

RESEARCH ARTICLE



NGUGI WA THIONG'O: A POSTCOLONIAL THINKER

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Article Info:

Article Received:08/06/2014

Revised on:11/6/2014

Accepted for Publication:15/06/2014

ABSTRACT

Ngugi as a theorist aims at creating a historical consciousness of national identity. He speaks of the necessity of decolonizing the mind. He asserts that narratives should represent the ethos of nation. Ngugi asserts that literature doesn't grow or develop in a vacuum, but is shaped by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. As he puts it in decolonizing mind—struggle makes history. Struggle makes people. In struggle is our history, our language and our being. That struggle begins, wherever we are whatever we do. The struggle of common people is his major theme in his fictions. He aims at progress and social justice for all. Ngugi argues that colonial languages and literature and university departments are responsible for the ruin of African language and culture.

He is important as a theorist in postcolonial studies for the reasons. He questions the hegemony of colonial language. He negates the colonial past and his postcolonial privileged class position. He emphasizes the role of peasantry in social reforms. He wants to bring back the indigenous culture.

Key words: ethos, vacuum, society, struggle, social justice.

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Ngugi is the most important personality in term of cultural expression and political activism. He is the general of the Kenyan land and freedom army. African cultures, history in pre-independent and post-independent Kenya have an impact on his works. Ngugi as a theorist aims at creating a historical consciousness of national identity. Nations themselves are narrations. He asserts that narratives should represent the ethos of nation. Indigenous narrative forms like parables, fables and myths and the use of the grotesque and the supernatural are also characteristic features of his works.

Ngugi asserts that literature doesn't grow or develop in a vacuum, but is shaped by social,

political and economic forces in a particular society. He speaks of the necessity of decolonizing the mind. As he puts it in decolonizing mind—struggle makes history. Struggle makes us. In struggle is our history, our language and our being. That struggle begins, wherever we are whatever we do.

Colonialism has been one of the most important politico-cultural phenomena. The notion of cultural superiority brought the conflicts between the colonizer and the colonized. He talks about the crippling effects of colonial dominations in Africa. White missionaries, white settlers and white administrators were the three arms of European powers that exploited the native. In his essay on

national culture, He wrote "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it." (Ngugi: 1972 ,2)

Ngugi traces colonial roots deep down in psychological, ideological, and cultural disintegration in the lives of Kenyans he shows how the Kenyans are exploited economically, politically and culturally. Colonialism undermines the African culture, religion education, and literature. Influenced by the works of both Marx and Fanon, Ngugi was aware of the internal colonization by the dominant ideology of the colonizers. The wish to change an existing, unaccepted social order is the primary concern of political novel.

He uses novel as tool for social change. Ngugi believes that literature and politics are inextricably linked with each other because both are about people. Ngugi believes that primary aim of literature is not merely to entertain but also to persuade .He questioned how European form of novel could express an African national identity. He used the novel as a vehicle for anti- imperialist arguments but at the same time he moves closer to indigenous style of narrative construction. The importance of literature in the process of decolonization was asserted. Caryl Philips says "A writer can infuse a people with a sense of their own identity and spiritually kindle the fire of resistance". (Philips: 2001, 185)

Ngugi thought that he should restore the Gikuyu values and redeem the Mau Mau movement. So he decided that he should write revolutionary works and arouse national consciousness in Kenya. For him the issues of land, culture, education, economy, leadership, history, etc, have all assumed ideological dimensions. Ngugi thought that he should restore the Gikuyu values and redeem the Mau Mau movement. So he decided that he should write revolutionary works and arouse national consciousness in Kenya. For him the issues of land, culture, education, economy, leadership, history, etc, have all assumed ideological dimensions.

Ngugi made history, including freedom struggle as theme of his powerful writings. He doesn't confine himself to mere chronicling of

factual details of historical events, but also takes a certain partisan attitude towards them. It is a social responsibility of Ngugi to present the most burning questions of his times. History is a central theme of in almost every genre in postcolonial writing from Africa to South America. For Ngugi history is very important, how we look at our past is very important in determining how we look at, how we evaluate the present. (The weekly Review: 1978, 10) Ngugi became the interpreter of his country's socio-political events of Kenya in transition. He is conditioned by the historical and political and economic circumstances of his times.

Ngugi places the contemporary Kenyan struggle in a historical context and resurrects revolutionary heroes so that the masses are inspired. The broad frame work of sociology of literature has been used for analyzing and evaluating the texts. Ngugi is committed to the political freedom and cultural renaissance of Africa .Ngugi's literary agenda behind the reconstruction of history, and decolonize of minds of people lead them to cultural freedom. His characters are politically and literature functions as a counter – discourse, providing culturally active.

Colonizing of minds of the people through cultural imperialism, Ngugi calls a cultural bomb. The instruments of cultural imperialism were the church and the western education system which sub served the interests of colonialism. The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth.

The power of colonialism is visible in what Gramsci calls hegemonic struggle for the hearts and minds of the Gikuyu through schools and Christian missions. Colonizers sent the missionaries to convert natives to Christianity and establishing churches and seminaries and through setting up schools to teach British customs, British history and the English language to children and adults to make them more like British citizens.

With these ideological exportations, British cultural standards were upheld and all other notions of culture were denounced as inferior and subordinated to western standards. Colonialism in Kenya thrived on the Eurocentric notions about history, and civilization, Africans had no past, and no history and they were primitive. Christianity was used to disintegrate the tribal Kenyan life.

A central focus in Ngugi is the idea of culture. He sees culture as expressing material and spiritual values. They find expression through the people's songs, dances, folk-lore, drawing, sculpture, rites and ceremonies. It enhances the dignity of man and makes him feel it worthwhile to work and fight for liberty. He links culture with revolution. He says: "Political and economic liberation is the essential condition for liberation, for the true release of a people's creative spirit and imagination." (Ngugi: 1972, 2)

Another cultural bomb in Kenya is the colonial system of education. The missionaries are introduced as part of the church activities. It had the same twin objectives of disrupting the traditional way of life in Kenya and the obedience to the power of colonialism. Colonial education under colonial rule, therefore had two primary goals: one, it universalizes the values embedded in colonial culture, literature and in the modern European sciences by showing other forms of indigenous knowledge and customs in the colonies as incomplete, inadequate, and barbaric: two it molded the colonized ways that best suited their reception of western knowledge.

For him colonial education could not be the prism through which African experiences were refracted. Education is important for the advancement of man and for the fight the alienated land and political freedom, but the content and method of imparting it must be relevant.

Colonial education fostered ideas of liberty fraternity and freedom in Kenyan population. Western enlightenment, notions of democracy and fraternity make Africans demand equality for themselves. Colonial enlightenment modernizes the customs and institutions of a traditional society. Christianity and the western education system subserve the interests of colonialism in Kenya. Historically the role of colonial education was to consolidate the colonial domination and strengthen the native elite.

He linked the national culture with national language. He asserts that language is the carrier of values and medium for unity and a meaningful self-image. When we destroy our language, we are destroying the important aspect of our heritage. He says: "the study of indigenous languages is a

prerequisite to the better knowledge of ourselves, our way of life our ideals of the beautiful, the true, the good and the holy". (Ngugi: 1972, 3) At last he gave up his Christian name and took his name in Gikuyu. He declared his intention to write only in Gikuyu as a part of his commitment to Kenyan culture.

He is important as a theorist in postcolonial studies for the reasons. He questions the hegemony of colonial language. He negates the colonial past and his postcolonial privileged class position. He emphasizes the role of peasantry in social reforms. He wants to bring back the indigenous culture. One, the debate over the language is questionable. Two, he negates his colonial past with his postcolonial privileged class position. Three, the future direction is that he points in postcolonial studies by presenting alternatives to the modern state by highlighting the role of peasantry in social reforms. For Ngugi, postcolonial alternatives are representations to European ones. Decolonization and postcolonial analytic practice means freeing African, native writing from oppressive myths generated from Western cultures.

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