africa but also revisits African history and touches on the plight of Africans in the Diaspora.

To achieve authenticity, Ngũgĩ locates his narrative within the situational context of the spoken language; Ngũgĩ uses a number of phrases and words in the Gĩkũyũ language, and whether or not they have equivalents in the language, they resonate with the experiences and everyday lives of the Gĩkũyũ people, his intended audience. Examples here include:

Figure 1: Common Inventions derived from English in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* unless otherwise indicated

Common usage and page number	English
Mburarĩbuu (45)	Bloody fool
Mbicĩ (119)	Busy
Kaũta (126)	Counter
Mathetera (279)	Settlers
Hendimathita (279)	Headmaster
Mberombotomu (in *Ngaahika*)	Bell-bottomed pants
Turanjibaa (in *Ngaahika*)	Transfer
Imanjini (128)	Imagine

All these words in the anglicized format are easily accessible to his readers in the Gĩkũyũ language irrespective of social standing or level of education and are evident in the daily register of the audience in mind.

[9] Martin Mbugua, "Ngũgĩ: Why I Advance African Languages," *Daily Nation Weekender Magazine*, Nairobi (Jan 13, 1995): vi.

However, *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* goes beyond the common usages, where Ngũgĩ increasingly anglicizes and swahilises the *Gĩkũyũ* language. But here, he deconstructs the myth of purity of languages, and leads us to a rethink of African languages, in capturing scientific and concepts.

Figure 2: Ngũgĩ's Gĩkũyũ Inventions of scientific and other concepts in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*

Ngũgĩ's inventions and page number	English
Thubanoba (125)	Supernova
Maĩrieni (133)	Aliens
Mamathiani (133)	Martians
Ũmbagũthi wa thegithi (131)	Sex discrimination
Thĩndũrũmu ya mũtheru Agũthũnitũ (210)	St Augustine's syndrome

Ngũgĩ's inventions in the examples above serve to put the African languages, in this case, Gĩkũyũ in the trajectory of globalization, while at the same time subverting the fallacy that argues that African languages cannot adequately represent foreign or scientific thoughts. Ngũgĩ achieves this by interspersing oral tradition with these concepts that capture today's reality.

A fitting example is where Ngũgĩ, in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*, reminds the Gĩkũyũ reader of the traditional method of counting from one to ten.

Figure 3: Traditional Gĩkũyũ numbering system in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*

In Gĩkũyũ (pp. 243–4)	English equivalent
Nĩ ngara	One
Na mbuukũ	Two
Ciathiire	Three
Ikũmbĩ-inĩ	Four
Rĩa Mũthoni	Five
Kuna rũtĩ	Six
Rũtĩĩndĩ	Seven
Mbũri kenda	Eight
Cia mwanake na mũirĩtu	Nine
Igakũmĩra	Ten

Prior to writing *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*, Ngũgĩ was involved in the production of the journal *Mũtiiri*, the express aim of which was to promote the use of Gĩkũyũ language in the publishing of academic pieces. Topics in the journal range from information technology debates on languages and a number of contemporary issues in the world.

The journal also carries short stories and poetry, and translations from non-Gĩkũyũ academics; all in Gĩkũyũ language.

In the inaugural issue of *Mũtiiri*, Ngũgĩ argued that "in any ethnic community in African countries, it is only 5% of the people who speak in foreign languages."[10] The remaining 95%, as Ngũgĩ observes "consist of workers and peasants"[11]. In this regard, therefore, it is only by writing one's literature in the local languages that a writer will obtain the objective of reaching a wider audience. They are the languages of the peasants, the workers the wretched and the downtrodden of the society.

From this statement, Ngũgĩ draws criticism on his use of anglicized Gĩkũyũ language in his latest vernacular novel, as seen in the above examples in Figure 2. According to Kamoche:

> Ngũgĩ inadvertently ends up perpetuating a hybrid language that is only part Gĩkũyũ. In a sense therefore, he finds himself in the paradoxical position of purporting to defend the Gĩkũyũ language and rejecting English, while in fact he succeeds in sneaking into his discourse a disproportionate volume of 'Englishisms' through what I call the phonetic backdoor. Ngũgĩ is preaching Gĩkũyũ while practicing Pidgin English.[12]

This criticism can be read against Ngũgĩ´s own proclamation in *Writers in Politics* that if a Kenyan writer wants to speak to the peasants and workers then he should write in the languages they speak.[13]

Ngũgĩ ´s use of the Gĩkũyũ language in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* cannot claim to speak the language of the peasants and workers. Though the theme aptly captures the reality of politics in an African context, Ngũgĩ ´s attempt to anglicize the vernacular leaves no doubt as to whom the intended audience is, one might argue. In his oeuvres, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Caitani Mutharabai-inĩ*, the language of the peasants he proclaims is vividly clear, unlike in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*.

Figure 4: Is Ngũgĩ speaking the language of the peasants in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*?

Ngũgĩ's Inventions and page number	**English**	**Gĩkũyũ Equivalent**
Ndĩa ya andũ eerĩ ũtheriini wa mĩcumaa (233)	Candle-lit dinner	Irio cia hwaĩ-inĩ
Utheri wa nioni (156)	Neon lights.	matawa
Rũithrũithi (30)	Rolls Royce	ngaari

[10] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Mũtiiri*, 18. My own translation of the citation, originally in Gĩkũyũ.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ken Kamoche, "Can Ngũgĩ Ape and Hope to promote Vernacular?" *Sunday Nation* (July 19, 2005), 12.

[13] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981), 60.

Ngũgĩ transliterates the words above in a way that only those with a nuanced understanding of the English language would make meaning of the words, or those who have the English language and the words signify realities of their lives. For any other speaker of the Gĩkũyũ language, the invented words in the novel make little sense. The use of more palatable words for Gĩkũyũ speakers who might not have been exposed to the sophistication of contemporary urban life would be practical in this context, as I have indicated in the last column of the figure.

However, Ngũgĩ's translation and transliteration of these concepts from English into Gĩkũyũ, some of which are distinctly western, may appear to make the realities appear more Gĩkũyũ. But here, a pertinent question arises: Who is Ngũgĩ writing for? Asked this same question, Ngũgĩ remains emphatic:

> […] If you write in a foreign language, you are (whether you like it or not) assuming a foreign-language readership. In other words, if you are writing in English, you must be assuming an English-speaking readership – in most African countries, this can only mean a minority ruling class, a ruling class which is often the object of your criticism as a writer. If I write in the Gĩkũyũ language (or in any African language, for that matter); I am assuming an African readership and so, in fact, am assuming a peasant and worker audience. That is why it is correct to say that to choose an audience is to choose a class.[14]

However, in the case of *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*, Ngũgĩ is seen to be writing for speakers of Gĩkũyũ language rooted away from home and most likely in the sophistication of western cities with an affinity to the high-class life of candle-lit dinners and Rolls Royce luxury cars. For a writer who has always argued that his works are intended for the peasants and workers, a fitting question here then would be whether these peasants can identify with the lifestyles that the language in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* seems to be concerning itself with.

However, such an argument is bereft of the fact that peasantry is not a static state of affairs, but an identity that is continually evolving with the changing times. If the peasantry is to be defined in terms of small scale farmers at the root of the chain of production, globalization must have redefined this class.

Homi Bhabha is wont to remind us of the problematics that come with perceiving any cultural identity as pure, monolithic, unitary, and hierarchical. The postcolonial experience of cultural change, according to Bhabha occurs at the threshold of cultures.[15] Individuals and cultures are in constant movement between different identities without necessarily being wholly attached to one identity. There is a continuous process of engagement and contestation that seeks to open up possibilities of cultural hybridity. To argue for a fixed identity in relation to Ngũgĩ's audience then becomes problematic.

[14]Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "Interview with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o," *Marxism Today* (September, 1982), 35.

[15] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 4.

Secondly, the audience that might have been addressed in *Ngaahika Ndeenda,* especially in the early 1980s when the play was written and acted on stage, might have outgrown their state of affairs and that *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* is directed to a young readership that is increasingly urbanized. This is a group of people to whom the utopian idea of the purity of language has been transcended by the birth of new languages; languages that adapt or live up to their daily realities.

In Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya and its environs, Sheng is this new language.[16] However, Ngũgĩ is not moving towards this kind of slang, for in anglicizing Gĩkũyũ, he still retains a sense of some deep aspects of the language, which might be inaccessible to young readers.

In this sense, therefore, could one argue that Ngũgĩ is bringing about a language that is continually alienating its readers/speakers by this hybridization of the Gĩkũyũ language? Or is he also pointing out to the readers the complexities of their identity? Is he asking if our languages capture the world of science technology and all forms of modernity? Can these languages domesticate these forms of modernity?

For a writer who is known for having divorced English and dedicated his time to writing in vernacular,[17] his own identity as a Gĩkũyũ takes an interesting dimension. In his memoirs, *Dreams in a Time of War,* (2010) an autobiographical account of himself, Ngũgĩ tells us that his grandparents were Maasai, a different ethnic community in Kenya, whose linguistic tendencies are markedly different from Ngũgĩ's own Gĩkũyũ language.

In fact, Ngũgĩ's Gĩkũyũ is one of the many fragments of the language spoken where he was born and bred. As Mwangi argues, some of the native speakers of Gĩkũyũ will find Ngũgĩ's Gĩkũyũ crude, if not rude because "Gĩkũyũ is a multiple fiction; it is an arbitrary fiction that defies all the amount of unity we would like to impose upon it for our own convenience."[18] This then raises questions about the authenticity of his claims and purpose.

However, as Ngũgĩ alludes in *Decolonising the Mind*, his books are meant to be read aloud, talked about, and argued with. Perhaps, with his innovation of these new words in Gĩkũyũ, with a touch of the English language, a language he quit using, "he is inviting his readers to sound out the words on the page that are written with spoken Gĩkũyũ phonemes."[19]

[16] Sheng has been defined as an acronym for Swahili-English slang, developed in Nairobi in post-independence Kenya. This innovation however incorporates also lexical items, not just from the two national/official languages but also from the wide array of the linguistic diversity defining the Kenyan nation. For more on Sheng, see Chege Githiora, "Sheng: Peer Language, Swahili Dialect or Emerging Creole?" *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15, 2 (2002): 159–81; Mungai Mutonya, "Redefining Nairobi's Streets: Study of Slang, Marginalization, and Identity," *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective* 2, 2 (2007): 169–85 and Peter Githinji, "Bazes and Their Shibboleths: Lexical Variation and Sheng Speakers' Identity in Nairobi," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15, 4 (2006): 443–72.

[17] Ngũgĩ states in *Decolonising the Mind*, that the book is his "farewell to English. From now on it is Gĩkũyũ and Kiswahili all the way" (1986: vix).

[18] Evan Mwangi, "Ngũgĩ's Notions of Pure African Languages are 'Fiction,'" *Sunday Nation* (Oct 5, 1997), "Lifestyle,", 12.

[19] Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, NH, 2004), 225.

This use of the Gĩkũyũ language in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* is reminiscent of Ngũgĩ s character, Gatuĩria in *Caitani Mũtharabainĩ*, as he highlights the dilemma that the intellectuals find themselves in, especially when torn between their cultures and the western education that they have received. Cultural practitioner and Gĩkũyũ musician Joseph Kamaru in the 1970s characterized this in-betweenness in a song, *Ndanuko cia Mĩtahato*[20] especially in the Kenyan urban folk, who retain the village connection, but whose children brought up in the city are removed from the realities of the village. Kamaru, in the song, warns such parents, not to feel ashamed when their urban children confuse a goat as 'a dog that eats sweet potato vines'. In his creation and innovation of Gĩkũyũ words that might not reflect the reality of his readers, in Mũrogi wa Kagogo, Ngũgi himself reflects the character of Gatuĩria, who oscillates between Gĩkũyũ and English.

In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ explains how the word 'missile' used to hold an 'alien/far away sound', until when he learned its equivalent in Gĩkũyũ. But in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*, Ngũgĩ is guilty of the same, where the invention of new words in Gĩkũyũ phonemes is not an "emotionally felt experience".[21]

Figure 5: Is Ngũgĩ's invention of new words in Gĩkũyũ phonemes an 'emotionally felt experience' in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*?

Ngũgĩ's inventions and page numbers	**English**	**Gĩkũyũ equivalent**
Athitoronoma (125)	Astronomer	Mũũgĩ wa njata
Burubu (125)	Proof	Ũira
Memorĩ (128)	Memory	Kĩririkano
Imanjinĩconi (129)	Imagination	Meciria
Egithambo (131)	Example	Kĩonereria
Ngiree (241)	Grey	Kĩbuu
Gathigathini, (11)	North	Rũgongo
Gũthini (11)	South	mũhuro
Mbayongirabĩ (23)	Biography	rũgano
Karekita (89)	Character	Eegerekanio
Ndurama (27)	Drama	Gĩthagathago,
Ngĩmu (95)	Game	ithaako
Bacĩnja (226)	Passenger	mũthii

Unlike in *Matigari*, Ngũgĩ opens up avenues of discourse through the use of these new inventions. Contrasting his earlier works, *Matigari* and *Devil on the Cross,* where Ngũgĩ works with words to give the readers a new vocabulary with which to talk

[20] *Ndanuko cia Mitahato*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTV8GV4Dby0.

[21] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 16–17.

politics, Peterson argues that in *Mũrogi*, the readers are only challenged to critically assess Ngũgĩ's use of the Gĩkũyũ language and the possible effects of a long stint in exile, and therefore, conditions under which the novel was written. Peterson adds that Ngũgĩ's fictions are pragmatic aids to discourse that are meant to call new imagined communities into being.[22]

In willing new realities in these Ngũgĩ's imagined communities, Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ[23] argues that Ngũgĩ has transformed into a global citizen in his years of exile and that being away from home for a long time allows Ngũgĩ to use his writing as an avenue through which he can reconnect to the land of 'his birth and upbringing.'

When he was asked while visiting Kenya to launch his book *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir (*2010), whether he dreams of ever coming to Kenya, Ngũgĩ answered; "Always, but I realize my dream by writing about home. Kenya is always with me, in my mind!"[24]

In this writing then, while in exile, Ngũgĩ, one can argue, has created a 'Kenya of the mind'.[25] In this endeavor to create this Kenya, then Ngũgĩ also innovates a language, borne of the fact that he has been removed from his people's language and culture. Adds Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ:

> Writing from external exile, Ngũgĩ adopts the whole world as his home and thus comments on issues on a global scale.[26]

From this perspective, and the examples of the invention of words in Gĩkũyũ language based on English words, then could we argue that Ngũgĩ is attempting to place the Gĩkũyũ language on a global path? Is anglicizing Gĩkũyũ consequently then alienating his target audience?

In this in-betweenness, Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ argues that Ngũgĩ in *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*, still highlights the realities and struggles in his imagined homeland, which he privileges over the global:

> […] he celebrates that variety of human cultures, but he is loyal to Kenya, his home and the other homelands that he has been forced to occupy. He is a patriotic global citizen whose cosmopolitanism is rooted in a Kenya fictionalized as Aburĩria.[27]

[22] Peterson, *Creative Writing*, 228.

[23] Gichingiri Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, "What Is My Nation: Visions of a New Global Order in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Wizard of the Crow," *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective 2*, 2 (2007): 188.

[24] http://www.youtube.com/k24tv#p/u/87/1HpQxY8GamI, August 18, 2010.

[25] Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, "What is My Nation," 189.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, "What is My Nation," 198.

Ngũgĩ 's imagined homeland and the memoirs of a home constitutes a form of nostalgia and by his continued use of the Gĩkũyũ language that appropriates the English language, even when unnecessary, is what Mazrui calls a "temporal homesickness" that leads to an idealization of the Gĩkũyũ language.[28]

By idealization, I mean that Ngũgĩ, is subverting the assertion that African languages cannot adequately represent western thoughts. But at the same time, while ignoring equivalents of words like in Figure 5 above which are available in the Gĩkũyũ language, and might not need to be phonetically connected with the English words, perhaps Ngũgĩ is being conditioned by what he is opposing; the denigration of African languages.

In fact, Ngũgĩ claims that while writing his first Gĩkũyũ novel, *Caitaani Mũtharaabaini*, in the confines of Kamiti prison, he was faced with the challenge of the 'unsatisfactory Gĩkũyũ orthography,'[29] which made the words and tenses even more slippery. But while in exile and writing *Mũroogi wa Kagogo*, Ngũgĩ seems to be confronted by the dilemma of Gĩkũyũ lexicography. His anglicized Gĩkũyũ language, especially in concepts and words that can be adequately expressed in Gĩkũyũ, and that appeal to a worldview of the speakers amounts to the murder of words in the Gĩkũyũ language. Ngũgĩ's creations of these new words cannot relate exactly to the realities of the Gĩkũyũ speakers who are his target audience.

In statements that buttress this argument, Ngũgĩ himself is very clear about what ails the growth of novels in African languages:

> The problem facing the growth and development of the African novel is finding the appropriate ''fiction language", that is with fiction itself taken as a form of language with which to effectively communicate with one's targeted audience.[30]

In addressing the same, Ngũgĩ further poses the question; how does a novelist capture and hold the interest of the reader when the reality confronting the reader is stranger and more captivating than fiction? [31]

In *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*, the political realities and the allegory in terms of names and places denote a striking semblance to the Moi regime of Kenya, especially in the 1980s and early 1990s. The Gĩkũyũ audience will relate to the thematic concerns that have been articulated in the novel. The concern in this paper, however, is that Ngũgĩ's use of some of the words might end up alienating the reader not exposed to the nuances of the lifestyles signified by the words. The application of these words might asphyxiate and strangle the Gĩkũyũ language that he is promoting.

[28] Ali Mazrui, "Cultural Amnesia, Cultural Nostalgia and False Memory: Africa's Identity Crisis Revisited," *African Philosophy* 13, 2 (2000), 87.

[29] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 74.

[30] Ibid, 75.

[31] Ibid,78.

On the other hand, this article argues that Ngũgĩ's invention of new words in Gĩkũyũ is his acknowledgment that the myth of linguistic purity is self-destructive and could also lead to the stagnation of any language. The effort to put his vernacular at par with colonial languages leads to a production of a postcolonial hybrid of the language. It is this hybridity that subverts assertions of cultural distinctiveness that essentializes identities. Ngũgĩ then uses the language as a liberation aesthetic that subverts the colonial discourse, which privileges certain languages.

Conclusion

Ngũgĩ's works are an important addition to the knowledge of the political and historical contexts of Kenya. Helland argues that understanding Ngũgĩ's later novels written in Gĩkũyũ is best accomplished by appreciating his assertion of the use of Gĩkũyũ as an abrogation of English. It is thus important to "appreciate the ways in which Ngũgĩ uses language to mediate and contextualize the dominant (colonial) discourse."[32]

As if to affirm the weight of exile in his use of the language and imageries, Ngũgĩ has argued in *Decolonising the Mind* that the writer has only one recourse: 'himself; those images that often flit across the mind; those mental reflections of the world around.'[33] Thus, Ngũgĩ's use of the language has been heavily influenced by the world around him; the western world in where he lives and continually wears away the writer's creativity in his own language, consequently polluting the Gĩkũyũ language unnecessarily, where such a book like *Mũrogi wa Kagogo,* should have served to enrich rather than impoverish the language. However, Ngũgĩ might be asking of his readers to rethink the usage of Gĩkũyũ language, by creating new ways that are respectful of their experiences, but at the same time, readily usable in the globalizing cultures. This is his idea of "repositioning his audience"[34] in cultural pluralism towards "understanding all the voices that come from what is essentially a plurality of centers all over the world."[35]

But one argument here would be that despite the wave of western cultures/ global cultures, there is still, in Africa, concepts, beliefs, and values that are regionally very pertinent. As Ngũgĩ has consistently asserted, it is languages that are carriers of these cultures. While accepting the fact that an idea espousing purity of languages is a self-defeating endeavor, it is also imperative that hybridity in the globalized world should also have its limits.

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[32] Kristin Helland, "Writing in Gikuyu: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Search for African Authenticity," in *Contact Linguistics in Africa and Beyond*, ed. byAkinmade T. Akande and Rotimi Taiwo (Nova Science Pub Inc; UK ed. edition 2013), 240.

[33] wa Thiong'o, *Decolonised*, 80.

[34] Joseph McLaren, "Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Moving the Centre and Its Relevance to Afrocentricity," *Journal of Black Studies* 28, 3 (1998): 391.

[35] wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre*, 11.

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