

# Misrepresentation, Resistance and (Re) Constructing Space in the Plays of Bate Besong and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Micere Gathae Mugo

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**Abstract:** This paper examines resistance to both colonial and neo-colonial oppression, exploitation, dictatorship and marginalisation as an authorial ideology in the plays of Bate Besong, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Micere Gathae Mugo. In an attempt to (re) construct their misrepresented identities and create a conducive environment for the oppressed and marginalised masses, the playwrights create in their plays, characters whose principal objectives are to radically dismantle all forms of socio-cultural, economic and historical inequalities as an attempt to emancipate themselves and the masses from the excesses of colonial and neo-colonial leadership politics. Consequently, resistance is projected in the plays under study as an ancestral imperative, a social expectation and a pressing personal need towards reconstructing space for the postcolonial masses. From a Marxist and Postcolonial theoretical paradigms, this paper sustains the argument that in the plays of Besong, Ngugi and Micere, there is a radical and contestatory content and this is initiated by the kind of nauseating images and stereotypical representations given to the oppressed masses by colonial and neo-colonial leadership. The analysis in this paper reveals that resistance becomes a pivotal alternative and a condition sine qua non for the Anglophone Cameroonian and Kenyan masses to liberate their societies from the bondage imposed by colonialist in partnership with the neo-colonialist. As a result, resistance as an ideology becomes unavoidable towards deconstruction, deligitimacy and reassertion of the historical and cultural identities of the postcolonial people.

**Keywords:** Misrepresentation, Resistance, Reconstruction, Postcolonial Drama

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## 1. Introduction

Stephen Slemon in "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance theory for the Second World" in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* quotes Selwyn Cudjoe and Barbara Harlow's definition of resistance as "An act or set of acts, that is designed to rid a people of its oppressor and it so thoroughly infuses the experience of living under pressure that it becomes an almost autonomous aesthetic principle" [104]. Slemon goes ahead to say that the most important forms of resistance to any social power will be produced from within the communities that are immediately and visibly subordinated by that power structure. Similarly, Homi Bhabha is "Signs Taken for wonders" in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* consider resistance as "an effect of the contradictory representations of colonial authority, a native

appropriation of its ambivalent strategies of power" [101] Bhabha sees representation as the principal initiator of resistance in post-colonial societies. From Slemon and Bhabha's points of view, one can easily draw the conclusion that the genesis of resistance in postcolonial literature is a consequence of the contradictory representations of the colonialist by both the coloniser and in recent times, the neo-colonialist. As a result of misrepresentation, resistance becomes a compulsory alternative for the oppressed masses and a genuine step towards their emancipation from all forms of oppression.

In almost all of Bate Besong's plays, the Anglophones are continuously projected as inferior human beings and pejoratively referred to as Second Class Citizens, Ten Class Citizens, Night-Soil-Men, Traitors, Biafrains, Anglos, Stooges, Lepers, Secessionist, Enemies in the House and

Slaves. Butake refers to them in *Family Saga* as “Executors”, while Nkengasong considers them as “Lunatic” and “Creature” in *Black Caps and Red Feathers*. Such stereotypical images, perceptions, symbols or ways of looking at the Anglophones by their Francophone counterparts justifies or influences the ways they are treated. This is because such stereotypical representations help to foster their marginalisation, alienation, exploitation and victimisation. Similarly, the colonialists and neo-colonialists in the plays of the Ngugis and Micere perceive the indigenous Kenya masses as people with no admirable ancestral history, labourers, Have-nots, peasant farmers or to quote Gicaamba in *I Will Marry when I Want*, “pots that cook without ever eating” [33]. These misrepresentation coupled with land expropriation, excessive oppression, marginalisation, alienation and exploitation is responsible for the numerous conflicts and instances of resistance that runs through *I Will Marry When I Want* [Henceforth simply referred to as *I Will Marry*] and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* [Henceforth simply referred to as *The Trial*].

## 2. (Mis) Representation and the Anglophone Cameroonian Dilemma in Bate Besong’s Drama

Bate Besong, perhaps, is one of the most misunderstood, exceedingly controversial, extremely absurd, exceptionally innovative and radically ideological Anglophone Cameroonian dramatists. This rounded literary artist from Manyu extraction is thus a living literary idol who romanticises in essays, poetry and most especially, drama. Besides being an essayist, poet and dramatist, Besong is also a confirmed social and justice crusader. In *Beasts of No Nations*, [Henceforth simply referred to as *Beasts*] *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* [Henceforth simply referred to as *Requiem*] and *Once Upon Four Great Lepers* [Henceforth simply referred to as *Great Lepers*] are plays in which resistance is sustained as Besong’s ideological prescription. In *Requiem* for example, overt resistance to oppression and dictatorship is noticed in a heated debate between Woman and Atangana. In terms of representation, Atangana consider Woman and the masses to be patient and passive observers of the day-to-day happenings in Agidigidi. This to him, justifies the reason why they should be marginalise and alienated from the political activities of the fictive nation of Agidigidi. Nevertheless, Woman makes Atangana to understand that the image of the masses he has is a false one. As she tells him:

*The poor people of today are no longer as patient as those of old, Amongou Atangana. They will no longer sit by and watch the Macarana’a vicars and their French allies prosper while their children go naked and hungry; they’ll not sit meekly and pray for those who have sold out to neo-colonial bribery!* [13].

The fact that the masses are no longer patient is indicative of the fact that they are willing to resist all forms of exploitation and alleviate themselves from poverty. The word

‘Macarana’a’ [Greetings in Ewondo native language] altered in Woman’s declaration emphasizes the fact that the Ewondos [Francophone Cameroonians] are responsible for the problems in Agidigidi. Resistance therefore becomes a means toward emancipating the Agidigidi masses from poverty. Similarly, Shadrach Ambanasom in *Education of the Deprived* views *Requiem* as a symbolic representation of a contemporary society, informed by the socio-political malaise that characterises the society. He further explains that Besong gives his work the force of topicality as he sometimes uses direct and recognisable references. This, to Ambanasom, is because Besong writes carrying the yoke of an Anglophone, struggling for his identity and that of his people. Ambanasom equally acknowledges the fact that in *Requiem*, Besong evidently defines himself as a humanist committed to the course of the suffering voices as he “adopts a stringent even vituperative voice to castigate those who despoil the state” [225].

Fairly on in the play, Atangana struggles to convince Woman that though they are poor on earth, their riches are in heaven. Woman again openly rebukes him when she says “They [the masses] will no longer listen to the national Old Testament prophets who predict cosmic annihilation if they don’t love their own exploiters to the point of folly [emphatically]. They are asking for their own paradise, here and now!” [13]. To create an enabling space for the masses, Besong recommends resistance as the means through which the masses can better their lives. In the lines above, Woman makes us once again to understand that *The Bible* has continuously been used as a weapon to oppress and exploit the masses. Her open confrontation with Atangana can be interpreted as a means to discard the neo-colonialist assumption that the riches of the poor masses of Agidigidi are in heaven. It is for this reason that the masses are asking for their own paradise “here and now!” Woman’s declarations become, from a Postcolonial theoretical point of view, a counter discourse to those of Atangana. The ideological contrast between Woman and Atangana justifies the Marxist claims that an individual’s social status determines that person’s perception of the world and the Marxist belief that people’s lives and ideas are shaped not just by their society but by “the material conditions of their time” [Stevens and Stewart, 1982, 301]. Atangana’s perception of the realities in Agidigidi is completely different from that of Woman because of the differences in their social class.

As in *Requiem*, one of the principal causes of resistance in *Beasts* is as a result of the misrepresentation of the masses by their leadership. Unlike *Requiem*, *Beasts* becomes the play where Besong distinguishes himself as an experimental playwright. His poetic background is translated in the play through the use of dense and far-fetch images which give the reader the allowance to multiply interpretations. It is for this reason that Hilarious Ambe in *Change Aesthetics in Anglophone Cameroon Drama and Theatre* cautions that it will be inadequate and even elusive for any critic to hope to grasp the different levels of meanings in Besong’s theatre by concentrating exclusively on the works’ formal attributes. His

advice therefore to readers of Besong's works is that, to appropriately comprehend the images in his works, a necessary sociological and ideological search and reading imposes itself, because his works are both thematically and formally constructed around the historical, economic, political, aesthetic and ideological experiences of contemporary time [2007, 94].

In a section of the play entitled "Beasts of No Nations", the conversation between Blindman and Cripple is quite revealing in the use of imagery and in terms of Anglophone representation, marginalisation and exploitation:

*Cripple: [Puts on his glasses] before the miracle year 2000 A. D.*

*When S. A. P. Will kill sap Slave-anglo?*

*Blindman: [Puts on his 'glasses' authoritatively] Interest per annum.*

*Don't waste my time... Anglos are traitors and slaves.*

*We saved them from the claws of the Igbos.... [105]*

The above lines may not make much meaning to a reader unfamiliar with the recent happenings in postcolonial Cameroon but an informed reader will easily deduce the implications behind such declarations. In terms of representation, the Anglophones are considered as "slaves and traitors". Slaves because in the context of the play, they are those involved in menial jobs like carriers of shit. Worse still, they do not have identification cards which by implication, means they have no identity. They are considered as traitors because they are commentators of the wrongs of the neo-colonial leadership politics. It is such representation that justifies Anglophone marginalisation and victimisation and this is one of the ills that Besong's *Beasts* set out to decry. To Besong therefore, there must be a change in the identity of Anglophone Cameroonians and such a change can only see the light of day through resistance and revolution. The mass resistance noticed in the storming of Aadingingin's marble palace with bucket of shit at the end of the play to request for identification cards is an attempt by the marginalised to reaffirm their identity and create a favourable space for their existence. They succeed at the end of the play to transform themselves from "Beasts of No Nation" to "People of a Nation". Their act in terms of significance becomes Besong's overriding message in the entire play as it means that to get something from a dictatorship and oppressive regime, one must resist, fight and be ready to risk one's life in the process.

Though some critics of Besong's *Beasts* have argued that the masses fail to overthrow the regime of Aadingingin because they all escape as soon as he fires his gun, and this to them only pre-supposes a continuation of dictatorship, it is important to note that the inability of the Night-Soil -Men to face the dictator with the same weapon in which he uses to oppress the masses is what Besong wants to emphasise. In other words, Besong by this act is saying that in order to overthrow a dictator like Aadingingin, the masses have to face the dictator with the same weapon with which he uses to oppress the masses. Buckets of shit happened as the play denotes, not to have been the best weapon to confront

Aadingingin and it is for this reason that the Night-Soil -Men's revolution fails to achieve its required goals. Nevertheless, their attempt at a collective resistance pre-supposes a new consciousness on the part of the oppressed masses.

Also, Besong in *Great Lepers* equally portrays a very pathetic picture of Anglophone representation and like the other plays; he recommends resistance as a solution to their identity crisis. While in *Beats* and *Requiem* Anglophones who constitute the masses are portrayed as slaves, Night-Soil-Men, Biafrans and Traitors, in *Great Lepers*, they are referred to as "Lepers" and "Tenth Class Citizens". In the play, the Lepers [Ntufam Vikuma Egu -Eku and Samdeng Ngufor Akriye Moghamo] consider 20th May as the origin of their marginalisation, enslavement and imprisonments. This to them is because this is the day in which the Lepers as "Kings" entered a union with their Francophone brother which turned them into "slaves". "We came as kings but we are treated as slaves" [20]. The Lepers in this play are deprived of all socio-political and economic privileges but unlike in the previous plays, their resistance is more subtle than in *Beasts* and *Requiem*. In an attempt to get rid of the tyrant Mbokaya, and possibly create a favourable space for themselves, the Lepers simple in an act that became very symbolic within the context of the play, refuse to donate blood for Mbokaya's survival. They abandon him to die in a very terrible condition. Mbokaya's death can be read as the end of a cruel regime and a new and promising dawn for the Lepers.

From the examples above, it can be seen that misrepresentation is the main cause of resistance in Besong's drama. This is because the derogatory and pejorative representation of Anglophones created a feeling of frustration, marginalisation, and alienation and most especially, a complete loss of identity. This assertion is validated by Bole Butake in a Newspaper interview in which he regrettably questions:

*How does it feel when you get up in the morning and somebody refers to you as a Biafrans or Anglos when you know that as his idea, the expression is derogatory and pejorative? You must then regard yourself as someone who does not belong, who is not accepted. [qtd in Tangem, 2008, 197]*

Such derogatory and pejorative appellations are at the heart of the postcolonial concepts of Representation, "Self" and "Other" and Stereotypes. There are equally, the major causes of the ranging disgust, suspicion and conflict between Anglophones and Francophones in postcolonial Cameroon.

Bate Besong is not the only Anglophone Cameroonian dramatist who recommends resistance as the appropriate instrument for the fight against misrepresentation and for identity reassertion. John Nkemngong Nkengasong in his poetic drama, *Black Caps and Red Feathers* equally portrays a pathetic picture of the Anglophone Cameroonians, symbolised in the play by Creature. Here, the Anglophone Cameroonian is not only a "creature" [animal] but he can survive only by eating crumbs of food from a rubbish heap.

Worse still, after being starved for six days, Creatures' food on the seventh day becomes very symbolic because it is another glaring picture of the extent to which Anglophones have been dehumanised, tormented and degraded. As he explains:

... *Old shit when I loosened it. King Traourou's shit that had been left bake in the sun for days. The mimbo, Mmff! Mmff!! It was the smell of a madman's urine. A madman called Traourou whose piss was left for days to torment... chained my hands again, quick, quick and forced the shit into my mouth. Washed it down into my belly with the piss...* [26]

Though narrated with a pitch of exaggeration, Nkengasong simply wants to x-ray the extent to which Anglophones where tortured and dehumanised under Ahidjo's regime, symbolised in the play by Traourou. Even though Nkengasong does not openly like Besong recommends resistance and revolution, such thematic concerns are inherently noticeable in *Black Caps and Red Feathers*. As a result of the excessive atrocities committed against the masses, symbolised by Creature, the play ends with the sustainable blasts of thunder, an action which to Ambanassom "may symbolised a sudden, unexpected event full of revolutionary impetuous [154]. Lanatic's claim that some clansmen must lead the clan to a sacrifice of pacification and expiation is suggestive of the end of one era and the beginning of another. For the masses to be "save again" [52] as lunatic proposes, Nkengasong like Besong, recommends resistance [symbolised by Creature's steadfastness to the truth] as an emancipation weapon. Unlike Besong, Nkengasong, equally sees nature [thunder] as being capable of creating a new space for the marginalised masses.

In Bate Besong's drama still, and in terms of representation, the Anglophone Cameroonians are portrayed as people who are fit only to do certain mean jobs. They are marginalised not only in terms of political and economic advantages but equally in terms of job opportunities. In the universe of *Beast* for example, the Anglophones are represented as Carriers of shit. There are those in charge of disposing the waste that is produced by those who will political and economic power. It is this derogatory representation which pushed Jean Stephane Biatcha to comment that in the play, the author holds the thesis that Francophones in power are responsible for the economic crisis because they are producers of waste matter, embezzlers of public funds. Anglophones are marginalised and confined to the undignified "roles like that of carriers of excrement" [qtd in Ambanassom, 2003, 113]. It is this peripheral representation that initiates the storming of Aadinging'in's marble palace by the masses at the end of the play with buckets of shit.

Though some critics have argued and with good reason too, that the Night-Soil-Men, the stooges and Lepers, in Besong's plays could represent any oppressed and marginalised group of people in any part of the world, there is enough textual evidence to prove that they represent Anglophone Cameroonians particularity and in general, any oppressed group of people. In a manner similar to that of

Besong, Nkengasong in *Black Caps and Red Feathers* equally highlights the notion of job discrimination. In a heated discussion between Creature and his ghost brother, he makes it clear that his job is that of killing cockroaches and chasing flies in a latrine. Such a representation, though not as bizarre as that of Besong and Nkengasong also features in Bole Butake's *Family Saga*. In the play, Kamala, his son Ngong, and daughter Sawa are presented as executors and people whose job is meant to transform instructions into concrete actions. They are deprived of the prestigious privilege to "conceived" in an estate which is supposed to partly belong to them.

The numerous instances of resistance, conflict and revolution which run through the above plays is partly initiated by such overt discrimination and any reader confessant with the political state of affairs in postcolonial Cameroon will readily identify the ideological premise in which the above plays are conceived. This is because such realities are still very present in today's Cameroon as Anglophones can hardly head certain political and administrative positions. Christian Cardinal Tumi buttresses this argument in his political diary, *The Political Regimes of Ahmado Ahidjo and Paul Biya, and Cardinal Tumi, Priest* in which he emphatically states:

*It would seem that there are certain administrative positions that cannot be assigned to a Cameroonian from the North West or South West provinces-such as the Secretary General at the presidency, minister of Territorial administration and Decentralisation, Minister of Foreign Affairs, of the Armed Forces, National Education. No Anglophone has ever been in charge of the National Police Force.* [10]

Such declarations only show the extent to which Anglophones are marginalised and this is amongst the many evils that Besong's plays set out to decry. Though a few Anglophones are beginning to occupy the above ministerial portfolios, their numbers as compared to that of their Francophone counterparts are still very insignificant. From an ideological standpoint therefore, and from the evidence provided so far, one will not be wrong to conclude that in the world of Besong' drama, resistance becomes a pivotal alternative to a conducive existence for the Anglophone Cameroonians in particular, and the oppressed and marginalised postcolonial people as a whole.

### **3. I will Marry When I Want, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi and the Mau Mau Armed Struggle**

In almost of Ngugi's creative works, the history of the Mau Mau armed struggle against British colonial occupation continue to serve as raw material for his works. The resistance was so historic that it features in most of his works including *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want*. As Ngugi himself posits in *Moving the Centre*, the Kenyan land and freedom army [KFLA] otherwise wildly

known as the Mau Mau, with Kimathi as its supreme leader was amongst the first organized armed blows against imperialism in Africa. Mau Mau opted for an armed struggle as the greatest form of political and economic resistance against foreign occupation.

In demanding back their land and power, the Mau Mau activists rejected the culture of the oppressor and created a popular culture embodying anti-exploitation values. The Mau Mau set out to fight against all forms of imperialism. It was indeed, the highest peak of heroic tradition of resistance aimed at redefining the distorted histories of the Kenyan people and presenting the people not in terms of always being acted upon but in terms of actors. The Mau Mau resistance became so important in the works of Ngugi that Alamin Mazrui and Lupenja Mphande in *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o* concluded that "the history of the Mau Mau resistance against British colonialism in Kenya has been a central feature of virtually all of Ngugi's works..." [164].

*I Will Marry* and *The Trial* are plays which are largely informed by the Mau Mau resistance. The plays are written with the intention of reconstructing imaginatively the Kenyan people's history as they envision the world of the Mau Mau and Dedan Kimathi in terms of the peasant and worker's struggle before and after independence. By the time Kenya attained its independence in 1963, virtually all records of the Mau Mau movement that existed in writing could be described as "colonial in perspective". The Mau Mau combatants were described as blood thirsty terrorists and some of their leaders as Kimathi as lunatics. In fact, before the 1960s, as Marshal S. Clough explains in *Mau Mau Memoirs*, the British government considered the Mau Mau revolt as "an atavistic eruption of African savagery rather than a legitimate response to real grievances" [2]. Western writers and journalists accepted this version and translated it into sensationalistic images of terror. Important rituals like the oath taking ceremony which is highlighted in *I Will Marry* and *The Trial* was considered by the British colonialist as filthy obscenities, reflecting the power which crude witchcraft still has over some Kikuyu minds. Worst still, most Kenyan political leaders saw the traumatic experiences of the Mau Mau past as "unusable" [15]. Jomo Kenyatta confirms this presupposition when he concludes in *Mau Mau Memoirs* that "the Mau Mau was a disease that has been eradicated and must never be remembered again" [15]. It should be noted that such misrepresentations provoked the resistance of the Kenyan masses against colonial and neo-colonial leadership. To re-assert their heroic historical past and re-collect their collective memories, the Kenyan writers resorted to writing resistant literature because according to them, the sacrifices made by the Mau Mau activists should never be forgotten.

Such sacrifices, Mathu reiterates should never be forgotten because as Gakaara Wa Wanju posits in *I Will Marry*, "a nation which does not know its history is a dead nation" [14]. The Mau Mau should therefore, as Josiah Mwang insists should be seen not as "hard core terrorists or murderers, but as the noblest of our fight for freedom" [ibid, 1]. The

differences amongst Mau Mau interpreters created serious opposition between written and oral sources of history, which centred on the fundamental question of whose history Kenya writers seek to represent. Is it that of the colonialist and the neo-colonial bourgeoisie or is it that of the masses or exploited people from whose ranks the Mau Mau emerged? It is against this background that Ngugi and Micere found it necessary to write *The Trial* because according to them:

*There was no single work by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic resistance of Kenya people fighting foreign forces of exploitation and domination. A resistance movement whose history goes back to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century when Kenya and other East African people first took up arms against European colonial power. Our historians, our political scientists, and even some of our literary figures were too busy spewing out, elaborating and trying to document the same colonial myths... For whose benefit were these intellectuals writing? [11]*

*The Trial* is thus an answer to the above question because it tries to recapture the heroism and determination of a people in the glorious moments of Kenyan history, moments that were the culmination of struggles that were started by other national resistance heroes such as Waiyaki, Mekatiti, Kiotalet amongst others. *The Trial* thus becomes an instrument and inscription of a powerful collective memory of the legendary Mau Mau resistance.

It should be mentioned here that torture, brutality and oppression practiced by the colonialist and neo-colonialist initiated resistance from the oppressed masses. In *The Trial*, at the very beginning of the play, Kimathi is brutalized and forced to answer charges for a crime he did not commit. He is accused of being in possession of a gun without a licence which according to the judge is contrary to the law and thus constitute a criminal offence. Kimathi as a true activist refuses to answer charges in a law court whose laws to him have done nothing to the Kenyan masses. In a couple of rhetorical questions, Kimathi despises the colonial court which to him is nothing but a symbol of colonialist oppression:

*I despise your laws and your courts: what have they done for our people? What? Protected the oppressor; licensed the murderers of the people: our people. Whipped when they did not pick your tea leaves, your coffee beans. Imprison when they refuse to "ayah" your babies... murdered when they didn't nickshaw your babies and your gentlemen. I recognized only one law, one court: the court and law of those who fight exploitation... [27].*

The judge goes ahead to justify the inequality in the judicial system by saying that "no society can be without laws to protect property.... I mean protect our lives..., civilization. Investment. Christianity...orders [26]. The colonial laws were meant to favour and protect the interest of the colonialist and the sustain resistance in the play partly erupts as a result of the bias in the judicial system.

Similarly, exploitation and alienation of the Kenyan masses from the day to day activities of their society is responsible for the Steve resistance in *I will Marry*.

Exploitation is objectified through the life experiences of ordinary people. Kiguunda has to toil endlessly in Kioi's farm in return for a pittance and a life of squalor and chronic want. Supporting evidence emerges from the experiences of Gicaamba, himself a factory worker. His own alienation, Amuta argues is placed in the context of international capitalism and becomes a vital compliment to Kiguunda's exploitation in the hands of a local landlord. According to Gicaamba "The power of our hands goes to feed the people: imperialists from Europe, imperialist from America. Imperialists from Japan and of course their local watchmen". [42]. Kiguunda is equally exploited and deprived of his one and a half acre of land by his master Kioi. It is these excessive exploitation and alienation of the Kenyan masses that leads to collective resistance and this justifies the Marxist notion that throughout history, the state has been a machinery for the exploitation of the masses.

Furthermore, in the play *The Trial*, the last of Dedan Kimathi's four trials is inevitably "trials" by torture in which he emerges as a season hero-figure. As he struggles as a true Mau Mau to his feet after Henderson's fruitless attempts to break him, and tears the letter of surrender he is expected to sign, he thunders a stereotyped cry of defiance and resistance "Four hundred years the oppressor have exploited and tortured our people; four hundred years we have risen and fought against oppression: against enslavement of body, mind and soul...our people will never surrender" [58]. Kimathi will never surrender because he took an oath at initiation, which was to "protect our soul, protect our people" [54]. The oath taking ceremony was used as a tool to strengthen the resistance against foreign domination. The oath taking ceremony is equally highlighted in *I will Marry* by Leader when he says:

*...I swear by the oath of the masses and by the blood of the Kenyan people...I will never let this soil go with foreigners leaving the people of Kenya wretched! If I ever let it go, may this, the people's oath, destroy me and the blood of the masses turn against me...? [68].*

As can be noticed above, to sustain and maintain the resistance, the Kenyan activists were obliged to take an oath of allegiance to their struggle.

Moreover, in *The Trial*, Johnnie accuses Woman that she looks like "a Mau Mau, like one of Kimathi women.... Wanjiru...at Karunani camp" (55). Woman is actually a Mau Mau activist and the Kurunani camp is of historical relevance because it is where Ngugi and Micere visited to gather information about Mau Mau activities. It was equally in the camp that Mau Mau activist were locked up and symbolically, this was where the Mau Mau war was hottest. Also, Settler highlighting the effects of the Mau Mau resistance regrets the fact that the Mau Mau activists headed by Kimathi seized his maize, wheat, cattle and sheep. Boy also says he will never forget the day that a court interpreter's home guard's post was burnt down by Kimathi's men. Kimathi's teachings as Woman says were "unite, drive out the enemy, control your riches, and enjoy the profit of your labour" [18].

From the evidence provided so far, one thing stands out clearly that if there is one consistent theme in the history of the Kenyan people over the last four hundred years or so, it is certainly one of the Kenyan people's struggle against foreign dominations. This theme animates almost all of Ngugi's works and as Ngugi and Micere explain in the introduction to *The Trial*, the play is:

*Not a reproduction of the farcical trial at Nyeri but rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement. [5]*

Like in *I will Marry*, *The Trial* to Ngugi thus becomes:

*A play that looks at the Kenyan history of struggle against imperialism with pride, delineating the traitorous role of those who sold out, and the heroic role of those that held out: a play which correctly reflects the true social conditions in Kenya today, especially in its comparative depiction of the style of life of the privilege minority and the laboring majority. [qtd in David Cook, 182]*

Ngugi reiterates in *Writers in Politics* that imperialism is a very powerful instrument of oppression because it distorts a people's vision of history and of the reality of the world around them. Gakaara in *Mau Mau Memoirs* laments on the destruction caused by the British to the Kenyan society. To him, the Kenyan ancestral lands, the idealized community, the honour and timeless customs were all imperiled by the British conquest of alienation and colonial rule. Consequently, resistance becomes a condition *seni qua non* towards societal transformation. Gakaara further argues in *Mau Mau Memoirs* that:

*...before the coming for the white man, our land was a land of joy and plenty, we had plenty of food and large heads of goats and cows, and our people were people of wealth and dignity and great warriors. And the white man did not usher in an era of peace. On the contrary, he introduces an era of perpetual war; war with ourselves as we struggle with desperate and hopeless poverty and deprivation. We have to come to grips with the realization of this bitter truth: for until we change the situation our plight will remain one of sorrow and tears. [10]*

One of the weapon to fulfill such a dream as Gakaara has suggested is through the use of literature. Kenyan literature as *I will Marry* and *The Trail* do must be a fighting literature meant not only to recollect memories of the heroic past but also to mould the future. Such a literature must stand on the side of the people and such a literature as Ngugi and Micere posit must "without making mistakes and weaknesses, give people courage and urge them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation" (3). The Ngugis and Micere in *I Will Marry* and *The Trial* resort to history as an attempt towards reconstructing a history once at the verge of extinction. Mime, symbolism, flashback, song and dance are devices used by the playwrights to transform historical events into an aesthetically fine dramatic art.

## 4. Conclusion

The analysis above reveal a sustain opposition and resistance to the excesses of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. While the Ngugis and Micere question the social system dominating colonial and postcolonial Kenya politically and exploiting it economically, Besong on his part agitates for socialist, economic and political concerns as he frowns at post independent leadership. Though all committed writers as exemplified above, the Ngugis and Bate Besong share some internal differentiations in terms of national, regional, attitudinal and to some extent ideological variations. Nevertheless, the unanimity and optimism with which misrepresentation and resistance as themes have been orchestrated by these playwrights validates the assumption that they succeed in using drama to take militantly patriotic stands. They all frown at the stereotypical images attributed to the masses by their leadership as an attempt to justify their oppression, marginalisation, alienation and exploitation. The playwrights can thus be qualified as playwrights who use their art to effect social change and their plays are quite exemplary in their passionate advocacy of the liberation of human consciousness as they battle between the dominant ideology and the ideology of resistance.

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