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## **Defining and Constructing the Self in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Autobiography Detained: A Writers Prison Diary***



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### **Abstract**

This paper engages selected Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o's autobiography, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, with a view to establishing how the writer's choices of form reconstruct his lived experiences as well as index Kenyan histories. From a range of conventional rhetorical styles to unique forms such as epistolary monologue, the paper nuances the autobiographer's motivations to project his life in the ways he does. Ngugi's diary goes beyond artistry as it privileges both history and culture and their relation to the freedom of the individual. Ngugi demonstrates that a diarist character can be perceived through the narrative strategies, formal choices as well as functioning as a vehicle for ideology, culture and history. Ngugi also uses African mythology, songs, and imitates the spoken in his written works in ways that suggest that he borrows heavily from an

African orature. His inclusion of stories that reflect the culture of the people, songs proverbs, myths and parables reflect the oral in his personal writing which gives authenticity to his experiences. This underscored the reading of a personal story as part of the cultural imagination in the postcolonial discourses. Ngugi's style of writing is peculiar as it is enriched by his ability to imagine and syncretize the narratives of himself, others as well as the nation. Ngugi's explicit self-provides the reader with plenty of information about himself, unwittingly exposing many of his personal shortcomings: this context influences the process of writing the synthesized memory.

**Keywords:** *Autobiography, Constructing, Defining, Detained, Prison Diary*

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## Introduction

The phrase 'autobiographical writings' defines various versions of life writing and should be understood in the context of works which do not follow the fixed definition of the term autobiography, such as memoirs, diaries, journals, letters, and autobiographies. Baldick (1990) observes that critics usually refer to the structural design and patterning or sometimes to the style and manner of artistic work in a wider sense as distinct from its 'content' (p. 134) when speaking of form. In this paper, 'form' refers to how a work is organized, constructed and arranged, to effectively contribute to its aesthetics. Jennifer Wallack (2006) observes that autobiography is a peculiar genre which purports to be both literature and history but is not entirely one or the other. Autobiography is a combination of 'auto', meaning *self*, 'bio' meaning *life*, and 'graph' meaning *to write*. Therefore, an autobiography operates within multiple registers. The focus of this paper is on the third aspect – 'graph', write – which involves form. The thesis interrogates textual construction as a reinvention and a reconstruction of a life as lived. Gusdorf's (1980) position that "every autobiography is a work of art, at the same time a work of enlightenment" (p. 39) suggests that in autobiographical writings a historical self, located within a social context, is also a creative self whose unique artistic choices help to put such lived experiences into a distinct interpretive perspective. An autobiographical writing plays into the politics of reflecting historicity, creativity and subjectivity in formal choices made.

Hart (1970) highlights the tension between those traditional scholars who would like to maintain what he underscores as "true autobiography", and those who accommodate changes that have taken place over time in autobiographical writings. Gusdorf (1980) maintains that a non-Western autobiography is "impossible" (p. 8). Further, commenting on life writing from Africa, Olney (1973) opines that if Africans write autobiography, then it is different from that of their Western counterparts (78). One of the reasons for these observations is that the West privileges the individual as the sole agent of consciousness as opposed to collective agency. Berger (2010) argues that despite Western autobiographical theory's ongoing efforts to render it impossible, African autobiography in Africa still thrives. Berger explains how his selected texts negotiate the challenging terrains of history, language, genre, modernity, and colonialism. Berger's analysis presents African texts both as specific, localized narratives and as a part of an emerging global discourse of "non-coercive knowledge" (p. 32).

The autobiographical subject has been seen by Bakhtin (1981) as a constructed individual. He identifies elements of autobiographical writing such as its definition, intertextuality, and subjectivity, the role of fiction, history, and orality influence the

writer's formal choices. Questioning the role of the autobiographer and history, Ochieng (1985) believes that perhaps the study of the place of autobiography in literature belongs to the province of clinical psychology. Ochieng is concerned with questions which autobiographies raise, but also about their motives that point to the formal choices by writers. Ochieng revisits the very questions such as subjectivity, the writer's position, success by writer worth emulating and the writer's intention. However, Ochieng's study has been criticized by Okoth (1985) who feels that the academic question on what is the form of Kenyan autobiography is not addressed. This paper underscores how Ngugi wa Thiong'o reconstructs self in his autobiography, *Detained*.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study analysed Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* not just as a text belonging to the distinct genre of autobiography, but as a literary output characterized by certain formal choices that speak to the history that constitute the speaking subject in the narratives. The thesis argues that selected autobiographer's choices of form significantly contribute to the reconstruction of his life as well as indexing Kenyan histories. The study reads the selected autobiography as a complex literary artefact whose form is moulded at the junction of individual and collective subjectivities which are best appraised with due regard to the vexing questions of race, ethnicity, gender and class. Therefore, the study approached Ngugi wa Thiong'o's text to identify how the formal stylistic strategies that he deploys are interwoven with the his ideological dispositions in regard to the text's subject matter.

### **Literature Review**

In *A Season of Harvest*, Wanjala (1978) points to the need for an analysis on form in autobiographical writing. In the essay *Imaginative Writing since Independence: the Kenyan Experience*, he observes that Kenyans have been writing a largely political literature. He notes that even though they display commitment to society, Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), Oginga Odinga's *Not Yet Uhuru* (1967), J.M Kariuki's *Mau Mau Detainee* (1975), and Tom Mboya's *Freedom and After* (1975) have little aesthetic value. Wanjala notes that these writers have used the autobiographical form as a purgation of their suffering. To bridge this gap, this study conducts a textual analysis of the selected texts in order to investigate if the situation on aesthetics has changed decades after these books were written.

Recent studies on Kenyan autobiographical work include that of Siundu (2011) who views the autobiography as giving women power to re-insert their experiences into history. He suggests that when dealing with some auto/biographical works, it may be hard to make a distinction between the autobiography and biography. Depending on the position one takes, Siundu argues, the two forms may be inseparable. His work points out a gap that research needs to attend to, that is, to establish points of convergence as well as divergence between men's and women's narratives.

Odhiambo (2007) uses the area study/race-based model to voice his concerns on the socio-economic impact of colonialism and urbanization. His intention is to show that history has a role in the production of an individual. In his other essay, Odhiambo suggests that the writers whom he examines adopt modes of expression that disturb the genre of autobiography, the discourse of history, and, ultimately, the whole picture known to scholars of East Africa and particularly Kenyan Asians. Even though Odhiambo points out that language has been creatively used, he overlooks analysis of narrative choices in favour of viewing these narratives as evidence of the issues affecting Asians. Although he points out that artistry is critical in the conception of autobiographical writing as a genre, he does not conduct a textual analysis of form but concentrates on content. Thus, it is important to analyse various kinds of artistry used in selected autobiographical works.

Like Siundu and Odhiambo, Ojwang (2011) is less interested in form as he dwells on the significance of the Asian question and its implications to the Kenyan society. Ojwang argues that Nanji Kalidas Mehta's work, being a translation, does not yield much in terms of style. Thus, he concentrates on the thematic aspects of the autobiography. This study fills this gap by examining how autobiographers employ artistry as they reconstruct their lives. An area where the narrative process of autobiographical writing has been considerably explored is in the writing of crime and imprisonment in autobiographical works. Here, writers use artistic strategies to write their lives and convince readers to empathize with them as they depict the real life of a person whom people have learnt to distrust and question. The studies have inquired into how imprisoned individuals transform their stories into narratives that are plausible and admirable. For example, Kiiru (2002) identifies a corpus of autobiographies written by convicted criminals. He examines those artistic strategies that create empathy towards criminal figures, in autobiographical writing despite narrating the subject's despicable life.

Ndlovu (2012) compares South African and Kenyan autobiographical narratives of crime and imprisonment. He explores the role of prison in the production of subjective experience. Furthermore, Ndivo's (2013) unpublished thesis, *Kiiru*

Muchungu's *The Quest for Redemption in the Kenyan Criminal Autobiography*, explores aspects of criminology that are not normally spoken of or shared with the public because they are considered wrong and shameful. His interest lies in examining the quest for redemption in the Kenyan criminal autobiography. There is, however, a significant difference in the writings by criminals and those incarcerated despite having led crime-free lives. Whereas Odhiambo, Kiiru and Ndlovu have established that the criminals may be motivated by the thrill of their criminal life and the money that these widely read narratives fetch, there is a need to further explore other writings other than those of criminals to bridges the gap on the narrative strategies that writers deploy either in or out of confinement.

Apart from possible influences, Ngugi's style of writing can also be said to be governed by three factors: his views on the role of the postcolonial writer, his ideologies on language, and his sensibilities as a writer. For instance, in *Detained*, Ngugi is critical of style in Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1985). According to Ngugi, Karen Blixen does not meet his expectations of the literary style from a writer whose works are set in Kenya. This suggests that a writer's location and positioning define their style of writing. Ngugi believes that excellence in aesthetics suffices only in so far as he condemns colonial injustice and tells stories drawing aesthetic conclusions meant to "have universal relevance and validity" (p. 37). This disruption of structure to reveal colonial and neo-colonial injustices is revealed in Ngugi's autobiographical writing which can also be read as allegories.

The review of critical literature on autobiographical works in Kenya reveals a tendency towards the socio-political understanding of the texts rather than on the narrative aspects. According to Geesey (1997), even to the casual observer looking at the development of contemporary African writing, autobiography would certainly seem to stand out as a major component in the vast array of cultural productions from that continent. One such writer she points out is James Olney (1973). Commenting on the specificity of African autobiography, Olney's (1984) interest is in American autobiography as regards the slave narrative. In such studies their classification reveal a correlation between a group that shares histories, geographies and other defining categories and the type of autobiography produced. For instance, Schumaker's (1954) foundational study focuses on English autobiography. Woods (1994) also explores the form of the Mexican autobiography. In Africa, the Maghreb region is covered by Moore-Gilbert (2009), Rice (2006) and Kelly (2005) who engage Anglophone writers, including Mouloud Feraoun, Memmi, Khatibi and Assia Djébar and others given the prominence of culture and colonialism. Similar studies have been done in South Africa using autobiographical writing as site and limit of intertextual cultural memory notable of which is the fact that they go further

to delineate black from white experience. Given its peculiar location and history of the Kenyan nation its autobiographical production is also bound to yield insights into its formal choices as illustrative of the complexity of narrating a situation in which the self is imbricated in the nation.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study employed a textual analysis approach with form as the focal point. The researcher, therefore, selected and read autobiographical work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981, 2010). Ngugi was selected because he is a literary writer and critic. Therefore, he presents a unique literary perspective in how he deploys language strategies to articulate his visions. To address the uniqueness in form of the reconstructed life of the author, the research drew insights from the principles of the theory of Autobiography, Autobiographics and African Feminism. This eclectic approach was influenced by the understanding that categories such as gender may determine writers' narrative strategies.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Defining and Constructing the Self In *Detained: A Writers Prison Diary***

The study examined how Ngugi constructs the diarist character through formal strategies. Ngugi's characterisation in *Detained* engages stylistic and narrative techniques that represent himself, his actions, intentions, desires and traits. Cochrane (2014) observes that, in narratives, the presentation of episodes of a life reflect traits or values. He asserts that fictional narratives provide character models that we can apply to real-life individuals and that fictional narratives help readers to reflect on the value priorities that constitute character. These important views can also apply to autobiographical works. Such a narration requires conscious selection of events and the formal choices used to negotiate between the "real" day-to-day life and its textual representations. Ngugi's self-characterisation is a vehicle to provide a discourse on imprisonment and on writing itself.

Ngugi's presentation of his personality can be measured by drawing from socio-psychology which negotiates the contested space and time between reality of the text and the actual world of the reader. The diary offers multifaceted ways of reading Ngugi's personality, especially the place of history in constructing the individual. Character construction starts with the psychology of an individual. Constructing an autobiographical character entails a presentation of an individual who speaks from the centre, who is self-aware and conscious and therefore authoritative; it calls for the writer's ability to assemble coherent, stable, unified and recognizable traits for the reader to judge personality. This may be problematic in itself, as, according to Freudian psychoanalysis, the self is never that clear and it is

riddled with unconscious wishes, fears, and aggressions and may be narcissistic, therefore subjective.

Language and the power that the government holds on the individual also influence character construction. In private spaces, the body and the awareness of gendered identities construct political subjectivities. Discourse of self-construction point to Althusser's interpellated individual. Construction of the self is also a means of highlighting the communal. Bruner (2002) posits that the individual constantly constructs and reconstructs a self to meet the needs of the situations they encounter and they do so with the guidance of their memories of the past and their hopes and fears of the future (p. 210). According to Eakins (2004), the self is continually evolving as one interacts with others. In assessing Ngugi's character construction, Ndlovu (2012) argues that the self is not autonomous and transcendent, that it is not constituted through a lonely process of introspection but rather at the intersection of the material world, the individual mental capacity and the indefinable spiritual entity (p. 16). These insights help us conceive characterisation as a formal device that Ngugi uses to highlight sites of struggle, subjectivities, his ideological bent, his positioning as spokesman of dominant or muted positions, instances of competing discourses and his body and consciousness. Furthermore, Ngugi fictionalizes his experiences in the same way pointed out by Mwangi (2009) who, in reference to other autobiographical writers, concurs with Hayden White (1980) that characters view events "subjectively and fashion themselves and one another in contestatory terms" (p. 52). To define and talk about oneself means to bring other political, social, and cultural factors into consideration. For Lodge (1992), "of all the elements of fiction which are recognisably discreet, character is the most difficult one to discuss in isolation" (p. 67). Lodge views character in the autobiographical writing as a construct and self-fashioning. Siundu's (2009) approach, albeit in a different context, gives more understanding of how closely character construction in autobiographical writing is linked to other intersecting factors like race, class and gender. Based on autobiographical writings by writers of Asian origin, Siundu, makes two observations: first, he views the construction of manhood and masculinities in these texts as a way of mapping communal boundaries and therefore mark belonging and unbelonging, and the way such constructions intersect with other issues that emerge from the novels. Secondly, that character constructs from the groups' standpoints in relation to each other mark out the role of "characters as representative of wider interest groups" (p. 59). Siundu associates character construction to other social constructs and factors such as the ways characters position themselves in relation to contests for different forms of resources.

Characterization in *Detained* is evident in its emplotment, dialogue, narrative voice, point of view and location. The choice of these strategies gives Ngugi his identity as a person, a writer and member of a community, and is a site where inequalities like race, class and gender intersect. In *Detained*, Ngugi considers the reasons for his incarceration and makes assumptions about his self, and others. He involves the reader in this construction by giving the reader an impression of a coherent, unified, belonging self. Ngugi's imagination of self and the consequent textual representation of himself and of others allows him to position himself strategically as a writer, a peasant, intellectual and protester against the neo-colonial regime. This results in a postcolonial aesthetics. In an interview with Noske (2013), Young warns of the danger of ignoring questions of aesthetics within critical literary studies. He examines the notion of a distinct aesthetic in postcolonial writing as influenced not only by language and culture, but also by the experiences that constitute the postcolonial: hybridity, trauma, dislocation and the experience of the third space. While he rejects the notion of a "unified aesthetic" within postcolonial texts, Young explores the nature of this experience and the possibility of writing subjectively from within it. Indeed, Ngugi's formal choices bridge the gap between the self and others and provide a way of thinking about how, as a narrator, he sustains the illusion of a coherent identity and, more importantly, how he invariably involves other people from whom the speaking self is differentiated from or identified with a collective consciousness.

The writer is the central subject in any autobiographical writing and demonstrates that the life story is embodied in the presentation of character. Ngugi draws out of the flux of events a coherent pattern. This is achieved through this closely associates a man's character to his destiny. In narrating the events of his life, Ngugi is indeed constructing his character. In *Metaphors of Self*, Olney argues that in order to understand autobiographical writing, we must start with the autobiographer, how he constructs his subjective reality, how he imposes order and creates significance. Thus, the study of self cannot be separated from the study of the writer since one's vocation always infiltrates into his autobiography. In the projection of self, he selectively creates who he wants to be. As a writer, Ngugi demonstrates autobiographical and historical awareness of the contexts and the process of inscribing the self. The various events that he describes depict him in a role that fits his character.

Having been incarcerated in ways that he feels are a violation of his rights, Ngugi constructs his character in a manner to maximize reader empathy, recognition and emotional involvement through an emphatic plea of innocence. He writes:



A few others were not content with accusations. They started attacking me even though they knew I was not in a position to answer back. One even wrote what amounted to an obituary and referred to me in the past tense (p. xv).

Bringing to light such accusations seems an attempt at character redemption, an exercise greatly aided by the diary form. He mentions that he was accused of being a traitor working with the Russians and the Chinese and that he was a leftist. His alleged Kikuyu-Centrism also came up. Ngugi highlights speculations about his incarceration, especially those that raise questions about his character which went on even after his release. Ngugi's *Detained* is, therefore, presented as a logical argument that clarifies the concerns and against these accusations.

The writing of the diary seems a bold attempt to declare: "this is who I am." Naming in autobiographical writing complicates the possible ideological implications in a cultural and historical context. Trying to answer the question "who am I?" gives opportunity to the writer to show off his self-knowledge. Ngugi identifies who he is by his name. His name has a controversial background, especially in his opposition to the West. Ngugi's stand on having a purely Kikuyu name, according to him, draws criticism by Charles Njonjo for not having a Christian name. Many of Ngugi's contemporaries like Micere Mugo actually shed off their Christian names as a sign of resistance to the west. Njonjo is seen by Ngugi as a collaborator. Dramatizing these polarities, Ngugi writes:

It is not merely a question of background, (he is the son of a colonial chief while I am the son of a peasant) but more of a difference in the perception of our roles vis-à-vis the struggle of Kenyan national culture against foreign imperialist cultures. [...]. I am not sure that having an English Christian name would have deterred me from the task of exposing imperialist cultural domination or spared me the attacks from those not opposed to imperialism. Only that, as charity begins at home, I had to start by rejecting the slave tradition of acquiring the master's name (p. xxi).

In this excerpt, Ngugi gives the genesis of abandoning the name James Ngugi to the current one Ngugi wa Thiong'o and shows how his protest is interpellated in his ideological standpoint as well as construction of the self. The name also features when imprisonment threatens to deprive him of his identity by renaming him: "here I have no name. Just a number in a file: K6, 77" (p. 1). Through dialogue with the

warder, Ngugi subtly presents his identity as an intellectual: “Professor why are you not in bed. Why do you want to know the time, Professor?” (p. 11).

Ngugi’s identity as a writer comes out forcefully when he draws from literary works to understand his imprisonment. He recalls that, in 1963, he once opened a short story, *The Mubenzi Tribesman*, which read:

‘The thing that one remembers most about prison is the smell: the smell of shit and urine; the smell of human sweat and breath.’ This was fairly accurate for a young imagination. Prison has its own peculiar smell: a permanent heavy pall of perpetually polluted air. On arrival at Kamiti, the smell hits me in the face, it descends on me, it presses me down, it courses down my nostrils and throat, I am gasping for breath, and I am really scared of an attack of asthma.

The smell of unsugared, unsalted, uncooked porridge is another. It is nauseating. I feel like vomiting. Was I a *Mubenzi tribesman* after all? (p. 119).

This allusion to a literary work enables readers of the diary to understand how Ngugi defines himself while imprisoned; as someone who shares in the trials of postcolonial disillusionment. Ngugi further portrays himself as a prolific writer when he writes about the novel he is writing while imprisoned:

To hell with the warders-- tonight I don’t want to think about the colonial warders and prisoners, colonial and neo-colonial affiants, I am totally engrossed in *Wariinga*, the fictional heroine of the novel I have been writing on toilet paper for the last ten months or so (*Detained*, p. 5).

The opening paragraph of his diary is “*Wariinga ngatha ya Wira* ... heroine of toil there she walks haughtily carrying freedom in her hands” (p. 1). Here, Ngugi asserts his commitment to writing despite censorship. He deviates from diary principles when he says he has been writing for ten months instead of giving actual dates of every sentence he has written.

Ngugi not only presents himself as a fictional character but also as a subjective one. For instance, he narrates the government raid on his house the night he was detained in a manner that clearly shapes his character. In this case, he uses storytelling to create attention for the readers to read and empathize with him by focusing on specific events the narrator witnessed or experienced. He gives the events that lead unto his arrest and shows the danger he is in. The raid has a beginning at his house when the soldiers drive into his compound, a middle replete

with the narrator's anxiety over his safety, an end when they enter the prison gates. He writes: "it was at midnight on 30-31 December 1977 at Gitogoothi, Bibirioini, and Limuru. Two Land-Rovers with policemen armed with guns, rifles and pistols drove into the yard" (p. 15). The security agents' invasion of his house, the repression he perceives and the resistance of it positions Ngugi as the central protagonist. Creating a protagonist character in such circumstances also involves making his voice vivid. Ngugi uses dramatic dialogue to show how he was forcefully removed from his home. Through narrating the raid, Ngugi condemns government censorship on certain books and its violent enforcement. His arrest for possession of such books and propagation of Marxist ideology positions him among those persecuted the state. He uses Victor Jacinto Flecha's poem "It is No Use" to reinforce his sense of persecution:

It's no use/ You're hiding deep in the dark well of your house/ Hiding your words/ Burning your words/ Burning your books it's no use./ They'll come to find you/ In lorries, piled high with leaflets, / With letters no one ever wrote to you/ They'll fill your passport with stamps/ From countries where you have never been/ They'll drag you away/ Like some dead dog/ And that night you'll find out all about torture/ In the dark room/ Where all the foul odours of the world are bred/ It's no use/ Your hiding  
(*Detained*, p. 16).

This poem is a strategy that brings out Ngugi's character of defiance, his determination to champion resistance against a seemingly powerful repressive system. In this performative act, Ngugi imagines "possibilities that his incarceration posed by exploring Flecha's aesthetic imaginings. He employs hyperbole, in Lorries, piled high with leaflets," figurative language like similes: "They'll drag you away/Like some dead dog" and metaphor: "Where all the foul odours of the world are bred" (*Detained*, p. 16). Indeed, the poem captures the malice that is pervasive in repressive states as seen in stamped passports and incriminating letters to serve as evidence in court. Yet, unlike Flecha's kind of state that at least makes pretences to judicial process, the regime that detains Ngugi acts with impunity as it skips the courts to make use of the prisons.

In narrating his entry into Kamiti Maximum Prison, Ngugi changes what could ordinarily be seen as dishonourable into a heroic act as he constructs himself into a patriot ready to sacrifice his life for his country. He writes:

The huge prison gates like the jaws of a ravenous monster, now slowly swung open to swallow me within its walls, which still dripped with the blood of the many Kenyan patriots who had been hanged there for their courageous Mau Mau guerrilla struggle against British Imperialism (p. 19).

Here, Ngugi inserts himself into the Mau Mau histories as he constructs as he illegitimizes the post-independent state in the light of the colonial regime. It is, also, a way of signalling to the reader the bloodletting horrors akin to those Mau Mau fighters and sympathisers faced (Elkins, 2005) that a political detainee was confronted with as soon as the Kamiti gates opened. Indeed, using these varied formal techniques to present the dramatic moment of his incarceration positions him as the hero of his diary novel in which he captures the interest and imagination of the reader. As demonstrated, the diary novel accommodates the writer's ability able to weave the environment into a personal story.

Even in narrating his journey in pursuit of education, Ngugi presents to the reader the image of Mau Mau war and how it shaped him as a person. This he does through flashback which foregrounds colonial deprivation, dislocation and dispossession. He writes:

The year before, my elder brother, Wallace Mwangi, had joined the Mau Mau guerrilla army after a dramatic escape from police custody. Many home-guard loyalists would never forgive me for what some thought a miscarriage of educational justice: a brother of a Mau Mau 'terrorist' securing a place in one of the then top African schools in colonial Kenya? I came back after the first term and confidently walked back to my old village. My home was now only a pile of dry mud-stones, bits of grass, charcoal and ashes. Nothing remained, not even crops, except for a lone pear tree that slightly swayed in sun and wind (p. 76).

This memory is presented so as to bring out cultural imperialism and how he experienced them as a child. He recalls why he didn't have a movement pass and why he was vilified for joining the best school in Kenya — association guilt since his brother was a Mau Mau fighter. These recollections shape Ngugi's identity as a peasant among peasants struggling against imperialism. Furthermore, in the similar ways that colonialists destroyed homes, Ngugi uses the diary to demonstrate that the post-independent regime was doing the same.

Apart from anecdotes, dramatic dialogue and flashback, Ngugi uses witnesses to corroborate his account. In *Autobiography as De-Facement*, Paul De Man (1979)

recognizes this as a necessary step to the reader author bond. Although the fact that he calls upon a witness to speak about what has taken place may not necessarily make an event true, what it does is to convince the reader that a third party can authenticate what happened. For instance, Ngugi makes references to fellow detainees, among them Koigi wa Wamwere in an attempt to convince the reader of the authenticity of his story. By so doing, Ngugi builds his character as a credible and honest witness to the events that he describes which can be verified by others with the same experience.

The character of the diarist is central because the very act of writing a diary is actually a self-examination. The self in the diary is determined by Ngugi's sense of self, of place, of history, and motives for writing. The diarist operates as a double persona: one who writes and the one produced by the writing. These two can be distinguished because they do not share the same time and place since the one reflecting on the one that is written is always ahead. The seemingly desolate/ lonely writing persona is forced into silent self-communication because no one else is willing to listen or able to share experiences desolate lonely. On the other hand, the I of the memoir is a happy, nostalgic individual while the diarist I is a suffering being.

Having been critical to their nations and getting imprisoned for it these writers show how their works confront inequalities such as race, gender, and class; how they articulate the problems faced by the subalterns; and how these texts might provide different lenses into the self. On many occasions, Ngugi refers to his writings to emphasise a point. This style of writing demonstrates Ngugi's standpoint on the role of the postcolonial writer, his ideologies and his sensibilities as a writer. Ngugi seems to use his personal experience to describe and analyse the postcolonial situation in Kenya. According to Lovesey (2010), all of Ngugi's novels demonstrate history "from below" (p. 4).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Ngugi's diary goes beyond artistry as it privileges both history and culture and their relation to the freedom of the individual. Ngugi demonstrates that a diarist character can be perceived through the narrative strategies, formal choices as well as functioning as a vehicle for ideology, culture and history. Ngugi also uses African mythology, songs, and imitates the spoken in his written works in ways that suggest that he borrows heavily from an African orature. His inclusion of stories that reflect the culture of the people, songs proverbs, myths and parables reflect the oral in his personal writing which gives authenticity to his experiences. This underscored the reading of a personal story as part of the cultural imagination in the postcolonial discourses. Ngugi's style of writing is peculiar as it is enriched by his ability to

imagine and syncretize the narratives of himself, others as well as the nation. Ngugi's explicit self-provides the reader with plenty of information about himself, unwittingly exposing many of his personal shortcomings: this context influences the process of writing the synthesized memory.

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