

RESISTANCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS
IN KENYA AND SOUTH AFRICA

A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH PARTICULAR
REFERENCE TO THE NOVELS OF NGUGI WA
THIONG'O AND ALEX LA GUMA

by

Anders Breidlid

*Thesis submitted to the School of Oriental and African Studies,
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Abstract

This study undertakes an analysis of the models of response (resistance/(non-agency) to colonial, apartheid and post-colonial imposition which are posited in the novels of the Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the South African writer Alex La Guma. Such a focus involves related issues such as the relationship between the consciousness level of the subaltern and his/her capacity for resistance and how oppression affects self-construction and consciousness. Since the thesis deals with resistance and consciousness within the textual space of the novels, the central issue raised in the thesis is explored around questions of representations.

In defining the nature of resistance literature, the introductory chapter characterises levels of resistance and distinguishes between "counter-hegemonic" and "combat" literature. Whereas "combat" literature tends to invert the colonial version of Manichean binarism and is placed squarely within the liberation struggle, "counter-hegemonic" fiction is defined as constituting the fragmented colonial subject and subverting the colonial representation of the subaltern without necessarily insisting on the implacable enmity of Manicheism and its location within the liberation struggle. Part 1 identifies Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* and La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threefold Cord* as counter-hegemonic fiction. The texts may be viewed from two interconnected levels: the ambivalence and subversion of colonial discourse and the reconstruction of self in resistance to the colonial/apartheid/post-colonial domination. The texts fill the vacuum created by colonial discourse by defying the non-representation of the Other/the subaltern by writing about the world, culture and values absent in colonial representations, but the textual analyses reveal at the same time representations of the subaltern which resist essentialist representation of subaltern consciousness and reject an essentialist view of resistance as an obvious, non-contradictory act.

In a brief chapter at the end of Part 1, the revised version of *A Grain of Wheat* is analysed, signalling Ngugi's transition from his counter-hegemonic to his combat phase.

In Part 2 Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* and La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* and *Time of the Butcherbird* are defined as "combat" fiction. In contrast to the novels discussed in Part 1, the texts under scrutiny in Part 2 expose essentialist assumptions about the colonial/apartheid/post-colonial situation. Ngugi and La Guma's literary projects focus on the urgency of the political situation in Kenya and South Africa, thereby underlining the ideological message in the texts and the importance of conscientising the subaltern. In the combat fiction of the two authors the emphasis is on a more direct, uncompromising and often one-dimensional reaction and struggle against the oppressor. While the thesis critiques certain aspects of this fairly fixed, one-dimensional representation of the African situation in these fictional texts, the thesis underlines the need for counter-narratives of freedom and liberation on the troubled African continent.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	6
1. THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS.....	8
1.1 Introduction.....	8
1.2 Non-fictional textual resistance.....	13
1.3 Theorising resistance: ideology, power and knowledge.....	17
1.4 Representation in historical and fictional discourse.....	23
1.5 Literary images of Africa. Some colonialist and anti-colonial texts.....	29
1.6 Defining counter-hegemonic fiction.....	34
1.7 Defining combat fiction.....	39
PART 1. COUNTER-HEGEMONIC FICTION: THE EXPLORATION OF AN AMBIGUOUS TERRAIN.....	46
2. General introduction.....	46
3. <i>A Grain of Wheat</i>	53
3.1 Introduction.....	53
3.2 Prospero in Africa: The Consciousness of Superiority.....	53
3.3 Interrogating resistance from within: the exposure of the fragile self.....	58
3.3.1 The enigmatic character of Mugo.....	58
3.3.2 Mugo's construction of self: Seclusion, agency and betrayal.....	61
3.3.3 Negotiating the interests of self and community : the betrayals of Gikonyo and Mumbi.....	65
3.3.4 Breaking the silence: voice as a revolutionary gesture.....	68
3.4 Exploring the grand narrative of resistance.....	71
3.4.1 The representation of Mau Mau in post-colonial Kenya.....	72
3.4.2 Kenyatta and Mau Mau.....	74
3.4.3 Ngugi and Mau Mau: Querying the Post-colonial Myth-Making.....	76
3.4.4 Recovering the grand narrative of Mau Mau: The ambivalent portrayal of Kihika	78
3.4.5 Talking about the Past as a Way of Talking About the Future.....	84
4. <i>A Grain of Wheat</i> Revisited: A Transitional Case.....	89
5. <i>A Walk in the Night</i>	98
5.1 Introduction.....	98
5.2 Exposing the solidity and the vulnerability of the apartheid system.....	100
5.3 Questioning assumptions about subaltern reconstruction.....	104
5.3.1 The ambiguous representation of the subaltern: Michael Adonis.....	105
5.3.2 Michael Adonis' construction of self: the importance of recognition.....	110
5.4 Exploring consciousness, resistance and regression.....	112
5.4.1 Michael Adonis: Resistance without a political agenda.....	116
5.4.2 The potentials of the crowd: recovering subaltern resistance? ²	118

6. <i>And A Threefold Cord</i>	124
6.1 Introduction.....	124
6.2 Apartheid hegemony and its different representations	124
6.3 Exploring the subaltern voice	127
6.3.1 Spatial constraints and oppression: the members of the Pauls' family	128
6.3.2 Questioning solidarity in the community: the dehumanisation of subaltern self	130
6.3.3 A community not at peace with itself	133
6.4 Examining alternative narratives: Resistance and complicity among the subaltern.	136
6.4.1 The border-crossings of Charlie Pauls	137
6.4.2 The colonising of the mind: Ma and Uncle Ben	140
6.4.3 The fly, the rain, the carnation and the bird: redemption beyond the apartheid discourse?.....	142
6.4.4 Transcending combat discourse.....	145
PART II. COMBAT LITERATURE AS POLITICAL COMMITMENT	148
7. General introduction.....	148
8. <i>Devil on the Cross</i>	160
8.1 Introduction.....	160
8.2 Exploring the post-colonial hegemonic order: the economics of the exploitative classes.....	161
8.3 Resisting dominant discourse.....	166
8.3.1 Conscientisation and the construction of Wariinga's self	170
8.3.2 Resistance and the strayed intellectual: The ambiguous life of Gatuiria.....	173
8.4 Querying the narrow ideological terrain: The suppression of plural stories	175
9. <i>Matigari</i>	182
9.1 Introduction.....	182
9.2 Exploring truth and justice: disillusionment and betrayal.....	183
9.3 Resistance and agency: the prophet and the grassroots	187
9.3.1 Transgressing Marxist discourse: The role of super-naturalism and Christian imagery	188
9.3.2 The identity of Matigari and the problem of grassroots agency	190
9.4 The apotheosis of Matigari and the rejection of the decentered voice.....	196
10. <i>In the Fog of the Seasons' End</i>	205
10.1 Introduction	205
10.2 Exploring the terrain of oppression.....	205
10.2. 1 The rationale of the struggle: Race and class	208
10.3 Resisting the apartheid regime: The anatomy of a resistance movement	209
10.3.1 Resistance against oppression: Coloured and black representation in the movement.....	212
10.3.2 Transcending subalternity: the importance of organisation and education.....	213

10.3.2 The concept of home.....	216
10.3.3 The re-establishment of a fragile self.....	217
10.3.4 The economics of low-key resistance and passivity.....	219
10.3.5 Black representation- the anonymous members of the Sharpeville crowd.....	221
10.4 The evaporation of the fog: the vision of the promised land.....	222
11. <i>Time of the Butcherbird</i>	226
11.1 Introduction.....	226
11.2 Exploring Boer ideology.....	228
11.3 Resistance against apartheid imposition.....	231
11.3.1 Rural resistance: The role of the peasantry.....	232
11.3.2 Race and class revisited.....	234
11.3.3 Querying Otherness and difference.....	238
11.3.4 The personal revenge motive.....	239
11.4 The eradication of difference: utopia envisaged.....	242
12. Conclusion.....	245
13. Bibliography.....	254

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1. THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

1.1 Introduction

Resistance in a third world context is characterised as a reaction to colonialism and imperialism, implying an alternative, non-hegemonic way of conceiving human history, which is also extended to encompass the struggle in the post-colonial period. This reaction comes about when the subaltern¹ becomes “aware of one’s self as belonging to a subject people,”² and becomes conscious of his/her oppression. Subaltern resistance necessitates a process of conscientisation which, according to Paulo Freire, means “the deepening of the coming of consciousness.”³ The deepening of this process implies “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.”⁴

As is well documented, resistance movements played an important part in the struggle for independence and also made an impact on the future structuring of the new nations. As Terence Ranger says:

African ‘primary resistance’ shaped the environment in which later politics developed. . . resistance had profound effects upon white policies and attitudes. . . during the course of the resistances, or some of them, types of political organization or inspiration emerged which looked in important ways to the future; which in some cases are directly and in others indirectly linked with later manifestations of African opposition.⁵

Said distinguishes in *Culture and Imperialism* between “primary” and “secondary” resistance, the former referring to the literal struggle against colonialism, the latter referring to what he calls “ideological resistance.”⁶ “Primary” resistance as I interpret it is a multifaceted concept which comprises physical resistance as expressed in liberation movements, mass demonstrations and similar high-profile actions, more low key resistance activities which include, in James Scott’s words, “false compliance, foot-dragging, dissimulation, desertion,

¹ The term “subaltern” was first used by Antonio Gramsci in political/philosophical debate. While “subaltern” originally was a military concept, Gramsci used it to denote an oppressed person or oppressed classes with no access to hegemonic power. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920*, ed. Quintin Hoare, trans. John Matthews (New York: International Publishers, 1977). The term was later picked up by the Subaltern Studies group of Indian historians meaning “the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way.” (See Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies 1: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1982), vii. The term was further used by Gayatri C. Spivak in her article: “Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow-Sacrifice,” *Wedge* 7/ 8 (1985): 120-130.

² Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), 258.

³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the City* (New York; Continuum, 1993), 110.

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1985), 15.

⁵ Terence Ranger, “Connexions Between Primary Resistance Movements and Modern Mass Nationalisms in East and Central Africa,” *Journal of African History* 9, no. 3 (1968): 631.

⁶ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 252.

false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander..."⁷ and more symbolic activities as either avoiding or returning the oppressor's gaze. "Secondary" or ideological resistance focuses, according to Basil Davidson, on rebuilding "a shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial system."⁸ Said sees "primary" and "secondary" resistance as mutually interdependent:

the interventions of non-European artists and scholars cannot be dismissed or silenced, and these interventions are not only an integral part of a political movement but, in many ways, the movement's successfully guiding imagination, intellectual and figurative energy reseeding and rethinking the terrain common to whites and non-whites.⁹

Located within what Said calls "secondary" resistance literature can be perceived as literature which resists the ideological impositions of colonial discourse. Since colonial discourse, according to Said, not only represents but produces the reality of the colonised and actually makes the colonised accept this construction of reality, resistance literature is often defined as literature which queries and often undermines the reality construction of colonial discourse.¹⁰ This remapping of reality and the African terrain is in line with Simon Gikandi's reading of Achebe's novels as being "prompted by the desire to initiate a discourse of resistance and to re-present Africans other than they have been presented by colonialist discourse."¹¹ As Achebe states:

what I think a novelist can teach is something very fundamental, namely to indicate to his readers, to put it crudely, that we in Africa did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans.¹²

According to Gikandi Achebe

turns the Western fantasy on Africa upside down, a gesture of reversal which... makes it possible for Achebe to initiate narratives of resistance. A reading... which fails to relate it to the discourse that shadows it, misses the revolutionary nature of... (the) text.¹³

This is in line with the authors of the seminal book *The Empire Writes Back*¹⁴ who suggest that anti-colonial discourse is a way, as Said states, "of *writing back* to the metropolitan cultures, disrupting the European narratives of the Orient and Africa, "replacing them with

⁷ See e.g. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), xvi.

⁸ Basil Davidson, *Africa in Modern History: The Search for a New Society* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 155.

⁹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 256.

¹⁰ See sections 1.6 and 1.7 for a more comprehensive discussion of the term "resistance literature."

¹¹ Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (London, Nairobi: Heinemann, Heinemann Kenya, 1991), 24.

¹² Chinua Achebe in an interview with Donatus Nwoga in *African Writers Talking*, eds. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann, 1972), 7.

¹³ Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, 26.

¹⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York, 1989).

either a more playful or a more powerful new narrative style.”¹⁵ The way of rewriting hegemonic discourse means a form of subversion,

as the subversive is characteristic of post-colonial discourse in general. Post-colonial literatures/cultures are thus constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices, and they offer ‘fields’ of counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse.¹⁶

By focusing on these counter-discursive practices the present study will explore selected novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Alex la Guma within the parameters of what is traditionally called resistance literature, grounded on the premise that the complex and important issues of resistance in third world literature will be illuminated from different angles by these two authors.

The central question of this thesis refers to the kinds of models of response (resistance/(non)agency) to colonial and post-colonial imposition which are posited in the texts. Such a focus involves related issues such as the relationship between the consciousness level of the subaltern and his/her capacity for resistance and how oppression affects self-construction and consciousness. In what way, in other words, can the subaltern act or speak? More accurately, is there a causal relationship between self-construction, consciousness and resistance? Is resistance/agency accompanied by or a consequence of a decolonised consciousness? In what way do the authors respond differently to the issue of resistance/agency in different periods of their career?

Since the thesis is concerned with resistance within the textual space of the novels the central issue raised in the thesis is explored around questions of representation. The textual analysis will investigate in what way colonial representations of the subaltern are confirmed or subverted and how or if the writers essentialise the subaltern. Moreover, by exploring the subaltern mind in resistance it is of paramount interest to expose the ideological underpinnings that inform the inscriptions of the subject positions and representations of the subaltern self in the texts of Ngugi and La Guma. Such an analysis will explore the ideological climate of the novels and analyse in what way the characters are interpellated by both dominant and non-dominant ideologies and whether the ideological interpellations and counter-interpellations in the different texts of Ngugi and La Guma vary in such a way that they cause various responses (resistance/complicity) to colonial/apartheid/postcolonial domination. The thesis will consequently explore how such inscriptions are mediated in various ways by race, class, gender, by authorial history and by context (South Africa/Kenya).

My final concern in this thesis relates to in what way Ngugi and La Guma, by representing or historicising colonial and post-colonial relations, move beyond the colonial and post-colonial “realities” themselves and reinterpret or offer alternative interpretations of that

¹⁵ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 260.

¹⁶ Helen Tiffin, “Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse,” *Kunapipi*, IX, no.3 (1987): 18.

world. This issue necessitates a discussion, albeit brief, of the relationship and potential tension between “history” (context) and imaginative texts.

Besides querying how the analysed texts both rival and reproduce “historical narratives” the thesis explores how and if the resistance literature of Ngugi and La Guma transcends the limitations of the historical and sociological reality and redefine new worlds. Have the novels escaped the grip of colonialist discursive practices and European aesthetics?

These are the questions which will inform the analysis of the novels in question.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Alex La Guma wrote their novels under very different circumstances and contexts. Whereas Ngugi’s fiction deals with the situation in colonial and post-colonial Kenya, La Guma focuses on the situation in his home country, South Africa, during the apartheid period, or during the period of internal colonialism. At first glance a comparative study of Ngugi and La Guma may seem idiosyncratic since the colonial experience in the two countries is very different and not easily comparable.

Whereas formal colonialism in Kenya ceased to exist with her independence in 1963, South Africa became independent from Britain as early as 1910. However, what many historians would term “internal colonialism,” i.e. the white subjugation of blacks within the country, continued up till the elections of 1994. The traditional definition of “colonialism” as appropriating material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation must therefore be supplemented with a version of “colonialism” which is duplicated from within.¹⁷

In any case the coloured and black people in South Africa and the blacks in Kenya suffered under the domination of white supremacy during important periods of the 20th century. A comparative study between the two different colonial experiences may yield different dialectical relationships between context and text which I will explore in this thesis.

Both Ngugi and La Guma published their first fictional books at the beginning of the sixties, Ngugi on the eve of Kenya’s independence and La Guma in the midst of resistance and increased repression by the apartheid regime. Ngugi's last novel (to this date), *Matigari*, was published in 1987 and reflects the disillusionment with the indigenous post-colonial regime whereas La Guma’s last, *Time of the Butcherbird*, published in 1979, focuses on the intensified resistance to the apartheid regime.

While Ngugi is one of the best-known and most highly profiled writers on the African continent, La Guma never achieved the same kind of reputation and prominence even though there is no reason to undervalue his contributions both as a writer and a politician. Ngugi, for one, admits to have been deeply influenced by La Guma and classifies him “among the best of African writers.”¹⁸ And at the first African Writers Conference in Kampala in 1962 Wole Soyinka, commenting on *A Walk in the Night*, stated that “La Guma

¹⁷ For a discussion of this special type of colonialism (“internal colonialism”), see Brian Bunting, “Introduction,” in Edward Roux, *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography* (Bellville, Cape Town: University of Western Cape, 1993), 20.

¹⁸ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, “Decolonising the Mind: Cultural Emancipation After Liberation.” Address at University of Western Cape Cultural Centre, 20.8 1991.

had managed to do in 91 pages what African writers had been trying to achieve for years.”¹⁹ Similarly other critics hold his writing in very high esteem.²⁰

My reading of the two authors separates the selected works into two parts, the first dealing with what I have called their counter-hegemonic fiction and the second what I have termed combat fiction. The first part deals with the counter-hegemonic fiction of the authors which in both cases coalesces with the early period of their writing careers whilst the second part deals with the combat fiction of their later period. I have chosen to focus on three of Ngugi's novels, one from his counter-hegemonic period, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and two from what I have called his combat period, *Devil on the Cross* (English version 1982) and *Matigari* (Gikuyu and English version 1987). In fact *A Grain of Wheat* appeared in an original and a revised version (1986). Whereas the most thorough analysis is undertaken of the original version, I have found it necessary to make some comments on the changes that have taken place in the new version to explain his transition to what I have called the combat period. Four of La Guma's novels are analysed, *A Walk in the Night* (1962) and *And A Threefold Cord* (1964) from his counter-hegemonic period, and *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (1972) and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979) from his combat period.²¹

By analysing two authors from different regions and countries, different historical and political settings and where the emphasis is in large parts on different ethnic groups, this study offers readings that focus on resistance- comparatively viewed- which critical studies of the two authors separately by logic and necessity have avoided. I will argue that it is critically and theoretically fruitful to examine the issue of resistance from such a comparative perspective.

The distinction between two types of resistance literature which in various ways challenge the various impositions of colonial and neo-colonial hegemony is by no means clear-cut, but is nevertheless a productive notion to distinguish between literatures which thematically and (sometimes) stylistically operate on different levels as far as resistance is concerned.

Whereas I define combat fiction as placed squarely within the liberation struggle or the so-called neo-colonial struggle and as characterised by its marked inversion of the Manichean binarism of colonial discourse, my discussion of counter-hegemonic fiction is meant to show, on the other hand, how it interrogates this binarism by introducing relational notions between the oppressor and the oppressed, and is consequently more concerned with the

¹⁹ Quoted from André Odendaal and Roger Field eds., *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex La Guma* (Bellville, Cape Town: Mayibuye Books, University of Western Cape, 1993), iii.

²⁰ See e.g. Lewis Nkosi, who in his obituary on La Guma, compares La Guma's vision to that of Dostoyevsky. *The Times*, London, 23.11 1985.

²¹ The choice of novels has primarily been determined by their ideological location within the total production of novels of the two authors. Space limitation has excluded Ngugi's *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child* and *Petals of Blood* and La Guma's *A Stone Country* from analysis.

possibility of self-construction within the space of the colonial/postcolonial world.²²

The present chapter provides a theoretical introduction to the central concepts which inform my analysis of the novels in Part 1 and Part 2. After having briefly focused on a very selective number of what I consider seminal, non-fictional writings and outlined some of the main concerns in anti-colonial non-fictional discourse (1.2) I address key theoretical concepts such as ideology, power and knowledge in relation to resistance and agency (1.3). The central question of representation is seen in connection with the discussion about the possibility of restoring the potential voice of the subaltern. Such a discussion must necessarily also include the contentious questions relating to notions of what “true” representations actually imply. Moreover the potential differences between historical and fictional narratives are discussed in this section (1.4). In the next section (1.5) I first briefly focus on a limited number of colonialist, fictional narratives and their ideological implications and then discuss anti-colonial fiction and its main concerns, in particular the notion of resistance in relation to the various ramifications of inverting colonial fictional practices. I finally analyse in somewhat more depth the theoretical implications of my distinction between counter-hegemonic (1.6) and combat fiction (1.7) and signal tentatively how my two authors can be placed in the midst of this theoretical debate.

1.2 Non-fictional textual resistance

The struggle against colonialism has produced, as Barbara Harlow correctly observes, “a significant corpus of literary writing, both narrative and poetic, as well as a broad spectrum of theoretical analyses of the political, ideological, and cultural parameters of this struggle.”²³ This is what Said terms “secondary” resistance and which encompasses a wide variety of narratives which in multiple ways signal an alternative way of understanding Third World history and the struggle against various forms of colonialism and imperialism. The theoretical analyses of the colonial situation were in many ways the precursors of the new, imaginative literature which appeared on the eve of independence and later and can be seen as a reaction both to the material and ideological ramifications of colonialism. By underscoring the dichotomy and difference of self and others, colonial discourse after World War II was, generally speaking, unable “to contain any notion of difference that was not directly tied to the question of inferiority and the necessity of subordination.”²⁴ Such a discourse of colonial psychology was grounded in a completely dehistoricised and depoliticised understanding of man, or rather, a politicised understanding of man to serve colonial interests.

The dichotomy between self and Other as expressed in writings on African psychology and psychiatry underlined the Other's inability to cross this colonial dividing line. The

²² A more detailed analysis of my distinction between counter-hegemonic and combat fiction appears towards the end of this chapter.

²³ Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), xvi.

²⁴ Megan Vaughan, *Cutting Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge and Stanford, CA: Polity Press and Stanford University Press, 1991), 115.

“Othering” of the colonised and the perception of them as different and inferior resides in the notion of what Frantz Fanon (and later Abdul JanMohamed) called the Manichean binarism²⁵ in which implacable discursive opposition between the coloniser and the colonised is being produced.

Octavio Mannoni’s contribution to colonial discourse, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonisation*,²⁶ polarised the debate on colonialism by explicating the situation of the colonised in ethno-psychological terms, claiming that the colonised became colonised because of a “dependence complex” they inherently possessed. Moreover, as Frantz Fanon underlined, any crossing or disordering of the line of demarcation between coloniser and colonised, i.e. anti-colonial resistance was “attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behaviour.”²⁷ J.C. Carothers’ report, *The Psychology of Mau Mau*²⁸ was interpreted along these lines. Fanon interpreted, on the other hand, this native hysteria as sign of resistance; the criminal record of Algerians, “his impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequences of the organization of his nervous system or of the characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation.”²⁹

By viewing colonialism from a Black African point of view, Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* underscores how “colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts.”³⁰ By placing colonialism in direct relation to an understanding of African man as a product of colonialism’s dehumanising aspects, Césaire reconstructs and historicises the establishment of self and the construction of human identity. This is in line with Frantz Fanon, who in both *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*, strongly contests biological explanations of difference, placing dislocated and confused psyches of the colonised squarely within the parameters of colonisation and colonial discourse. In one sense Fanon upholds the binary division between self and Other created by the colonisers, but explains the development, or rather, demolition of black selfhood, not in biological or pseudo-psychological terms, but as a result of colonial political and cultural imposition on the Black man.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon claims that colonialism eroded the very being of the black man, his very self. “At the risk of arousing the resentment of my coloured brothers, I will say that the black man is not a man”³¹ since the colonial experience crushes his

²⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, transl. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968), 41. Abdul R. JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1983).

²⁶ Octavio Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonisation*, trans. P. Powesland (London: Methuen, 1956).

²⁷ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, transl. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 41.

²⁸ J.C. Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1954).

²⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 309.

³⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 13.

³¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C.L. Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 8.

selfhood. Fanon thus inverts the colonial version of the Manichean binarism and defines colonialism as the culprit, the evil, the uncivilised, the savage. As Césaire says: “a poison has been instilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly, but surely, the continent proceeds toward savagery.”³²

This does not prevent Benita Parry from reading both Fanon and Césaire as

authors of liberation theories... (who) affirmed the intervention of an insurgent, unified black self, acknowledged the revolutionary energies, released by valorising the cultures denigrated by colonialism and, rather than construing the colonialist relationship in terms of negotiations with the structures of imperialism, privileged coercion over hegemony to project it as a struggle between implacably opposed forces...³³

There are two things to be said here. First Fanon both argues for the unified self with revolutionary agency and at the same time clearly, as in *Black Skin, White Masks*, for the split colonised subject, or even, as referred to above, a non-self imposed upon it by colonialism. The split self results when the colonised subject realises that he/she can never attain the whiteness he has been taught to desire, or shed the blackness he has learnt to devalue. So in a sense, both post-modern critics like Bhabha and more Marxist critics can appropriate Fanon by either privileging the split, dislocated self over the native elite who have experienced Western education or the revolutionary self who Fanon identified in the peasants possessing a unified, agent self. As a consequence of Fanon's perception of the colonial world as a Manichean world, “a world cut in two,”³⁴ the two zones between natives and settlers “follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity.”³⁵ In the Manichean world the settler “paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil”³⁶ whereas the settler views himself/herself as the civilised saviour. The binary opposition between Europe, the West, the rational, the dynamic, the civilised as opposed to the other, Africa, the irrational, the strange, the static, the savage is not only an invention in Fanon's, the Other's mind. Edward Said claims that the whole project of studying the Orient was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure created a binary opposition between the familiar and the strange.³⁷ So, in a sense one can talk of a reciprocal understanding of what the colonial encounter entailed between the coloniser and the colonised. The dialectics between self and the Other constituted the domination and subjugation of colonialism and turned the colonized, in Fanon's words, into an animal: “At times this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal.”³⁸

³² Césaire, 13.

³³ Benita Parry, “Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism,” in *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 179.

³⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 38.

³⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 39.

³⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 41.

³⁷ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 45.

³⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 42.

The binary Manicheism in the colonial encounter has been challenged, not surprisingly, both by Western and non-Western scholars and artists since the binarism may seem to reside in a static, inflexible understanding of complex relationships which do not easily succumb to simple, devastating opposites. As Frederick Cooper puts it:

The risk is that in exploring the colonial binarism one reproduces it, either by new variations of the dichotomy (modern versus traditional) or by inversion (the destructive imperialist versus the sustaining community of the victims)... The binaries of colonizer/colonized, Western/non-Western, and domination/resistance begin as useful devices for opening up questions of power but end up constraining the search for precise ways in which power is deployed and the ways in which power is engaged, contested, deflected and appropriated.³⁹

Or put differently, Fanon's fierce binarism may seem to deny the natives any history but that of oppression and pushes under the carpet any ambiguity or ambivalence with which the colonised might confront and appropriate colonial ideology.⁴⁰ Fanon's binarism is in fact an inverse duplication of the coloniser's dichotomy, not allowing for, it is claimed, the significant nuances which the colonial encounter entailed. The disordering of the binary dichotomy adds in one way to the complexity of the colonising project, since a mere inversion or abrogation of colonialist discourse may reinforce, according to Ashcroft, the old binarism:

without the process of appropriation the moment of abrogation may not extend beyond a reversal of the assumptions of privilege, the 'normal', and correct inscription, all of which can simply be taken over and maintained by the new usage.⁴¹

In other words, the worry relates to an understanding of counter-hegemonic discourse as only reflecting an inversion of the binarism of colonialist discourse.⁴²

On the other hand, however, recent critics of Fanon seem to underplay the context in which he wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*, the French-Algerian War, which, at least psychologically, necessitated clear-cut lines of demarcation between "friend and foe." Fanon's insistence on Manicheism undoubtedly reflects ingrained conceptions both among

³⁹ Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1517.

⁴⁰ Fanon's oppressed group was not the native population in toto, excluding as it were the comprador people belonging to the petty bourgeoisie or working class. The peasants and the lumpenproletariat were the true oppressed and the true revolutionaries. As Cooper puts it: "Fanon's reduction of ideology and political strategy to traits of social groups in effect created purge categories: the organized worker or the petty bourgeoisie, ... was a traitor by definition." Cooper, *American Historical Review*, 1543.

⁴¹ Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, 38.

⁴² Said's thesis in *Orientalism* was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted a binary opposition between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them"). This is in line with Fanon's binarism, and Said shows how this opposition is crucial to European self-conception, colonised people are irrational, barbaric, sensual; Europeans are rational, civilised, sensible. This dialectic between self and other has been crucial in trying to analyse colonial structures in various parts of the world.

the colonised and not the least among the coloniser and underscores the in many ways disastrous consequences of colonial aggression, arrogance and domination. Moreover Fanon's insistence on the binary world of colonialism must also be seen, not only as a response to, but as a dramatic revolt against the almost all-pervasiveness of colonial ideology and colonial discourse, how they "take their effect, not only within the Western mind, but also on consciousness and the very constitution of colonial people themselves."⁴³ Reflecting fundamental concerns in various phases of Ngugi and La Guma's fiction writing the binary/relational debate will significantly inform my analyses of their resistance fiction.

1.3 Theorising resistance: ideology, power and knowledge

This infiltration and imposition of ideology referred to above has been theorised by Althusser who, by dissociating himself from traditional Marxist thinking about ideology as "false consciousness" or illusion, defines ideology as "bodies of representations existing in institutions and practices."⁴⁴ Ideology is

a system of representations, ideology responds to the individual's quest, conscious or unconscious, for knowledge about the complexity of the world. Ideology functions as 'the relation through which human beings live in relation to the world.'⁴⁵

In that sense ideology is a real relation to the world, but the relationship is also "imaginary" in the sense that it does not tell the whole "truth" about man's relationship to society; it conceals real contradictions in society by trying to establish a sense of security and recognition among its subjects. Thus dominant ideology has the function of obscuring from the subaltern classes the "real" state of their own lives and exploitation. According to Althusser, society in a certain sense addresses the individual ("interpellates" the individual) as a subject and recognises the individual as a subject with value and identity. This means that subjectivity or personhood is itself formed in and through ideology as the interpellation idealises the individual and its real situation in order to conceal the real contradictions of society. When the subjection of selves cannot easily be achieved due to indomitable contradictions, repression replaces the mechanism of interpellation. Althusser includes literature, as Catherine Belsey states, "among the ideological apparatuses which contribute to the process of *reproducing the relations of production*."⁴⁶ Referring to classic realist fiction, Belsey argues (derived from Althusser's position) that this fiction "interpellates" the reader, addresses itself to him or her directly, offering the reader as the position from which the text is most 'obviously'

⁴³ Megan Vaughan, *Colonial Discourse Theory and African History or has Post-Modernism passed us by?* (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies Publication, 1994), 4.

⁴⁴ Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London: NLB, 1969), 155.

⁴⁵ J. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 90.

⁴⁶ Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1980), 56.

intelligible, the position of the *subject in (and of) ideology*.⁴⁷ While Althusser's concept of ideology is a useful concept in analysing dominant power structures, it is also problematic in the sense that it, by exposing no articulation of non-dominant ideologies, seems to give no space for agency and resistance which are not contained within the limits of dominant ideology.

Resistance in relation to dominant ideology and power structures is theorised by Foucault in his discussion of power and knowledge where resistance is placed inside the power structure. Foucault's idea of power is to be seen in

the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them, as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another.⁴⁸

Power can thus be conceptualised as multi-directional relations where force, processes, linkages, disjunctions and strategies are central concepts. The diversity involves negotiations, compromises and struggles. And more importantly, power relations are not totally imposed from the one side, but are created in a dialectical relationship. According to this view power is not exclusively possessed by one actor or one party; in a colonial context this means that the colonial culture is constantly recreated through overlapping and conflicting discourses. As Ran Greenstein says: "History is seen as a process that allows alliances across the colonial divide, not a dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless."⁴⁹

It is my contention that Foucault employs the notion of power not very different to Althusser's notion of ideology in the sense that while power *per definitionem* is coercive, its campaign/use is often secretive or veiled as is Althusser's ideology. In this sense power is at the same time seductive and coercive, establishing some sort of dependence among those who are coerced by it. Like ideology power is viewed as an all-pervasive phenomenon which, if not interpellating the person (as with ideology) is, as Foucault insists,

employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads, they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing or exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are like vehicles of power, not its point of application.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Besley, 57.

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Book, 1980), 92-93.

⁴⁹ Ran Greenstein, "History, Historiography and the Production of Knowledge," *South African Historical Journal* 32, (1995): 225.

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-77*, ed. Colin Gordon (Hertfordshire: Harvester Press, 1980), 98.

Whereas knowledge gives rise to power, knowledge is also a product of power, intimately linking the two concepts. The problematic point with Foucault's concept of power and knowledge is its pervasiveness which means that the imposition of power seems unavoidable and that there is nothing outside of power. This pervasiveness is due to the transformation of power to knowledge which is being transmitted in the net-like fashion mentioned above, meaning that Foucault's theory seems to leave no room for opposition or resistance from the outside, similar to Althusser who found no room for alternative, oppositional ideological interpellations outside these very ideological interpellations. By picking up the issue of subaltern resistance which he neglected in *Orientalism*, Said critiques in a fundamental way Foucault's concepts of power and knowledge. Said insists that there is no system of domination which is so all-pervasive that there are no spaces which are outside its control. Said leans on Gramsci's theorising of hegemony to underline that ideology in general works to maintain social cohesion and dominant interests, but that there are also particular ideologies that express the protest of those being exploited. Gramsci's important observation is that the oppressed has a dual consciousness, one which is complicit with the will of the rulers and one which has the potentials of developing into resistance. As Said states:

If power oppresses and controls and manipulates, then everything that resists it is not morally equal to power, is not neutrally and simply a weapon against that power. Resistance cannot equally be an adversarial alternative to power and a dependent function of it, except in some metaphysical, ultimately trivial sense.

(Gramsci) would certainly appreciate the fineness of Foucault's archeologies, but would find it odd that they make not even a nominal allowance for emergent movements, and none for revolutions, counter-hegemony, or historical blocks.⁵¹

Homi K. Bhabha's resistance model, on the other hand, reflects Foucault's "resistance from within" paradigm where he elaborates on the function of mimicry as a form of "intransitive" resistance, where the gaze is seen as a control mechanism employed by the coloniser, but also as an act of defiance by the colonised. However, it would seem that the coloniser's gaze is more proactive than that of the colonised, who is often merely responding to an act of domination. In Bhabha's view, it is the failure of the colonial authority to reproduce itself that allows for anti-colonial subversion. As a result, like Said in *Orientalism*, Bhabha does not consider the indigenous sources of anti-colonial intellectual and political activity. In La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* Michael Adonis' return of the policeman's gaze can, arguably, be seen as an act of defiance. That the colonised gaze or mimicry is, as Bhabha puts it, "the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination... that turns the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power"⁵² is, however, in Michael Adonis' case certainly contentious, but is from our perspective theoretically and ideologically interesting as it implicitly raises the fundamental question of

⁵¹ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 246.

⁵² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 112.

resistance “production” inside or outside the power structure. There is, however, little evidence that Bhabha’s psychological warfare or resistance model affected the stability of the dominant regime in any substantial way. This is due to Bhabha’s resistance model which is theorised entirely in semiotic or psychoanalytic terms, neglecting or negating as it were the establishment of self and the relationship between self and Others in terms of context, class and gender. While it will be shown that there is little indication that Michael Adonis’ return of the gaze in any way destabilises the apartheid regime, or effects in Michael Adonis a politically grounded resistance mood, it is of interest to analyse whether his reactive response can help boost his morale and his sense of self-control. Bhabha’s insistence on intransitive resistance or resistance from within coincides with a post-structuralist account of self as fragmented and non-unitary.⁵³ For our purposes it is necessary to explore briefly the theoretical ramifications of this debate where the post-structuralist position⁵⁴ is central.

Clearly there is some sort of symmetry between the notion of self and self-formation and the idea of resistance and agency. In Fanon in particular the idea of the unified, solid self with potentials of agency is grounded in his theory of the rural masses as the revolutionary spearhead in the resistance against colonialism. This line of thought is followed by Harlow who seldom seems to question agency among the oppressed, and is thus rarely preoccupied with the problematics of non-agency. The post-structuralist idea of language as prior to and the condition of self-consciousness means the prioritisation of linguistic operation as the medium of self-conception, that a sense of self-hood which precedes linguistic formulation

⁵³ Kim Worthington elaborates on the post-structuralist position: “A theory of linguistic constructivism, in which authoritative agency is dismissed as delusion, offers no possibility for revolutionary practice.” Kim Worthington, *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 8. A bit later he asks: “How can socially constructed subjects ever be the agents of social change?” Worthington, 12.

⁵⁴ The connection between post-structuralism and post-modernism on the one hand and post-colonialism on the other is complex. Arif Dirlik, among others, claims that post-colonial theory is the child of post-modernism and thus inadequate in either understanding or changing the world. He argues that the link which has been established between post-modernism and late capitalism can now be extended to post-structuralism. Therefore, post-colonialism, which appears to critique the universalist pretensions of Western knowledge systems, and starts off, according to Dirlik, “with a repudiation of the universalistic pretensions of Marxist language ends up not with its dispersal into local vernaculars but with a return to another First World language with universalist epistemological pretensions.” Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no.2 (1994): 342. Dirlik goes on to claim that post-colonialist theories’ privileging of cultural analysis ignores the economic dimension that shapes our world. One way of understanding the contemporary situation in the Third World, and particularly that of the subaltern, is to combine different theoretical perspectives, such as is done in the Subaltern Studies group which, according to Prakash, “employs in combination Marxism, post-structuralism, Gramsci and Foucault, the modern West and India, archival research and textual criticism.” Gyan Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism,” *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1490. Such a hybrid approach between different theoretical propositions does not mean to unproblematised multiple theoretical applications; clearly such applications may lead to contradictions and tensions, but it must also be borne in mind that the complexity which postcolonial studies represent, demands flexible tools of methodology.

is inconceivable. The self is not a pre-linguistic given, but is rather a construct of language. Since human subjects are “beings of language” who do not possess pre-linguistic essentiality, human relations and conceptions are fundamentally linguistic. The self and its world are intra-linguistic: It is, according to Tallis, “the world of words that creates the world of things... it is in the world of meaning of a particular language in which the world of things will come to be arranged.”⁵⁵ In the rhetoric of post-structuralism/post-modernity, all absolutes, according to Worthington, “including the ostensibly free-thinking subject of modernity, are deemed to be the product of the kind of deluded metaphysical thinking which seeks to ground the contingencies of experience in an authoritative, substantial presence.”⁵⁶ The consequence of such a poststructuralist/postmodern theory (reminiscent of Foucault) is from a resistance viewpoint very problematic since it postulates that personal subjectivity/authenticity and personal agency are, if not impossible, exceedingly difficult. The post-structuralist position that self, identity is solely a linguistic construct, that selfhood is written and read in the extra-personal terms of social language seems contradictory to our experiences as human beings. As Worthington says:

If I do not possess some kind of personal identity through time, a sense of myself which, if not fixed, is at least coherent, how can my actions have any guarantee of consistency? If I am only the always-already product of discourse, how can I speak with originality or act with intention?... How can socially constructed subjects ever be the agents of social change?⁵⁷

My repudiation of a post-structuralist position of self, however, is not meant to minimalise the danger of subjection, even subjugation by the discourses of prevailing social practices and institutions. La Guma’s portrayal of the submissive, oppressed people on the Cape Flats and District Six is in this respect a telling example of successful, dominant subjugation. Nor is scepticism of the post-structuralist position meant to reject the idea of self as somewhat more problematic and unstable than Fanon’s unified self seemed to project. In the West one of the changes (from tradition to modernity) relates to the concept of the self. In traditional societies the self went through ritualised alteration when passing from childhood to responsible adulthood, and could still be defined in kinship structures and communal rituals. In modernity the self (self and subjectivity are inseparable) is something which has to be constructed, reflected upon and explored; the reflexive activities of the individual are of central importance. The idea of a self which is open to questioning and which in order to be consolidated involves rational thought and sense experience is not only a Western phenomenon; the colonial encounter is in one way an encounter between traditionalism and modernity. As in the West the classical system of representation of the subject entered a state of crisis because of, as Braidotti says, “the failure of the traditional definition of the subject as an entity that is expected to coincide with his/her conscious

⁵⁵ See Raymond Tallis, *Not Saussure: A Critique of Post-Saussurean* (London: MacMillan, 1988), 160.

⁵⁶ Worthington, 8.

⁵⁷ Worthington, 12.

self.”⁵⁸ This does not necessarily mean that the manifestations of the crisis are similar in the west as in Kenya and South Africa; obviously the domination of Western modernity had a different impact in various cultural contexts, but the essence of the paradigmatic change has had a dramatic influence on the self also in Kenya and South Africa. In a situation where modernity and traditionalism clash or alternatively meet, it is difficult to conceive of a pre-programmed, stable identity which is established through a pre-given ritualised pattern. The self is developed through self-reflexive activities which involve rational (and sometimes irrational) decision-making on the basis of often conflicting ideological signals. As will be demonstrated in my analysis of Ngugi’s combat fiction, the essentialising of the resistance fighters’ self not only contributes to narrational closure, but runs the risk of lacking human and thereby political credibility. The problem arises when the self is stabilised by some sort of ideological imposition, without as it were, taking into account the process of self-formation as an active interpretative and interactive process where it is important to filter the often incompatible signals that the self is bombarded with daily. Whereas Waiyaki in Ngugi’s *The River Between* is confronted with the tough challenges of accommodating the divergent impulses from colonialism and traditionalism into his own self, and Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat* is torn between his own individualistic desires and the collectivist imposition of Kenyan nationalism and thus is from a resistance viewpoint sidelined, these complex, often contradictory challenges will be shown to be more or less suppressed in Ngugi’s combat fiction. Ngugi seems less willing, it will be argued, to keep his hands off the ideological steering wheel, resulting in resistance fighters whose non-fragmentary selves seldom, if ever transcend one-dimensional predictability. La Guma, on the other hand, may seem to allow in his combat fiction for protagonists with decentered, conflict-ridden selves who simultaneously are geared towards active resistance. Insisting on a less than stable self because it constantly has to draw together past and present subject positions does not mean, however, complete anarchy or fluidity of self: there is still some sense of continuity, a sense of myself which does not have to be recuperated or established anew every time. So it is important to make a difference between an unstable, fragmented yet coherent self and a self which is completely dislocated.

As O’Hanlon and Washbrook claim:

Our present challenge lies precisely in an understanding of how the underclasses we wish to study are at once constructed in conflictual ways as subjects yet also find the means through struggle to realize themselves in coherent and subjectively centered ways as agents.⁵⁹

There is, however, a sense where clearly the subaltern potentiality for agency is being subjected to subversion to a degree where one wonders if the dislocation of self is so

⁵⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1994), 239.

⁵⁹ Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, “After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34, no.1 (1992): 153.

absolute as to make agency non-viable. Certainly La Guma's low-key portrayal of the subaltern in his counter-hegemonic phase re-echoes this pessimism, even though the fact that subaltern agency is not always transparent, visible and unambiguous may underestimate its potential force. Stuart Hall's emphasis on the importance of subaltern existence even though they are not always clear-cut agents of history is worth noticing:

in spite of the fact that the popular masses have never been able to become in any complete sense the subject-authors of the cultural practices in the twentieth century, their continuing presence, as a kind of passive historical-cultural force, has constantly interrupted, limited and disrupted everything else.⁶⁰

1.4 Representation in historical and fictional discourse

Whereas Foucault's notion of power and knowledge queries resistance outside the dominant power structure, Spivak's rhetorical question of whether the subaltern can speak is, as I see it, closely linked to the question of representation. By problematising the subaltern's ability to speak, Spivak focuses on who speaks for the Other and the representation of the Other in post-colonial discourse. In colonialist discourse the subaltern was cut off from representation: there was nothing to represent. One of Said's epigraphs in *Orientalism* from Marx' The 18th Brunaire of Louis Napoleon is in this respect telling: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented."

While critics of *Orientalism* are right in contending that the Orientalist image drawn by the Occident was more nuanced, ambiguous and contradictory than Said exposes in his book, it is both historically and ideologically problematical to deny that the major thrust of Orientalist ideological transmission encompassed a deeply-entrenched self-Other dichotomy where the Orientalists decided that the Other was incapable of representing themselves and where they without embarrassment spoke on behalf of the Other. In other words the Orientalist representation of the Other was filtered through the lenses of a European bias. Said is right when contending that

a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides 'truth', which is itself a representation. What this must lead us to methodologically is to view representation (or misrepresentation-the distinction is at best a matter of degree) as inhabiting a common field of play defined for them not by some inherent common subject matter alone, but by some common history, tradition, universe of discourse.⁶¹

Representation is thus not something that can be taken at face value or, in Homi Bhabha's words, that which is simply "pre-given."⁶² But the problem of representation is not only related to Western narratives of the East. Clearly Stuart Hall is right when contending that

⁶⁰ Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation" (interview with Hall) in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. D. Morley and K.H.Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 140.

⁶¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 272-73.

⁶² Bhabha, *The Location*, 2.

representation is “one of the key problems in all criticism and philosophy”⁶³ because all textual discourse represents biased, fragmented representations where truth is being negotiated.

There is simply no, again to quote Bhabha,

unmediated and sequential progression to truth, the originality of vision...are historical and ideological productions without any of the inevitability they claim...They are ideological in the sense in which the discourses of historicism and realism manifestly deny their own material and historical construction...⁶⁴

Bhabha’s insistence on rejecting meaning as recuperable through a direct reference to the “origins” of mimetic reflection or authorial intention is in line with our rejection of historicism and realism.

Whereas the political and ideological anti-colonial treatises represent the colonial (or neo-colonial) experience from a historical or social science perspective, there are other dimensions of the colonial experience, of the representation of the colonial mind in oppression and resistance which escape these theoretical analyses and which can be explored in imaginative forms by indigenous writers. But this distinction is by no means a clear-cut, systemic venture where the rules of the historical and fictional games are completely different, the one posing as scientific and the other as artistic, since both history and fiction are narrative mediations of reality. Our understanding and knowledge of reality is, in Raymond Tallis’ words, “presented to us largely in the form of stories...”⁶⁵ Historical “reality” as it comes to us is based on a selection made by the historian in terms of his/her point of view, his/her ideology, his/her personal interest, dominant or non-dominant ideologies at the time of writing etc., not qualitatively different from the selection made in completing a literary product. True, a historical or anthropological research paper about Gikuyu society is fundamentally different from a work of realistic fiction in pretension, expressive mode and subjectivity. At the same time, however, they are all interpretations and structurings of, in our case, the Gikuyu reality. The implication here is that the Aristotelian distinction between the poet’s and the historian’s rendering of reality is very complex and far from clear-cut.

Whereas the fictionalised versions of African “history” in some respects are distinguished from texts in archives or autobiographies, the distinction between “fact” and “fiction” is, however, extremely difficult bearing in mind that Africa and Africans have been fictionalised for centuries. Historians have to a large extent reproduced colonial relations at a scholarly level, and many of the texts that are found in the archives and history books

⁶³ Edward Said, *The World*, 200.

⁶⁴ Bhabha, *The Location*, 97.

⁶⁵ Raymond Tallis, *In Defense of Realism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988), 24. See also Peter Brooks who writes: ‘...there has recently been a discernible return to narrative on the part of many professional historians, since there appear to be kinds of understanding and explanation that demand narrative form, demand that the mind move over events in their temporal interrelation, setting up patterns of sequence and consequence.’ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 334.

have thus already been fictionalised, i.e. been produced through the filters of colonial ideology. The layers of fiction are so deep that serious researchers can never be sure if they are dealing with facts or fiction. As de Rudder states, "all texts are a translation, transposition, transformation."⁶⁶ In Africa, the exercise of separating fact from fiction is thus complicated

by the overwhelming, one might almost say asphyxiating, domination of fiction coming not only from the works of outsider novelists, but also from the fiction which comes from the work of scholars who are supposed to be producing factual accounts.⁶⁷

The Mau Mau resistance is for our purposes an interesting case; while colonial discourse de-legitimised and demonised the whole resistance endeavour, the post-independent Kenyan regime of Kenyatta and Moi have tried to relegate the whole struggle into complete oblivion. As will be shown later some historians have questioned the nationalist aspects of the liberation struggle whereas both historians like Maina wa Kinyatti, Athieno Odhlambo and Thabita Kanogo⁶⁸ and fiction writers and critics like Micere Mugo and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have underlined the national significance of the movement by telling the story from the perspective of the resistance fighters.

It is therefore an open question whether the African novelist or the African historian is more likely to produce historical knowledge; a more relevant question is probably what kind of historical knowledge is being produced and from which perspective.⁶⁹ For as Edward W. Said insists:

it needs to be made clear about cultural discourse and exchange within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is not 'truth' but representations...language itself is a highly organized and encoded system, which employs many devices to express, indicate, exchange messages and information...In any instance of a written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation.⁷⁰

This is in line with Wilson-Tagoe's suggestion:

The epistemological certainties and the objectivity long claimed by the discipline have been considerably undermined by new insights which have revealed the

⁶⁶ Orlando de Rudder, "Quand l'historien se fait romancier." *Le débat* 56 (1989): 32. "Que toute écriture est traduction, transposition, transformation."

⁶⁷ Jacques Depelchin, "Between Falling Apart and Healing: Trying to Sort Facts from Fiction." Paper at a conference at the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town: *Problematizing History and Agency: From Nationalism to Subalternity*, 22-24 October 1997, 5.

⁶⁸ See their contributions: Maina wa Kinyatti, "Mau Mau: the Peak of African Nationalism in Kenya," *Kenya Historical Review* 5, no. 2, 1977: 287-310. Athieno Odhlambo, *The Paradox of Collaboration and Other Essays* (Nairobi: East African Literary Bureau, 1974) and Thabita Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905-1963* (Portsmouth, N.H., London, and Athens: James Curry and Ohio University Press, 1987).

⁶⁹ Obviously the same problematics is equally relevant for the contentious issue of South African history.

⁷⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

historical method as a literary construction similar to the artist's creation of story and narrative.⁷¹

But even though history and fiction are narrative discourses and both discourses have to undertake the very complex transformational process from reality to history/fiction which also for the historian involves an artistic component, Wilson-Tagoe claims that the historian, unlike the fiction writer must,

work towards conclusions based on questions raised about a particular history (i.e. what happened and why). Thus, over and above the artistic presentation of narrative and story, the historian must present another level of argument that would seek to explain what happened by invoking principles and laws of historical explanation... the historian is bound by a particular space and time and by a constant need to be truthful to fact and evidence. There is a sense, then, in which the imaginative leeway available to the historian may be limited by the historical discipline itself.⁷²

Whereas it is true in one particular sense that literature is "freer" and can transcend the boundaries of time and space and can in fact break the linear, rational time dimension which historians have to adhere to, the notion that historians "need to be truthful to fact and evidence" is highly contentious, not the least seen in relation to for example the fierce ideological battle of truth-making about Mau Mau in Kenya referred to above and the making of apartheid history in South Africa. True imaginative literature can rival historical discourse by operating in terms of its own procedures and reach conclusions that are not necessarily checkable by history, but the references to Kenya and South Africa contest the notion that a historian's history is checkable by some sort of objective parameters or criteria beyond a certain point (mostly related time and place). One difference between history and fiction is related to what is "acceptable" in terms of genre: whereas historians in a certain sense pretend to convey "what really happened," it is accepted that the fiction writer not only records and experiences the past, but also transforms and reinvents it (even though transformation and reinvention is also part of the game of historians).

Ngugi describes how he perceives the difference between historical/political writings and fiction:

The present collection of essays (*Homecoming*) is an integral part of the fictional world of *The River Between*, *Weep not Child*, and *A Grain of Wheat*. Most of them were written at about the same time as the novels; they have been products of the same moods and touch on similar questions and problems. There are differences. In a novel the writer is totally immersed in a world of imagination which is other than his conscious self. At his most intense and creative the writer is transfigured, he is possessed, he becomes a medium. In the essay the writer can be more direct, didactic, polemical, or he can merely state his beliefs and faith; his conscious self is here more at work.⁷³

⁷¹ Nana Wilson-Tagoe, *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), xi.

⁷² Wilson-Tagoe, *Historical Thought*, 8.

⁷³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming* (London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1972), xv.

It is from the point of view of this open concession to imagination and reinvention that this thesis will explore the colonial and post-colonial experience, and by analysing how ideology works on and makes its impact on literary representation. As Wilson-Tagoe states:

Ideology encompasses not merely those systems of belief that make up coherent doctrines but the very conditions of our experience of life, those combinations of social, economic, and political conditions which constitute what Althusser has called our social formation. The ways in which a text constructs these contexts and analyzes relations within them represents an ideological discourse, and in most imaginative literature such a discourse shapes the nature and representation of experience as well as its transformation within the text. In evaluating such interactions, the critic must not only extract perceptions and meanings but also demonstrate the working of ideological discourse as it informs the entire conception and form of the work...⁷⁴

This is in line with Bakhtin who claims that

Literature is one of the independent parts of the surrounding ideological reality, occupying a special place in it in the form of definite, organized philological works which have their own specific structures. The literary structure, like every ideological structure, refracts the generating socioeconomic reality, and does so in its own way. But, at the same time, in its 'content,' literature reflects and refracts the reflections and refractions of other ideological spheres (ethics, epistemology, political doctrines, religion, etc.). That is, in its 'content' literature reflects the whole of the ideological horizon of which it is itself a part.⁷⁵

In *Homecoming* Ngugi emphasises literature's ideological as well as imaginative conditioning:

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored.⁷⁶

His view is developed further in *Writers in Politics*:

literature, as a product of men's intellectual and imaginative activity embodies, in words and images, the tensions, conflicts, contradictions at the heart of a community's being and process of becoming... At the same time literature is more than just a mechanistic reflection of social reality... It follows then that because of its social character, literature as a creative process and also as an end is conditioned by historical social forces and pressures; it cannot elect to stand above or to transcend economics, politics, class, race, or what Achebe calls 'the burning issues of the day' because those very burning issues with which it deals take place within an economic, political, class and race context.⁷⁷

As I will show in my readings of La Guma's early novels his fiction transcends the borders of historical complementarity even though La Guma's own remarks more often than not re-echo a somewhat dogmatic, realist position:

⁷⁴ Wilson-Tagoe, *Historical Thought*, 1.

⁷⁵ M.M. Bakhtin and P.M. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, transl. Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 16-17.

⁷⁶ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, xv.

⁷⁷ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Writers In Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 5-6.

Again it was a matter of recording history or recording situation. The book was about the suburban slums which is a character of the South African scene... This was just another scene in the life of the community, another facet of the picture. I decided again that the picture of the suburban slums did not appear anywhere in South African writing, so I said well why shouldn't I do it, because it is part of our life, our scene, so it should appear in the picture.⁷⁸

By exploiting the understanding that literary discourses, like historical discourses, produce specific representations of the world both Ngugi and La Guma provoke very consciously forms of knowledge which are intended to conform to specific paradigms and certain ideologies. Orientalism is a form of representation which could be called misrepresentation, or in Said's terminology, deformations, but all representations are in one sense misrepresentation/deformations because they speak, write, and act on behalf of more or less conscientised Others, if they don't represent themselves. Even the self-representations of the (formerly) colonised people are problematic in the sense that they are also filtered through a set of ideological lenses. So in a sense there is no true self-representation either, a fact which may seem to be aggravated by the fact that much counter-hegemonic literary discourse is conducted in the language of the colonial powers. On the other hand the leverage of an English counter-hegemonic discourse should not be easily dismissed. As we know Ngugi in his combat period resorted to Gikuyu for a number of reasons (both novels were eventually translated into English) whereas La Guma throughout his career used English as a medium (Afrikaans being his mother tongue), his target group during the combat period being primarily the West since his books were banned during the apartheid years. The question still remains whether Ngugi's use of Gikuyu is a more powerful subversion of colonialist discourse than say Achebe, who uses an Africanised version of English, refusing thus to reject a European cultural paradigm for an indigenous one. As Leela Gandhi says: "If the mimic mode subverts the authority of imperial textuality, it also forecloses, once and for all, any appeal to an 'authentic' or 'essential' Indianness."⁷⁹ Whereas all representation are ideologically negotiated, the self-representation of the previously colonised functions, however, differently from the West's representation of the South even though the post-colonial era has exposed other oppressive power relations, now from the Southern elites. But the representation of the subaltern does still not escape the problem of authenticity or truthfulness since the mediation of the subaltern voice only appears through layers of representations. The question of authenticity seems never to be an issue of contention in my two authors' ideological horizon; in fact the theoretical reluctance referred to above is implicitly dismissed, it seems to me, by both Ngugi and La Guma, the latter proposing quite unashamedly to record the lives of the dispossessed on the Cape Flats. If we insist that all representations, even self-representations are ideological by nature, it is maybe sufficient to

⁷⁸ Cecil Abrahams, "The Writings of Alex La Guma," in *Essays on Contemporary Post-Colonial Fiction*, eds. Hedwig Bock and Albert Wertheim (Munich: Max Hueber, 1986), 156.

⁷⁹ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 151.

say that subaltern resistance is represented differently by different discourses. Clearly both Ngugi and La Guma pretend to speak for the oppressed or the subaltern, but their voices are mediated, ideologised voices which are never the self-representation of the oppressed or the subaltern, a group which cannot be subsumed into any one political, ideological category anyway. The estimation of authenticity or truthfulness is thus not even academically interesting; it is more a matter of how convincing the representation is, whether the representation essentialises the subaltern and whether the narrational representation forecloses any possibility of ambiguity and ambivalence. But the representational problems do not end here: an essentialist representation of the subaltern with ideological closure may be well received by the Gikuyu subalterns who listen to *Matigari* (indeed, we know that it was!) in the bars of the Rift Valley, but re-echoes poorly in some Western academic circles who have jumped on the postmodern band-wagon.

1.5 Literary images of Africa. Some colonialist and anti-colonial texts

Whereas *Orientalism* focuses on images of the Orient constructed by the West, no such comprehensive study exists to my knowledge about the “Orientalism” of Africa. Still it is not difficult to trace fiction on Africa which exposes various colonialist ideological impositions that illuminate colonialist discursive practices. Ngugi’s attempt to distinguish between two types of literature which had an adverse impact on the image of Africa and Africans⁸⁰ is dictated by his own ideological agenda and is one-dimensionally critical of both types, calling the first category “downright racist,”⁸¹ and the second liberal. The second category sets out to treat the African world sympathetically by either appealing to the European liberal conscience or by simply interpreting Africa for the Africans.⁸² Having nothing but scorn for this type of writing, Ngugi claims that

Liberalism has always been the sugary ideology of imperialism... Liberalism blurs all antagonistic class contradictions, all the contradictions between imperialist domination and the struggle for national liberation...⁸³

Whereas Ngugi’s analysis of the first category of colonialist discourses is hardly contentious, his reference to e.g Paton’s *Cry The Beloved Country*⁸⁴ as imperialistic expresses a view that “true” representations of the African must adhere to his own understanding of

⁸⁰ See Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, 16–18.

⁸¹ Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, 16. Ngugi mentions the following texts which tried to define the colonised world for the European coloniser: John Buchan, *John Prester* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), Elspeth Huxley, *A Thing to Love* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954) and *Red Strangers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), Robert Ruark, *Something of Value* (London: Hamisch Hamilton, 1962) and *Uhuru* (London: Hamisch Hamilton, 1955), Rider Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines* (New York: Hart Pub. Co, 1977) and Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa* (New York: Modern Library, 1952).

⁸² Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, 19. Besides Joseph Conrad *The Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson*, Ngugi includes Alan Paton’s *Cry The Beloved Country* in this category.

⁸³ Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, 20.

⁸⁴ Alan Paton, *Cry the Beloved Country* (London: Longman), 1966.

Africa. Ironically his own *The River Between* might, with some caveat, fall into the same category. A more fruitful, but also problematic approach of analysing colonialist discursive practices is to employ the issue of *visual or serious* (if not ideologically correct) representation as a parameter of colonial discursive practices. Simon Gikandi's criticism of Conrad and Carey⁸⁵ is here a case in point, claiming that their representation of Africa is either "a blank space or a monstrous presence."⁸⁶ The African has no character because he/she exists solely as a projection of European desire. Reminiscent of Fanon's contention that African man is not a man (from a European perspective), the underlying premise of white fictional writing on Africa is that the Africans have no history and that the Africans cannot represent themselves and they cannot, it has been noted, be represented. Not surprisingly early white South African literature was also prone to denigrate the African self. In the South African context, the coloured people were sometimes stigmatised by both whites and Blacks. In Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Step Children*⁸⁷ the coloureds are pictured in no uncertain terms as being degenerate, useless and flawed and in even Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* the conception of coloured Africans is almost as problematic: Mzilikazi warns against the Bechuana's alliance with the Boers, who will "take Bechuana women to wife and, with them, breed a race of half man, half goblin, and they will deny them their legitimate Lobola."⁸⁸ Like the Western writing about the Orient, however, there are exceptions to this one-dimensional image of Africans by whites referred to above. But even if writers like Margaret Laurence in fiction such as *This Side Jordan* and *The Tomorrow-Tamer*⁸⁹ attempt, colonialist features notwithstanding, at transcending the one-dimensional, colonialist discourse of superiority and condescension,⁹⁰ fictional colonialist discourse in general follows in the footsteps of its non-fictional counterparts, i.e. by reaffirming and reinforcing the imperial assumptions about Africa and its indigenous population.⁹¹

The indigenous, African fiction writers in the late fifties and the sixties initiated a new oppositional discourse by countering the "permanence of vision" embedded in colonial discourse. They read, challenged, and rewrote the colonial discourses, V.Y. Mudimbe states, "as a way of explicating and defining their culture, history and being."⁹² By

⁸⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1994) and Joyce Cary, *Mr. Johnson* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

⁸⁶ Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, 27.

⁸⁷ Sarah Gertrude Millin, *God's Step Children*. (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1924).

⁸⁸ Sol T. Plaatje, *Mhudi* (Jeppestown, AD. Donker (Pty) Ltd., 1989), 188. (Original edition, Lovedale Press, 1930).

⁸⁹ Margaret Laurence, *This Side Jordan* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) and *The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970).

⁹⁰ See Micere Githae-Mugo, *Visions of Africa* (Kenya Literature Bureau: Nairobi, 1978).

Githae-Mugo's view of Laurence is extremely positive: "Margaret Laurence's records stand clean in this respect and her works are her best witness. She is one of the very few who tried to learn and understand." Micere Githae-Mugo, 12.

⁹¹ During the struggle against apartheid, of course, contemporary white South African writers like Brink, Gordimer, Coetzee and Breytenbach all challenge the colonialist discourse on Africa, even though labelling them anti-apartheid rather than anti-colonialist seems preferable.

⁹² V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*

interrogating the visions, ideologies, the historical claims and the representations of Africans propagated by colonialist discourse they mapped out a new African future which could only take place in confrontation with colonial ideology. It was, according to Boehmer, “a literature which identified itself with the broad movement of resistance to, and transformation of, colonial societies.”⁹³

Since the political rupture which independence in some sense created did not, according to many writers, necessarily mean an ideological or epistemological rupture, the importance and the difficulty of the task was formidable. Achebe’s belief that narrative, in Gikandi’s words, “can indeed propose an alternative world beyond the realities imprisoned within colonial and postcolonial relations of power”⁹⁴ was an important point of departure for African novelists, even though the success of such an enterprise is certainly contested.⁹⁵ Achebe’s insistence on an alternative imagined existence underlines literature’s importance as a unique tool in presenting dimensions of the African experience impossible to fit in historical and sociological analyses. By resorting to the mythical to give space to the production of imagination Achebe maintained that it was not enough to evoke “geographical, political, economic and other rational explanations... (for) there will always remain an area of shadows where some (at least) of the truth will seek to hide.”⁹⁶ The danger of such a view, at least in a socio-political context, is its flirtation with escapism which may distract from the political and ideological challenges.

From a somewhat different angle, J.M.Coetzee argues that in times of intense ideological pressure “the novel... has only two options: supplementarity or rivalry.”⁹⁷ Being supplementary would mean to provide the reader “with vicarious first-hand experience of living in a certain historical time, embodying contending forces in contending characters and filling our experience with a certain density of observation.”⁹⁸ It may seem as if Coetzee’s “supplementarity” resides more or less in the tradition of mimetic realism by attempting to reflect the external, so-called objective conditions of society – a problematic concept since it neglects the very complex transformational process from “reality” to fiction. As Bhabha states: “The text is not seen as productive of meaning but essentially

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), xi.

⁹³ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 184.

⁹⁴ Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, 3.

⁹⁵ Achebe's counter-hegemonic writing is being questioned by some critics, notably Jacques Depelchin who claims that Achebe “reproduces the colonial discourse...this does not necessarily mean that he accepts the colonial view of Nigerian history.” Depelchin, 21. But Ngugi is also at times very critical to Achebe for having created the Afro- European novel. See Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind*, 70

⁹⁶ Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day : Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 90.

⁹⁷ Quoted from David Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, Cape Town, Johannesburg: University of California Press & David Philip, 1993), 15.

⁹⁸ Attwell, 15.

reflective or expressive... The main question that is asked of the production of the image... is in relation to the pre-given model or original.”⁹⁹

If the novel is to operate as a rival to historical discourse, it would, according to Coetzee, have to operate

in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history (as a child's schoolwork is checked by a school mistress). In particular I mean a novel that evolves its own paradigms and myths, in the process (and here is the point at which true rivalry, even enmity, perhaps enters the picture) perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history- in other words, demythologizing history.¹⁰⁰

According to Coetzee literature can rival historical discourse by rewriting and reinventing the experience in ways that may be impossible in historical and political analysis; by demythologising history imaginative literature in particular has, at least in theory, the unique possibility of contravening the imperatives of colonial discourse. Still Coetzee's distinction between complementarity and rivalry is by no means clear-cut, containing extensive grey zones of discourses which may or may not fall into one of the categories depending on different critical practices.¹⁰¹

My own distinction between counter-hegemonic and combat literature projects a similar, if not identical articulation of difference between literatures which both contest and rival hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives and narratives which more directly invert the Manichean binarism between the coloniser and the colonised. Like that of many of his contemporaries Achebe's early fiction falls into the category of what I have termed counter-hegemonic, there are other writers who more forcefully place themselves in the middle of combat fiction. In South Africa numerous writers committed themselves to the liberation struggle by tracing, in Shiva's words, “the trajectory of the emergent black militant politics.”¹⁰² There was a shift to a more militant mood in South African literature after Sharpeville in 1960 even though La Guma's early post-Sharpeville fiction was not part of that change. But writers like Richard Rive and Peter Abrahams, with novels such as *Emergency* (1964) and *A Night of Their Own*¹⁰³ (1965), focused on the resistance movement from a non-white point of view. *Emergency* fictionalises the events during and after the

⁹⁹ See e.g. universalist and nationalist critics- both representationalist theories with a predominantly mimetic view of the relation between the text and a given preconstituted reality. Homi K. Bhabha, “Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism,” in *The Theory of Reading*, ed. Frank Gloversmith (Sussex and New Jersey: The Harvester Press, Barnes Nobles Book), 1984, 100.

¹⁰⁰ Attwell, 15.

¹⁰¹ See J.M. Coetzee's articles on Alex La Guma: 1) “Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer.” In *New African Literature and the Arts Vol. 3*, ed. Joseph Okpaku (New York: The Third Press, 1973), 116-124 and 2) “Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex La Guma” In *Doubling the Point. Essays and Interviews: J.M. Coetzee*, ed. David Attwell. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 344-360.

¹⁰² Piniel V. Shiva, *A People's Voice* (London: Zed, 1989), 52.

¹⁰³ Richard Rive, *Emergency* (Cape Town, Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988) and Peter Abrahams, *A Night of Their Own* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).

revolts in Langa and Nyanga in Cape Town, events which La Guma never referred to in his novels even though as a journalist he reported on the Langa revolt for the newspaper *New Age*.¹⁰⁴ More militant and revolutionary than Rive's text, Peter Abrahams' novel is also set in the early 60s, and exposes a resistance movement which in its initial combatant period—despite its offensiveness—is also torn with conflicts along racial lines. Together with novels written after Soweto like *The Children of Soweto* (Mbulelo Mzamane), *Amandla* (Miriam Tlali) and *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (Sipho Sepamla)¹⁰⁵, Rive and Abrahams' novels fall within what I have termed combat fiction and which Albie Sachs disparagingly calls “a gun is a gun is a gun” —literature (see section 1.7 where Sachs is discussed in some more detail and where ambiguity is seen to distract from the struggle).

Outside South Africa and Kenya Sembene Ousmane from French-speaking Senegal stands out as one of the most prominent politically committed artists who in *God's Bits of Wood* inverts the binarism of colonialist discourse by describing the mobilisation of the indigenous railway workers against the French colonial employers, i.e. the strike on the Bamako-Dakar railway between October 10, 1947 and March 18, 1948. Insisting on Black worker agency Ousmane nevertheless transcends a narrow anti-colonial discourse by focusing on class more than nation or race. Gikandi is right when contending that the novel “is remarkable for authorial constraint: Ousmane does not intrude upon the narrative unnecessarily, and his work has none of the tendentiousness which often plagues this genre.”¹⁰⁶ By placing itself in the unique position of exposing an important event in the anti-colonial struggle of the continent, the novel anticipates a strong and united working class as avant-garde in the anti-colonial struggle. What is even more striking: Ousmane foregrounds the female colonised in his narrative, whereas women are not mentioned at all by Jean Suret-Canale in his historical narrative of the same event, a narrative which is sympathetic to the strikers' cause.¹⁰⁷

With *Two Thousand Seasons* Ayi Kwei Armah reaffirms a Manichean binarism by rejecting all things Western and by romanticising the African past. Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* projects an image of an African renaissance which can only be achieved through a guerilla warfare of armed struggle. In ideological conviction and artistic fervour Armah seems a close companion to the decolonising agenda of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. At the same time Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* foregrounds the problematic aspects of combat fiction by its essentialising of race, ethnicity and the African past, thereby projecting a narrative which effects political closure.

¹⁰⁴ Alex La Guma and F. Carneson, *New Age*, 24. and 31. March, 1960

¹⁰⁵ Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, *The Children of Soweto* (Harlow: Longman, 1994), Miriam Tlali, *Amandla*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980) and Sipho Sepamla, *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (London: Heinemann, 1984).

¹⁰⁶ Simon Gikandi, *Reading the African Novel* (London, Nairobi, Portsmouth N.H : James Curry, Heinemann Kenya, Heinemann, 1987),125.

¹⁰⁷ See Jean Suret-Canale, “The French West African Railway Workers' Strike, 1947-48,” in *African Labor History*, eds. Peter Gutkind, Robin Cohen and Jean Copans (Sage publications: Beverly Hills, 1978), 129-155.

In the early fiction of Achebe and many of his contemporaries it has been noted that there is no simple reversion of colonial discourse as this fiction seems to reject irreconcilable binarism. I have asserted, however, that the ambiguity and ambivalence often typical of this fiction was countered by the fiction of other indigenous writers who chose a more militant course where there is no contact zone between the coloniser and the colonised and where the colonial binarism is reversed. While such oppositional categories may simplify the complexity of colonial and neo-colonial relations, they nevertheless underline the serious oppression and subjugation under which the oppressed suffered due to colonial imposition. In the two next sections, then, the notions of counter-hegemonic (1.6) and combat fiction (1.7) are discussed against this background and elaborated more thoroughly with special reference to the fiction of Ngugi and La Guma.

1.6 Defining counter-hegemonic fiction

The concept of “resistance literature” put forward by Barbara Harlow and others, among them Selwyn Cudjoe,¹⁰⁸ seems to delimit the concept to exclude counter-discursive narratives from the South which do not deal directly with the liberation struggle. Edward Said includes, on the other hand, all counter-discursive narratives that write back to the centre.¹⁰⁹ The complexity of the critical debate is seen in the discussion of how resistance can be spotted in literary texts. Whereas Harlow’s largely untheorized position of resistance literature presumes the transparency of literary resistance in the texts, Sharpe maintains that there are “certain problems with identifying sites of colonial resistance...,”¹¹⁰ and Parry claims that resistance literature does not necessarily have to directly illuminate the struggle or articulate dissent or protest.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ See Harlow, xvi and Selwyn Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980).

¹⁰⁹ See Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 230ff. and in particular 260. This is admittedly a long step from *Orientalism* where he simply left out the “response to Western dominance which culminated in the great movement of decolonization all across the third World.” Even though Said is not very explicit about the reason for this elision, it obviously has something to do with, as Moore-Gilbert claims, Said’s view of the subaltern in *Orientalism* as “an ‘effect’ of the dominant discourse with no agency which can operate oppositionally.” Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Post-Colonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London, New York: Verso, 1997), 131. Whereas *Orientalism* does not attempt to retrieve the narratives which run counter to the imperial narratives, the subaltern and the liberation narrative in *Culture and Imperialism* is recognized as an independent force operating not as an effect of, but as a reaction to and even rejection of colonial discourse. That does not prevent Said from preferring, as Ahmad suggests, the so-called ideological independence of Western high culture to the more ideologically oriented liberation art. In short, Said wants, as Moore-Gilbert states, to keep “straightforward propaganda out of the canon by virtue of his stress on complexity.” Moore-Gilbert, 66. For our purposes, however, the important point is to acknowledge Said’s later emphasis on “resistance” narratives and resistance culture.

¹¹⁰ Jenny Sharpe, “Figures of Colonial Resistance,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 1 (1989): 139.

¹¹¹ See Benita Parry, “Some Provisional Speculations on the Critique of ‘Resistance Literature,” in *Altered State? Writing and South Africa*, eds., Elleke Boehmer, Laura Chrisman, Kenneth Parker (Australia, Denmark, United Kingdom: Dangaroo Press, 1994), 11. Parry’s views are discussed in more detail in Part 2.

By defining all counter-narratives as resistance literature the concept of resistance may seem to be, in F. Cooper's words, so broadly expanded that "it denies any other kind of life to the people doing the resisting. Significant as resistance might be, Resistance is a concept that may narrow our understanding of African history rather than expand it."¹¹² Such a conceptual inclusiveness defines existence in Africa solely in terms of resistance, leaving no room for other activities. And as Slemon underlines, even in "resistance literature proper" resistance is "never purely resistance."¹¹³ By labelling all counter-narratives resistance narratives on the basis that they foreground the subaltern and decenter the oppressor in one way or another means including narratives which understand these relations in terms of what Sara Suleri calls "imperial or colonial intimacy."¹¹⁴ According to Slemon: "counter-discourses...inherently situate themselves as 'other' to a dominant discourse which by definition attempts to exclude heterogeneity from the domain of utterance and is thus functionally incapable of even conceiving the possibility of discursive opposition or resistance to it."¹¹⁵

Resistance literature in the Harlowian sense, reminiscent of Fanon, defines the colonial and post-colonial relationships in terms of a Manichean binarism where resistance against colonialism and post-colonialism means a reversal of that binarism. Signalling a Gramscian position of an alternative space of oppositional practice independent of the hegemonic order this reversal can only come about when the subaltern realises the implacable enmity in colonial relations and tries to disturb the unjust order through struggle.¹¹⁶

In short there is a difference in perception and description of the nature of the colonial and post-colonial encounter between the two "schools" and secondly also a difference in the understanding of what resistance implies and the political implications of that encounter. This difference is reflected, although somewhat differently, in Ngugi's and La Guma's fiction, and is indicated in my distinction between counter-hegemonic and combat fiction. The term counter-hegemonic fiction is used to define the counter-narratives of the two authors which are not necessarily located in the midst of the liberation struggle (*A Grain of Wheat* is whereas *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threefold Cord* are not) and which signal an ambiguous relationship to the hegemonic order, focusing on the relational aspects of the colonial encounter or on the difficulty of conscientising the subaltern beyond the colonial power structure. The response or resistance to colonial imposition is multifaceted, complex and ambiguous, and is not necessarily heralded from the mountain top. This fiction is

¹¹² Cooper, "Conflict and Connection," 1532.

¹¹³ Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire. Resistance Theory from the Second World War," in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 108.

¹¹⁴ Sara Suleri, "The Rhetoric of English India," in Ashcroft, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 113.

¹¹⁵ Stephen Slemon, "Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse," *Kunapipi*, 9, no.3 (1987): 11.

¹¹⁶ The problematic aspects of defining the colonial relationship in Manichean terms have been discussed earlier.

counter-hegemonic in the sense that it queries the hegemonic order, but may at the same time embrace certain aspects of it. Combat fiction will be defined more closely in the next section. Suffice it to say here that it reflects a Gramscian mood of agency which in fact undercuts the ambiguities and ambivalences of their early counter-hegemonic fiction. Ngugi writes in his early career as a fiction writer back to the centre by privileging the existential dilemmas of the indigenous population in the crossfire between traditional and colonial values and ideologies. Clearly both *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child* are counter-hegemonic novels in the sense that they foreground issues central to the Kenyan mind, but both novels' ambiguous inscription of the subject position of the colonised torn between the traditional and the modern opens a terrain which is far from the Manichean binarism portrayed by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. These are novels which blend the fascination for certain, important aspects of colonial values like education with a wish to stick to key Gikuyu traditions and practices. By acknowledging the strength of the ideological interpellation of colonialism, *The River Between* projects notions of resistance which are clouded in an ambiguous battle between various indigenous groups claiming ideological control. Ngugi reflects the mood of his early novels in an interview in 1964:

the problem with the African writer in Kenya is surely one of being able to stand a little detached: and see the problem, the human problem, the human relationship in a proper perspective... (While the African writer must be) committed to the situation ... wholly involved in the problems of Kenya... he mustn't allow the involvement in that particular situation to impinge on his judgement or on his creative activities.¹¹⁷

By never articulating the epistemological break with the colonial past, there is no complete inversion of colonialist discourse. However there is something unstable, ambivalent and even fluid about Ngugi's own thinking, his critique of Soyinka as early as 1966 being only one of many examples where he exposes a much more combative mood:

Although Soyinka exposes his society in breadth, the picture he draws is static. For he fails to see the present in the historical perspective of conflict and struggle. It is not enough for the African artist, standing aloof, to view society and highlight its weaknesses. He must try to go beyond this, to seek out the sources, the causes and the trends of a revolutionary struggle which has already destroyed the traditional power-map... The artist in his writings is not outside the battle... he can give moral direction and vision to a struggle.¹¹⁸

His criticism of Achebe below (in the same year) reinforces an ideological sentiment which deviates strongly from the open ideological terrain of his two first novels. Concomitantly his attack on Achebe functions in a way as a self-criticism levelled at the ambiguous ideological message of his own fiction. "Achebe-cum-teacher has left too many questions unanswered. Or maybe he has levelled his accusation, has raised questions, and left it to the

¹¹⁷ Aminu Abdullahi, "Ngugi wa Thiong'o," in *African Writers Talking*, eds. Duerden and Pieterse, 128.

¹¹⁸ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 65-66.

pupils to find answers.”¹¹⁹ Two years later, however, after the publication of *A Grain of Wheat*, there is hardly any re-echoing of his previous ideological position. “I’m a writer, first and foremost; I don’t believe in joining political parties myself, but I believe as a writer, in being kind of conscience of the nation.”¹²⁰

As will be demonstrated in my analysis of the original version of *A Grain of Wheat*, the mood of this novel does not deviate much from the ideological sentiment of his first two novels (even though it thematically has a different focus), a point which Ngugi himself must have been concerned about since he some years later came up with a revised, “radicalised” version of the same novel. Ngugi’s challenge of the dominant means of representation is also in *A Grain of Wheat* wrought with ambiguity and ambivalence in the sense that both dominant colonial and anti-colonial ideologies are under critical scrutiny. By continuously contesting both the representation of colonial ideology as holistic and non-contradictory and the representation of the liberation struggle as a nationalist enterprise without exclusions, Ngugi privileges in the early years of his fiction career a discourse which definitively rivals and transcends a narrow inversion of colonialist discursive practices and at the same time subverts a propagandistic anti-colonial discourse.¹²¹

Ngugi’s political writing at the time reflects a mind which vacillates between liberal humanism and a more militant stand. In his early writings for *The Nation* Ngugi is for example very critical of Mau Mau,¹²² but as early as 1963 he also declares: “Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and to preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal, and diminishes man.”¹²³ As Maughan-Brown states: “This is the more surprising considering that Ngugi was not introduced to Fanon’s work until after he had gone to Leeds the following

¹¹⁹ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 53.

¹²⁰ David Cook & Michael Okenimkpe, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o: An Exploration of his Writings* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 218.

¹²¹ Cook and Okenimkpe have traced Ngugi’s political development identifying three stages:

“1. An early period, stretching to about the end of Makerere in 1964, when he evinces an essentially moralist-humanist outlook on human affairs, characterized by a firm hope for a better future and a youthful (almost naive) innocence of trust in the good intentions and goodwill of people for bringing about that future. . .

2. An intermediate phase, embracing Leeds and his early teaching career, which is a period of maturing vision in which interests are narrowing down to such large ideas, events and phenomena as the Mau, Mau, capitalism, socialism, nationalism, etc. The period saw the writing of most of his essays collected in *Homecoming* and the articulation of what might be called his theory of history.

3. The present time, marked by a corrosive disillusionment with the emerging social faces of independent Africa, particularly of his native country, Kenya, and a bitter revulsion against an emerging African middle class.” See Cook & Okenimkpe, 208. His political and aesthetic views are developed in *Writers in Politics*, *Decolonising the Mind* and *Moving the Centre*.

¹²² See Bernth Lindfors, “Ngugi wa Thiongo’s Early Journalism,” *World Literature Written in English* 20 (1981): 29.

¹²³ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 28.

year.”¹²⁴ As I will elaborate on later in this chapter, his political leftist orientation effectively pushed his fiction writing in the direction of combat.

In a seemingly less complex perception of his role as an artist La Guma views his mission as being directly related to his intense political involvement on the part of the oppressed.

Having read South African literature, I discovered that nothing satisfactory or worthwhile from my point of view had been written about the area from which I sprang. So I think there was a conscious effort on my part to place on record the life in the poor areas, working class areas, and perhaps for that reason most of my work is centered around that community and life.¹²⁵

Undoubtedly La Guma clearly identified himself with the working class even though his class position was in reality, as Odendaal and Field state, “petty bourgeois.”¹²⁶ There is a parallel here between La Guma's preoccupation as an artist and his political commitment: he was a member of the Communist party as well as heavily involved with the SACPO (South African Coloured Political Organisation) and the ANC. In contrast to Ngugi La Guma's political views did not experience the same kind of political development in stages as his Communist views remained more or less the same throughout his career. Writing fiction was for La Guma a way of restoring a voice which had always been suppressed by the apartheid government. It was, in Coetzee's terminology, a way of supplying a complementary version of a historical narrative which had never been properly written (“the picture of the suburban slums did not appear anywhere in South African writing”¹²⁷). In this sense La Guma's fictional history writing is a reversion of colonial discursive practices by filling the void of the non-representation of the Other, but it deviates from the principles of colonialist dogmatism by refraining from a romanticised rendering of the oppressed Other as self. His articulation of his role as a writer is sometimes slogan-like and programmatic: “Therefore a democratic writer, a progressive writer should be against the man-hating ideology of the capitalist system, against neo-colonialism, racism. It is his duty to his own conscience, and it's his social mission.”¹²⁸ His subversion of colonialist discourse in his two first novels *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threefold Cord*, transcends, however, such a dogmatic role by seriously querying the level of conscientisation and the potentials of resistance among the oppressed population groups. In short, the representation of the coloured in resistance is almost being annulled by the prominent resistance fighter, thereby approaching, I will suggest, a replica of colonialist discourse. Even though the struggle which informs La Guma's fiction is based on his own experience, mostly indirectly through close observation and intimate knowledge, and despite his reiteration of his role as a recorder of the history of the oppressed, his early fiction is not a

¹²⁴ David Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya* (London: Zed, 1985), 230.

¹²⁵ Cecil Abrahams, ed., *Memories of Home: The Writings of Alex La Guma* (New Jersey: Africa Press, 1991), 19.

¹²⁶ Odendaal and Field, xxiii

¹²⁷ See my earlier reference to Cecil Abrahams, “The Writings of Alex La Guma,” 156.

¹²⁸ Alex La Guma, interview in *World Marxist Review* 27, no. 5 (1984): 113.

straightforward reworking of his experiences in District Six and on the Cape Flats. It is rather an attempt, if not to transcend the particularity of that experience, to strip oppression and resistance of its mythic face. Thus the link between La Guma's fiction and the materiality of his life as a resistance fighter is important, but much more complex than La Guma's more dogmatic comments on his art may sometimes seem to signify. On one rare occasion, in the interview quoted below, La Guma also acknowledges that his art is not simply based on a mimetic reflection of life in the disadvantaged areas, but on a transformative rendering of that life through the medium of fiction:

I was interested in recording *creatively* (my italics) the life of a community under various conditions. I thought that it would help to bring to the reader an idea of what goes on in various black areas of the Cape and that through a novel this would be done.¹²⁹

By recording creatively the life of a disadvantaged community in the Cape La Guma not only complements, but rivals potential sociological or historical discourses from the same area.

1.7 Defining combat fiction

Even though no clear cut line of demarcation can be drawn between the two categories counter-hegemonic and combat literature, combat literature seems nevertheless to assume a different understanding of the function of literature by 1) perceiving literature as a reflection of social and ideological struggle and 2) linking aesthetics and ideology, so that opposition to social and political organisation enacts a similar position in narrative and aesthetic positions. Combat literature is thus governed by political expediency rather than bourgeois aesthetics.

My use of the concept "combat literature" is close to what Barbara Harlow calls "resistance literature" and which she locates, as has already been noted, directly in the struggle against colonialism and post-colonialism, reflecting "the resistance and national liberation movements ... and in which it can be said to participate."¹³⁰ Harlow goes on to define resistance literature as "a particular category of literature that emerged significantly as part of the organized national liberation struggles and resistance movements in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East."¹³¹ Thus, according to Slemon,

resistance is an act, or a set of acts, that is designed to rid a people of its oppressors, and it so thoroughly infuses the experience of living under oppression that it becomes an almost autonomous aesthetic principle... And 'resistance literature,' in this definition, can thus be seen as that category of literary writing which emerges as an integral part of an organized struggle or resistance for national liberation.¹³²

¹²⁹ Cecil Abrahams, *Alex La Guma* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), 70.

¹³⁰ Harlow, xvi.

¹³¹ Harlow, xvii.

¹³² Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire," 107.

However, Harlow refrains from a more theoretical definition of “resistance literature” by saying that the definition “will be undertaken largely through a reading of the literary material itself.”¹³³ As we shall see Harlow’s use of the term is similar, if not synonymous with Fanon’s “literature of combat” which “calls on the whole nation to fight for their existence as a nation” and which “molds the national consciousness.”¹³⁴ However, whereas Harlow does not seem to link resistance literature to a specific genre or style, “literature of combat” is for Fanon linked to the disruption of “literary styles and themes”¹³⁵ and creating a new public. Fanon’s use of literature of combat is related to themes which are typically nationalist in order to mold and regain national consciousness and sovereignty. Fanon also stresses the discontinuity between colonialist literature and combat literature, and warns against the apotheosis or romanticisation of traditional culture as a basis for further struggle.¹³⁶ Fanon clearly sees the colonised writer as part and parcel of the struggle and as “an awakener of the people:”

The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope. But to ensure that hope and to give it form, he must take part in action and throw himself body and soul into the national struggle.¹³⁷

This is in line with both Ngugi’s and La Guma’s moral and political projects or projects of conscientisation. La Guma not only wants “to stir the conscience of the reader,” but “to change their (African people) lives, to change society.”¹³⁸

Like Fanon Benita Parry underlines the importance of innovative styles in subverting colonial discourse.¹³⁹ My use of the term “combat literature” privileges, however, content more than form even though Ngugi’s combat fiction clearly has stylistically disruptive elements which distinguishes it from his counter-hegemonic fiction. My focus on the novels’ thematic universe is also in line with Ngugi’s own artistic credo:

Content is ultimately the arbiter of form... So the most important thing was to go for a subject matter, for a content, which had the weight and the complexity and the challenge of their everyday struggles.¹⁴⁰

Such a focus also agrees with La Guma’s novels which in no way can be termed stylistically subversive. A major problem with “combat literature” has been that it has had the mark of one-dimensionality as an inversion of the singularity of the prevailing colonial discourse. By embarking on resistance writing, liberation writers aimed at dissolving the deeply

¹³³ Harlow, xvii.

¹³⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 240.

¹³⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 240.

¹³⁶ See Fanon, *The Wretched*, 209.

¹³⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 232.

¹³⁸ La Guma, *World Marxist Review* 27, no. 5 (1984): 112 and 111.

¹³⁹ See Benita Parry, “Culture Clash,” *Transition*, 55 (1992): 125-134.

¹⁴⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London, Nairobi, Portsmouth N.H., Harare: James Curry, Heinemann Kenya, Heinemann, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1986), 78.

embedded residues of colonialist discourse and, as we have seen, reversing its Manichean binarism, thereby often making the mistake of being too uncritical of the weaknesses and flaws of the oppressed. As Maxime Rodinson warns:

Ideology always goes for the simplest solutions. It does not argue that an oppressed people is to be defended because it is oppressed and to the exact extent to which it is oppressed. On the contrary, the oppressed are sanctified and every aspect of their actions, their culture, their past, present and future behaviour is presented as admirable. Direct and indirect narcissism takes over and the fact that the oppressed are oppressed becomes less important than the admirable way they are themselves. The slightest criticism is seen as criminal sacrilege. . . In an ideological conception, such an admission would imply that the object of admiration was flawed and hence in some sense deserving of past and present oppression.¹⁴¹

In the beginning of the 90s Albie Sachs commented very critically on South African art in the era of resistance against the apartheid regime:

In the case of a real instrument of struggle, there is no room for ambiguity- a gun is a gun, and if it were full of contradictions, it would fire in all sorts of directions and be useless for its purpose. But the power of art lies precisely in its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions - hence the danger of viewing it as if it were just another kind of missile-firing apparatus. . . . We need to accept broad parameters rather than narrow ones: the criterion being pro- or anti-apartheid. In my opinion, we should be big enough to encompass the view that the anti-apartheid forces and individuals come in every shape and size, especially if they belong to the artistic community.¹⁴²

As is well known Sachs' views have been supported by for example Njabulo Ndebele who has deplored the "overt political nature and journalistic reportage of some black South African fiction", and Chris Van Wyk who has lamented that post-1976 poetry has been weakened where "writing was not sustained by a rich human and cultural dimension."¹⁴³ Ndebele claims in his lengthy essay "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" that the South African writer

produces an art that is grounded in the negation of social debasement, where scenes of social violence and a host of examples of general social oppression become ends in themselves. As a result very little transformation in reader consciousness is to be expected since the only reader faculty engaged is the faculty of recognition. Recognition does not necessarily lead to transformation; it simply confirms. Beyond that confirmation, it may even reinforce the frustration produced by the reader's now further consolidated perception of an overwhelmingly negative social reality.¹⁴⁴

In "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" Ndebele elaborates on the term "protest literature:"

¹⁴¹ Maxime Rodinson, "Introduction," in *People Without a Country: the Kurds and Kurdistan*, ed. Gerard Chaliand (London: Zed Press), 1980, 5.

¹⁴² Albie Sachs, "Preparing ourselves for freedom," in *Spring is Rebellious: Arguments about cultural freedom*, eds. Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press (Cape Town: Buchi Books, 1990), 20 and 28.

¹⁴³ Both quotes taken from Frank Meintjies, "Albie Sachs and the art of protest," *Spring is Rebellious*, 33.

¹⁴⁴ Njabulo Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Johannesburg: COSAW, 1991), 28.

Why the misnomer 'protest'? The misnomer devalues the literature as art since 'protest' carries the implications of political and specifically expository declaration of dissent. The misnomer is obviously from the concept of 'politics of protest.' But this literature, while definitely labouring under the pressure of the expository intention, deliberately sets out to use conventions of fiction not of exposition. To call it 'protest literature' is to deny it any literary and artistic value: and those values are to be found in the phenomenon of the spectacle... The spectacular documents; it indicts implicitly; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority... Nothing beyond this can be expected of it.¹⁴⁵

Ndebele's view is quite contrary to that of La Guma who at the African-Scandinavian Writers' Conference at Hässelby, Stockholm in February 1967 affirmed his views of the South African artist:

I, as a South African writer, am prepared to run guns and to hold up radio stations, because in South Africa that is what we are faced with, whether we are writers or whether we are common labourers ... South African Literature, I am prepared to say, is that literature which concerns itself with the realities of apartheid. And what are the realities of South Africa? When we sit down to write a book, I or any of my colleagues around me, we are as writers faced with the reality that 80% of the population lives below the bread-line standard; we are faced with the reality that the average daily population of prisoners in South African prisons amounts to 70,000 persons. We are faced with the reality that half the non-white people who died last year were below the age of five years... Even if we want to ignore these gruesome details and think in terms of culture and art in South Africa, we are faced with the fact that in South Africa today people are not allowed to develop their minds along the lines which they prefer.¹⁴⁶

Whereas Kendell Geers sees Sachs' argument as remaining critical of apartheid, "but at the same time become critical of both itself as well as its own history,"¹⁴⁷ Tony Morphet criticises Ndebele's and Sachs' positions, claiming that "neither is able to relinquish the fixed point of closure in the framework of social action to which they have committed themselves."¹⁴⁸ As I understand him Morphet is saying that even though Sachs and Ndebele criticise the gun- is- a- gun- is- a gun literature their basic commitment and their expectations of "correct" literature does not have the range, flexibility, complexity and openness they are advocating, closed in by their own ANC-dogmatism. But the most provocative point in Morphet's discussion is his rejection of Sachs and Ndebele by referring to post-structuralist and post-modernist theoretisations, ridiculing the assumption that cultural texts can have any impact on "real action."¹⁴⁹ As I will show in Part 11 on combat literature Morphet's disclaiming of cultural texts' impact on real action is indeed problematic in view of *Matigari*'s shock waves into the Kenyan political landscape. Clearly it

¹⁴⁵ Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* 28.

¹⁴⁶ Per Wastberg, *The Writer in Modern Africa* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), 22.

¹⁴⁷ Kendell Geers, "Competition with history: resistance and the avant garde," *Spring is Rebellious*, 44.

¹⁴⁸ Tony Morphet, "Cultural Imagination and cultural settlement," *Spring is Rebellious*, 143.

¹⁴⁹ Morphet, 143.

is both Ngugi's and La Guma's firm conviction that their fictional texts can make a difference in the real world of resistance and combat.

In the combat novels of Ngugi and La Guma it will be shown how the more soft-spoken, ambiguous tone of the counter-hegemonic novels is replaced by a much more assertive, triumphant one which offers an ideological and epistemological break with colonialism, post-colonialism and the apartheid regime. By underlining the need for the necessary discontinuity with the colonial/apartheid past, not in the sense of historical amnesia, but in the sense of ideological rupture, Ngugi's and La Guma's futurological projection announce a new, alternative beginning. Especially in Ngugi's texts this utopianism is premised on the recovery (but not romanticising) of the silences of the past to shape a new future, discarding the common belief in the ephemerality of that very past. The serious implications of this kind of historical amnesia are, in Lyotard's words, a rupture which is "a way of forgetting or repressing the past, that is to say, repeating and not surpassing it."¹⁵⁰ Ngugi's student years in Leeds were instrumental in his shift to a more revolutionary, Marxist view, even though, as we have seen, his militancy erupted already somewhat surprisingly in a *Nation* article already in 1963. As Ime Ikiddeh writes in his foreword to *Homecoming* :

Leeds provided an ideological framework for opinions that he already vaguely held. It was at this time too that we both read two books which became major influences: Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*... and Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.¹⁵¹

With the publication of *Petals of Blood* in 1977 Ngugi still remained within the tradition of the Afro-European novel. It was only with his later novels, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* (written in Gikuyu), that Ngugi transcended traditional European aesthetics. But his revisions of *A Grain of Wheat*, almost two decades after the novel was published, testify to a dramatic change in aesthetic reflection and practice. It seems, however, that it took some time before his political or even aesthetic convictions were translated into literary practice. Already in the same year as he published *A Grain of Wheat*, 1968, his commitment to socialist art is underlined:

I believe the African novelist, the African writer, can help in this struggle. But he must be committed on the side of the majority (as indeed he was during the anti-colonial struggle) whose silent and violent clamour for change is rocking the continent... It is only in a socialist context that a look at yesterday can be meaningful in illuminating today and tomorrow. Whatever his ideological persuasion, this is the African writer's task.¹⁵²

Ngugi acknowledges the dramatic changes in his life as a writer between 1970 and 1980 which he sums in the following way:

¹⁵⁰ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*, eds. Julian Pefanis & Morgan Thomas (Sidne:Power Publishers, 1992) , 90.

¹⁵¹ Ime Ikiddeh, "Foreword," in Ngugi, *Homecoming*, xiii.

¹⁵² Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 46.

what's the relevance of literature to life?... For me, it was a decade of tremendous change: towards the end, I had ceased being a teacher and had become a student at the feet of the Kenyan peasant and worker.¹⁵³

In the essay "Writers in Politics" from 1975 his combat posture as a writer is not to be mistaken:

What is important is not only the writer's honesty and faithfulness in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him, but also his attitude to those big social and political issues... We must join the proletarian and the poor peasant struggles against the parasitism of the comprador bourgeois, the landlords and the chiefs, the big business African classes that at the same time act in unison and concert with foreign business interests.¹⁵⁴

It is from this political vantage point that his combat novels, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* have been written, and it is because of Ngugi's utter disillusionment with the post-colonial regime in Kenya (and in other African states for that matter) that his fiction engages in a confrontational attack against these regimes: "Our pens should be used to increase the anxieties of all oppressive regimes... should be used to 'murder their sleep' by constantly reminding them of their crimes against the people."¹⁵⁵ Ngugi's deliberate shift to combat fiction is moreover a conscious attempt to speak on behalf of the peasants and other subaltern groups in a language of their own and with a content which exposes the underlying reasons of their oppression. By adhering in a very conscious way to the gun-is-a-gun-is-a gun-syndrome which Sachs distances himself from, Ngugi in his combat fiction attempts to suppress the ambiguities and contradictions of (resistance) life. My reading of the novels shows, however, that it is the nature of the fictional texts to resist some of the ideological impositions of the author, exposing cracks which place the texts in somewhat more uncertain ideological terrain.

La Guma's shift of focus to the liberation struggle proper in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* and *Time of the Butcherbird* cannot be explained in terms of a new development in La Guma's political views since they remained, as we have seen, more or less the same throughout his literary career. Even his advocacy for changing the unjust order through violence remained basically the same from the beginning of the 60s with the publication of *A Walk in the Night* till the publication of his last novel in the late seventies, *Time of the Butcherbird*.

La Guma himself explains the shift in themes in terms of the development of the liberation movement:

I have written books about the beginnings of the idea of national liberation. I have tried to show the growth of the resistance movement in South Africa in the face of incredible obstacles, telling blows and bitter setbacks. I have always wanted to watch the transformation of unassuming, seemingly ordinary people into staunch

¹⁵³ Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, preface.

¹⁵⁴ Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, 74 and 78.

¹⁵⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press), 69.

fighters against the racist regime, for the freedom and social equality of the black population.¹⁵⁶

Reflecting La Guma's aesthetic view where he conceives of art more or less as a replica of "what really happened," his move from low-key resistance in his first novels to a focus on resistance in the liberation movements in his later works relates to a liberation reality where the coloureds were cut off from representation in the beginning of the sixties, but got on the liberation band wagon later, culminating during and after the Soweto revolts in the mid-seventies. His novels can thus be seen as an evolutionary process of conscientisation which shows, according to Piniel Shiva,¹⁵⁷ "how the political consciousness of his heroes develops in stages." It is only with *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* that there is, as Gerald Moore claims, "convergence of (La Guma's) fiction with his own long-held position of an uncompromising revolutionary."¹⁵⁸ But this convergence is, as I will show, precarious in the sense that despite La Guma's intention to impose a confrontational stance against apartheid oppression, the La Gumian political dogmatism is never given free rein in the texts as the revolutionary commitment and will of the protagonists are in different ways being interrogated and contested. Whereas Maughan-Brown attributes the tensions and contradictions in his last novel, *Time of the Butcherbird*, to his situation in exile,¹⁵⁹ my reading of the novel's contradictions focuses more on the very nature of ideological transformation into a fictional text than geographical location.

Whereas Gordimer claims that "the essence of the writer's role lies in her social responsibility, and responsibility is treated primarily as a form of *witness*..."¹⁶⁰ both La Guma and Ngugi would, arguably, interpret their roles as artists in the combat period in a less detached, and more ideologically programmatic way. Since truth in any way is a negotiable concept it seems more important for Ngugi in particular and La Guma to address the urgency of the political situation through ideology in such a way as to assist liberation than to speak of, as Brenda Cooper labels it, "the truth of the round."¹⁶¹ Both Ngugi and La Guma's combat texts try, as Gikandi states in a commentary on the political novel, "to capture human life as a totality in spite of contemporary alienation, and grow(s) out of the premise that art is an instrument to counter fragmentation..."¹⁶² Buffeted by strong historical and ideological forces the combat texts of my two authors can thus be seen to resist the onslaught of postmodern inertia and dislocation. Part 11 of this thesis will explore some of the implications of this combative enterprise.

¹⁵⁶ Alex La Guma, *World Marxist Review* 27, no. 5 (1984): 111.

¹⁵⁷ Shiva, 37.

¹⁵⁸ Gerald Moore, *Twelve African Writers* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 106.

¹⁵⁹ David Maughan-Brown, "Adjusting the Focal Length: Alex La Guma and Exile," *English in Africa*, 18, no. 2 (1991): 30.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted from Attwell, 13. Truth is here interpreted as the interaction between 'creative self-absorption and conscionable awareness.'

¹⁶¹ Brenda Cooper, *To Lay These Secrets Open* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1992), 17.

¹⁶² Simon Gikandi, *Reading the African Novel*, 113.

PART 1. COUNTER-HEGEMONIC FICTION: THE EXPLORATION OF AN AMBIGUOUS TERRAIN

2. General introduction

In different colonial contexts the notion of the nation was a powerful instrument in mobilising resistance against colonial imposition. Even though the notion of “nation” is, as Boehmer states, a “social artifice,”¹ it played an important role in establishing a common frame of reference, a collective consciousness and imagination which in many ways cut across racial and ethnic barriers. Whereas the power and energy of anti-colonial nationalism should be underlined, it should not be forgotten that anti-colonial nationalism also had its exclusions, again varying in various contexts. In Kenya the exclusion could relate to gender, age, tribe and social status whereas in South Africa anti-colonial nationalist struggle often had racial overtones, as seen in the Black Consciousness Movement and in the secondary position often relegated to coloureds. The fact that subaltern histories often were excluded from nationalist narratives was exposed by the Indian Subaltern Studies group,² and by so doing the neat division line between colonial and anti-colonial was questioned and either replaced or extended by a dichotomy between the elite and the subaltern. The complexity of the issue is underlined by the contention that oppression in India may have a stronger explanatory force if drawn by caste more than by colonial oppression. This issue is picked up by Ngugi who in his combat fiction makes the resistance against the elite to be his central concern. This is in line with Fanon’s scepticism against the role of the bourgeoisie in any liberation struggle in Africa. In the category of the elite both foreign as well as indigenous groups were included whereas those (the vast majority of the colonial population) alienated from the mainstream of colonial life were defined as subaltern. This allows us to explore the difference between rhetoric and reality in the question of the nation-state, a fact which for example Ngugi does in *A Grain of Wheat*. Ngugi asks how subaltern groups contributed to nationalism and why people were alienated from and excluded from the liberation struggle. In what way did the liberation struggle take into account the lives and consciousness of ordinary people? Similarly La Guma asks in what way did the coloured people take part in the national liberation struggle? Thus many who contributed to the nationalist project were in fact excluded by it and resistant to it. As Loomba says:

nations are communities created not simply by forging certain bonds but by fracturing or disallowing others; not merely by invoking and remembering certain versions of the past, but making sure that others are forgotten or repressed.³

¹ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York), 185.

² See Guha, footnote 1 (Theoretical propositions).

³ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 202.

The complexity of the issue is moreover confounded by exclusions, not only by the liberation movements, but by the ideological interpellations of the oppressive regimes which produced servility, lack of consciousness, introverted violence, non-agency and compliance. The underlying, existential and mainly rhetorical questions refer to the reasons for these exclusions: why many oppressed groups never moved from oppression to revolt and were never conscientised to a degree that they questioned the dominant order whereas others moved from a recognition of injustice to resistance, from anti-colonial consciousness to revolution. These are issues central to both Ngugi and La Guma's literary works in their counter-hegemonic period, the complexity of which is reflected in the fact that resistance and compliance took and take many forms depending not only on time and place, but on a vast number of variables both personal and contextual.

In defining the nature of resistance literature my introductory chapter characterises levels of resistance and distinguishes between combat literature and counter-hegemonic literature. Whereas combat fiction as I have defined it tends to invert the colonial version of Manichean binarism and place it squarely within the liberation struggle or the neo-colonial struggle, counter-hegemonic fiction is defined as reconstituting the fragmented colonial subject and subverting the colonial representation of the subaltern without necessarily insisting on the implacable enmity of Manicheism and its location squarely within the liberation struggle. Here the emphasis is more on personal and social reconstruction and multi-faceted types of agency rather than on a direct, uncompromising and one-dimensional reaction and opposition and struggle against the oppressor.

While such a distinction is convenient for identifying certain ideological imperatives and their impact on fictional representation, it has been underlined that it is not a rigid demarcation since both versions are oppositional by writing back, in one way or another, to the centre. The implications of a counter-hegemonic literature are therefore never simplistic and must be continually problematised in our analysis of the fiction of our two authors. For instance, the insistence on remapping and redefining colonial worlds and selves as an act of resistance is not necessarily to suggest, as we noted in the introductory chapter, that *colonialist* representations of colonised worlds and people were always one-dimensional. Homi Bhabha's work on anti-colonial resistance identifies several ambiguities in colonial ideology which attest to consistent patterns of conflict slippage in colonial fiction. According to Bhabha the representation of the colonised in colonial discourse is set in ambiguity, attesting to the consistent patterns of conflict in this discourse. Bhabha defines the image of the black as

both savage(cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child, he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces.⁴

⁴ Bhabha, *The Location*, 82.

What Bhabha suggests is that colonial discourse of “the Other” as stereotype “is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation.”⁵ Bhabha repeatedly argues for this ambivalence by underlining “the wide *range* of the stereotype, from the loyal servant to Satan, from the loved to the hated.”⁶

While Bhabha is right in stressing the wide range of representations within the stereotype of the Other, these must, as already has been noted, be viewed and interpreted-with rare exceptions- within the categories of negative representation, signifying, as Bhabha asserts somewhat paradoxically in the same article, that race “becomes the ineradicable sign of *negative difference* in colonial discourses.”⁷ This is underlined by Fanon's desperate statement: “Wherever he goes... the Negro remains a Negro.” The (mis) representations of the colonised were different according to the responses in the colonies, but it is clear that even before the encounters racist stereotypes provided, as Loomba asserts, “an ideological *justification* for different kinds of exploitation.”⁸ Colonial psychology and psychiatry pathologised difference and were unable, according to Vaughan, “to contain any notion of difference that was not directly tied to the question of inferiority and the necessity of subordination.”⁹

We have already noted how the idea of subverting these misrepresentations was high up on the agenda for the new generation of African writers in the post-colonial and apartheid era. But the subversion and interrogation of various strands of colonialist discourse was made difficult by the very fact that while many of the writers in question were solidly anti-colonial, they had simultaneously problems in rejecting the colonialist culture point blank in the same condescending way as the colonizers rejected the colonised. The asymmetrical, colonial relationship maintained by the coloniser was therefore in many respects not in the same way reciprocated by many writers of the new Africa. This may be one reason for the ambivalence of counter-hegemonic discourse in the representation of both the colonial and colonised self. Gikandi relates one episode from his childhood in Kenya which underlines the perceived paradoxes of the colonial encounter:

One of the things that puzzled me about my people... is how strongly they detested colonial rule, which they fought tooth and nail, often ending up in prison, and how passionately they believed in the efficacy and authority of colonial culture. For many of them this was not a contradiction: the reason they were fighting colonial rule was not because they wanted to return to a precolonial past... but because they wanted access to the privileges of colonial culture to be spread more equitably, without regard to race and creed.¹⁰

⁵ Bhabha, *The Location*, 70.

⁶ Bhabha, *The Location*, 79.

⁷ Bhabha, 75.

⁸ Loomba, 13.

⁹ Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*, 115.

¹⁰ Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1996), xix.

Such duality and ambivalence have implications for representation in counter-hegemonic narratives in the sense that it impacts on the nature of narrative. The narratological dilemma arises from the potential conflict of containing these different dimensions and at the same time maintaining their ideological thrust as anti-colonial literature. It is this potential conflict contained within counter-hegemonic literature which broadly speaking separates it from the Harlowian concept of "resistance literature." At the same time counter-hegemonic texts convey a different epistemological framework from colonialist discourses since they offer other themes (Fanon) and transcend the monolithic, ideological one-dimensionality of colonial discourse.

To write a counter-hegemonic narrative means to restore colonised and post-colonised selves and worlds and at the same time reveal their contradiction and ambivalence. Such a discourse therefore necessitates a re-working of our concept of mimesis. Ricoeur shows how a narrative discourse, "can be both symbolic and realistic at one and the same time."¹¹

narrative discourse does not simply reflect or passively register a world already made; it works up the material given in perception and reflection, fashions it and creates something new, in precisely the same way that human agents by their actions fashion distinctive forms of historical life out of the world they inherit as their past.¹²

The contradictions and ambivalences that emerge in the representation of the colonial and apartheid subaltern, even though approached within the framework of a realist novel, thus offer multi-dimensional representations of "reality;" African "reality," like other "realities" is not objectively there and is only accessible as it has been represented by others. In many ways the selected novels by Ngugi and La Guma are very different. While they are set in different locations, the novels also differ in terms of resistance focus since *A Grain of Wheat* primarily deals with various aspects of the liberation struggle (without being defined as combat literature), whereas *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threefold Cord* are placed temporally in the midst of the apartheid struggle without centring on the overtly political or military aspects of the resistance fight.

It has been noted that in Ngugi resistance is perceived in terms of the nation-state. The very notion of the nation-state is also appropriated by the new, indigenous rulers to legitimise the authority of their post-independent regime. It is a dilemma which surfaces already in the original version of *A Grain of Wheat*, a dilemma which is reinforced by the revised version some years later. While Gikandi's argument that the modernist stance of the post-colonialist rulers was due to the fact that "they had no real access to modes of knowledge outside the horizon of expectations established by empire"¹³ may be true, it is for our purposes more important to explore how Ngugi, within the modernist structure of

¹¹ See Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 178.

¹² White, *The Content*, 178.

¹³ Simon Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.



a nation-state, converts the ideological content of the modernist project to explore colonial and colonised identities in resistance and complicity.

Throughout his working life as a journalist and as a novelist La Guma painted a picture of another South Africa which was not only distorted, but mostly totally neglected. In his fiction La Guma incessantly queries and interrogates not only the colonial representation of South African identities and their worlds but his own image of the apartheid subaltern as well.

The analysis of the two authors' counter-hegemonic fiction, which is undertaken in Part 1 of this thesis, is divided into three thematic sections each of which explores different aspects of Ngugi's and La Guma's texts respectively. (Chapter 4 about the revised version of *A Grain of Wheat* is for obvious reasons not included in this set-up.)

The first sections (3.2, 5.2 and 6.2) offer an analysis of the colonial and apartheid selves and discourse as seen through counter-hegemonic lenses. While in colonialist discourse the colonised Other is more or less deprived of representation, the early novels of Ngugi and La Guma are no simple reversals of that discourse, giving textual space to colonial/apartheid presence within the over-all framework of the novels.

In the texts of both authors the colonial and apartheid presence represents an indispensable background to an understanding of subaltern existence, a textual presence which also invites an exploration of various aspects of the hegemonical order. Focusing on the self-Other dichotomy of colonial and apartheid discourse the texts question the solidity of such binarism by uncovering cracks that go beyond the surface structure. Although Ngugi and La Guma approach the colonial and apartheid situation from very different angles, and where colonial disintegration is more clearly spelt out in *A Grain of Wheat* than apartheid instability is uncovered in the back streets of District Six or the mud roads of the Cape Flats, the history of domination and subjugation has carved its pattern into the lives, not only of the oppressed but the oppressor as well - in Kenya and in South Africa. The texts, my analysis argues, propose an understanding of colonialism and apartheid ideology, through their textual representatives, which both breaks with the essentialism of colonialist discourse and shies away from the consistent demonisation so common in combat literature.

The next sections (3.3, 5.3 and 6.3) proceed to analyse the representation of the colonised self and his/her social world as the site for counter-hegemonic response and agency. In both *A Grain of Wheat*, *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threefold Cord* the complexity of challenging colonialism or apartheid is inscribed in the texts where essentialist assumptions of subaltern agency and response are being interrogated. In Ngugi's text the grand narrative of resistance is both rejected and embraced as colonised selves find themselves in completely different epistemological territories. Focusing in this section on the betrayal of resistance and agency *A Grain of Wheat* opens a terrain where individual needs and concerns are prioritised at the expense of collective responsibility, but where betrayal and heroism also are seen as negotiable entities not easily defined or demarcated.

In La Guma's early fiction where the setting is distanced from the liberation struggle *per se* my analysis focuses more on a lack of political commitment than on betrayal as such. Whereas *A Grain of Wheat* offers political alternatives to colonial discourse, the La Guma texts expose a terrain which is more or less a-politicised and where resistance consists of personalised acts where political redemption is difficult to envisage. In fact the lack of agency and conscientisation in the La Guma texts provokes, my analysis insists, an image of subaltern selves which at times comes close to images conjured up by apartheid discourse.

In the final sections (3.4, 5.4 and 6.4) the analyses focus on various types of interventions to colonial/apartheid imposition and oppression.

In *A Grain of Wheat* interventions are high-profiled resistance linked to the war of liberation and where liberation fighters, invested with a resistance zeal beyond the normal, are seen negotiating the new order or utopia in a complex terrain, not only between the colonial war machine and the liberation movement, but within the Gikuyu community itself where tensions run high between claims to agency and resistance on the one hand and the needs to privacy and self-construction on the other. Far from romanticising the resistance fighters, the text queries assumptions about resistance and resistance struggle, thus transcending a simplistic and euphoric resistance ideal often projected in combat fiction.

The ambiguous portrayal of the resistance movement and Kihika in *A Grain of Wheat* must be seen, this section claims, in relation to the heated historiographical debate in post-colonial Kenya and in particular the denigration of the Mau Mau movement by prominent politicians after independence. It has therefore been deemed necessary to outline relevant aspects of this debate here, also because, this thesis argues, the historiographical controversy "forced" Ngugi to revise the original version of *A Grain of Wheat* in which Mau Mau is less ambiguously portrayed.

In *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threefold Cord* resistance and agency is less spectacular and confrontational than in *A Grain of Wheat*. By questioning if the apartheid locality, both cartographically and politically, can be transcended, transgressed or resisted La Guma's counter-hegemonic fiction touches upon the problematic raised by Foucault, whether there is ideological or political space outside the dominant episteme, in La Guma's case the apartheid regime. In what may seem to be a dramatic difference to *A Grain of Wheat*, La Guma's first novels are apparently immune to the macro-politics of South African resistance. Focusing on the lives of the coloured population on a community level, the novels are in no way linked directly to the more concerted efforts of resistance through movements like the ANC and the PAC. The gloomy picture of the dismal existence in District Six and on the Cape Flats is, however, being challenged by interventions which attempt to shake non-resistant, status-quo attitudes at the micro-level, thus signalling, if not confirming, a faint light at the end of the apartheid tunnel.

As already suggested, the fiction under scrutiny defies the more narrow concept of resistance literature where "the oppressed are sanctified and every aspect of their actions,

their culture, their past, present and future behaviour is presented as admirable.”¹⁴ Nevertheless both La Guma’s and Ngugi’s novels are attempts to rewrite history - past and/or present- and to counter the euro-centric, patriarchal nature of colonial/apartheid ideology, but where the challenging of colonial ideology also enforces a sort self-mirroring which leaves the indigenous image not quite untarnished. The counter-hegemonic fiction of Ngugi and La Guma thus inscribes an image of colonial and post-colonial relations which has a different epistemological and ideological thrust than the textual manifestations of their later works. Even though both Ngugi and La Guma read the relationship between centre and periphery as opposition also in the counter-hegemonic phase, there is a sense that this opposition is more antinomial than Manichean since there exists some sort of a contact zone in the two authors’ early novels which is more categorically ruled out in the resistance phase.

¹⁴ Rodinson, 5.

3. *A Grain of Wheat*

3.1 Introduction

The intervention of Ngugi in *A Grain of Wheat* as a way of remapping the colonial topography illustrates how counter-hegemonic discourses are no simple reversions of colonial projections of colonial and colonized images. Written against the backdrop of what Maughan-Brown calls the colonial interpretation of Kenyan history¹, as well as against fragments of the neo-colonial, Kenyattan interpretation, in particular in relation to the history of the Mau Mau, *A Grain of Wheat* moves on explosive ideological terrain. It is a terrain where colonial and post-colonial historical cartography must be read against the Manichean division of civilised coloniser and savage resistance fighter. The British Parliamentary Delegation of 1954 stated after their return from a visit in Kenya: "Mau Mau intentionally and deliberately seeks to lead the Africans of Kenya back to the bush and savagery, not forward into progress."² The colonialist ideology's focus on difference in all spheres of life determined the coloniser-colonised relationship. Stoneham makes this unashamedly clear: "There is in the British in their dealings with the black races a consciousness of superiority; our history and traditions proclaim it."³ This superiority was linked to the colonisers' civilizing mission as manifested in Majdalany's support of the High Commissioner of Kenya's claim: "We are not destroying any old or interesting system, but simply introducing order into blank, uninteresting, brutal barbarism."⁴

In addition to this unambiguous discourse of colonial ideology which certainly had played an influential role during Ngugi's years at school in the fifties, *A Grain of Wheat* was also written against the backdrop of Western fiction on Africa, and in particular, as Ebele Obumsele has pointed out⁵, Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. Even though *A Grain of Wheat* in many ways only duplicates Conrad's plot and not Conrad's underlying message, the active borrowing from the Western canon may give nourishment to the critical suspicion of the presence of a colonialist discourse in *A Grain of Wheat*.

3.2 Prospero in Africa: The Consciousness of Superiority

While colonial representation is arguably not a prioritised area for counter-hegemonical or anti-colonial discourse, any counter-hegemonic text is by definition shadowed by colonial discourse and colonial representational patterns. Colonial representation from "the other side," i.e. from those writing back to the centre, constitutes therefore an important frame

¹ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 49.

² Report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies by the Parliamentary Delegation to Kenya. Cmd. No 9081, London, HMSO, 1954, 4.

³ C. T. Stoneham, *Mau Mau* (London: Museum Press, 1953), 67.

⁴ Fred Majdalany, *A State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau* (London: Longman, 1962), 15. See Ngugi's critique of the book in Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 26-30.

⁵ Ebele Obumsele, "A Grain of Wheat: Ngugi's debt to Conrad," in *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, ed. G.D. Killam (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984), 110-121.

of reference for an understanding of the main concern of *A Grain of Wheat*, i.e. the patterns of resistance and agency in confrontation with colonial discursive practices. The present section analyses how *A Grain of Wheat* locates colonial representation and colonialism within the borders of counter-hegemony.

It is the irreconcilable dualism of the colonial enterprise which *A Grain of Wheat* focuses on. At the heart of the colonialist's mission is his desire to civilise the African, to make him at par with the coloniser, the colonial *raison d'être* itself rests on the difference between the colonial and the colonial Other and this dualism in the colonial enterprise remains a fundamental contradiction in colonial discourse. By juxtaposing potential and difference in colonial discourse, Ngugi exposes colonial double-talk, not by rewriting history but by exposing the dualism of the colonial enterprise of civilising/exploitation, a contradictory dualism which was always there (and always exposed, however subtly and hidden, in colonial discourse). These contradictions have been summed up by JanMohamed:

But this creates another contradiction for him: if he genuinely pursues his manifest destiny and 'civilizes' the native, then he undermines his own position of social privilege; if the democracy from his home country is extended to the dominated country, then the colonizer can no longer retain his superior status.⁶

The colonial version of reality is not always ridiculed by the text, but subverted by the textual abundance of contradictions and ambivalences. Reminiscent of Mannoni's study *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonisation*⁷ John Thompson's civilising project *Prospero in Africa* in *A Grain of Wheat* suggests the possibility of Africans becoming like the English in mind given the right environment:

Here were two Africans who in dress, in speech and in intellectual power were no different from the British. Where was the irrationality, inconsistency and superstition so characteristic of the African and Oriental races (62)?⁸

Thompson insists on the morality of the civilising mission: "it means, it must surely lead to the creation of one British nation, embracing peoples of all colours and creeds, based on the just proposition that all men were created equal" (62). Not directly adopting Mannoni's thesis that particular peoples are colonised because they suffer from an unresolved "dependence complex,"⁹ Thompson subverts the Orwellian slogan into something like "All men are created equal, but Western men are more equal than others." Even this subversion is later degraded into an absolute dichotomy between self and Other where savagery and primitiveness are named to be the characteristic features of the Other:

⁶ JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 5.

⁷ See first chapter, footnote 26.

⁸ All references in this chapter are to the original version: James Ngugi, *A Grain of Wheat* (London, Nairobi, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1968). It is worth noting that recent critical books on Ngugi do not distinguish between the original and the revised version of *A Grain of Wheat*. See for example Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* and Patrick Williams, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁹ Loomba, 139.

The darkness and mystery of the forest, have led him (the primitive man) to magic and ritual... Dr. Albert Schweitzer says 'The Negro is a child, and with children nothing can be done without the use of authority.'... Remember the African is a born actor, that's why he finds it so easy to lie. (64-65)

This demonisation of the Other is reinforced by the emergency situation in which the settlers find themselves, viewing Mau Mau and in particular the widespread use of oaths and oath-taking ceremonies as “essentially an irrational rejection of modernity.”¹⁰ By invariably modelling his civilising project after Westminster as always the relevant point of reference, Thompson is bound to entangle himself into a set of absurd contradictions from where there is no escape: a transfer of Thompson’s colonialist credo would, as JanMohammed accurately has argued, undermine the coloniser-colonised dichotomy that Thompson at all costs wants to maintain, and colonialism itself would collapse. The disaster of such a collapse is poignantly summed up by Thompson:

Would these things remain after Thursday? Perhaps for two months: and then- test-tubes and beakers would be broken or lie un-washed on the cement, the hot-houses and seed-beds strewn with wild plant and the outer bush which had been carefully hemmed, would gradually creep into a litter-filled compound. (49)

By exposing and subverting colonialism by means of the colonialist himself, Ngugi infers an image of colonialism which violently contests the inherent moral character of the mother country, thus blurring any opposition between domestic and colonial space based on moral or ethical categories. The dualistic nature of the colonial enterprise is in this sense more fictitious than real because difference is the forceful parameter on which the strategic manoeuvring of the colonial enterprise is based. Willifried F. Feuser’s description of colonial perceptions of difference typically reflects this attitude:

To the West, Africa has long been the heart of darkness. Even during the age of discovery, European seafarers only skirted the coastlines of the continent, leaving the interior unexplored and peopled, in the popular imagination, by monsters and human freaks.¹¹

By underscoring the superiority of the whites and by giving the moral mission legitimacy in the minds of the Europeans, Thompson in effect rejects, colonial style, the colonised as subjects. As Moore-Gilbert asserts, “the authority of (neo)colonialism depends precisely upon fracturing the subjectivity of its subordinates through encouraging the non-Western subject to identify with metropolitan cultural forms and values”.¹²

Acknowledging that colonialism has shaped hierarchies of subjects, Ngugi in *A Grain of Wheat* focuses on the asymmetrical relationship between the coloniser and the colonised through exposing the fragile and dependent subject position of Karanja. Whereas

¹⁰ Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. and John Nottingham, *The Myth of Mau Mau. Nationalism in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi: Transafrica, 1996), 331.

¹¹ Willifried F. Feuser, “Reflections of History in African Literature,” *World Literature Written in English*, 24, no. 1 (1984): 53.

¹² Moore - Gilbert, 122.

Thompson's behaviour towards his native workers signals difference and superiority, Karanja's problem is related to his unquestioned appropriation of the civilising authority of colonialism, thereby stripping him of any identity outside colonial space.

As long as he did not know the truth, he could interpret the story in the only way that gave him hope: the coming of black rule would not mean, could never mean the end of white power. (45)

Moreover Karanja's appropriation of Western ideology, not at all unique in the history of the Emergency,¹³ sidelines him completely in the resistance struggle as his colonial bias is in the end treacherous. His pathetic subordination to the whites is repeatedly underlined as in the scene where he is invited for tea at Mrs. Thompson's house: "Then gradually he became exhilarated, he wished Mwaura had seen him at the house" (46).

Reminiscent of Fanon's statement that "The native is an oppressed person whose permanent vision is to become the persecutor"¹⁴ Karanja sees in the Thompsons everything that he as an individual desires.

The corrupting consequences of colonialism are not, however, a one-way street. On the contrary, the self-destructive nature of colonialism is enacted within the text itself by exposing the rise and fall of Mr. Thompson as he corrupts himself as well as his indigenous companions through manipulation of power. Thompson's attempt to impose his Western authority on the alien world is catastrophic as the deaths of the eleven detainees at Rira attest to, thereby effectively puncturing any notion of the civilizing mission of colonialism as earlier proposed by Thompson himself:

John Thompson had worked as a District Officer in many parts of Kenya. He worked hard and his ability to deal swiftly and effectively with Africans was widely recognized. A brilliant career in the colonial administration lay before him... At Rira, the tragedy of his life occurred. A hunger strike, a little beating and eleven detainees died. The fact leaked out... A commission of inquiry was set up. He was whisked off to Githima, an exile from the public administration he loved. (54)

The irony of the episode is too conspicuous to be ignored: The tragedy is not, the narrative tells us, the deaths of the eleven Kenyan detainees, but the very fact that Thompson, responsible for deaths at Rira, is being involuntarily removed from his position and that his career is in shambles. Ngugi's historical reference for the Rira disaster was the Hola massacre of 1959 when eleven detainees who refused forced labour were beaten to death, an incident which made the British public aware of the atrocities taking place in the name of colonialism and civilization. For the Africans, the Hola Massacre was "the culmination

¹³ Robert Buijtenhuijs refers to how "the colonial myth of Mau Mau has been impressed upon the Kikuyu mind... I have already mentioned before the problem of the interiorization of the colonial myth of Mau Mau by many Africans..." Robert Buijtenhuijs, *Mau Mau Twenty Years After: The Myth and the Survivors* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton: 1973), 104-105.

¹⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 53.

of the colonial war of extermination” and a writer in *The New Kenya* called for an end to ‘the barbaric savagery, the sickening brutality’ of British rule.”¹⁵

Thompson’s fall from grace breaks the essentialist version of the coloniser promoted in colonialist discourse, thus puncturing any notion of cultural or racial difference in absolute, homogenous terms. The stripping of colonial superiority and morality as witnessed in the gradual degeneration of Thompson is juxtaposed with Ngugi’s narration of the white man’s coming to Kenya. The emphasis on land grabbing (“Soon people saw the whiteman had imperceptibly acquired more land to meet the growing needs of his position” (15)) and how the Bible came along with the sword (“and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried, not the Bible, but the sword” (15)) kills any remainder of Thompson’s civilising mission as the text dramatically redefines the colonial image painted by colonial discourse. On a more personal level, and after the Rira disaster, Thompson’s control and authority is gradually being weakened in confrontation with the Kenyans: “He remembered the detainees at Rira the day they went on strike. Now he sensed the same air of hostility. He must keep his dignity – to the last. But panic seized him” (50). The complete dissolution of Thompson’s authority is symbolically enacted in Mugo’s dream about the incidents in Rira where Mugo, the saviour, is on top of everything, even the white man Thompson:

All at once, Githua shouted: Mugo save us. The cry was taken by the others: Mugo save us. The suppliant voices rose to a chanting thunder: Mugo save us. And John Thompson had joined the condemned men and he was crying out louder than all the others: Mugo save us. (146)

But this surrender of colonialism is never absolute and not even always necessarily willed by the colonised themselves. Whereas the demolition of indigenous self and economic exploitation and extraction is resisted the import of modernity in the wake of colonialism is embraced. The world of *A Grain of Wheat* is thus a transitional world in which the colonial presence moves beyond the Thompsons to an ambivalent presence, and where the figure of modernity attracts not only curiosity but desire. This ambivalence is captured in the pairing of the notions of stasis and change where Thabai, the village around which the novel centers, represents the unchangeable Gikuyu location: “And even in 1963, it had not changed much from the day in 1955...” (5). This notion of stasis, however, is countered by temporal and ideological change; everything is at the same time in a state of flux by the advent of independence of the nation state which conceptually is, as we have seen, in itself a modern notion. The trading centre, the stone and the brick walls in Thabai and Rungei (the first in Gikuyuland) and most importantly the train, are symbols of this ambivalence:

The train became an obsession: if you missed it, sorrow seized your heart for the rest of the week: you longed for the next train. Then Sunday came, you went there on time, and immediately you were healed. (84)

¹⁵ Quoted from Carol Sicherman, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources 1957-1987* (London: Hans Zell, 1989), 398-399.

It is this ambivalent response, stylistically written into the text, that complicates the restructuring of the world of *A Grain of Wheat*. This is exposed in the next section where the response to colonial imposition proves to be multi-faceted and far from unambiguous.

3.3 Interrogating resistance from within: the exposure of the fragile self

While the next section will focus on the narration of the liberation movement and the individual hero who calls for unity in resisting colonial domination, the concern in this section is on the parallel, much more comprehensive representation in which the whole concept of the hero is questioned and the assumptions about the grand narrative of resistance are queried. The complexity and ambivalences of subaltern resistance to colonialism are analysed by exploring the representation of the subaltern self in a world on the brink of some sort of restoration and reconstruction. By exposing the inner lives of members of the Gikuyu community with their doubts and beliefs, their strengths and weaknesses the text presents avenues for interrogating both the colonial world and the projections of a “new” world.

It has already been noted how the context of *A Grain of Wheat* is represented as a transitional world in which the colonial presence is an ambivalent presence, generating both attraction and rejection, and complicating what in Fanon is a straightforward opposition between oppressors and the subaltern. African history, so totally absent from colonialist discourse, functions in the novel as the site for an identity almost being crushed by the European invaders. But African history is neither made sacral nor venerated unduly. It functions as another equally valid historical narrative couched in the medium of prophecies and stories. It tells about the prophecies of Mugo wa Kibiro which proved right but which were completely ignored as well as about the dethronement of the female chief who overreached herself by dancing naked in front of the tribesmen. It is a story of success and mostly defeat where Harry Thuku’s betrayal of the Movement stands out, both on a personal and collective level, as one of the darkest incidents in modern, Kenyan history. It is in this contradictory and conflicting context the drama of resistance and complicity at the eve of Kenyan independence develops. Thus from the very beginning *A Grain of Wheat* signals the fragility of subaltern resistance, most clearly observed, the next subsection argues, in the portrayal of Mugo.

3.3.1 *The enigmatic character of Mugo*

The very description of the protagonist of *A Grain of Wheat*, Mugo, defies any pre-conceived image of the suppressed subaltern as a potential revolutionary and rejects, this subsection argues, an essentialist view of resistance as an obvious, non-contradictory act. It also queries the level of political and societal consciousness among the subaltern, and exposes the conflict between individualism and communalism. And finally – the representation of Mugo rejects an essentialist notion of indigenous identity as being rather

than becoming. It is the careful, albeit sometimes puzzling construction of a self not necessarily united which transcends the borders of the self-Other- dichotomy which colonial discourse so laboriously has tried to establish. The complexity is enforced through the multiple views of Mugo: the exposure of his own inner terrain is in dramatic contrast to the terrain the people of Thabai perceives. Simultaneously the text itself, by exposing to the reader the ironic distance between appearance and reality, questions the apotheosis of the hero and his or her single vision.

The duplication by reversion in *A Grain of Wheat* of certain parts of Conrad's plot in *Under Western Eyes* effectively undermines the colonialist image of the African as devoid of logic, rationality, history and subjectivity. Both Mugo and Razumov are orphans who betray a cause, and their existential situation is marred by loneliness and anti-social behaviour. The similarity of the complexity of their situations and the choices they have to make undermine the colonial emphasis on difference and in one sense universalise the "Western" traits of character, not by debilitating the typically African features, but by inverting certain traits of the Manichean binarism which colonial discourse has established. Both novelists project, as Obumsele correctly observes, through Mugo and Razumov, "a mirror of our existential separation and insecurity."¹⁶ The drama which unfolds in *A Grain of Wheat* is kept within the parameters of European aesthetics; Ngugi employs a "Western style" to interrogate Western discourse, trying to beat, it seems, the colonialists at their own game. Alienated from his native environment, and unable to appropriate the totality of colonial ideological and cultural practices, Mugo finds himself in existential no-man's land. Mugo's alienation from the liberation movement is a complex result of factors ranging from personal to ideological issues. His obsession with isolation, with an unwillingness to be drawn into other people's lives, is a fairly consistent trait of character and is not a trait developed after his betrayal of Kihika. Explained as partly due to a very tragic childhood Mugo's sense of otherness and alienation is profound:

Mugo was deeply afflicted and confused, because all his life he had avoided conflicts; at home, or at school, he rarely joined the company of other boys for fear of being involved in brawls that might ruin his chances of a better future. (221)
... Kihika who had a mother and a father, and a brother and a sister, could play with death. He had people who would mourn his end, who would name their children after him, so that Kihika's name would never die from men's lips. Kihika had everything; Mugo had nothing. (221)

¹⁶ Ebele Obumsele, "*A Grain of Wheat*," 111. See also Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 247-49. He also notes that there "is an insistent stress in this novel on aloneness... and the impression is created that aloneness is... the constitutive element of the human condition." Maughan-Brown, 248. His references to Karanja and Gikonyo's statements (Karanja: 'Every man in the world is alone, and fight, alone to live' (*A Grain*, 166) and Gikonyo: 'One lived alone, and like Gatu, went into the grave alone... To live and die alone was the ultimate truth' (*A Grain*, 135) cannot, however, necessarily be taken as Ngugi's perception of the existential condition of man since the representatives of this view have more or less sidelined themselves from the resistance struggle.

Clearly Mugo's seclusion is at odds with the strong communal sense the community claims as a given trait: "You want to be left alone. Remember this, however: it is not easy for any man in a community to be left alone" (29). The communal trait of Gikuyu society is further elaborated by Kenyatta's categorical statement in *Facing Mount Kenya*:

The selfish or self-regarding man has no name or reputation in the Gikuyu community. An individualist is looked upon with suspicion and is given a nickname of 'mwenbongia' as one who works for himself and is likely to end up as a wizard.¹⁷

Even communities far less communal than the Thabai community would certainly be puzzled, particularly in times of crisis, by Mugo's seclusion. And for Kihika, who challenges the forces of colonialism head-on, this predisposition for evasion and escape coupled with a sense of desolation makes his situation very difficult. There is, however, a sense that Mugo's withdrawal and seclusion, although containing both rationalisation and opportunism, also transcends cynicism and egotism. In a response to one of Kihika's speeches Mugo challenges Kihika's ideological message and his "easy" talk of blood and sacrifice:

Mugo felt a constriction in his throat. He could not clap for words that did not touch him. What right had such a boy, probably younger than Mugo, to talk like that? What arrogance? Kihika had spoken of blood as easily as if he was talking of drawing water in a river, Mugo reflected, a revulsion started in his stomach at the sight and smell of blood. (19)
... Why should Kihika drag me into a struggle and problems I have not created? Why? He is not satisfied with butchering men and women and children. He must call on me to bathe in the blood. I am not his brother. I am not his sister. (220)

There are several things to be noted here: First Mugo's story of escape or exclusion punctures any notion of African monolithic collectivism. Secondly the text, by exposing Mugo as the protagonist, interrogates the boundary-fixing and the sidelining and marginalisation of those who are not in step with the meaning carriers in that world. Mugo's position of liminality is a noteworthy reminder of the exclusions of nationalism and the liberation movements, whether self-imposed or not, and cuts across the image elsewhere in the novel of a Party or a Movement which invites us to forget these exclusions by stressing its democratic ideas of being for all people and encompassing the diversity of the Kenyan population: "There was also a Luo speaker from Nyanza showing that the Movement had broken barriers between tribes... (18) and "Nearly everybody was a member of the Party" (13). In his own personal way Mugo rejects, it seems, the emancipatory vanguardism of Kihika and the movement, suspiciously interrogating the pretensions of Kihika and General R. as what Dick Hebdige in another context calls "illusory Faustian omnipotence,"¹⁸ insisting on redrawing the maps of the indigenous world by calling into question the undisputed power and knowledge position of Kihika and

¹⁷ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London, Nairobi, Ibadan: Heinemann, 1979), 119.

¹⁸ Dick Hebdige, "Postmodernism and 'The Other Side,'" *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 91.

his likes. By rejecting the repeated and aggressive interpellations from the resistance movement, Mugo refuses to be subjectified and to be constructed as a social agent in a historical formation. By way of Mugo's personal inclinations the anti-colonial version of resistance and agency are thus being problematised, opening up complex negotiations between the needs and interests of the individual and the demands of the collectivity. The text resists, by stressing Mugo's exclusionism, the homogenising of the subaltern by opening up various responses to the oppressed situation without necessarily accepting them. This de-essentialising of the indigenous underlines a perception of identity which is shifting and multiple rather than static and singular and makes it possible to rethink resistance (albeit of a different character) outside the essentialisms of dominant, anti-colonial ideology. It is this complexity of Mugo's psychological and ideological terrain which is being unfolded in *A Grain of Wheat*.

Clearly this focus on inter-ethnic difference in the Gikuyu society, based not so much on gender as personal and more vaguely political difference, projects an almost postmodern sense that radically complicates the possibilities for reconstructing self with a radical political project and set of transformative practices. In contrast to Kihika's open revolt against the colonialists, Mugo's more covert revolt against the Party by interrogating its vision is ideologically incorrect and would not have been understood or tolerated by the Mau Mau. The syncopation of the demands from the Party and individual desire lead to a hide and seek- marathon which at some point has to be finalised. Mugo's state of liminality, bombarded with resistance ideology, yet somewhat attracted to colonialist values, explains the problems of constructing a self.

The coupling of self-interest and a strong dislike of everything Kihika stands for not only makes him reject the Movement, but leads him into the role of a traitor. It is this crossing of borders between the two contesting physical and ideological spatial terrains of Mau Mau and colonialism which almost undermines resistance in the Thabai region. His remark that his betrayal is also an "act of moral courage...a kind of purity in the act" (226) seems, his unreliability as a narrator notwithstanding, to go beyond a simplistic revenge or jealousy motive; it is, from Mugo's perspective, an act of resistance against the multiple demands of a liberation movement he doesn't want to belong to. It is, however, difficult to see how Mugo's journey, by focusing on difference, so celebrated in post-modernist discourse, fosters anything but non-agency by reproducing and even reinforcing power relations rather than changing them.

3.3.2 Mugo's construction of self: Seclusion, agency and betrayal

According to Giddens, in modernity (and Kenya in the 50s was in the crossfire, as has been noted, between modernity and traditionalism) "the self is something which has to be constructed, reflected upon and explored. In Giddens' definition of self-identity, "the

reflexive activities of the individual are of central importance,”¹⁹ i.e. the idea of a self which is open to questions and experience and which involves rational thought. By not going through ritualised alteration from childhood to a responsible position as an adult – a typical sequencing in traditional societies, Mugo deviates from the secure, traditional path of self-realisation. Exposing thus more than any other character in the novel modernist traits by not succumbing to the traditionalist values of communalism and consensus, Mugo is, as this subsection shows, nevertheless in an identity squeeze since his self-imposed isolation makes the construction of a self difficult as the dialectical relationship between his self and the world is, arguably, at times not very dynamic. As E. San Juan Jr. states in a different context: “It requires the protagonist in the dialogue not to be equal but asymmetrical and radically distinct, so as to facilitate ... the objectification of the I...”²⁰ Apparently forced to fight the shackles of Gikuyuism to reconstruct his self Mugo enters, in betraying Kihika, for the first time an authentic relationship to another man:

The confession was his first contact with another man. He felt deep gratitude to the whiteman, a patient listener, who had lifted his burden from Mugo's heart, who had extricated him from the nightmare. He even dared to look at the whiteman, the new-found friend. (226)

Mugo's betrayal of Kihika, offering him only temporary relief from his continuous agonies between withdrawal and involvement, anonymity and power, can thus only be understood as a complex web of multiple considerations which is not only related to his desire for worldly attractions and power, but it is a decision which is emptied of real macro-political understanding and substance, and is thus perilous in the critical phase of the liberation struggle. His betrayal opens up a terrain outside self and Gikuyuism as Mugo becomes involved in negotiations between the unconscious processes of desire and agency and the conscious position of subjectivity and isolation. Mugo's refusal to relate properly to the resistance fighters and the world at large is (his meeting with Thompson being the only exception) in a peculiar way compensated for by his encounters with the supernatural fantasies which may or may not be a projection of his own wishes and visions. Mugo's obsession with power is very much linked to these incidents where the text transcends the realistic mode in the portrayal of Mugo's dreams and visions and where Mugo's dreams seem to serve as a catalyst for his emotional repressions and his existential reflections. During a noon rest on his shamba he is called from God like Moses and Mugo responds positively:

A voice... told him. Something is going to happen to you. Closing his eyes, he could feel, almost touched the thing, whose form was vague but oh, so beautiful...

¹⁹ Quoted from Maria Olausson, *Forceful Creation in Harsh Terrain. Place and Identity in Three Novels by Bessie Head* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 17. See also Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 52.

²⁰ E. San Juan Jr., *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998), 205.

And God called out to him in a thin voice, Moses, Moses. And Mugo cried out, Here am I, Lord. (143)

Mugo's acceptance is not easily reconciled with his seclusive tendencies, a contradiction supported by Ngugi's employment of naturalistic devices like the landscape, taking on symbolic significance in its shifting, almost contradictory signals prior to Mugo's vision:

The fields around, all covered with green things - long, wide leaves hiding the dark earth - appeared beautiful to look at. The sun became increasingly hotter; the moisture on leaves evaporated; leaves dropped, so that at noon the greenness had waned, slightly ashy, and the fields appeared tired. (143)

The lack of reconciliation between the conscious and the unconscious torments Mugo throughout and makes his conscious insistence on non-agency and non-commitment more problematical than a mere deviation from the traditional path would have made. Braidotti's distinction between identity and subjectivity is pertinent here: "Identity bears a privileged bond to unconscious processes whereas political subjectivity is a conscious and wilful position. Unconscious desire and wilful choice do not always coincide."²¹ Gradually it seems as if the subconscious drive for identity surfaces in Mugo's own mind, most notably after the encounter with Githua's dismal fate which in fact stirs Mugo emotionally: "Yet. Like everybody else, he felt his sympathies now drawn to this man who was more worthy of praise than he." (126) Left alone by General R., the words of Githua reecho in his head as the idea of the elect, of the chosen emerges in the darkness:

He felt he could embrace the whole night, could contain the world within his palms. For he walked on the edge of revelation... he remembered the words: he shall save the children of the needy. It must be him. It was he, Mugo, spared to save people like Githua, the old woman, and any who had suffered. Why not take the task? Yes. He would speak at the Uhuru celebrations. He would lead the people and bury his past in their gratitude. Nobody would know about Kihika. To the few, elect of God, the past was forgiven, was made clean by great deeds that saved many. It was so in the time of Jacob and Esau; it was so in the time of Moses. (146)

In a dream that night his image of himself as an elect is reinforced as he is called upon by inmates in the detention camp to save them as John Thompson is about to shoot them. Surrealistically the cry for help from the men is, as we have seen, even joined by John Thompson, the executioner himself. As dream and conscious thinking gradually converge Mugo moves from seclusion to agency in a bid for power in the Gikuyu society, even though his betrayal of Kihika, the epitome of Gikuyu consciousness, is not exposed. What is important for our purposes here is to note the depoliticised response and resistance to hegemonic control which Mugo's subconscious and psychologically laden agency attests to. Even the focus on moral categories such as good and evil, emptied as they are of any political content, are suspiciously transcended by the category of power. His subconscious wish to lead the people in a Biblical sense is not in any sense linked to a programme of liberation or of reconstructing a world based on certain visions and

²¹ Braidotti, 29.

principles apart from some vague ideas about saving the children of the needy.²² It is as if Ngugi foreshadows the crisis of vision and leadership which emerged at the time of the production of the original version of the novel. Moreover his vision as the great benefactor, the saviour of the oppressed stumbles not only upon his seclusive personality, but upon his unwillingness to expose the past. His reflections are self-revelatory: "To the few, elect of God, the past was forgiven, was made clean by great deeds that saved many" (146).

This lack of confession is problematical because it means a continued rejection of the ideals and principles on which the new, post-independent era is supposed to be built: How can he, who betrays the hero of the oppressed, take on Kihika's role, a role he usurpes to make room for his own ascendancy as a leader?

It is through his encounter with Mumbi that Mugo's dramatic change takes place.

Earlier fatalism was his credo: But now this fatalism yields to a consciousness of the interconnectedness between events and the link between past and present,²³ thereby realising that self-construction means a dialogic, narrative dimension which he earlier was unable to detect inside the Gikuyu borders. Mumbi's confession that she had betrayed Gikonyo just before he returned from the years in the camp "had cracked open his dulled inside and released imprisoned thoughts and feelings. The weight of her words and the face of General R. dissolved into acts of the past" (195).

Mumbi's story exposes to Mugo a world beyond authorised resistance where he also plays a part. His return to the trench dramatically reechoes Mugo's total past, where Mugo's betrayal of Kihika effected a chain reaction which also contributed to Wambuku's death, the woman he saved in the first place. His willingness to see the interconnectedness of things is indisputable: "He would fix his eyes on the scene, and he would not flinch" (196). Mugo thus slowly emerges from his self-imposed isolation by trying to bridge the gap between visions and the reality out there. After the betrayal Mugo's reputation for being courageous in the camp and during the siege of Thabai is well-founded even though it can at least partly be explained as an expiation for the past misdeed. The apotheosis of Mugo is moreover reinforced by the common belief that he sheltered rather than betrayed Kihika before he was murdered.²⁴ As Gikonyo says:

²² Mugo's a-political response is not unique. As John Lonsdale claims: "...the commonest reaction to suffering is futilely to rail against one's fate. Politically creative anger, vision and courage based on a culturally alert understanding of one's predicament, need a rare imaginative labour. John Lonsdale, "Foreword," in Greet Kershaw, *Mau Mau fom Below* (Oxford, Nairobi, Athens: James Currey, East African Educational Publishers and Ohio University Press, 1997), xvii and xviii.

²³ Note Nazareth's commentary: "But, the novel shows us, things of yesterday are present today." Peter Nazareth, "Is *A Grain of Wheat* a Socialist Novel?" in Killam, *Critical Perspectives*, 246. See also Robson's concern about the centrality of the past in the present: "For Mugo, and for many of the other inhabitants of Thabai ridge, the past is the present." Clifford B. Robson, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 46.

²⁴ He did not confess anything since he had not taken the oath and had thus- ironically enough, nothing to confess and during the siege in Thabai he helped Kihika's woman when she was beaten by the home-guards.

Your name and that of Kihika will ever be linked together. As the General here has said, you gave Kihika shelter without fear of danger to your own life. You did for Thabai out here in detention what Kihika did in the forest. (28)

The fact that nobody seems to get suspicious about the apparent discrepancy between past deeds and present behaviour/attitude can be explained partly as a need for a hero in the absence of Kihika. But it is this view of the hero, which the population of Thabai has sustained in order to keep the image of the party and the struggle alive, which the novel interrogates. It is an interrogation with few participants, however, since cracking the heroic image may expose other cracks which are not easily exposed in the era of post-independence euphoria. In a more complex state of “dual consciousness” than Gramsci’s notion seems to contain, Mugo, whose initial complicity with colonialist discourse was self-willed and intentional, has managed to clear space to resist the ideological impositions of the liberation movement while gradually and simultaneously moving to the centre stage of that very movement. Mugo’s move on the inside of the Thabai community is not a complete surrender as he is trying to remap, not the world of resistance which he earlier despised as such, but rather the unfortunate ramifications of a movement where ideological closure is not only accepted, but is the order of the day.

It is only through Mumbi that Mugo understands the significance of open confession as it seems to be the only therapy against his disintegration as a human being: “As soon as the first words were out, Mugo felt light. A load of many years was lifted from his shoulders. He was free, sure and confident” (267). In a sense Mugo’s “homecoming” at the end is not only a return to segments of the Gikuyu community, but also some sort of restitution of the broken bridge between his identity and subjectivity. As Mugo’s dreams serve as a catalyst for his emotions, doubts and reflections, it is through the dreams or revelations together with the moral implications of Mumbi’s status that actually make Mugo openly confront the dark sides of his past.

3.3.3 Negotiating the interests of self and community : the betrayals of Gikonyo and Mumbi

Besides Mugo the stories of Gikonyo and Mumbi seriously problematise the anti-colonial version of the liberation struggle by exposing the complex negotiations between egotistical self-interest and the needs of the collectivity. Both Mumbi and Gikonyo lose in different ways political direction when being challenged emotionally, their narratives thus opening up multiple horizons which not only query the authorised version of the liberation struggle but more generally interrogates notions like loyalty, agency and nationalism. By failing the collectivist test Mumbi and Gikonyo move beyond traditional combat propaganda as their fallibility as participants in resistance is confirmed.

It is symptomatic of the fragility of the resistance movement that even Gikonyo, the leader of the movement in Thabai, eventually breaks down in the camp and confesses - without guilt - the oath. In a revelatory confession to Mugo Gikonyo tells about his betrayal, his low resistance threshold and his focusing on personal things:

We talked of loyalty to the movement and the love of our country. You know a time came when I did not care about Uhuru for the country any more. I just wanted to come home. And I would have sold Kenya to the whiteman to buy my own freedom. I admire people like Kihika. They are strong enough to die for the truth. I have no such strength. (79)

The reason for Gikonyo's betrayal was that he wanted to see Mumbi and was worried that his self/his identity would be annihilated in the detention camp: "that his identity even in death would be wiped from the surface of the earth was a recurring thought that often brought him into a cold sweat on cold nights" (123). Ironically by saving his self/ identity he has to betray the oath. As Greenfield writes:

Gikonyo's betrayal of the revolution is thus perceived by Ngugi as a psychological and moral event: torn by the conflict between building his own hut and risking that personal goal for the elusive objectives of the community. Gikonyo lacks the strength to sustain indefinitely his commitment to the common good.²⁵

Clearly *A Grain of Wheat* is not merely concerned with the reaction to the forces of domination, but with the response to the construction of alternative visions and futures. Gikonyo's "lack of strength" may also be seen as a result of Mau Mau's problems, like many liberation movements, of envisioning a future which, according to Linda Alcoff, "can motivate people to sacrifice their time and energy towards its realization."²⁶ By contesting that a particular way of representing the world is the only representation the narrative of the "traitors" is a way of attacking the foundationalism of Mau Mau and projects a sense of uneasiness into how knowledge and subjectivities are being constructed. Transgressing the boundaries of totalisation is, however, not only a way of questioning the very notion of true representation, but the oppositional narratives of Gikonyo and Mumbi (as well as Mugo) can at the same time be viewed as an escape from the oppressive resistance practices of the Party where for example General R. exposes multiple strands of subjugation and coercion to achieve homogenous practices. By thus taking the reader beyond the oppositional pairing of colonial/colonised, the text queries the notion of domination as being singular and uncomplicated or spatially and epistemologically restricted.

What is important about Mugo, Gikonyo and Mumbi's projects is their exploration of a terrain more undefined, uncertain and problematic than both colonialist and resistance discourse seem to involve. The modernist projects of colonialism and liberation are on seemingly safe political and epistemological ground whereas the so-called traitors move between different worlds, trying to find out which world is to be explored, what happens when these worlds are placed in confrontation or when boundaries between them are crossed. It is the voices of these marginalised, in their paradoxical silences, which expose a

²⁵ Kathleen Greenfield, "Murdering the Sleep of Dictators: Corruption, Betrayal, and the Call to Revolution in the Work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o" in *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, ed. Charles Cantalupo (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc, 1995), 29.

²⁶ Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism vs. Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 418-419.

plurality of voices and narratives, for, in Giroux' words, "narratives of difference that recognize their own partiality and present the unrepresentable, those submerged and dangerous memories that provide a challenge"²⁷ to the dominant ideologies on both sides of the colonial divide.

In contrast to Ngugi's combat phase the text of *A Grain of Wheat* at one level argues for a history which is fragmented, plural, decentered even when written within a counter-hegemonic framework or discourse. Whereas Ngugi in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* seeks, as Jim Collins argues in a different context, "histories that seek to minimize heterogeneity in pursuit of a dominant style, collective spirit, or any other such unitary conception,"²⁸ *A Grain of Wheat* perverts this homogeneity by focusing at length on those individuals who are not at peace with these homogenising, ideological practices. *A Grain of Wheat* tests in a way the postmodern perception of the fragmentary self and its potential of agency by underscoring the multiplicity of subject positions that are produced by contradictory social practices. By recognising the multiple struggles and antagonistic and contradictory signals that constitute the establishment of subject positions *A Grain of Wheat* probes into the possibility of acknowledging this democratic distribution of meaning within Gikuyu society. In this sense *A Grain of Wheat* is concerned with how the narrative of the liberation struggle is established, and the high odds against those who query how the particular epistemological and political world of resistance is being constructed. The somewhat paradoxical situation is that both Mugo, Mumbi and Gikonyo engage in some sort of border crossing which can be said to humanise the liberation project, but which at the same time makes resistance and agency extremely difficult, if not impossible. It is this contradiction between the need for collective agency and the need for emotional and existential development and self-construction which *A Grain of Wheat* focuses on to a degree which makes the text problematic as a tool in the liberation struggle. By rejecting the master-narrative of the liberation movement the outsiders seem reluctant, in the language of Hebdige, to "define an essential human nature, to prescribe a global human destiny or to proscribe collective human goals."²⁹ Even though the subjectivities and multiple narratives of Gikonyo and Mumbi (as well as Mugo), their desires and their intentions transcend the grand narrative of resistance they are nevertheless inextricably linked to the political and material practices of the Gikuyu society and the society at large. From a resistance point of view the manoeuvring of these border crossers defies the certainties of the modernist universe by writing a pluralist society which ideologically cannot be sustained in time of crisis, and which blurs the objectives and the need for agency in resistance.

²⁷ Henry A. Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 120.

²⁸ Jim Collins, *Uncommon Cultures* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 115

²⁹ Dick Hebdige, 81.

3.3.4 *Breaking the silence: voice as a revolutionary gesture*

One of the most significant features of this propensity for non-agency in the novel is the silences and communicative break-downs of the border-crossers. Decker writes:

The lacunae evident in the narrative seem paralleled by those in Mugo's silence, and would thus suggest that Ngugi means to employ Mugo as a metaphor for the novel's stylistic concerns. Mugo, then, equals text... The novel... employs a complex pattern of communicative breakdowns that function to underscore the potential for neocolonialism in the fledgling free nation.³⁰

Mugo's silence is superficially reminiscent of the Spivakan insistence that the subaltern cannot speak. In the case of Mugo, however, the communicative problems transcend a singular colonial-colonised dichotomy. Even though it is certainly true that the negative effects of silence "have their sources in colonialism" and that colonial discourse imposes a situation where natural, unimpaired "communication is dysfunctional,"³¹ the point is not primarily, as Decker says, that "Ngugi's characters emphasize the extent of their torment by remaining mute"³² or as Ngara states, that "there is so much suffering, so much pain, that reticence and not shouting is the only way to express what one feels deep down."

³³Whereas suffering and torment are indisputable traits of any community in crisis, the silences and communicative break-downs are, as we have seen, due to ideological and personal fragmentation and dissension within the Gikuyu community. Besides signifying that Mugo as well as Mumbi and Gikonyo have something to be silent about, reticence is also attributable to lack of political consciousness since none of the border crossers expose a political understanding which places their sacrifices and the struggle within a larger national or international context. The equation of silence and non-agency is clearly exposed in the contrasting figures of Kihika and partly Gatu. They are resistance fighters with few compromises and speak extensively and at great depth about the reasons for fighting the colonialists.³⁴ As we have seen there is no real dialogue, whether political or personal, between Mugo and the Party as the men in the Party impose a role on Mugo's fragile personality without explicit concession from him. Or more to the point: they take for granted Mugo's heroic subject position without getting an unambiguous response from Mugo. Mugo's silences up towards the end are symptomatic of a split self where silences

³⁰ James Decker, "Mugo and the Silence of Oppression" in Cantalupo, *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 45-46.

³¹ Decker, 50.

³² Decker, 51.

³³ Emmanuel Ngara, *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 83.

³⁴ It is worth noting, however, that Gatu, who was the ideological and spiritual rallying point at Yala, succumbs to the pressure and commits suicide. As will be shown in the transitional chapter, the suicide is left out in the revised edition.

prevail even in speech. Mugo's first speech in public is for example an exercise in reticence because of the distance "he had established between himself and the voice" (77). He says what the community expects him to say whereas his succumbed, true self is full of treacherous, non-resistant thoughts. It is this profound gap between appearance and reality, between reticence and truth which complicates the whole resistance endeavour. This complexity is pushed to its ultimate end when Mugo is credited and almost apotheosised for not telling the oath, an oath he never took in the first place. The effect of Mugo's reticence about his past is thus the myths that are constantly being spun around him which blur lines of demarcation and which make proper orientation in the Gikuyu terrain almost impossible. But the silence which linguistically is exposed in murmurs, stutters etc. is symptomatic of a more pervasive silence in the Thabai community. Thus Mugo's silences, transgressing the borders of his own self-centered world, actually mirror the reticence which seems to permeate the larger section of Thabai and is about to undermine, not only the celebrations around Uhuru, but the very fabric of the resistance movement. It is the pervasiveness of silence which exposes a closed and self-contained Thabai community which is textually paralleled with not only manifestations of missed and failed communication, but with non-agency and unwillingness to expose the cracks of those involved in resistance.

Mugo's confession cracks the illusions of the Thabai community that Mugo's silences hide every day forms of resistance which might have achieved many, if not all, of the results aimed for by the Mau Mau. At the same time the restoration of Mugo's split self undermines the inscribed image of Mugo as the leader and the hero in the Thabai society. But Mugo's confession is a sounding indictment on reticence as it underlines the need to engage voice as an act of resistance and self-transformation. There is something revolutionary about Mugo's confession at the end for, as bell hooks points out, coming to voice means

moving from silence into speech as a revolutionary gesture...the idea of finding one's voice or having a voice assumes a primacy... Only as subjects can we speak... Awareness of the need to speak, to give voice to the varied dimensions of our lives, is one way (to begin) the process of... critical consciousness.³⁵

Even though Mugo initially refuses the invitation to join the collectivity out of self-interest, he emerges – paradoxically - as a man who sacrifices himself by inviting the Thabai community to critically scrutinise their own motives and their own past. Mugo speaks out, thereby investigating cracks in the image of the resistance movement which is supposed to bring a brighter post-colonial future. Mugo proposes, by remapping the Gikuyu world, an exit out of the muddy terrain of Thabai, exposing and killing as he does the misdeeds of the past. However, it is this remapping which the Gikuyu society is not sanctioning by way of pervasive silences.

³⁵ bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1989), 106.

This dialogic presentation of Mugo at the end opens a spectrum of different and often completely contradictory meanings. Mugo's death can be interpreted as a way for the community to kill traits of that community which cannot survive the new times. The importance of bringing out the hidden pasts and dealing with them paves the way for a new future. It signals a new order that cannot accept reticences about the past. This simple signal is, however, complicated by the fact that the death is brought about by a self-righteous community that exposes Mugo's treason while refusing to deal with other individual and unacknowledged betrayals. The contradictions concerning Mugo's death thus abound: it can both be seen as a sacrifice to assess the past, as a self-righteous killing of a victim and a commentary on the future. The novel thus transcends the limitations of traditional historical discourse by encompassing irreconcilable contradictions where Mugo's death is seen as both being redemptive and deceptive.

On the one hand the crushing of the heroic image of Mugo is consistent with how the text discourages the veneration of the hero in the liberation struggle and questions common assumptions about the resistance movement and the nationalist struggle, assumptions which are also held within the text. The destruction of Mugo's venerated image is, however, on the other hand countered by Mugo's courage at the end where he by sacrificing himself paves the way for and invites a critical self-examination of the Thabai community, an invitation, as we have noted, which Thabai refuses.

The failure of the characters to duplicate Mugo's confession kills the euphoria of independence and to a very large extent punctures the example that Mugo sets. The emission of divergent signals projects an uneasy sense of uncertainty about what might happen in building the nation in the future, not the least because silence is condoned by the government: " 'Do you ever forget?' 'I try to. The government says we should bury the past.' 'I can't forget...I will never forget,' " Gikonyo cried (79).³⁶

By questioning the solidity of the subject-positions of the people in resistance and on the eve of the post-independent era, the novel projects a feeling of opacity which makes the emergence of the African self anything but unequivocal. Ngugi's rewriting of the past as counter-hegemonic resistance means subverting colonial and neo-colonial definitions of the struggle, of history and the self as well as subverting definitions by the Party and anti-colonial ideology. These subversions map a terrain of resistance which is wrought with ambiguities and ambivalences, and where the representation of the fragmented self in the context of counter-hegemonic fiction is necessarily a dual, even a multiple representation. The individuation and subjectification of the subaltern functions on the one hand as a

³⁶ The insistence on forgetting the past has been hotly contested by Mau Mau fighters during the whole post-colonial era. In *The Urban Guerilla* Mohamed Mathu states some years later: "I should like to remind those African leaders who now condemn Mau Mau and tell us to forget our past struggles and suffering that their present positions of power in the Legislative Council and else where would not have been realized except for our sacrifices. I would also warn them that we did not make these sacrifices just to have Africans step into the shoes of our former European masters." Mohamed Mathu, *The Urban Guerilla* (Richmond: Canada, 1974), 75.

crushing indictment of the novel's "shadow narratives" as it subverts the colonialist representations of the subaltern and on the other as an interrogation of the process of becoming itself, a process also of transformation and self-evaluation in a new, or not so new world. Thus offering an alternative to the monologic rendering of Africa by the West, *A Grain of Wheat* rejects simultaneously, through its multiphonic narrators and the ambivalence which this creates, a simplistic resistance narrative which merely reiterates African superiority and flawlessness in direct opposition to Western "inferior" ideology. Reminiscent of postmodernism's suspicion of grand narratives, *A Grain of Wheat* problematises the legitimacy of the anti-colonial narrative of the liberation movement by emphasising its historical and social constructedness. By exposing the contradictions, flaws and ambivalences of the liberation movement *A Grain of Wheat* refrains, it seems, from imposing some sort of control in which, according to Lyotard, "we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality."³⁷ However, by interrogating and deconstructing the various versions of reality of *A Grain of Wheat*, by questioning the tendency to totalise historical experience and its one-dimensional, all-encompassing rationale, *A Grain of Wheat* engages in a counter-hegemonic and counter-dominant discourse that destabilises colonialism, but, paradoxically, also shakes the ground of counter-hegemony and counter-dominance. There is, then, a sense in which the textual interrogation of the colonial and the restored world can be seen as a complex pattern of resistance and affirmation. At the end Mugo's resistance is transformed into an affirmation of certain sets of traditional Gikuyu values which the liberation struggle seems to have forgotten. Mugo affirms the communal aspects of the Gikuyu community when he exposes his own betrayal without sanctioning the unwillingness of that very same community of critical self-evaluation and perusal. By this interrogation into the deplorable parts of the Gikuyu society the novel projects concern about the whole enterprise of post-independent nation-building.

3.4 Exploring the grand narrative of resistance

Even though *A Grain of Wheat* in the original version focuses on interpersonal relations, an emphasis which is somewhat shifted in the revised version, the anti-colonial narrative of the liberation struggle is not neglected as the novel projects contradictory perspectives within the same text. At the same time as the text very seriously queries the grand narratives, not only of colonialism but of the liberation movement the text also in a way upholds the totalising notion of the latter by seeing Mau Mau both as a significant nationalist movement and as part of global, anti-colonial struggle. By perceiving the micro-level as both theoretically and practically relevant in the broader historical and relational contexts the novel's emphasis on the particularistic and the individual is a relevant point of departure for a more comprehensive political vision emphasising how the two levels

³⁷ Jean- Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 82.

influence each other. It is Kihika's life, covering not many pages of the novel, but with ramifications far exceeding those pages, which sustains the meta-narrative of the liberation struggle. When analysing the role of Kihika as the crucial figure of Mau Mau in *A Grain of Wheat*, it is necessary not only to explore briefly the representation of Mau Mau in post-colonial Kenya but also to comment upon the complex relationship between Mau Mau and Kenyatta as well as Ngugi's ambiguous understanding of the liberation movement at the time. This is so because the non-hegemonic construction of the past which *A Grain of Wheat* is, is mediated not only by the events of the past themselves but by present concerns. There is a sense in which the struggle for independence and its various ramifications cannot be understood fully without the notion of hindsight, that the struggle does not make sense unless it is analysed against the background of post-independence and decolonisation. As Ngugi himself says:

I want to talk about the past as a way of talking about the present... Here I want to argue that what has been - the evolution of human culture through the ages, society in motion through time and space - is of grave import to the poet and the novelist. For what has been, especially for the vast majority of the submerged... is intimately bound up with what might be: our vision of the future, of diverse possibilities of life and human potential, has roots in our experience of the past.³⁸

Even early in his career Ngugi was aware of the distortion of the past³⁹ and as a writer Ngugi wanted to dive into himself, "deep into the collective unconscious of the people...(to) seek the root, the trend, in the revolutionary struggle."⁴⁰

3.4.1 *The representation of Mau Mau in post-colonial Kenya*

The representation of Mau Mau seen from Kihika's point of view is important since the post-colonial Kenyan political scene saw the whole idea of the Mau Mau fighters and the contributions of the Mau Mau to the freedom and independence of Kenya being undermined by prominent Kenyan politicians, most notably by the President himself, Jomo Kenyatta. The denigration of Mau Mau in the post-independent years must be seen against the background of Kenyatta's nation-building efforts and the divisions and splits within the ruling party which emerged at the time of the publication of *A Grain of Wheat*. The split resulted in 1966 in the establishment of an opposition party, Kenya People's Union (KPU) under the leadership of Oginga Odinga, the former Vice-President of Kenya. The split between KANU and KPU had both political and personal undertones. Politically the division ranged over a substantial number of issues, notably the centralisation of political power, the land issue, the legacy of the resistance fighters, nationalisation and Kenya's foreign policy. The land issue involved disagreement about the economic viability of the settlement schemes policy as a whole, which many insisted had been designed to assist outgoing European farmers rather than the new African farmers (a point on which

³⁸ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 39.

³⁹ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 41.

⁴⁰ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 46.

Government subsequently agreed).⁴¹ The Africans who had fought during the colonial period for the return of the lands in the former Scheduled areas had been told by the politicians in those days that when independence came the land would belong to those who fought. Since independence, however, it had been a small group of individuals who had been buying land and amassing large acreages. According to Gertzel, the central point of disagreement was

whether individuals should be free to amass and own as much private property as they wished, or whether there should be a limit set by the state in the interests of the society as a whole on the amount of property of all kinds that the individual might own.⁴²

Expressing the disillusionment of many in the resistance movement after independence Ngugi, many years after the publication of *A Grain of Wheat*, stated that “KANU had changed from a mass nationalist party to a moribund bureaucratic machine catering, when necessary, for the alliance of a few home and foreign financiers.”⁴³ Even though KPU was, according to Leys, “petty-bourgeois rather than socialist,”⁴⁴ the new party (KPU) was nevertheless supported by the landless peasants and workers as well as by well-off peasants and traders. One of the main conflicts between KANU and KPU was about the legacy of Mau Mau as Kenyatta as the leader of KANU repeatedly exposed a very hostile attitude to the previous fighters from the forest. In a statement from 1962 Kenyatta declared:

We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred towards one another. Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again.⁴⁵

The whole development of the economy of post-independence Kenya determined, as Maughan-Brown correctly contends, an attitude towards Mau Mau which “was that no official recognition was given to the role Mau Mau had played in the independence struggle.”⁴⁶ It meant that the civil service was staffed with the same people as before independence, people who were predominantly loyalists during the Emergency and thus in reality anti-resistance in the post-independence years. Moreover the middle class which established itself after independence consisted of people who largely did not take part in the struggle in the forest.

Kenyatta’s denigration of the Mau Mau fighters can be explained in terms of the choice Kenyatta and his men had to take just after independence on the issue of land: either

⁴¹ Cherry Gertzel, *The Politics of Independent Kenya* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 45.

⁴² Gertzel, 50.

⁴³ Ngugi, *Detained* (Nairobi, London, Ibadan: Heinemann 1981), 56.

⁴⁴ Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 224-28. Ngugi defines the same class as lower petty-bourgeoisie which saw the future in terms of some kind of socialism.

⁴⁵ Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering Without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenya Nation* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 189.

⁴⁶ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 199.

nationalise the land and expropriate the white farms in the White Highlands, resulting in an exodus of white farmers from the country and no inflow of Western, in particular British capital or leave it as it was and then secure foreign capital to the country. By opting on the latter route, they simultaneously disaffected the forest fighters. To worship the Mau Mau fighters as heroes when they in reality had been betrayed by the government was too contradictory to be politically viable. Additionally a deification of the Mau Mau might have alienated the other tribes which did not take part in the resistance, an important, if not wholly legitimate, consideration since the idea of unity was high up on Kenyatta's agenda. The idea of unity fostered the myth that everybody, not just the forest fighters, had participated in the freedom struggle, a blatant lie considering the thousands of loyalists and collaborators who openly sided with the colonialists. But as Maughan-Brown states: "To allow Mau Mau to have brought independence would be to destroy Kenyatta's potential to fill the crucial ideological role of the 'Father of the Nation.'" ⁴⁷

As Kenyatta writes:

We were all seeking freedom (together), and therefore it is not right to discriminate, saying that one man served to bring freedom while another man did something else. All we Africans were in a state of slavery, and all of us (together) brought our freedom.⁴⁸

And as Ngugi tells us:

In schools the children were taught colonial history which glorified the role of traitors- Kinyajui wa Gathirimu, Mumia, Karuri wa Gakure, Lenana, Wangoombe wa Nderi, Wambugu wa Mathagamia, Wangu wa Makeri – and other collaborators with the enemy.⁴⁹

The importance of forgetting the past "as it really was" was therefore high on Kenyatta's agenda: We should "commit ourselves to erase from our minds all the hatreds and difficulties of those years which now belong to history. Let us agree that we shall never refer to the past."⁵⁰

3.4.2 *Kenyatta and Mau Mau*

Kenyatta's betrayal of the forest fighters should not come as a total surprise since his attitude to them before the Emergency was nothing but equivocal. His ambiguity during this time is underlined by Furedi:

Kenyatta himself found it expedient to refrain from taking a clear stand. He recognised that if he publicly broke with Mau Mau, his hold over the Kikuyu people would be severely limited... The leading activists in Nairobi had a profound mistrust of Kenyatta but nevertheless used his name to justify their actions... Kenyatta, despite his opposition to the stepping up of resistance, had no option but to remain ambiguous. Thus he was all things to all men and as his biographer

⁴⁷ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 197.

⁴⁸ Kenyatta, *Suffering*, 341.

⁴⁹ Ngugi, *Detained*, 55.

⁵⁰ Kenyatta, *Suffering*, 241.

recorded: 'Friends as much as enemies now found Kenyatta's position equivocal...' The ambiguous position of Kenyatta reflected the ambiguity of the situation... The reluctance to discredit as the public figurehead of the Kikuyu people reflected one of the central weaknesses of Mau Mau... Although representing a distinct social base, Mau Mau never expressed a point of view that ideologically conflicted with the standpoint of the moderates.⁵¹

This is in line with Throup who states that Kenyatta's ambiguous position and his caution to avoid any outright denunciation of Mau Mau

stemmed as much from fear of assassination by Mau Mau as from passive support for the movement... (Kenyatta was) therefore under intense pressure to moderate... (his) attacks, Kenyatta having been warned that an outright condemnation would bring a swift response from the militants and would not be tolerated. In fact Kenyatta went as far as he dared to satisfy the authorities.⁵²

Kenyatta's ambiguous position is underlined by Bildad Kaggia who in his memoirs states that Mau Mau was not under Kenyatta's control even though they looked upon him as their leader. He knew little of what was going on in the Mau Mau Central Committee meetings. At least on two occasions Kenyatta publicly denounced Mau Mau in 1952. On July 26 1952 he denounced Mau Mau and also linked Mau Mau to theft and lawlessness: "I don't want people to accuse us falsely... that we steal and that we are Mau Mau... Beer harms us and those who drink it do us harm and they may be so-called Mau Mau."⁵³ His strongest condemnation of Mau Mau was at the Kiambu meeting attended by almost thirty thousand people where Kenyatta said that "Mau Mau had spoilt the country urging the people to search for Mau Mau and kill it."⁵⁴ Naturally the Mau Mau Central Committee was not very happy- to put it mildly- with Kenyatta's denunciations and asked at a meeting with Kenyatta not to continue with the remaining meetings. "After discussion he accepted the request and undertook to get the remaining meetings cancelled."⁵⁵ As Fred Kubai notes: "If Kenyatta had continued to denounce Mau Mau, we would have denounced him. He would have lost his life. It was too dangerous and he knew it."⁵⁶ This did not prevent Kenyatta from openly renouncing Mau Mau and the use of violence at the trial in 1952. Whether this was merely a tactical manoeuvre still remains an open question:

To fight for equal rights does not mean to fight with fists or with a weapon, but to fight through constitutional means and negotiation... No, we do not believe in violence at all; we believe in negotiation, that is, we ask for our rights through constitutional means - through discussion and representation... first telling them that there was no connection whatsoever between the KANU and Mau Mau... I

⁵¹ Fank Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* (London, Nairobi, Athens: James Curry, Heinemann, Ohio University Press, 1989), 137-38.

⁵² David W. Throup, *Economic & Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945-53* (London, Nairobi, Athens: James Curry, Heinemann, Ohio University Press, 1987), 229.

⁵³ Jeremy Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), 244.

⁵⁴ Wunyabari O. Maloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 70.

⁵⁵ Bildad Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), 114.

⁵⁶ Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 411.

told the people that the best thing to get rid of Mau Mau would be to look for it, put a rope around its neck; then find an axe handle, hit it on the head and finish it for good.⁵⁷

Kenyatta was convicted at Kapenguria in 1952 after a damning testimony by Rawson Mbogwa Macharia who linked him directly to Mau Mau activities. However, in 1958 the same witness confessed that he had been bribed to give false witness.⁵⁸ People sympathetic to Kenyatta, but still critical of his treatment of the forest fighters after independence, have tried to explain his betrayal as due to his absence from the political scene between 1952 and 1961, when he, as Kanogo states,

was supposedly unaware of the extent of the people's suffering and sacrifice during his absence. As Kenyatta had been idolised during the freedom struggle, despite his absence over the crucial years, it is hardly surprising that he was the one who should receive the blame for the eventual outcome of the whole decolonisation and independence bargain...⁵⁹

A more reasonable hypothesis is that there is a consistent, if not completely unambiguous line between Kenyatta's intentional, obscure attitude towards the Mau Mau before independence and his outright rejection of their legitimate claims in the post-independence years. This is more or less confirmed by Kenyatta who denies in *Suffering Without Bitterness* (as he did during the trial in 1952) that he was in any way connected to Mau Mau and its violence: "Those who built up an organization of unbridled violence in Kenya were never the political associates or executive colleagues of Kenyatta."⁶⁰

3.4.3 Ngugi and Mau Mau: Querying the Post-colonial Myth-Making

It is against this background of strife and ambiguities in post-independent Kenya that *A Grain of Wheat* was written as Ngugi became increasingly disillusioned with the situation both in Kenya and other African, post-independent countries. Even though Maughan-Brown is right in claiming that Ngugi had not developed anything "approaching a coherent Marxist problematic before the writing of *A Grain of Wheat*...",⁶¹ Ngugi voiced already in

⁵⁷ Montagu Slater, *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta* (London, Nairobi, Ibadan: Heinemann, 1955), 151 and 154.

⁵⁸ Sorobea N. Bogonko, *Kenya 1945-1963: A Study in African National Movements* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1980), 82.

⁵⁹ Tabtha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905-63* (London, Nairobi, Athens: James Curry, Heinemann, Ohio University Press, 1987), 174.

⁶⁰ Kenyatta, *Suffering*, 56.

⁶¹ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 251. It is true that it is only in *Detained* (1981) that Ngugi more explicitly analyses the Kenyan post-independence scene in more Marxist terms by e.g. differentiating the Kenyan post-independent bourgeoisie in three sections: "Leadership was in the hands of the petty-bourgeoisie, itself split into three sections representing three tendencies: there was the upper petty-bourgeoisie that saw the future in terms of a compradorial alliance with imperialism; there was the middle petty-bourgeoisie which saw the future in terms of national capitalism; and there was the lower petty-bourgeoisie which saw the future in terms of some kind of socialism. The upper petty-bourgeoisie can be branded as comprador; and the middle and lower as nationalistic." Ngugi, *Detained*, 52.

Ngugi goes on to define the struggle between 1961 and 1966 as a struggle between

1963, as suggested in the first chapter, opinions on violence and Mau Mau which makes any neat categorisation of Ngugi's political development somewhat problematic:

To most Africans, Mau Mau in fact was a heroic and glorious aspect of that mainstream. The basic objectives of Mau Mau revolutionaries were to drive out the Europeans, seize the government, and give back to the Kenyan peasants their stolen lands and property... Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery, it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal, and diminishes man.⁶²

And in 1966, at the time of the publication of *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi expresses his strong resentment with the new African elite, their disregard for the masses and their collaboration with the colonial interests after independence:

As Frantz Fanon has pointed out, the nationalist elite and the colonial administration quarrel in, and speak, a language they both understand- using phrases such as the 'rights of man', 'the sanctity of private property,' etc.- while all about them, the workers and peasants clamour simply for bread and clothes. Eventually, either through violence, as in Kenya, or through 'peaceful' means, as in Nigeria, the national elite gains power, but only after it has promised to respect Prospero's values.⁶³

By betraying the masses, safeguarding their powers through violence and paying respect to colonial ideology, the African elite had, in Ngugi's view, come close to what he later, in the ideological, Marxist jargon, called the compradorial alliance with imperialism.⁶⁴ However, as both Lindfors and Maughan-Brown have noted (see Theoretical introduction) Ngugi's Mau Mau sympathies were in the first years of post-colonial Kenya anything but equivocal. In an attempt to counter what has been termed the myth-making of Mau Mau by both colonial and the dominant, post-colonial (Kenyattan) discourse two important books appeared in 1966, viz. Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama's book *Mau Mau from Within* and Carl G. Rosberg Jr. and John Nottingham's *The Myth of Mau Mau: Nationalism in Colonial Kenya*.⁶⁵ In

comprador bourgeois interests, led by Kenyatta, Gichuru and Mboya and the national patriotic interests backed by the masses. Struggling over the direction of Kenya's economy Kenyatta, according to Ngugi, joined hands with foreign economic interests, ensuring the foreign interests "the unrestricted freedom of the foreign economic interests to make profits, meaning of course the freedom to continue, unmolested, their age-old exploitation of Kenyan peasants and workers." Ngugi, *Detained*, 53.

The nationalist bourgeoisie, on the other hand, wanted a national economy, restricting the foreign economic interests from exploiting Kenyan economy and a fair land distribution.

⁶² Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 28. The statement is, according to Maughan-Brown, 'surprising, indeed quite startling in the context of the dominant ideology of post-independence Kenya... (and) surprising considering that Ngugi was not introduced to Fanon's work until after he had gone to Leeds the following year.' Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 230. For Maughan-Brown Ngugi's statement is also problematic in terms of Maughan-Brown's thesis of the anti-Mau Mau-sentiment in *A Grain of Wheat* even though Ngugi's position on Mau Mau was quite unpredictable at the time.

⁶³ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 56

⁶⁴ See Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, 78.

⁶⁵ Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt* (New York and London: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1966) and Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. and John Nottingham, *The Myth of Mau Mau* (referred to earlier).

the preface to *Mau Mau from Within* the authors critique heavily the historiography of Mau Mau in post-independent Kenya and hope that the book will “break the conspiracy of silence about the Land and Freedom Army struggle” and “to help to pierce that veil of reticence which surrounds the Land and Freedom Army and go some way at least to secure to those who fought in the forests of the Nyandarua their due recognition as national heroes.”⁶⁶ By rejecting the myth of Mau Mau as being “the apotheosis of unreason... and a barbaric, atavistic, and anti-European tribal cult whose leaders planned to turn Kenya into a land of ‘darkness and death...’” Rosberg Jr. and Nottingham suggest that while the European conception of Mau Mau constituted as myth, Mau Mau “was indeed an integral part of an ongoing, rationally conceived nationalist movement.”⁶⁷

3.4.4 Recovering the grand narrative of Mau Mau: The ambivalent portrayal of Kihika

Written within this contradictory context of post-coloniality, *A Grain of Wheat* reflects these ambiguities and ambivalences by contesting certain social “realities,” indulging in a complex double enquiry and contestation of ideological patterns in the 60s (at the time of production) and the 50s (during the time of resistance). It is from this perspective that the portrayal of Kihika must be seen as the representation of him in *A Grain of Wheat* is a way of recovering, albeit ambivalently, the narrative of the liberation struggle as a nationalist movement which played an important part in the fight for independence. In stark contrast to Karanja’s defeatism (“ ‘What can we do?... They have got the guns and the bombs. See how they whipped Hitler’ ” (102)), Kihika sets the moral tone of resistance in the novel:

‘It’s a question of Unity... The example of India is there before our noses. The British were there for hundreds and hundreds of years. They ate India’s wealth. They drank India’s blood. They never listened to the political talk-talk of a few men. What happened? There came this man Gandhi. Mark you, Gandhi knows this whiteman well. He goes round and organizes the Indian masses into a weapon stronger than the bomb. They say with one voice. We want our freedom.’ (102)

Kihika’s appeal to unity and nationalism (“ ‘Do you know why Gandhi succeeded? Because he made his people give up their fathers and mothers and serve their one mother- India. With us- Kenya is our mother’ ” (103)) is based on a clear vision of sacrifice with repeated references to the Bible:

‘Take up my cross, is what Christ told his people,’ Kihika resumed in a more lighthearted tone. ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.’ (103)

But even though General R. insists that Kihika “ ‘believed in prayer. He even read the Bible every day’ ”(26), Kihika’s version of Christianity is in many ways secular, having nevertheless a tremendous symbolic and metaphorical impact on Kihika’s vision:

⁶⁶ Barnett and Njama, 11.

⁶⁷ Rosberg, Jr. and Nottingham, xvii.

'But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say that you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes the oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ.' (110)

Kihika's rationale for participating in the liberation movement is predicated on a clear understanding of the injustices and oppression imposed by colonialism:

'We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He said: Let us kneel down to pray. We knelt down. Mubia said: Let us kneel down to pray. We knelt down. Mubia said: Let us shut our eyes. We did... When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard...' (18)

'Take your whiteman, anywhere, in the settled area. He owns hundreds of hundreds of acres of land. What about the black men who squat there, who sweat dry on the farms to grow coffee, tea, sisal, wheat and only get ten shillings a month?' (113)

But by stressing not only the material deprivation of colonialism, but its robbing of self as well, Kihika transcends a shallow materialist interpretation: " 'It's not politics, Wambuku,' " he said, " 'it's life. Is he a man who lets another take away his land and freedom? Has a slave life?' " (112) Emerging as a model for his compatriots by his courage and complete disregard for personal danger Kihika also encourages resistance as a means to establish a new self based on pride in black power (31).

Maughan-Brown's interpretation of the motives of the resistance fighters in purely individualistic terms, claiming for example (by referring to General R.) that the armed revolt is "seen in terms of individual propensity to violence"⁶⁸ and that the novel "provides no more adequate account of the class structure and contradictions which occasioned the revolt"⁶⁹ than his earlier novels, is indeed problematic. Maughan-Brown's criticism is reminiscent of Maina wa Kinyatti's criticism of leaders of the Kenya African Union (KAU) during the Emergency: "Again while the leadership was superficially anti-imperialist, it did not, at any time in its existence, have a clear-cut and consistent conception of what was to replace the colonial society."⁷⁰ Kinyatti goes on to underline the class base of the struggle:

The Movement pointed out clearly to the Kenyan patriots the road of the armed struggle, stirring up a vigorous nationalist upsurge throughout the country in which the workers and peasants became an independent leading political force.⁷¹

This leftist interpretation of Mau Mau is reiterated by Ngugi and Micere Mugo in the play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*,⁷² paving the way for the revision of *A Grain of Wheat* some years later. However, Kinyatti's class focus is a hotly contested issue in the historiography of the

⁶⁸ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 243.

⁶⁹ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 243.

⁷⁰ Kinyatti, "Mau Mau," 291.

⁷¹ Kinyatti, "Mau Mau," 294.

⁷² Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (Heinemann: Nairobi, 1976).

Mau Mau. For example Rob Buijtenhuijs rejects Kinyatti's claim out of hand by asserting that

it would be in vain to search for leftist or proletarian leanings in Mau Mau documents, a fact that is moreover borne out by Kinyatti's own anthology of *Mau Mau Patriotic Songs* ... which clearly reflects Mau Mau's obsession with the 'stolen lands' and subsequently with national independence, but does not contain any song carrying workers' grievances and only one specimen that has anything to do with trade-unionism.⁷³

And even Kinyatti himself seems, some years later, to have left his conception of class as a determining factor in Mau Mau ideology:

Ideologically, Mau Mau, as Kimathi's writings show, was based on patriotic nationalism rather than on the theory of dialectical materialism... For instance, because of its nationalist outlook, there was no ideological struggle within the Mau Mau movement to transform nationalist consciousness into class consciousness, nor was there a serious and systematic analysis of imperialism, the class struggle, and the relation of socialism to the Kenyan revolutionary process.⁷⁴

A Grain of Wheat may then, even by hindsight, have good reason for not being a text book in class analysis, but it is worth noting that the text stresses not only the injustice of the colonisers' land grabbing, but also Kihika's concern about injustice and oppression from very early in life:

Kihika's interest in politics began when he was a small boy and sat under the feet of Warui listening to stories of how the land was taken from black people... Unknown to those around him, Kihika's heart hardened towards 'these people', long before he had ever encountered a white face. (96-97)

The use of violence is explained in terms of the rationale of the struggle and grounded in Kihika's political philosophy as the only way of regaining land and selfhood:

'We just don't kill anybody... We are not murderers. We are not hangmen - like Robson - killing men and women without cause and purpose.' ... See? We must kill. Put to sleep the enemies of black man's freedom. But a few shall die that the many shall live. That's what crucifixion means today.' (216-217)

This is reminiscent of Dedan Kimathi's rationale for taking the road of armed struggle:

"We resort to armed struggle simply because there is no other alternative left to us, because our people are exploited, oppressed, plundered, tortured..."⁷⁵

Fanon explains the logic of violence in national resistance in the following way:

The practice of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning... Violence is in action all-inclusive and national. It follows that it is

⁷³ Robert Buijtenhuijs, *Essays on Mau Mau: Contributions to Mau Mau Historiography* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, Research Report No. 17, 1982), 159-160.

⁷⁴ Maina wa Kinyatti ed., *Kenya's Freedom Struggle: The Dedan Kimathi Papers* (London and New Jersey: Zed, 1987), 12.

⁷⁵ Quoted from Maina wa Kinyatti, "Mau Mau," 306.

closely involved in the liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism. Thus the national parties show no pity at all toward the caids and the customary chiefs.⁷⁶

There is, however, a sense that Mau Mau violence sometimes transcends the rationale of the struggle, most notably in the brutal and senseless rape of Dr. Lynd, which somewhat alarmingly reechoes Fanon's view of individual violence: "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect."⁷⁷

A Grain of Wheat places the Mau Mau struggle as a decisive factor in the fight for liberation of Kenya, and Kihika in particular is at pains to describe the sacrifices that were necessary to achieve this goal. The articulation of his desire to change the political situation dramatically seems, however, almost ruthless: "In Kenya we want a death which will change things, that is to say, we want a true sacrifice." (110)⁷⁸

Even though Peter Nazareth is right when claiming "that what motivates Kihika is a powerful desire for justice and a refusal to compromise in his pursuit of truth and justice,"⁷⁹ and despite the apotheosis of him by the Party and the people and even by some critics,⁸⁰ there is a sense that Kihika's monomania is also being interrogated by the text. Kihika's murder of Tom Robson is not committed in self-defense, but is part of a strategy to kill the worst enemies of the struggle and must be understood within the logic and rationale of the liberation struggle. Nevertheless the focus on terror and violence inevitably creates a certain insensibility to ordinary human values, and a one-directedness that is potentially subversive:

He (Kihika) spoke without raising his voice, almost unaware of Mugo, or of his danger, like a man possessed: His bitterness and frustration was revealed in the nervous flow of the words. Each word confirmed Mugo's suspicion that the man was mad. (217)

By stressing, in many ways quite legitimately, unity and sacrifice as a rallying point for the liberation movement at all costs, Kihika has the unenviable task of collecting a multiplicity of discourses into a single front against colonialism. But Kihika's belief in strength and disgust for weakness almost takes on Nietzschean proportions, and is uncompromising in its harsh indictment on the tribal ancestors or family members deviating from the party line:

⁷⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 93-94.

⁷⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 94.

⁷⁸ Note the difference in the revised version: "In Kenya we want deaths which will change things, that is to say, we want true sacrifice." 95.

⁷⁹ Nazareth, 255.

⁸⁰ See Govind Narain Sharma, "Ngugi's Christian Vision: Theme and Pattern in *A Grain of Wheat*", in Killam. Sharma writes: "But Kihika stands pre-eminent among them: he is the young hero who sees the vision of an independent Kenya, is 'moved by the stories of Moses and the children of Israel', and like the great prophet hopes to lead the people to the promised land. Govind Narain Sharma, 202.

'They say we are weak. They say we cannot win against the bomb. If we are weak, we cannot win. I despise the weak. Let them be trampled to death. I spit on the weakness of our fathers. Their memory gives me no pride. And even today, tomorrow, the weak and those with feeble hearts shall be wiped from the earth. The strong shall rule. Our fathers had no reason to be weak.' (217)⁸¹

'A day comes when brother shall give up brother, a mother her son, when you and I have heard the call of a nation in turmoil.' (19)

Not unexpectedly his resistance monomania effects family tension as Wambuku, his girlfriend, describes his obsession at one stage as a demon (114) which she hopes he will leave alone: "He (Kihika) was a man following an idea. Wambuku saw it as a demon pulling him away from her" (112). Being nothing but wishful thinking Wambuku's hopes are smothered as Kihika leaves her to fight in the forest. Even though the victimisation of Wambuku may seem inevitable in terms of the rationality of the liberation movement, it creates wounds which are not properly addressed and which are, consequently, never healed. After Kihika's death she loses moral and political balance completely and is finally beaten so badly by a homeguard that she eventually dies, three months pregnant (156). Emerging thus as far from flawless Kihika is, if not completely divested of moral values on the micro-level, in his single-minded focus on the Good Cause, close to becoming an agent of sheer instrumentalist rationalism where personal identities are subsumed under the collective struggle for utopia. Still his role as a committed agent against colonial imposition is important in a text where the euphoric meta-narrative of the national liberation is problematised by focusing on the problems of agency, resistance and loyalty to the tribe, the individual and the cause. It is this contradiction between the multiple discourses and various, fragmented subject positions on the one hand and the solidity as a sovereign, united self, reminiscent of Fanon, on the other which creates the tensions and the ambivalences in the text. By transcending Bhabha's various types of transitive resistance⁸² Kihika embodies the subaltern's concrete response to colonialism which dramatically modifies the image of subaltern inertia of the other characters in the novel. By linking rather than severing the relationship between the personal and the political as part of a broader struggle for justice and social transformation. *A Grain of Wheat* thus transcends post-modernism's unwillingness and inability to privilege analyses which make visible the interrelations between the particularistic and the individual commitment that shape larger social and political systems.

⁸¹ In the revised edition the weakness of the forefathers has been toned down in an unfortunate attempt to homogenise the resistance struggle, but the author's ambiguity towards the forefathers has nevertheless not been completely deleted: "We must kill. Put to sleep the enemies of black man's freedom. They say we are weak. They say we cannot win against the bomb. If we are weak, we cannot win. I despise the weak. Why? Because the weak need not remain weak. Listen! Our fathers fought bravely. But do you know the biggest weapon unleashed by the enemy against them? It was not the Maxim gun. It was division among them. Why? Because a people united in faith are stronger than the bomb.' 191.

⁸² See Moore-Gilbert, 133.

The novel presents the reader with parallel representations of both the version of the linear struggle centered on the Party and on the single efforts of individual heroic figures who galvanize its people towards struggle and resistance, and of another version in which the whole concept of the hero and his single vision is deflated and undermined and resistance is seen in all its ambiguities, uncertainties and fraudulences. Clearly the text questions common assumptions about the resistance movement and the nationalist struggle, assumptions, as we have seen, that are also held within the text.

The text shows how nationalism and the nationalist struggle not only enforce a kind of unity and coherence among the oppressed (Kihika's version),⁸³ but also how nationalism tries to suppress heterogeneity, failures, betrayals and certain relationships.⁸⁴ This exposure of cracks in the glorious past of the resistance struggle also signals patterns that may reappear in the future, i.e. the decolonised state, but where certain versions of the past will be authorised at the expense of others in the name of stability and unity.

By employing literary devices which transcend the traditional realism of the novel genre, he text produces a novel form which is more complex than what has been termed by Barthes as realism:

Realism, that is to say, represents the world 'realistically' or naturalistically, as if the novel were a transparent window on the world, as if its own signifying procedures entailed no distortion... And in so far as it is the given social world that realism characteristically investigates, all the habits, patterns and assumptions of a society are therefore mirrored back to it with an effectively perfect complacency.⁸⁵

By questioning this monolithic view of realism it has been shown how Ngugi's novel rejects the notion that the world can be represented "realistically" or naturalistically, in our case as a mere mirroring of the struggle for liberation. In Ngugi's text the representation of the struggle is conveyed as a complex mediation of multiple determinants. By continually contesting the material route of the liberation struggle and by subverting the linear, romanticised and unproblematised liberation struggle the novel is situated in a terrain

⁸³ New historical information reinforces the idea that any attempt to homogenise or totalise what we call Mau Mau is historically problematic. Lonsdale refers to Kershaw who claims that "there never was a single Mau Mau movement and that none of its members, even those who supposed themselves to be its leaders, ever saw it whole, not because they did not have a political aim, because that agenda was contested within different political circles over which they had no control and of which they may scarcely have any knowledge." John Lonsdale, xix.

⁸⁴ The question of betrayal and collaboration is a hotly contested issue in Mau Mau historiography. See for example the special and controversial issue of *Kenya Historical Review*, vol. 5 No 2 1977, William R. Ochieng and Karim JanMohamed eds.: *Some Perspectives on the Mau Mau Movement*, Rosberg Jr. and Nottingham, 294-295; Kershaw, 324-325. Kershaw refers to a collaborator, reminiscent of the early Mugo, as a person "whose single objective is private gain, who does not hesitate to harm his fellow Kikuyu in the process if they can be used to advantage, who does not protect his fellows when he can." Kershaw, 324. The loyalists (collaborators) came to play a decisive political role after independence.

⁸⁵ Stephen R. Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), 63.

resistant to ideological or political closure. The novel thus transcends what Nkosi calls “journalistic fact parading outrageously as fiction”⁸⁶ or Ndebele’s “spectacular fiction.”⁸⁷ It is this complex negotiation between Kihika’s modernist insistence on utopia and the shaky beliefs of other members of the liberation movement which transcends and problematises a simplistic combat design which Ngugi returns to in his later fiction.

3.4.5 Talking about the Past as a Way of Talking About the Future

Ngugi’s return to the past was predicated on the wish to investigate the complex negotiations between the various strands of the colonial encounter, both between Kenyans and between the coloniser and the colonised. Since the representation of the struggle for independence and its aftermath was written by hindsight and since Ngugi has suggested, as we have seen, that talking about the past is a way of talking about the present (*Homecoming*, 39) Ngugi’s return has provided the basis for and even given legitimacy to questioning, as this subsection does, the novel’s contemporary message and the novel’s visions of the future. Which patterns are likely to say something about the present situation and the future (at the time of literary production), or the other way round, which patterns in the present situation are bouncing back on the novel and its patterns? In what specific ways are the visions, the euphoria, the disillusionment and the contradictions of Kenyan contemporary scene embedded in the novel?

One word that sums up the ideological climate in the novel is, as we repeatedly have noted, ambiguity, strikingly reminiscent of the situation that surrounded the perceived leader of the resistance struggle, Jomo Kenyatta. The words of Kenyatta’s biographer that “friends as much as enemies now found Kenyatta’s position equivocal” is very analogous to the situation that the people of Thabai find Mugo in. Ngugi’s strong emphasis on betrayal is necessarily a reflection of what many people, Ngugi included, felt about the post-independence period. Ngugi’s own position is expressed on the page of the epigraph:

Although set in contemporary Kenya, all the characters in this book are fictitious. Names like that of Jomo Kenyatta and Waiyaki are unavoidably mentioned as part of the history and institutions of our country. But the situation and the problems are real- sometimes too painfully real for the peasants who fought the British yet who now see all that they have fought for being put on one side.

Indicating that there is some discrepancy between the objectives of the struggle and the post-colonial outcome, Ngugi challenges, textually, the mythical, heroic image of the formal leader of the movement, the now president Jomo Kenyatta. It is my contention that Kenyatta’s ambiguous position during the Emergency is being fictionally mediated through the figure of Mugo even though the outer histories of Mugo and the Father of the Nation⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Lewis Nkosi, “Fiction by Black South Africans: Richard Rive, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma,” in *Introduction to African Literature. An anthology of critical writing*, ed. Ulli Beier (London: Longman, 1979), 222.

⁸⁷ See Njabulo Ndebele, “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary.”

⁸⁸ Kihika is the forest fighter per excellence in the novel, but bears little resemblance to

in many ways are so dissimilar that any comparison would at first glance be unthinkable. While there is no one- to- one relationship between Mugo and Kenyatta, there is a sense that Mugo's ambiguous, contradictory life is saying something about patterns and resolutions during the emergency that may be projected into post-independent Kenya. The point of departure for such a comparison is both Mugo and Kenyatta's very strained or ambiguous relationship to the Movement, Mau Mau, a somewhat paradoxical situation since they both by prominent resistance fighters⁸⁹ were regarded as leaders or leaders-to-be. Both "managed" to keep out of the resistance fight; Mugo by his self-imposed isolation and fear of conflicts, Kenyatta because he was kept in detention by the British. Their attitude to oath-taking⁹⁰ and violence⁹¹ was nothing but equivocal, their self-imposed ideological game of hide and seek managed to mystify the two heroes and thereby driving the other prominent members of the Mau Mau to desperation. The obscurity around their leadership positions in the Movement is linked to fairly conscious strategical and tactical considerations and manoeuvres since their ambiguity is counterpoised by their mutual ambition to power and leadership and their view of themselves as elects. On the day of Uhuru they are both being viewed as legends: On Mugo:

We wove new legends around his name and imagined deeds... Then the women cried out the five Ngemi to welcome a son at birth or at circumcision. These they sang for Kihika and Mugo, the two heroes of deliverance from our village. (232)

On Kenyatta at his homecoming:

The area was jammed tight, broad smiles on all faces, the whole atmosphere and feeling something between carnival and miracle, with those pressed stoically against the wire, unable to move and almost unable to breathe, indifferent to their agony: they were in the front row for a special performance of the beginning of time.⁹²

The confusion around both Mugo's and Kenyatta's roles as heroes is not only their emission of ambiguous signals, but that their heroism is based on the important, but very dubious premises that the past must be forgotten. An exposure of their past is the path to their own downfall. Their spirit of resistance is further complicated by their collaboration

Kenyatta in his unequivocal dedication to the fight for independence and against oppression.

⁸⁹ See e.g. Slater, 152.

⁹⁰ Slater, 152.

⁹¹ People believed that Mugo was part of the resistance movement, part of Mau Mau. People (including the British) thought that Kenyatta was part of Mau Mau even though Kenyatta refuted it at the trial: "I also told the people that the Kenya African Union had no connection with the Mau Mau, and we do not want any of our people, especially our members, to have anything at all to do with Mau Mau, and that if we want to advance our country we can only do it by being honest, speaking the truth, not engaging ourselves in any nefarious activities, such as hating other people." Slater, 151. Obviously Kenyatta's words at the trial cannot be taken unreservedly as the truth, but even the resistance fighters seemed very uncertain about his real relationship to the movement since he also denounced Mau Mau publicly on several occasions. The point is that Kenyatta's relationship to Mau Mau is still inconclusive in Kenyan historiography.

⁹² Kenyatta, *Suffering*, 140.

with the coloniser, in Mugo's case when he betrays Kihika and further reinforced in the dream from the detention camp where even John Thompson, the white executioner, asks to be saved. In the case of Kenyatta, the whole post-independent political project can be viewed as a project of collaboration, and as Ngugi indicates in the beginning, as a betrayal of the forest fighters. The temporal asymmetry between Mugo and Kenyatta in relation to themes of the past and collaboration is important because it underlines that patterns of the resistance fight re-emerge with dramatic consequences during the days of independence. If the points of *semblance* has legitimised a perusal of the complexity of resistance struggle and liberation policies, it is the *difference* in the fates of Mugo and Kenyatta that challenges not only the heroism of the resistance struggle, but the very interpretation of Kenyan history and contemporary scene by the dominant ideology in the post-independent years. The crucial difference is that whereas Mugo exposes his past misdeeds and thus with open eyes both loses the leadership role of Thabai and his own life, Kenyatta hides his betrayal from the masses by rewriting history even though the exposure of his disavowal of the forest fighters by his policy of alienation is seen, but only by the conscious observer. It is unclear, and not necessarily decisive for our reading of *A Grain of Wheat*, to what extent Ngugi consciously invented parallel histories of the type sketched above. In *Detained* (1981) he says:

In the novel *A Grain of Wheat*, I tried, through Mugo who carried the burden of mistaken revolutionary heroism, to hint at the possibility of the new Kenyatta. But that was in 1965-6 and nothing was clear then about the extent to which Kenyatta had negated his past, nor the sheer magnitude of the suffering it would cause to our society today.⁹³

Very little critical attention has focused on Ngugi's somewhat ambiguous statement⁹⁴ which is worth pursuing. The intriguing point here is that, if we stick to Ngugi's version, Mugo as the new Kenyatta (interpreted as something qualitatively different from the "old" President Kenyatta at the time) was created by Ngugi the artist despite the fact that Ngugi as a citizen had not clearly seen the need for a new Kenyatta. The complexity and asymmetry of the equation is underlined by the fact that the new Kenyatta dies (the grain dies to provide for a rebirth) whereas the old Kenyatta lives on betraying the cause of the forest fighters. But clearly it is the radical moral conversion of Mugo which is needed if Kenya is going to escape the political and moral quagmire that Kenya already had sunk in when *A Grain of Wheat* was produced. *A Grain of Wheat* implies that "it would have required at least a symbolic death of Kenyatta and the values he epitomized as a condition for creating a new just Kenya."⁹⁵ That the need for such a death and rebirth is urgent is not only explicitly exemplified in the novel by the MP's ruthless purchase of the farm, but by Gikonyo's bitter analysis of the post-independent situation:

⁹³ Ngugi, *Detained*, 90.

⁹⁴ Cook and Okenimpke refer to Ngugi's statement in a short footnote commentary. Cook and Okenimpke, 89.

⁹⁵ Cook and Okenimpke, 89.

But now, whom do we see riding in long cars and changing them daily as if motor cars were clothes? It is those who did not take part in the movement, the same who ran to the shelter of schools and universities and administration. At political meetings you hear them shout: Uhuru, Uhuru, we fought for. Fought where? (.80)

The terrible betrayal of ordinary Kenyans through the massive exclusion of the Mau Mau movement from post-independent, native politics confirmed the worst excesses of the new post-colonial elite with this duplication of colonial exclusions. *A Grain of Wheat* therefore inserts another dimension into the national narrative and formulates a more authentic, inclusive vision of the Kenyan legacy. The story of the leaders' disastrous betrayals was suppressed in the dominant narrative of the 60s and Ngugi seems to admit that it was, at least partly, also suppressed by him at the time, but may be not by his aesthetic consciousness. This may explain the gaps and silences in the narrative which relate the past to the present without necessarily constructing symmetric links between them. To fill in the lacunae "the obsessed fiction writer" has constructed an imaginary past which besides possessing some factual validity projects an uncomfortable image of the contemporary scene. In the dominant narrative of the 60s, however, the past is another country with no bridges connecting it to the present, which is another country.

In a very real sense *A Grain of Wheat* asks us to reconsider or rather expand colonial dichotomies. It transcends the traditional binarism by extending the binarism to the elite and the rebels among the indigenous population, drawing the line between oppressed and oppressor beyond the coloniser-colonised dichotomy to include the new, indigenous oppressors. In a very real sense Ngugi manages to underline the failure or the unwillingness of the new elite to speak for the nation, a theme Ngugi turns with full force in his combat fiction.

The optimism at the end of the novel with the renewed contact between Mumbi and Gikonyo is not unequivocal since Gikonyo has not exposed his failures in the same way as Mugo. And Gikonyo repeats the question which has permeated the whole novel:

What difference was there between him and Karanja or Mugo or those who had openly betrayed people and worked with the whiteman to save themselves? Mugo had the courage to face his guilt and lose everything. Gikonyo shuddered at the thought of losing everything. (278)

Since it is the courageous one who has to die whereas the broken ones, like Karanja and Gikonyo, go on living, the uncertainty about what the future will hold is prevalent. In a glimpse of introverted self-reflection, not only Gikonyo, but also one of the old veterans in the resistance movement, Wambui, have second thoughts about the killing of the "courageous" traitor:

Darkness was creeping into the hut. Wambui was lost in a solid consciousness of a terrible anti-climax to her activities in the fight for freedom. Perhaps we should not have tried him, she muttered. Then she shook herself, trying to bring her thoughts to the present. I must light the fire. First I must sweep the room. How dirt can so quickly collect in a clean hut! But she did not rise to do anything. (275-276)

By interrogating their own roles in the drama of independence, there is some sense of potential hope which is, arguably, balanced against Wambui's non-agency at the end, confirming the uneasy feeling that the path to utopia is, if at all, indeed long and windy.

4. *A Grain of Wheat* Revisited: A Transitional Case

The present chapter is a transitional chapter in the sense that it marks Ngugi's transition from his counterhegemonic to his combat phase. Analysing the revised version of *A Grain of Wheat*¹ the chapter points to how the author revises central passages of the original version to fit his new perception of the resistance struggle and the post-colonial era. Grounded in the counter-hegemonic phase, however, the limited space of ideological manoeuvring prevents, my chapter argues, the new *A Grain of Wheat* from moving fully into the category of combat novels like *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*. While admitting that he underwent a crisis after having written *A Grain of Wheat*, primarily due to his use of English in the novel ("I knew whom I was writing about but whom was I writing for? The peasants whose struggles fed the novel would never read it"²), Ngugi started rethinking the language question in his writing. After the publication of his next novel, *Petals of Blood*, which also belonged to what Ngugi called the tradition of "the Afro-European Novel"³, his two last novels, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* were both written in Gikuyu. But the crisis after the publication of *A Grain of Wheat* was not only a question of language. His revision of *A Grain of Wheat* some 20 years later attests to a growing uneasiness with the contents of his earlier novels as well. When he was asked in 1990 why he revised the novel (it had not happened with any of the other novels), Ngugi cited "the growing familiarity with the history covered by *A Grain of Wheat*"⁴ and historical inaccuracies he wanted to correct.⁵ More than a matter of historical inaccuracies, however, Ngugi's understanding of the significance of Mau Mau had changed dramatically after the first editon.⁶ While the original version of *A Grain of Wheat* was written, as we have seen, in the ideological and political turmoil after independence where Ngugi himself was caught in the crossfire between different Mau Mau historiographical schools, the revision some twenty years later is due to Ngugi's political radicalisation which resulted in a bitter, unambiguous indictment of Kenyatta and his betrayal of the Mau Mau legacy after independence:

The sad truth is that the neo-colonial ruling regime (under Kenyatta and Moi) has arrogantly betrayed everything for which our people have struggled for ... Why have there never been shrines erected in honor of the Mau Mau guerilla fighters? Why has there never been a statue erected in honor of Kimathi and all those who died in the struggle for our national independence? The answers lie in the sort of independence finally settled for by Kenyatta and the Kenyan African Union

¹ All references in the revised version are to Ngugi wa Thiong'o *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1986).

² Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London, Nairobi, Portsmouth N.H, Harare: James Currey, Heinemann Kenya, Heinemann, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1986), 72.

³ Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind*, 71.

⁴ Kathleen Greenfield, "Murdering the Sleep of Dictators," in Cantalupo, 33.

⁵ "For example, there was an incident in which a white man shot an African for raising-not throwing- a stone against his dog." Greenfield, 33.

⁶ See e.g. Carol M. Sicherman, "Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Writing of Kenyan History," *Research in African Literatures* 20, no. 3 (1989): 347-370.

(KANU) leadership. Mau Mau had forced the issue but its leadership was excluded from the final settlement and done out of any power in the state.⁷

Ngugi's first minor change in the new *A Grain of Wheat* seems to be directly linked to his disillusionment with the party of Kenyatta. Whereas he in the original version equates the Party and the Movement, Ngugi in the new edition fairly consistently replaces Party with the Movement. Clearly not simply a play with words, Ngugi is implying in his new historical awareness that the Party and the Movement were not identical entities. This is confirmed by comparing the following excerpt of the text of the revised version with the old: "The hut had been bought for them by ardent members of the local branch of the Party who then believed the party was the reincarnation of the Movement" (new version, 25) vs. "The hut had been bought for them by the local branch of the Party" (old version, 30).

As Ngugi himself realises, the understanding of Mau Mau is a question of which representation counts: "The interpretation of Kenya's past, of Mau Mau... depends on who is looking at that crucial event and from whose viewpoint or angle of vision."⁸

Undoubtedly Ngugi's "new" understanding of Mau Mau was nourished in particular by the historian Maina wa Kinyatti's articulation of Mau Mau as "the peak of African nationalism in Kenya."⁹ Attacking the University of Nairobi School of Thought Kinyatti asserts that

a national movement that attracted hundreds of thousands of our people, a movement whose goals and aims were so appropriate to the common desires of so many, a movement which so profoundly influenced Kenya's political evolution and inspired so many fraternal peoples... can not be dismissed merely with a flick of the pen.¹⁰

Being a hotly contested issue in Mau Mau historiography the national character of Mau Mau has been denied by scholars of the University of Nairobi, notably W. Ochieng, B.E. Kipkorir and B. Ogot, who claim that Mau Mau was a Gikuyu rather than a national movement.¹¹ By analysing the Mau Mau songs, for example, Professor Ogot states that "what emerges from a study of these hymns is a strong sense of Kikuyu nationalism as opposed to Kenya African nationalism."¹² What seems to be the issue of contention here is not so much whether the majority of Mau Mau guerillas were Gikuyu of origin or not, but what a nationalist movement in reality implies. There is no doubt, as W. O. Maloba underlines, that

⁷ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1983,) 3 and 7.

⁸ Ngugi, *Barrel of a Pen*, 9.

⁹ See Maina wa Kinyatti, "Mau Mau."

¹⁰ Kinyatti, "Mau Mau," 287.

¹¹ See William Ochieng, "Review of *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*: the autobiography of Bildad Kaggia," *Kenya Historical Review* 4, no. 1 (1976): 138-40 and B.E. Kipkorir, "Mau Mau and the Politics of Transfer of Power in Kenya, 1957-1960," *Kenya Historical Review* 5, no 2 (1977): 313-328.

¹² B.A. Ogot, "Politics, Culture and Music in Central Kenya: A Study of Mau Mau Hymns: 1951-56." *Kenya Historical Review*, 5, no 2 (1977): 275-286.

the majority were Gikuyus, with the rest from Embu, Meru, and Kamba groups. The revolt did not extend beyond Central Province, and if there were any Luo or Abaluyia, they were few.¹³

But were the political objectives of Mau Mau tribal or ethnic rather than national? Whereas Kinyatti's dismissal of Ogot and his colleagues is not very elaborate, ("There should be no doubt... that the organizers of Mau Mau and those who went to the forest to wage war viewed Mau Mau as a countrywide movement whose aim was to fight for national independence..."¹⁴), Maloba offers a more comprehensive explanation which takes into account both Mau Mau's tribal and national character:

Mau Mau was determined to eliminate European domination in Kenya and to attain an African government. This was, without doubt, a national political aim, for the Kikuyu could not have reasonably expected to attain political freedom independent of other ethnic groups... Mau Mau... was a case of 'tribalism serving the nation.'¹⁵

This dissension between the historiographical schools notwithstanding, Ngugi in the revised version of *A Grain of Wheat* positions himself unambiguously in the Kinyatti camp, for example by replacing the word Gikuyu with the word Kenyan. The importance of confirming Mau Mau's nationalist pretensions is to show that Mau Mau could not be sidelined after independence because of its tribal bias. But even though Mau Mau may have had a nationalist agenda, the Gikuyus were, as we have seen, split between loyalists and guerilla fighters, a split which was reinforced after independence, if not necessarily and consistently along the same political or ideological lines.¹⁶ What Ngugi does in his political essays is to appropriate Mau Mau for his own political sympathies and ends.

While the original *A Grain of Wheat* exposed a nuanced tapestry of ideological splits both within resistance movement and between the movement and other Kenyans and portrayed a fairly ambiguous and sometimes contradictory image of Mau Mau, the revision of *A Grain of Wheat*, adding and deleting passages from the original version, is meant to be, it seems, a contribution to the on-going Mau Mau historiographical debate by focusing more unambiguously on the traitors and collaborators and by reducing the ambiguities of Mau Mau.

Reflected for example in the essay: "Mau Mau Is Coming Back"¹⁷ Ngugi's more uncompromising attitude towards the traitors and collaborators is also inscribed in the new *A Grain of Wheat*, for example when General R. and Koina discuss the betrayal of Kihika. Besides underlining the importance of the oath (the old version refers to circumcision and not the oath) General R. in the new edition emphasises the necessity of bringing the

¹³ Maloba, 170.

¹⁴ Kinyatti, "Mau Mau," 304.

¹⁵ Maloba, 171.

¹⁶ As Buijtenhuijs claims: "It must also be said that the Government succeeded in enlisting some well-known ex-forest fighters like Field-Marshal Mwaiama, General Kimbo and General Mbaria Kaniu, who publicly expressed their confidence in President Kenyatta." Buijtenhuijs, 141.

¹⁷ Ngugi, *Barrel of a Pen*, 7-31.

traitors to justice: 'We must find our traitors, else you and I took the oath for nothing. Traitors and collaborators must not escape revolutionary justice' (27). By commenting upon those participating in the independence celebrations Gikonyo's indignation-somewhat ironically- against those with dubious national credentials is given more space in the new edition:

And even some who were outright traitors and collaborators. There are some who only the other day were singing songs composed for them by the Blundells: Uhuru bado! Let us carve Kenya into small pieces. (69)

For the traitors there is no mercy, underlined by Ngugi in a sentence added in the new version as a response to the prayers of the traitors in the revivalist movement: "but the people prayed a different prayer: yes, let all the traitors be wiped out" (85).

The reassessment of Mau Mau in the new *A Grain of Wheat* is partly a need for Ngugi to contest the image in colonial discourse of Mau Mau as "the apotheosis of unreason... a barbarous, atavistic, and anti-European tribal cult whose leaders planned to turn Kenya into a land of 'darkness and death.'" ¹⁸ Kihika's single-mindedness of vision in the original version is for example not very dissimilar to the perceptions of the forest fighters articulated in colonial discourse, most clearly exposed in his uncompromising and ruthless speech on the weak:

'I despise the weak. Let them be trampled to death. I spit on the weakness of our fathers. Their memory gives me no pride. And even today, tomorrow, the weak and those feeble hearts shall be wiped from the earth. The strong shall rule. Our fathers had no reason to be weak. The weak need not remain weak.' (217, original version)

While Kihika's monomaniac tendencies in the original is reminiscent of a man "haunted by the Conradian fixed idea" ¹⁹ the new text attempts to reduce the image of Kihika as a possessed resistance fighter, or, in Maughan-Brown's words, to reduce "the polemical extravagance of a fanatic." ²⁰

'I despise the weak. Why? Because the weak need not remain weak. Listen! 'Our fathers fought bravely. But do you know the biggest weapon unleashed by the enemy against them? It was not the maxim gun. It was division among them.' (191 new edition).

By revising this inglorious picture of the Gikuyu past into a more self-assertive, but not altogether unproblematic past, the new text also manages at the same time to reinforce a link between the pre-Mau Mau period and the liberation movement.

The deletion in the new *A Grain of Wheat* of the brutal rape of Dr. Lynd by two Kenyan men (53, original version) is in line with recent historical knowledge on Mau Mau where both Edgerton and Maughan-Brown confirm that there are no historical accounts at all

¹⁸ Rosberg Jr. and Nottingham, xvi.

¹⁹ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 242.

²⁰ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 242.

where white women were raped by the Mau Mau fighters.²¹ The rape scene is replaced in the new version by the brutal murdering of her dog by the houseboy turned resistance fighter. Whereas the brutality of the scene is sustained by Ngugi's insistence on the cruelty of the killing ("But what followed was no less cruel and barbaric than if they had killed her..." (45), the point is made that violence and brutality against whites are only committed according to clear political objectives. Statistics from the period of the Emergency kills any notion of excessive Mau Mau brutality against the whites, so predominant in colonial historiography. By readjusting the image of the liberation fighters from the original edition Ngugi simplifies, as Greenfield asserts, "the moral complexity of the revolutionary situation."²²

This image of Mau Mau killings as restricted to political objectives is reinforced in the brutal killing scene where the revivalist preacher Jackson, who betrayed the cause, was "hacked with pangas into small pieces" (99, old version, 85, new version). In a subtle difference from the original the new version emphasises that his wife and his children are "not touched. But they were left without a home" (85), the implication apparently being that Mau Mau killings privileged those who deserve it. In the original, Mau Mau killings seem to transcend this clinical, discriminate focus by emphasising that the other family members were lucky that they were not at home when the reverend was killed, implying that his wife and children might have been targeted if they had not been away: "Fortunately his wife and younger children were not at home" (99).

Where native brutality cannot be interpreted in political terms the new text seeks explanations in colonial ideology. The portrayal of General R.'s father, reinforced in the new edition, is reminiscent of Fanon's portrayal of the colonised who under certain circumstances turns into an animal. Recalling his boyhood, General R reminisces about a father who was both a wife and a child-beater of the worst sort. In order to explain the father's animal-like behaviour, Ngugi in the revised version adds background material about his father's job with the coloniser:

His father had graduated from an ordinary colonial messenger into a petty assistant chief. He contributed nothing to the home except violence. He even extorted money from both his wife and son... The son did not see a father, but a perpetrator of unprovoked violence, a petty colonial tyrant who would extort money from even his closest relatives. (211-212)

And when his mother, brutalised by her husband, still defends him in confrontation with her son (General R.), the narrator adds (in the new *A Grain of Wheat*) the following comment: "It was only later when he saw how so many Kenyans could proudly defend their slavery that he understood his mother's reaction" (212). Clearly transgressing the

²¹ See Robert B. Edgerton, *Mau Mau, an African Crucible* (New York and London: The Free Press and Collier Macmillan, 1989), 112. See also Maughan-Brown: "I have been unable to find a single allegation of the rape of a white woman by 'Mau Mau' in any of the colonial writings" Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 243.

²² Greenfield, 31.

private and psychological space these additions place the micro-events into a more comprehensive, materialist perspective where colonialist influences are seen to impact seriously on colonised selves.

While the description of the relationship between Dr. Lynd and her houseboy (Koina), reminiscent of Fanon's emphasis on the reciprocity of the hatred on both sides of the racial divide, is kept unchanged in the new edition (26 and 44), a new political dimension to the struggle is added in the new *A Grain of Wheat* by focusing on the disparities between the coloniser and the colonised. By grounding the liberation struggle in more radical class terms the coloniser-colonised dichotomy is lifted up on a higher, more political level where Koina, many years after the incident, reflects upon the enormous disparity between Dr. Lynd with her house and dog and an ordinary Kenyan family:

Then he started thinking. The amount of steak the dog ate could have fed a whole family. The amount of money spent on the dog was more than the total wages of ten Kenyans... Why should he live in a shack while this woman and her dog lived in such opulence and luxury? (213)

The issue of land ownership also strikes a more radical note in the new text: "The soil belongs to Kenyan people. Nobody has the right to sell or buy it. It is our mother and we her children are all equal before her. She is our common inheritance" (98). While Ngugi is, as has been noted earlier, on fragile historical ground by inserting a more progressive, leftist interpretation of Mau Mau resistance, the new version is more satisfactory both in terms of Ngugi's own political perceptions at the time (as well as the early Kinyatti) and critics like Maughan-Brown who complains that the novel "provides no more adequate account of the class structure and contradictions which occasioned the revolt than did the earlier one."²³

In an interview with Greenfield Ngugi acknowledges the shift to more political considerations: "The question is whether the personal, psychological, or the political motives receive first emphasis - which comes out of the other."²⁴

While the widening of the socio-economic perspective adds some weight to the rationale behind the liberation struggle and is grounded in his intention to politicise and ideologise the novel it is difficult to see that Ngugi's revisions totally change the balance between the personal and the political in favour of the latter. On the contrary, it is still the exposure of the individuals occupying various spaces in the political terrain which adds substantial dimensions to the political because the individual focus involves, as Darby puts it in a different context,

reckoning with aspects of culture and socio-economic forces which empower and constrain them... the focus on the personal directs attention to broader societal conditions and to change over time because of the way they enframe the lives of men and women and establish the patterns of personal interaction.²⁵

²³ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 243.

²⁴ Greenfield, 33.

²⁵ Philip Darby, *The Fiction of Imperialism: Reading Between International Relations* &

Perhaps the most profound shift in the two versions of *A Grain of Wheat* is related to Gatu in the detention camp. In both versions of the novel Gatu, who is the resistance fighter *per excellence* in the camp, tells Gikonyo about the parable of the hut where a man who wanted to build a hut before getting married, never finished the building so that the potential wife found another man. While Gikonyo's initial reaction of pity and later hatred is referred to in the original version the narrator is at pains in the new edition to "explain" Gikonyo's reaction through his own words: "So that's why he is so strong. He has no woman like Mumbi. How dare he talk to me about collective strength?" (111) By explaining Gatu's dedication to the struggle in terms of the parable Gatu reinforces Kihika's repeated call for sacrifice in the resistance. Gikonyo seems, however, intentionally to turn the meaning of the parable upside down by reassuring himself that it is easy to focus wholeheartedly on the struggle when one is without a woman. By rationalising his own behaviour in this way Gikonyo is psychologically and even politically unprepared to be reticent about the oath taking. Unlike Greenfield who interprets Gikonyo's confession "as an isolated act of betrayal, not a collapse of moral strength made understandable by the general circumstances they all face,"²⁶ it is my contention that Gikonyo's confession should be seen as a totally inadequate surrender to the private domain.

Whereas Gatu in the original edition committed suicide ("For on the following day, the well-known oath administrator and the spirit of the camp, was found hanging against a wall of his own cell... His name, he who had taken godhead into his hand and ended his life, was never mentioned in Yala detention camp..." (127, original edition)), Gatu in the new *A Grain of Wheat* never gives in to the pressures of detention and torture from the authorities and he is murdered by the very same authorities:

The soldiers came for Gatu in the quarry. That very evening the others found his body hanging against the wall of his cell. 'Hanged himself...' the commandant told them, laughing. 'Guilt, you see! Unless you confess, you'll end up like him.' Gloom fell on Yala. They could not agree on a common united response to Gatu's murder. (111)

Besides accentuating colonial brutality against the resistance fighters and thereby the Manichean binarism typical of combat discourse, the revised edition identifies less ambiguously the real heroes who would never give in to colonial pressure and brutality. By apotheosising Gatu the text tries to counter the impression of pervasive moral corruption in the resistance movement even though there is not enough artistic space, within the framework of the original novel, to catapult the novel into the domain of what we have termed combat literature. While the moral dimension of the struggle is not phased out, Ngugi in the new version attempts, as has been argued, to lift the struggle from a concern with home and family to the macro-level of revolutionary necessity. By widening the perspectives of the revolutionary struggle considerably in the new version, Ngugi has

Postcolonialism (London and Washington: Cassell, 1998), 229.

²⁶ Greenfield, 30.

simultaneously and intentionally reduced some of the complexities and ambiguities of the first edition. While it earlier has been argued that the counter-hegemonic fiction brings out, in Philip Darby's words, "the tensions and cross-purposes within the imperial project,"²⁷ but also the ambiguities and ambivalences within the project of the oppressors, it has been noted how this revised version of *A Grain of Wheat* focuses more on inflating the heroic qualities of the spearheads of the revolution and denigrating the acts of treason. However since the main focus of *A Grain of Wheat* is on the existential dilemmas of Mugo and (to a lesser extent) on Gikonyo and Mumbi the restoration project is, in terms of a more consistent combat posture, doomed to end in fragmentation and patchiness. Since the revision of *A Grain of Wheat* is done within the framework of the original version Ngugi's didactic role is all but absent as there is not as much room in the thematic logic of the text for dramatic ideological shift as there is in the political essays²⁸; the new edition is, as it were, a transitional document which signals ideological patterns that will emerge more consistently in his later novels. Both in style and content *A Grain of Wheat* (1986) is still a far cry from his two combat novels proper, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*. But it is this lack of ideological manoeuvring within the framework of the original work which sustains the narrational nerve/thrust of the new *A Grain of Wheat* and prevents it from collapsing into a historiographical ditch. In a somewhat ironic and paradoxical move one of the additions in the new *A Grain of Wheat*, i.e. Dr. Lynd's insistence on staying in Kenya after Uhuru despite her hatred and fear of the Blacks, is consistent with the attempts to homogenise the new narrative along more binary lines, but projects at the same time a sense of ambiguity and unease, expressed in Koina's troubled reflections below:

She stood there as if she was mocking him. See me, I have still got the big house, and my property has even multiplied... The exclusive white settlement seemed to have grown bigger instead. Why was she still in Kenya? Why were all these whites in Kenya despite the ringing of Uhuru bells? Would Uhuru really change things for the likes of him and General R? Doubts stabbed him. Dr. Lynd's unyielding presence became an obsession. It filled him with fear, a kind of premonition. (214)

The colonial presence after independence, reflecting the narrator's own concern about how independence unfolded after the first years of euphoria, thus disturbs the more unambiguous visions of Kihika and Gatutia (and even Koina), complicating yet again their clarity of vision which the new *A Grain of Wheat* is at pains to underline and puncturing as it were the utopia after independence described by Koina below:

How glad he was when he took the oath to join the Kenya Land and Freedom Army! He had seen the way. Independence, when finally won, would right all the wrongs, would drive the likes of Dr. Lynd and her dogs from the country. Kenya after all was a black man's country. (213)

²⁷ Darby, 228.

²⁸ See Ngugi, *Barrel of a Pen*.

It is in this contradictory terrain that the new *A Grain of Wheat* moves, critically querying the discontinuity between the independence struggle and the post-colonial era where heroism during the Emergency is relegated to the back seat in post-colonial Kenya and where the collaborators seem to be reaping the dividends.

In this way the new *A Grain of Wheat* foreshadows the post-colonial stage revealed in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*. While the new *A Grain of Wheat* does not allow for dramatic ideological revisions, it permits a signalling of a future where there are few, if any links between promise and reality.

5. *A Walk in the Night*

5.1 Introduction

La Guma's first counter-hegemonic novel, *A Walk in the Night*, is concerned with subaltern existence in a context of apartheid hegemonical control, but far away from the scenes of sabotage and violent demonstrations or the dilemmas of the liberation struggle discussed in the analysis of *A Grain of Wheat*. The change of location from Kenya to South Africa means exposing a terrain where the relationship between the oppressor and the subaltern is characterised in unambiguous Manichean terms, where the few zones of contact are certainly antagonistic, but where resistance is, if at all, low-profile expressions of anger and frustration where political motivations may seem difficult to detect.

Apartheid discourse was grounded in firm, traditional binary oppositions between white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation where the non-whites were constructed, in Bhabha's words, "as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction."¹ It was a Fanonesque world where there was no pretense of a civilising mission and where the white self was defined in relation to the non-white other, projecting, as Erik Erikson maintains in another context, onto a minority group all of those qualities and characteristics which it most fears and hates within itself.²

Seen in essentialist, static terms the Other and his/her world was given no room for manoeuvring and no potential for general upliftment. Clearly the ideology of the Nationalist Party and Afrikaner nationalism, which was formally legislated after the 1948 elections, shared many of the ideas perpetrated by colonialist ideology, but in a much more dogmatic and structured form. The Seidmans explain the emergence of the apartheid state in the following way:

Over time, the white settlers in South Africa, particularly the more wealthy and powerful Afrikaner elements, succeeded in welding the majority of whites behind a powerful political movement built around the chauvinist ideology of white supremacy and centered in the nationalist Party...the resulting system constituted fascism of a classic type.³

The racial segregation completed through the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act and other legislation in the 1950s was accompanied by laws ensuring the disenfranchisement of all non-white groups, in some ways particularly painful to the coloured population who had enjoyed special treatment in various fields compared to the Black population. Since miscegenation was anathema to the Nationalists, the coloured were

¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 70.

² See Judith Walsh, *Growing Up in British India* (London: Holmes and Meier, 1983), 7. She refers to Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), 295-321.

³ A. and N. Seidman, *South Africa and U.S. Multinational Corporations* (Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1978). Quoted from *Contending Ideologies in South Africa*, eds. James Leatt, Theo Kneiffel and Klaus Nurnberger (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1986), 67.

singled out for special treatment, particularly in the Western Cape Area where 90 per cent of the coloured lived. The problem with coloured areas in Cape Town like District Six was that these areas were also inhabited by other population groups. As Nasson states: "despite the strengthening pulse of urban racial segregation, some immigrant Jews, Britons and Italians still lived cheek by jowl with the majority population of coloured Capetonians and a trickle of Africans."⁴ Goldin is right when claiming that the mixed residential areas of Cape Town were, according to nationalist parliamentarians, "the death-beds of the European race" in which poor whites stood "in danger of being absorbed by the Coloured community" and where there is "the inevitable miscegenation,"⁵ and hence the segregationist legislation. While the apartheid regime stepped up its apartheid legislation during the 50s, the decade was, despite apartheid's hegemonical domination, a period of optimism in the resistance movement where broad alliances were being forged across the racial spectrum. The ANC toned down its nationalist, Africanist rhetoric and the Congress Alliance underlined its multi-racial character. *The Freedom Charter* stressed the over-all principle that "South Africa belongs to all who live in her- Black and White."⁶ For when the apartheid regime insisted that there could be no contact zone or no integration between the races the Congress alliance insisted on the opposite, on full racial integration. Actually a black township like Sophiatown on the outskirts of Johannesburg was, as Clingman states, "a vital symbol of the 1950s: an ethnically mixed and vibrant black township."⁷ District Six in Cape Town symbolised some of the same values and was in many ways a vibrant society in the 50s and early 60s. Bill Nasson describes District Six in the following way:

the area had an identity and an imagery rooted in a sense of separateness and social and cultural localism. Its shoestring terraced streets reproduced a richly varied and introverted way of life, marked by interests, traditions and values which powerfully shaped its distinctive popular sociability, culture and politics. In particular, the largely autonomous development of a throbbing popular recreational and cultural life was one of the most striking characteristics of the District Six community.⁸

The material roots of the popular leisure culture of District Six were grounded in a poverty-stricken community, with inadequate housing and dismal day-to-day lives. It was overcrowding that attracted children and adults into the streets; the District Six people were outdoor people. Despite their depravity, "that community also imbued its popular life and practices with the indigenous resources of the locality... and invested it with a rolling

⁴ Bill Nasson, " 'She preferred living in a cave with Harry the snake-catcher': Towards an Oral History of Popular Leisure and Class Expression in District Six, Cape Town, c.1920s-1950s " in *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa*, eds. Philip Bonner, Isabel Hofmeyr, Deborah James and Tom Lodge (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University: Ravan Press, 1989), 285.

⁵ Ian Goldin, "The reconstitution of Coloured identity in the Western Cape" in *The Politics of Race, Class & Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, eds. Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (London and New York: Longman, 1987), 170.

⁶ From *The Freedom Charter*, Kliptown, 25-26 June 1955. Alex La Guma was one of the participants at the Congress of People which adopted the Charter

⁷ Clingman, 49.

⁸ Nasson, 285.

tolerance and libertarianism to be found perhaps nowhere else in South Africa.”⁹ But while vibrancy was certainly there District Six also had at the time La Guma wrote *A Walk in the Night* “a notorious reputation as a crime-ridden slum,”¹⁰ where the dire consequences of the oppressive apartheid regime were experienced daily. Even though the narrative of the novel takes place prior to the enforcement of the Group Areas Act which resulted in the forced removal of all inhabitants to various segregated settlements in and around Cape Town La Guma's description of District Six is a testimony of institutionalised racism which pervaded South Africa under apartheid. When *A Walk in the Night* was being written the destruction of Sophiatown had already begun, and the mood of the fifties, with multi-racialism as the political beacon, was about to falter towards the end of the decade. The Pan African Congress (PAC) was founded in April 1959 on a platform clearly opposed to multi-racialism, focusing in stead on the oppression by a white minority of the black majority. Suspicious of white dominance in the Congress Alliance the PAC stressed the importance of seeing the struggle for freedom in terms of the national oppression of the blacks.

Since Alex La Guma had actually lived in District Six he knew intimately the area where violence and the brutality of the apartheid state - manifested through the military and the police- were daily or nightly reminders of a regime where lack of elementary human rights was the order of the day.

5.2 Exposing the solidity and the vulnerability of the apartheid system

In the South African context of La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* the representation of colonialist patterns surface in other ways than in *A Grain of Wheat* (see 3.2). Apartheid presence in the predominantly coloured area of District Six does not only cloud the total atmosphere of the area, but is crucial to the development of the plot of the novel. The present section analyses in what way apartheid ideology is reflected in the text, and how this representation is seen to impact on the relations between the various actors in the streets of District Six. Furthermore this section focuses on how, if at all, a counter-hegemonic text like *A Walk in the Night* challenges dominant ideological assumptions found in official apartheid discourse.

It is the pervasive atmosphere of hopelessness and evil and not the animated and pulsating aspect of District Six which dominates the walk during the night. The feeling of desperateness and despondency is given shape through the meaningless hunt by two white policemen for the perceived murderer of Doughty, the old white man inhabiting District

⁹ Nasson, 303.

¹⁰ Mohamed Adhikari, “ ‘He was sorry he wasn't white and glad he wasn't black': Race and Identity in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and other Stories.” Paper presented at the seminar arranged by the Mayibuye Centre and UWC English Department: *Alex La Guma: journalism, writing, and the representation of race and place*. University of Western Cape, December 5, 1995.

Six. The cruel chasing of Willieboy, who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, not only illuminates the whole apartheid machinery of death, but also the unpredictability of apartheid atrocity. For Raalt, the identification of the murderer is completely subjugated to the need for a scapegoat since Raalt never questions the link between the murder and Willieboy; in fact any non-white with a yellow shirt will obviously do. As Paulo Freire states in another context:

And the more the oppressors control the oppressed, the more they change them into apparently inanimate 'things.' This tendency of the oppressor consciousness to render everything and everyone it encounters inanimate... unquestionably corresponds with a tendency to sadism.¹¹

This homogenising and reification of the Other by negating and annulling his/her separate identities facilitates the control enacted by the representatives of the apartheid regime, confirming the positional superiority of the whites (as representatives of the apartheid regime) over the positional inferiority of the non-whites. Transcending any "normal" political situation this disinterest in identification points to a situation where the dogma of apartheid ideology is carried out in practice, where the individual, chased like a dog, is not treated according to what he does or what his abilities are, but according to the colour of his skin. Even though La Guma makes a point out of the protagonist Michael Adonis' class background as he is sacked quite indiscriminately by his foreman (and the poor white Doughty lives in District Six), Raalt's obsession confirms the impression in *A Walk in the Night* that it is race rather than class which is the decisive, discriminatory factor.¹² The novel thus works to expose the direct, logical link between apartheid, racist ideology and praxis. Raalt, well protected by the underlying idea of apartheid ideology (although he seems to break the more formal police rules) feels that he has free play in District Six where his darker sides can be played out without any repercussions. There is no "civilising mission-credo" inherent in Raalt's (or Andries') crusade, no moral justification for what they are doing. It is Raalt's fanaticism, akin to some sort of compulsion neurosis or even sadistic impulse, which engineers the wild hunt and which ultimately results in Willieboy's death. The difference between Ngugi and La Guma here can possibly be explained in terms of the historical rationale behind the colonial and apartheid endeavours and the Manichean set-up in South Africa which was fundamentally and explicitly Manichean; separation and

¹¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1985), 35.

¹² According to the classic Marxist explanation of racism in South Africa, however, race and class are inextricably linked, race being the ideological expression of capitalism. As Legassick and Innes state: "From its inception (apartheid) has operated simultaneously as an expression of the domination of capital in South Africa and as an expression concerned to reproduce (in changing forms) separate 'racial' and 'cultural' identities. Its real effects, as institutionalised through state policy, are to perpetrate oppression, uneven development, and exploitation inherent in capitalist relationships: its ideological functions are to present these realities as forms of 'racial' and 'cultural' conflict... 'solved' by varying modes of separation." Quoted from Leatt, Kneifel & Nurnberger, 67. Being a contentious question in La Guma's writing, however, the issue of race or class as a decisive factor in apartheid policy will be discussed in Part II.

otherness being the very fabric of the apartheid state. Whereas there is political and ideological space in the Kenyan location of *A Grain of Wheat* for Thomson to expound, at least on a superficial level, the contradictions of the colonial endeavour, no such contradiction exists in the minds of Raalt and Andries¹³ since their mission in District Six is a logical extension of the maintenance of the perceived non-contradictory basis of the apartheid state.

It is apartheid's "successful" management of the population problem into categorisations based on race both as genetic and psychological categories that has resulted in what La Guma describes in the novel as exclusions, discrimination and prejudice.

The Manichean binarism sustained by Raalt has no leeway for compromise:

Raalt held the dusty grey eyes on him and lifting his right hand up near his left shoulder struck the olive-skinned man across the mouth with the back of it, saying, spitting out each word: 'You don't have to smile at me, young. I'm not your playmate.' (42)

Clearly Raalt's gaze signals authority and control, but also interdependence as Raalt defines his "superiour" identity, it seems, in relation to the "inferiour" Other ; as Moore-Gilbert states, referring to Bhabha: "colonial identity is always partly dependent for its constitution on a colonized Other who is potentially hostile."¹⁴ Even more racially indiscriminate than official apartheid policy Raalt names all non - whites kaffirs (abusive word for African meaning infidel) whereas the other policeman, Andries, is scornful of Raalt's wild hunt and indiscriminate practices:

He did not like Raalt. He was becoming convinced of that. There was something about Raalt that increased his nervousness all the time they were together, so that it amounted at times almost to the point of fear...He is one of those who will disgrace us whites. In his scorn for the hottentots and kaffirs he is exposing the whole race to shame. (39)

The prototype of the "coloniser" whose spirit of domination creates what JanMohamed calls "a feudal spirit, supported by a series of familiar rationalizations: the superiority of white races...their lack of intelligence, their hyperemotional and uncontrollable personalities..."¹⁵ Raalt seems in the setting of District Six stripped of any redeeming qualities. Raalt's frantic behaviour reechoes Paulo Freire's observation that as "the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized."¹⁶ It is particularly when the personal and systemic levels converge that the solidity of the oppressive system in *A Walk in the Night* is being queried. Raalt, the dominating, abusive person who seemingly commands full control in District Six and

¹³ The only exception possibly being Andries' fictive relation to the coloured maid: "for a while he had thought about sleeping with one of the meide, the girls, but he had never got around to it, and anyway, he thought that it would bring great dishonour upon himself, his family and the volk if ever such a thing was done and discovered." La Guma, *A Walk*, 79.

¹⁴ Moore-Gilbert, 131.

¹⁵ JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 3.

¹⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 32.

expects total submission from the coloured community, is totally at a loss when trying to control his unfaithful wife. The dangerous combination of apartheid ideology and personal problems accentuates the intensity of Raalt's uninhibited hunt, projecting his own shattered self-image on to the coloured community and in particular on to Doughty's murderer. As Joel Kovel claims in another context:

Whatever a white man experiences as bad in himself . . . whatever is forbidden and horrifying in human nature, may be designated as black and projected onto a man whose dark skin and oppressed past fit him to receive the symbol.¹⁷

However shaky his personal life seems to be Raalt's behaviour can nevertheless be understood within the economics of apartheid rationality and ideology as his uncontrolled journey through the dark streets of District Six enacts symbolically the whole apartheid tragedy of domination and subjugation. By revealing cracks behind the seemingly impenetrable, and unsympathetic mask of the apartheid representatives as they drive through District Six, the text exposes a system which is far from immune to human concerns and fragility. The underlying, tacit clash between Raalt and Andries goes, arguably, beyond differences of personality and signals a system which in some way or other is at odds/loggerheads with itself. The unhealthy combination of police brutality and personal insecurity indicates the shakiness of the very system Raalt and Andries are uncompromisingly consolidating, the cracks behind the impregnable façades subverting the apparent invincibility found in colonial characters, and thus - since the two white characters personify the authority of the apartheid system-the vulnerability of that very system. The important implications of this is moreover that any difference between self and Other is difficult to sustain as both parties' response to an unpredictable situation is, as will be shown, one of unease, fear and discomfort, the asymmetry in power and domination notwithstanding. This textual undermining of apartheid ideology does not imply, however, an immediate disintegration of apartheid/colonial supremacy during the walk in the night, but it signals the problematic premises on which the whole system is based and deconstructs any essentialist, apartheid presumptions. *A Walk in the Night* thus resists in a subtle way the colonialist image of superiority and signals the possibility of a widening of these cracks given the vulnerability and the inconsistencies embodied in the apartheid representatives. Arguably the poor, white man Doughty in District Six reinforces these cracks by disturbing the neat racial compartmentalization of the apartheid state:

Now he (Doughty) was a deserted, abandoned ruin, destroyed by alcohol and something neither he nor Michael Adonis understood, waiting for death, trapped at the top of an old tenement, after the sweep of human affairs had passed over him and left him broken and helpless as wreckage disintegrating on a hostile beach. . . The room was as hot and airless as a newly-opened tomb. . . (25)

¹⁷ Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychobiography* (New York: Random House, 1970), 65.

But even the portrayal of Doughty is ambiguous as his past legacy transcends the ruins of his present state: "He had performed in the theatres of Great Britain, South Africa and Australia, and had served in two wars. (25)... 'Look at me. I used to be something in my days. God bless my soul, I used to be something' "(27). It is the accumulated weight of Doughty's economic deprivation, significantly aggravated by his fall from grace, and his habitation in a racially mixed environment which emits ominous signals of a future beyond apartheid control.¹⁸

5.3 Questioning assumptions about subaltern reconstruction

My thesis suggests that what has been termed counter-hegemonic resistance may be seen then from two interconnected levels: the ambivalence and subversion of colonial discourse and the reconstruction of self in resistance to colonial definitions of the colonised. Filling the vacuum "created" by colonial discourse means in principle writing the world, culture and values absent in colonial representations. This type of counter-hegemonic exercise: animating and affirming the restored world is clearly not unproblematic since there is a real danger of seeing this world unambiguously, of resurrecting the world only to venerate it in contradiction to its exclusions and denigration in the colonial text. One of the important factors which separates the counter-hegemonic from the combat texts is the interrogation and critical querying of the reconstruction of the world and self of the former texts and the questioning of what resistance in the colonial/postcolonial/apartheid world entails. This concern is exploited in subtle ways since there is a dual affirmation and critique of self, world and resistance in the reconstructed worlds of the selected texts.

The present section explores the representation of the subaltern self and the potentials for identities robbed by the apartheid state to be reconstructed. By analysing the selves made invisible in apartheid discourse the section probes into a complex terrain of subaltern existence where optimistic assumptions about the potentials of subaltern reconstruction is being queried, if not completely undermined. This will be shown by exploring how the main character of the novel, Michael Adonis, faces and tries to come to grips with the massive apartheid oppression in District Six. While the next section more explicitly analyses potential, direct interventions against apartheid oppression, this section is more concerned with how the subaltern, Michael Adonis, tries to reconstruct his self in a world and an environment almost devoid of positive, constructive alternatives and how Michael Adonis' spontaneous, apparently non-political subversion to apartheid imposition dramatically endangers his situation. Despite the ambiguous representation of Michael Adonis *A Walk in the Night*, giving the oppressed a voice, however weak and fragmentary, places the

¹⁸ Up to a point the racial difference in District Six seemed to be obliterated due to class similarity, but in a crisis situation race overshadows class and Doughty through Michael Adonis' lenses is a representative of the oppressive white class even though he in one sense is as suppressed or oppressed as Michael Adonis himself. Historically speaking the racial mix in District Six was intolerable to the regime resulting in its destruction in the 60s and 70s.

coloured subaltern on a South African map previously erased from official political cartography.

Whereas Ngugi explicitly frames his story within the specific context of the liberation struggle and exposes the inward terrain of those implicated, it has already been noted how La Guma's novel is silent about the macro level and focuses instead on exposing the challenges and tribulations of the people on the ground affected by apartheid imposition, but distanced from the world of political resistance against the regime. Since this diversity and vibrancy of District Six, described by the historian Nasson, is almost non-existent in La Guma's novel from the same area, the different mediations of "reality" suggests a moral and even political agenda on the part of the author as the focus is on the dismal existence of "the subaltern of the subaltern." In an interview with Cecil Abrahams La Guma outlines his intentions with the novel:

One of the reasons I called the book *A Walk in the Night* was that in my mind the coloured community was still discovering themselves in relation to the general struggle against racism in South Africa. They were walking, enduring, and in this way they were experiencing this walking in the night until such time as they found themselves and were prepared to be citizens of a society to which they wanted to make a contribution. I tried to create a picture of a people struggling to see the light, to see the dawn, to see something new, other than their experiences in this confined society.¹⁹

What is striking about *A Walk in the Night*, besides the absence of political incidents related to the liberation struggle, is the unconscientised people who roam the dark streets of District Six and their apparent inability to transcend the borders of their self-contained world. This lack of border-crossing is symbolically enacted through the movement in the dark streets of the mostly coloured community of District Six, projecting the mood suggested by the title of the novel. With reference to Hamlet in the epigraph, the I-person is "doom'd for a certain period to walk the night... Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature Are burnt and purged away." Besides signalling the pervasive darkness and bleakness that is to accompany the reader through the streets of District Six, however, the epigraph suggests a possible fragile, flickering light at the end of the walk through the night. Clearly linking the unpoliticised characters to the dismal environment and the massive oppression of apartheid, La Guma nevertheless queries a rigid naturalistic determinism where individual choice is precluded and apartheid oppression is the inevitable order of the day.

5.3.1 The ambiguous representation of the subaltern: Michael Adonis

It is through Michael Adonis that the narrative gives shape to and embodies the experience of subjugation and oppression in District Six. This subsection explores how the concrete examples of apartheid discrimination impacts on Michael Adonis' behaviour and what kind of strategies Michael Adonis' employs in order to sustain some kind of self, both in relation

¹⁹ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 49.

to Raalt and Andries who patrol the streets of District Six as well as to his white neighbour, Doughty. By showing the complexity of the terrain in which Michael Adonis moves the present subsection articulates the high odds Michael Adonis is up against and shows how *A Walk in the Night* betrays a subaltern representation which both contests and embraces a colonialist essentialisation of the Other.

It is Michael Adonis' traumatic experience of being sacked by the white foreman which sets the adversarial tone of the journey through district Six:

That white bastard was lucky I didn't pull him up good... Every time a man goes to the pisshouse he starts moaning. Jesus Christ, the way he went on you'd think a man had to wet his pants rather than take a minute off. well, he picked on me for going for a leak and I told him to go to hell. (2)

The feeling of oppression is strong and his anger is justifiably not easily subdued. Gyan Prakash's contention, in another context, that the postcolonial subject has been "worked over" by colonial discourse²⁰ is not only confirmed in the episode with the foreman, but reinforced when he a little later after the sacking is confronted with the two policemen Raalt and Andries. La Guma's description of the two is suggestive: "They had hard, frozen faces as if carved out of pink ice, and hard, dispassionate eyes, hard and bright as pieces of blue glass" (11).

Michael Adonis' response to oppression is seen to be markedly contextual as he at the same time apparently both "accepts" and resists the imposition from the external world. After he allegedly²¹ answered back to the white foreman (4), Michael Adonis has learnt a lesson and avoids direct confrontation with the "new" oppressor, apart from mentally fighting back: "White sonofabitch. I'll get him'" (4). Michael Adonis deals with the situation within the realm of "Realpolitik": the uneven relationship between the police and himself not lending itself to direct confrontation since the end result is given. The mere rhetoric of his threats is clearly shown as he is tracked down by Raalt and Andries:

You learned from experience to gaze at some spot on their uniforms, the button of a pocket, or the bright smoothness of their Sam Browne belts, but never into their eyes, for that would be taken as an affront by them. It was only the very brave, or the very stupid, who dared look straight into the law's eyes, to challenge them or question their authority. (11)

As Michael Adonis correctly observes, the gaze is employed by the very brave or stupid among the oppressed and he does not identify himself with any of those categories. In a colonial situation the gaze is basically privileged the oppressor whose gaze enacts "the identification, objectification and subjection of the subject... the imperial gaze defines the identity of the subject..."²² By not mimicking the policemen by returning their gaze,

²⁰ Gyan Prakash, "Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography," *Social Text*, 31, no. 2 (1992): 8.

²¹ Michael Adonis' reliability as a narrator is somewhat dubious as his courage by answering the foreman suddenly evaporates in his encounter with the policemen.

²² Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, 226.

Michael Adonis in one way renounces the possibility of reversing the process of domination that turns, according to Bhabha, "the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power."²³ The implication of this may at first glance be apartheid's successful construction of the subject position of Michael Adonis. This would be in line with Fanon's claim that colonialism, referring to the Algerian context, is fighting "to maintain the identity of the image it has of the Algerian and the depreciated image that the Algerian has of himself."²⁴ On one level it seems as if apartheid ideology constructs a particular subject named Michael Adonis with which Michael Adonis himself concurs because of his powerlessness. His refusal or inability to openly challenge the Law is linked to Michael Adonis' earlier experience and know-how of the external world, a know-how where his position as underdog is clearly and realistically exposed. By defining himself in relation to the two policemen Raalt and Andries and the communicative situation between them, Michael Adonis has clearly in one way situated himself within the oppressor/oppressed-dichotomy, a Manichean division which clearly is constitutive of Michael Adonis' identity. Michael Adonis' submissive attitude is amplified since the bodily evasion is accompanied by a lack of courage or willingness to confront the enemy linguistically, exposed by La Guma by putting the protagonists' internal, angry dialogues in brackets: "(you mucking boer)...(you mucking bastard boer with your mucking gun and your mucking bloody red head)... " (12).

His silence means a surrender of his own world of speech, forced into quiescence by the culture which is in control both literally and linguistically. Michael Adonis' compliance is the rule of the game played by the oppressed Other who survives by defining itself, in Fanon's words, as non-being. As the text says about Willieboy, his alter ego:

He (Michael Adonis) saw Willieboy emerge from the lemon-coloured light of a street-lamp, recognized him, and relaxed, but maintaining an expression of officiousness with which he tried to hide his identity as another of the massed nonentities to which they both belonged. (49)

In a very real sense, it is this projection of a non-self which explains Michael Adonis' lack of overt resistance or agency. On the other hand, however, Michael Adonis, by not returning the gaze, may be seen as trying to avoid the subject position imposed by the apartheid authority and mean an initial step in the reconstruction of a battered self destroyed by colonialism/apartheid which, I will argue, is a necessary first step on the way to agency. Countering the policemen's oppression and condescending behaviour, as the internal dialogues testify, by what could be labelled "mental resistance," Michael Adonis

²³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 112. It is worth questioning the whole issue of the significance of the gaze in the decolonising process. Moore-Gilbert's contends that there is little evidence that "the psychological guerilla warfare of the kind which Bhabha describes...was particularly destabilizing for the colonizer." Moore-Gilbert, 134. This is probably true in a materialist sense, but simplified or even distorted when applied to the very important process of decolonising the mind.

²⁴ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 30.

contests the oppression at the level of self-construction and consciousness, if not at the level of open resistance. Never accepting the situation as a normal, justifiable part of the social order even if pretending Michael Adonis transcends any sense of fatalistic acceptance, or, in Marxist terms, mystification. Distanced from the representatives of the apartheid regime his "resistance" is exposed to the outer world as he externalises his former internal dialogues: " ' To hell with them. I'm not scared of them. Ou Scofield and the law and the whole effing lot of them. Bastards. To hell with them.' "(20).

Thus Michael Adonis, the subaltern, speaks through his former silences, signalling a mood resistant to apartheid discourse on a very personal level as apartheid's subjectification utterly undermines his self-image and self-confidence. Being in a state of liminality by "accepting" and "resisting" at the same time, he exposes a hybrid self which necessarily is unstable, fragmented, agonised and in a fluid state, "necessary attributes of the colonial condition."²⁵ The text exhibits how Michael Adonis' self is being constructed by specific ideological and discursive operations, i.e. on the basis of histories and experiences of his own past, most recently, as has been noted, the unjust sacking from his job and the arrogant, condescending attitudes of the policemen: "He thought about the foreman, Scofield, and the police, and the little knot of rage reformed inside him again like the quickening of the embryo in the womb"(16).

Not being completely blindfolded by the interpellation of the dominant ideology Michael Adonis therefore desperately tries, more or less covertly, to deconstruct and contest the subject-position imposed by apartheid discourse by getting even with them:

The mention of sorrows brought back the sense of persecution again and he surrendered himself to it, enjoying the deep self-pity for a while, thinking, I'll get even with them, the sonsabitches. They'll see. (23)

His idea to "get them" as a way of asserting and constructing a self which is not powerlessly subjected to apartheid discourse makes Doughty a victim of Michael Adonis' anger. Placed in the foreman's role by Michael Adonis, Doughty functions as a punching ball for Michael Adonis' aggression against the whites: " ' You old bastard,' Michael Adonis said angrily. 'Can't a boy have a bloody piss without getting kicked in the backside by a lot of effing law?' "(28)

The compartmentalisation of South African society based on race and colour makes a transfer of rage from one individual to the whole racial group to which the individual belongs simpler; in JanMohamed's words: "the individual is treated generically."²⁶ This generic treatment of individuals, which in this case transfers Michael Adonis rage to the "innocent" Doughty and inverts to some extent the Manichean dichotomy of apartheid ideology, replicates in one sense the homogenising thrust of apartheid discourse also

²⁵ Loomba, 176.

²⁶ JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 236.

See also Abdul JanMohamed, "Humanism and Minority Literature: Toward a Definition of Counter-hegemonic Discourse," *Boundary 2*, XII, no 3/ XIII, no 1 (1984): 281-299.

among the groups which are oppressed. Significantly Michael Adonis's generic treatment is also transferred to the Blacks whom he treats in the same way.

Even though the murder of Doughty can be seen primarily as an attempt at survival of the self, its location within the economics of the racially infected apartheid state is nevertheless indisputable. Underlined by Michael Adonis' extremely condescending and racist behaviour towards Doughty, Michael Adonis confirms in action his attempt to reverse the oppressor-oppressed dichotomy. Linked to the fact that Doughty's position has been badly tarnished due to his dismal living conditions, Michael Adonis now dares to expose openly what he had to suppress in his encounter with the policemen, exploding in a savage verbal and later physical attack on the white representative:

He said: 'What the hell you crying about. You old white bastard, you got nothing to worry about.'

'What's my white got to do with it? Here I am, in shit street, and does my white help?' (27)²⁷

Aggravating the situation by identifying Michael Adonis with a ghost who is doomed to walk the night, Doughty provokes Michael Adonis and naturally shatters any attempt to reestablish a self based on a more solid foundation. In fact Doughty's reinforcement of the image of the underdog which Michael Adonis wants to fight effectively halts the complete reversal of the positions of subordination and domination. In Michael Adonis Doughty mirrors a reflection of himself:

'We're like Hamlet's father's ghost. I played the ghost of Hamlet's father once. London it was.' 'You look like a blerry ghost, you spook,' Michael Adonis said bitterly. (27)

And a little later:

He cleared his throat of a knot of phlegm, choked and swallowed. He started: '...I am thy father's spirit, doomed for a certain time to walk the night...and ...and for the day confined to fast in fires, till the foul crimes done in my days of nature's...nature are burnt and purged away...But...' 'That's us, us, Michael, my boy. Just ghosts, doomed to walk the night. Shakespeare.' (28)

While Michael Adonis' "revenge" seriously imperils his own situation and is clearly not going to change the conditions of the oppressed population or in any way shake the apartheid regime his attack is nevertheless, from the perspective of the oppressed, a means of regaining some sort of dignity unattainable in the sphere of macro-politics:

He was suddenly pleased and proud of his own predicament. He felt as if he was the only man who had ever killed another and thought himself a curiosity at which people should wonder. He longed to be questioned about it, about the way he had felt when he had done it, about the impulse that had caused him to take the life of

²⁷ Note M. Adhikari's observation: "Uncle Doughty, a white man, is made to utter the non-racial sentiments with which La Guma himself identified." Adhikari, 25.

another... The rights and wrongs of the matter did not occur to him then. It was just something that, to himself, placed him above others, like a poor beggar who suddenly found himself the heir to vast riches. (66)

Michael Adonis' feelings are reminiscent of what Fanon says in *The Wretched of the Earth* :

He (the colonised) is overpowered but not tamed; he is treated as an inferior but he is not convinced of his inferiority. He is patiently waiting until the settler is off guard to fly at him. The native's muscles are always tensed... He is in fact ready at a moment's notice to exchange the role of the quarry for that of the hunter. The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor.²⁸

Even though the contextual signals in the text are fiercely anti-apartheid, Michael Adonis' action can, from a different perspective, be seen as a partial confirmation of apartheid discourse, justifying in a way the colonialist dichotomisation where the Other is viewed as irrational, evil and mad. In an ironic twist, the attempt to avoid the essentialism of combat literature comes close to serving as a partial subscription to the apartheid image of the Other where Michael Adonis' unpremeditated action may seem to transcend rational explanation. The textual representation of the indigenous Other is thus steeped in ambivalence and ambiguity, contesting and flirting with the colonialist stereotype at the same time.

5.3.2 Michael Adonis' construction of self: the importance of recognition

While the previous subsection focused on Michael Adonis' responses to apartheid oppression and imposition, the present subsection is concerned with how Michael Adonis tries to transcend the negative bombardment of apartheid discourse by progressively constructing a self based on recognition and acceptance. The subsection thus deals with the major existential dilemmas of subaltern existence: how to survive in a situation where direct confrontation with the powers of oppression seems futile and where political mobilisation is not on the agenda. Influenced by the negative, crushing impulses from the apartheid world, Michael Adonis' feeling of total alienation involves him in a desperate hunt for some sort of recognition, desire and pleasure, however perverted, trying to redress the imbalance created by an apartheid regime which never recognizes him as a decent human being. In response to the question, what does the black man want, Fanon states:

When it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire... As soon as I desire I ask to be considered. I am not merely here and now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity in so far as I pursue something other than life.²⁹

Besides being pleased and proud after the killing of Doughty (" 'He was suddenly pleased and proud of his own predicament' "(66)) Michael Adonis also admits pleasure when being

²⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 53.

²⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.

asked to join the gang: “ ‘He felt a stir of pleasure at being approached, but he was still hesitant’ ” (67). This is even augmented when Foxy, the gang leader, tells him nicely: “ ‘Mikey’s a good boy. He’s not like you jubas. He got class. Don’t I say Mickey?’ ” (68) In a way Michael Adonis secretly agrees, having found out a bit earlier that “he, Michael Adonis, was a bigger shot now than he was”(68). The significance of recognition and visibility in the reconstruction of a battered self drives Michael Adonis towards the alluring temptations of Foxy and the gangsters even though Joe warns him repeatedly: “ ‘You mustn’t go with those gangsters, Mikey. You leave those gangsters alone’ ” (71). Clearly the temptation is of a different character than the temptation Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat* is exposed to, but both cases show the fragility of subaltern existence in times of crisis and desolation. By being recognised and called into being by the gang Michael Adonis awakens and starts to exist. It is a struggle of resistance against the nullification strategies of the apartheid regime, fighting for the survival of a self which transcends the spatial and existential constraints of a Willieboy:

He was also aware of his inferiority. All his youthful life he had cherished dreams of becoming a big shot. He had seen others rise to some sort of power in the confined underworld of this district and found himself left behind. . . . he was always aware of his own inadequacy, moving unnoticed in the mob. . . . he continued to remain something less than nondescript, part of the blurred face of the crowd, inconspicuous as a smudge on a grimy wall. (72)

Bordering on rigid naturalist determinism, the choice he is offered between Joe and Foxy, between dismal decency and gangster visibility, is arguably between two paths to destruction,³⁰ tipping the balance almost imperceptibly in favour of a Michael Adonis who is unable to transcend the stereotypical notions of either a noble savage or a petty criminal. While the representation of Michael Adonis disturbs the silences of colonialist discourse by its very representation, *A Walk in the Night* is no simple reversal of that discourse since the novel’s emphasis on truth-value in no way underplays the flaws and deficiencies of the subaltern. This is in contrast to colonialist fiction where, as JanMohamed states, “the Europeans own potential, purpose and direction are never called into question. . . .”³¹ The text, then, by highlighting the complexity of subaltern representation, both rejects the negative strategies of colonial discourse (and its thesis of innate depravity) and the apotheosis of the subaltern so common in combat literature. This complex

³⁰ Kathryn Balutansky states: “ it also points to La Guma’s subtle use of naturalism, for in this instance, the emphasis is not on determinism but on the importance of choice. A strict naturalism would require that the similar social conditions that shaped Willieboy and Joe should cause similar effects. . . . On the contrary, Joe’s attitude represents the imperative of human concern and sharing which supersedes that of oppressive social forces.” Kathleen M. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma: The Representation of a Political Conflict* (Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1990), 19. According to Freire oppression “can lead the oppressed to what Fromm calls necrophilic behaviour; the destruction of life- their own or that of their oppressed fellows.” Freire, 40.

³¹ Abdul R. JanMohamed, “The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, (1985): 69.

representation is not necessarily what Brenda Cooper calls “contradictions” in the text, but exposes rather another of Cooper’s terms: “truth in the round.”³²

Tremendous and complex insights into the relationship between different dimensions of life are appropriate to great literature. Such literature depicts not only the subjective as supplement to the objective of historical discourse but the network, the ‘intersections’ between these dimensions.³³

In the next section the consequences of this type of “honest” representation, at times paralleling colonialist stereotyping of the Other and thus being regarded as complicit with colonial ideology, will be explored in more detail. Writing the subaltern self in *A Walk in the Night* is thus no unambiguous discursive journey as the text, as this section has argued, interrogates essentialist assumptions about the subaltern where both apartheid and oppositional discourses in varying degrees are both being rejected and confirmed.

5.4 Exploring consciousness, resistance and regression

Organised along lines where absolute demarcations between people based on racial categories were legally enforced, the South African apartheid society after the 1948 elections comes closer to Fanon’s concept of Manicheism than probably any other colonial society. Fanon not only described the colonial binarism, but also envisaged a future which “traces the overthrow of Caliban (sic) and his Manichean order and culminates with the restoration of an indigenous, liberated culture.”³⁴ By envisaging a reversal of the Manichean binarism where the last shall be the first, not only in ideological terms, but in terms of power and domination as well, Fanon creates, according to Fontenot, “a system, a myth, which he feels has the power to move the reader...into a mode which will allow the reader to participate in the insurrectionary activity described in *The Wretched of the Earth*.”³⁵ While Ngugi in particular and La Guma address the issue of the potential transformative and insurrectionary effects of their fictional texts in their combat phase, the perspective in counter-hegemonic writing is more complicated, and never predictable or conclusive because such narratives probe the inner recesses of consciousness and take the reader beyond political closure. The complex nature of counter-hegemonic narrative means that focusing only on the overt, concrete signs of political resistance may divert the attention away from other types of resistance since resistance is, as Bhabha notes, not necessarily always an “oppositional act of political intentions.”³⁶ While not offering a comprehensive, satisfactory analysis and understanding of subaltern agency and resistance, Bhabha’s

³² Cooper, *To Lay*, 17.

³³ Cooper, *To Lay*, 19.

³⁴ Patrick Taylor, *The Narrative of Liberation: Perspectives on Afro-Caribbean Literature, Popular Culture, and Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 8.

³⁵ Chester J. Fontenot, *Frantz Fanon: Language as the God Gone Astray in the Flesh* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Studies, no 60, University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 9.

³⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 110.

observations may, as in the case of La Guma's novels, attract attention to areas of oppositional discourse which otherwise might have remained in disguise.

While the complexity and ambivalences of subaltern resistance to colonialism in *A Grain of Wheat* was analysed in terms of how the protagonists were positioned in relation to the grand narrative of liberation, the present section explores the potential of subaltern agency in the dark streets of District Six without necessarily analysing potential subaltern interventions along the same lines as in Ngugi's novel. Since *A Walk in the Night* is grounded in the area of micro-politics, the nature of resistance as manifested in the low-profiled characters of the novel is being scrutinised within the parameters of a counter-hegemonical framework where political-ideological subversion is locally grounded with few, if any explicit national or nation-state overtones in the surface structure. By first examining how Michael Adonis' low level of consciousness means avoiding the apartheid gaze (by resorting to criminal activities) rather than resisting the apartheid regime in a political sense, the present section proceeds to explore how Franky Lorenzo and the crowd return the gaze by querying apartheid imposition without as it were engaging in a direct, confrontational struggle against the apartheid regime.

La Guma employed his pen both as a journalist and as a fiction writer to convey the extremely difficult situation for the oppressed in apartheid South Africa. His participation in the anti-apartheid struggle within the broad Congress Alliance, his prominent role in coloured politics, his job as a journalist and his background as a citizen in one of the most dilapidated areas in Cape Town provided him with first-hand experience of life in the police state. In a sense JanMohamed is right when contending that La Guma's novels "constitute a transformed, fictive version of his own marginality, which initially consists in his social and political disenfranchisement and then is followed by enforced internal isolation and later 'voluntary' exile."³⁷ In another sense, however, La Guma's marginality was on another level than the marginality of the characters he introduces in his first novels since his position as a writer was clearly "petit bourgeoisie." La Guma tries to overcome this problem by blending his more conscious position as an author with the subject position of his characters so that we, in Odendaal and Field's words,

understand each character from his own position while remaining receptive to the commentary which the writer communicates through the language, tone and actions he associates with each character.³⁸

La Guma was one of the 156 leaders of the Congress Alliance who was arrested in 1956 for treason and not until 1960 was he acquitted of the charges.³⁹ Obviously the trial was a great

³⁷ JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 227.

³⁸ André Odendaal and Roger Field, *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex La Guma* (Bellville, Cape Town: Mayibuye Books, UWC, 1993), xix.

³⁹ The court found none of the accused guilty and they were all acquitted: "On all the evidence presented to this court and on our findings of fact... it is impossible for this court to come to the conclusion that the ANC had acquired or adopted a policy to overthrow the state by violence." Edward Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: The Black Man's Struggle for Freedom*

drain on La Guma's financial and personal/psychological resources and in addition his personal situation was aggravated by several events prior to 1960. In 1956 he quit his position as SACPO-organiser probably due to financial problems in the SACPO which made it difficult for La Guma to be in the forefront of the political struggle. In the 1957-elections La Guma campaigned strongly for the white candidate from the Congress of Democrats, Piet Beyleveld, but the coloured voters also had the choice of supporting the Non-European Unity movement, and La Guma's candidate was heavily defeated. In 1958 he barely escaped an attempt of assassination and in 1959 he was arrested when trying to enter Nyanga township. The personal situation for La Guma must have been rather gloomy as he was awaiting the result of the treason trial.

On the macro-level the Congress Alliance, although it represented a radical challenge to the apartheid system by advocating universal franchise and nationalisation of banks and mines, did not on the whole call for a dramatic upheaval or revolution of the present order. The primary goal of the Congress Alliance was "the winning of political and civil rights within the basic framework of South Africa's existing parliamentary democracy."⁴⁰

1960 was a watershed in the struggle for ideological supremacy in South Africa. The demonstration arranged by the PAC on March 21 against the pass laws obtained a considerable following in Langa in Cape Town and Sharpeville. The demonstrations were amiable and peaceful, but in Sharpeville the police lost control and some 67 persons, among them small children were killed and 186 were injured. On 28 March 1960, the government announced that it would be banning the ANC and the PAC, a ban which came in effect on April 8 and on March 30 the government declared a state of emergency followed by massive arrests all over the country- over 20000 people were put behind bars, among them Alex La Guma.

As a political journalist La Guma was very active at the time. Living in Cape Town, La Guma comments on the demonstration arranged by the PAC in Langa (similar to the one in Sharpeville). In a very upbeat tone La Guma notes:

In a superb demonstration of unity, courage and determination, the people of Langa last week scored a smashing success in their struggle against the pass laws... These were the only incidents until ... rioting broke out at Langa in the evening (and) at least five people were killed and an unknown number injured during a night of clashes between the people and the police... On Tuesday morning a tense atmosphere persisted in the township. The police were going from door to door ordering people to work and beating those who refused... Sporadic bursts of shooting continued to take place. Soldiers in the township made no secret of the fact that they were ready to 'shoot kaffirs.'⁴¹

in South Africa (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 401.

⁴⁰ Clingman, *The Novels*, 68.

⁴¹ Alex La Guma with F. Carneson, *New Age*, 24 and 31. March, 1960. Quoted in Odendaal & Field, 142-43.

Arrested during the emergency La Guma bitterly comments upon the suffering of the detainees in an article in *New Age*, September 8 1960. He admits to having been ruined financially and he goes on:

All of us suffered arrest without warrant, imprisonment without trial. We have been humiliated, brow-beaten and pushed around by a hateful police tyranny. We have had police snoopers standing about, listening to our conversations with wives, husbands and relatives.⁴²

Even though the suffering was enormous, he nevertheless insists that

the Emergency was a calamity for Afrikaner nationalism. Perhaps also for the Afrikaner people because they have allowed themselves to be mixed up with Afrikaner nationalism and the Nationalist government.⁴³

Knowing this we have come out of the jails stronger, more determined than before... Therefore, we ex-detainees say, the Nationalist government and all apartheid policies must go. And we dedicate ourselves to their overthrow and to the creation of a new society in which all of us, whatever the colour of our skin, shall be free to live, work and play in dignity and peace⁴⁴

There is, arguably, some confusion as to when *A Walk in the Night* was actually written. While Cecil Abrahams states that the novel was completed before entering jail André Odendaal & Roger Field refer to an interview with La Guma's wife, Blanche La Guma, who claims that he finished the novel in prison (probably August 1960).⁴⁵ According to an interview with Liz Gunner, however, Alex La Guma confirms that *A Walk in the Night* was written prior to his imprisonment.⁴⁶ It is therefore difficult to gauge to what extent the mood of *A Walk in the Night* can be seen against the backdrop of the events of Sharpeville and Langa. Apparently more convinced than ever in his objective of getting rid of the apartheid regime La Guma was simultaneously disillusioned at the time with coloured politics and coloured participation in the resistance struggle, even though he did not often explicitly voice this disillusionment.⁴⁷ It is a disillusionment which can be summed up in

⁴² Quoted in Odendaal & Field, 146.

⁴³ Odendaal & Field, 146.

⁴⁴ Odendaal & Field, 148.

⁴⁵ "The five months in prison during the emergency were not wasted for Alex. He was able to finish the manuscript of *A Walk in the Night* which he had started in 1959." Odendaal and Field, xiii.

⁴⁶ Alex La Guma interviewed by Liz Gunner, London, June 1984 (unpublished).

⁴⁷ His disillusionment was confirmed in my interview with Blanche La Guma (February 1998) and also referred to in his comments on *A Walk in the Night*: "One of the reasons I called the book *A Walk in the Night* was that in my mind the coloured community was still discovering themselves in relation to the general struggle against racism in South Africa. They were walking, enduring, and in this way they were experiencing this walking in the night until such time as they found themselves and were prepared to be citizens of a society to which they wanted to make a contribution. I tried to create a picture of a people struggling to see the light, to see the dawn, to see something new, other than their experiences in this confined community." Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 49. And Odendaal and Field write: "Concerned about the implication of the divided political response by coloured people to the State of Emergency and the liberation struggle, he also urged the

Gerald Moore's commentary on the emergency situation: "In 1960, the blacks of Sharpeville died alone."⁴⁸

5.4.1 Michael Adonis: Resistance without a political agenda

It has already been noted how apartheid politics, as in the case of Michael Adonis, incite, as Foucault suggests, "refusal, blockage, and invalidation"⁴⁹ in its attempts to control the oppressed. At the same time *A Walk in the Night* transmits a world inhabited by people who seem both unconscious of the outer world of political strife and conflict and the political mechanisms which govern their day-to-day existence. This subsection analyses briefly how Michael Adonis' inability to analyse in some depth or detail, beyond the political rhetoric, the underlying causes of his oppressive situation, effects a response to oppression which is at best symbolically subversive, and politically counter-productive.

Michael Adonis' comprehension of and interest in the political forces at work hardly transcends the borders of his own self-centered world into any kind of political analysis of the situation in District Six. Far from being exceptional, however, Michael Adonis' low resistance profile seems to be more in line with most oppressed people throughout history who have "rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity. Or better stated, such activity was dangerous, if not suicidal."⁵⁰ His lack of ideological/political consciousness (at one time he plans to move to the US to escape oppression!) seems linked to the fact that he does not experience apartheid ideology on an abstract level. As Piven and Cloward underline:

First, people experience deprivation and oppression within a concrete setting, not as the end product of large and abstract processes, and it is the concrete experience that molds their discontent into specific grievances against specific targets. Workers experience the factory, the speeding rhythm of the assembly line, the foremen, the spies, the guards, the owner, and the pay check. They do not experience monopoly capitalism.⁵¹

Michael Adonis' lack of knowledge of or interest in the macro-level is clearly underlined when the taxi-driver tries to "explain" why the whites act like they do by referring to capitalism:

coloured community to seriously assess their relationship with the struggle to liberate South Africa and the rest of the continent. Our place is with the active forces of progress so we can honestly claim that we deserve our place in the sun." Odendaal and Field, xiii.

⁴⁸ Gerald Moore, *Twelve African Writers* (London, Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland: Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1980). Not until 1976 were many young "coloureds" shot down in the streets along with their black comrades." Gerald Moore, 105.

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), 11.

⁵⁰ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985), xv.

⁵¹ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed. How They Fail* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 20.

'It's the capitalis' system,' the taxi- driver said. 'Heard it at a meeting place on the Parade. Whites are like that because of the capitalis' system' 'What the hell do you mean-capitalis' system?' Michael Adonis asked. 'What's this capitalis' system you talking about?' 'I can't explain it right, you know, hey,' the taxi-driver answered, frowning. 'But I heard some johns on the Parade talking about it. Said colour bar was because of the system. Shit.' (17)

Although one would not expect Michael Adonis to debate or even "understand" fully the underlying causes of apartheid, his comments emphasise a situation repeatedly stressed by Freire:

As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically 'accept' their exploitation. Further, they are apt to react in a passive and alienated manner when confronted with the necessity to struggle for their freedom and self-affirmation.⁵²

It is an "acceptance" which means surrender since Michael Adonis never seems to harbour faith in the possibility for "constructive" agency against the oppressive order, clearly distanced from Fanon's insistence on an almost Cartesian agency for the colonized subject:

I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom... It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal condition of existence.⁵³

As Michael Adonis' negotiations with the apartheid system never give the reconstitution of self a chance he takes refuge into a world where transactions are not only a one-way street. Joining the gang seems the only way of sustaining some sort of dignity and recognition as his escape into gangsterism can be understood as a way of avoiding the gaze from the oppressors. This refusal to satisfy apartheid's demand for recognition by eluding the subject positions to which apartheid seeks to confine him is Michael Adonis' way of "revenging" the dismal treatment he has been subjected to. His self, so badly damaged by apartheid oppression, is being reconstituted through killing and gangsterism. Michael Adonis' more positive self-image through recognition and acceptance from the Others in one way essentialises him as a representative of the Other, but there is never any doubt that such a fixation is primarily due to apartheid oppression. While Michael Adonis' new subject position thus functions as a moral indictment of the apartheid system, it also serves as a minor subversion of that very system (through his symbolic acts of defiance), and at the same time as an undermining of subaltern resistance since his acts of defiance are

⁵² Freire, 40.

⁵³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 231 and 232. His view of agency is clearly expressed in the following passage: "For the Negro who works on a sugar plantation in Le Robert, there is only one solution: to fight. He will embark on this struggle, and he will pursue it, not as the result of a Marxist and idealistic analysis but quite simply because he cannot conceive of life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery and hunger." Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 224. And further: "It is not because the Indo-Chinese has discovered a culture of his own that he is in revolt. It is because 'quite simply' it was, in more than one way, becoming impossible for him to breathe." Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 226.

individualized, a-political and thereby lacking in transformative force. The ambiguity of Michael Adonis' subject position as both a replica of colonialist discourse and as a rejection of that very discourse underlines the complexity of subaltern existence under apartheid. He is fixated into a double bind situation as his refusal to accept the subject-position imposed by apartheid sends him into another, problematical subject-position which leaves little room for resistance and agency in a politically subversive sense. Thus, Bhabha's theory about the destabilizing effect of the avoidance of the gaze is discursively and psychologically relevant, but does not in the case of Michael Adonis initiate an alternative construction of self which opens avenues to a restored world.

The complexity of the predominantly dark terrain of District Six signals profound textual anxiety about not only the socio-economic consequences of apartheid oppression, but of subaltern moral depravity and political passivity as well. The walk in the night takes us beyond the apartheid battle-field and desperately illuminates a hegemonical situation where resistance never seems to move outside the darkest streets of District Six.⁵⁴ By merely describing the situation on the Cape Flats, the surface narrative apparently refrains from intervening in the political sphere by not agitating for change to rectify the dismal conditions. By interrogating assumptions of subaltern essentialism and by "explaining" the construction of (negative) subaltern subject positions with few redemptive exits *A Walk in the Night* projects a narrative where Michael Adonis' prominent role may seem to seriously undermine counter-hegemonic presence in a subversive sense beyond the very existence of subaltern representation.

5.4.2 *The potentials of the crowd: recovering subaltern resistance?*

While Michael Adonis gradually evaporates as a rebel in a political sense, other actors who are potentially more agency-oriented will be examined in this subsection. It has already been noted that subversion and resistance are less dramatic or spectacular in *A Walk in the Night* compared to *A Grain of Wheat*, and this subsection explores the ramifications of the potential subversiveness and resistance of Franky Lorenzo and the crowd. In particular the subsection discusses to what extent symbolism impacts on the understanding of the novel's ideological message.

⁵⁴ JanMohamed distinguishes between hegemony and domination, placing dominance in terms of the "exercise (of) direct and continuous bureaucratic control and military coercion of the natives" and was terminated by independence. The hegemonic phase is marked by the moment of independence, within which "the natives accept a version of the colonizers' entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions and mode of production." See Abdul JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," in *Race, Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 80-81. This distinction between dominance and hegemony is overlooked by Fanon, and would be disputed by Ngugi who insists on the continuity between the colonial and post-colonial periods rather than its rupture.

By sporadically entering the dark streets of District Six in connection with the murder of Doughty and the killing of Willieboy, the crowd first intervenes by its mere presence as if querying -by indirection- the legitimacy of Raalt's presence:

The crowd was silent and Constable Raalt, writing in his notebook again thought, They hate us, but I don't give a bloody hell about them, anyway... (63)

It is through Franky Lorenzo that the anonymous crowd is given a face. Lorenzo emerges as the crowd's leader after Doughty's murder by taking John Abrahams, the overrunner, to task by telling him to be less cooperative with the police: " 'You've said enough already, Johnny' " (62). And when Raalt reprimands him Franky confronts him, admittedly in silence, but mimetically head-on: "Still he met the constable's eyes, holding them with his own, until he felt his wife tugging at his arm..." (63). In stark contrast to Michael Adonis' encounter with the police where he dared not "look straight into the law's eyes" (11) Franky Lorenzo's return of the gaze is here a matter of confrontational defiance, foreshadowing the crowd's temporary physical destabilisation of apartheid powers later in the novel. Fanon sums up the situation of such an eye-to-eye encounter in the following way:

When their glances meet he (the settler) ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive. They want to take our place. It is true for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place.⁵⁵

Angered by the senseless killing of Willieboy the crowd, which in the beginning posed no threat to the police beyond Franky Lorenzo's interference, intervenes violently by attacking the police van of Raalt and Andries: "Fists thumped on the metal bodywork and a shower of brickbats rained suddenly down on it, but the driver got the vehicle under control and ploughed slowly through the mob"(89).

Intercepting temporarily the smooth running of the apartheid state apparatus and thus representing a threat to apartheid authority, the crowd effects the only non-verbal, violent resistance against the forces of the apartheid regime in the novel: "The driver (one of the policemen) stooped quickly and took the boy by his ankles. He was in a hurry to get away from there, and felt nervous and anxious" (88).

Kathleen M. Balutansky seems to overinterpret the incident, however, when claiming, referring to Sharpeville, that "The freshness of the event seems to account for the intensity of La Guma's description of the hostile crowd in *A Walk in the Night*."⁵⁶ Besides the uncertainty about when *A Walk in the Night* was actually written, the similarities between the two incidents are few and far between as the District Six crowd is placed in a completely different context than the Sharpeville crowd who demonstrated politically against the hateful pass books. Apart from (perhaps) Franky Lorenzo, there seems to be nobody in the crowd whose act of "terrorism" is directed by strong political motives; in

⁵⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 39.

⁵⁶ Balutansky, 4.

fact the crowd's reaction could have happened anywhere where the representatives of law and order trespass upon the territory of the oppressed. The attack is at best a protest of despair and contempt, quite contrary to the stark demonstration of will to change the political order that the Sharpeville incident showed:

'Must have been one of those skollies. Always interfering with people.' 'They all end up like that. Did he have a knife?' 'Shot the poor bastard in cold blood.' 'That's all they know. Shooting us people.' (87)

It could be argued, however, that the significance of the crowd is not so much linked to what the crowd actually does, i.e. its spontaneous reaction to the oppressive forces, but to its metaphorical implications through the accompanying sea imagery, repeated throughout the novel, first in connection with the discovery of the murder of Doughty:

Then Michael Adonis saw the tenement crowd spill onto the pavement and into the street, eddying for a moment and then drawn in a small whirlpool around the vortex of a man in shirtsleeves and baggy grey flannel trousers. (46)

The crowd eddied and rippled for a few moments and then parted as a heavy, wine-bloated man pushed his way forward. (58)

And after the senseless killing of Willieboy the intensity of the crowd's reaction increases:

The crowd roared again, the sound breaking against the surrounding houses. They wavered for a while and then surged forward, then rolled back, muttering before the cold dark muzzle of the pistol. The muttering remained, the threatening sound of a storm-tossed ocean breaking against a rocky shoreline... The mutter of dark water eroding the granite cliffs, sucking at the sand-filled cracks and dissolving the banks of clay. (87)

Focusing on the sea imagery linked to the crowd, Balutansky calls *A Walk in the Night* a "fiercely optimistic political vision." By claiming that the latter line ("The mutter of dark...") "is an ominous symbol of the end of the people's forbearing and the beginning of their erosion of the oppressive system,"⁵⁷ she explains how the sea imagery takes precedence over the bleakness of the surface structure. But the sea imagery returns on the last page where it is linked, not to the crowd, but to Joe who "made his way to the sea..." (and would) "hear the relentless, consistent pounding of the creaming waves against the granite citadels of rock" (96). Balutansky is at pains to fit her previous interpretation of the sea-imagery with Joe when she writes:

Thus, although Joe's benign thoughts are unable to sway Michael from the current of pettiness and waste, he at any rate is not lost, since he remains linked to the sea and its eroding movement in the metaphor of the destruction of apartheid.⁵⁸

Balutansky's reading is problematic in the sense that it annuls the contradictory signals which she herself partially admits. Since Joe is "unable to sway Michael" away from crime,

⁵⁷ Balutansky, 26.

⁵⁸ Balutansky, 27.

he is very worried and disappointed about having both lost the fight against the evil forces at work and thus lost his "brother:"

'Mike, maybe it isn't my business, you see? Maybe it got nothing to do with me, but you like my brother. I got to mos think about you. Jesus, man, why, you even gave me money for food. There's not a lot of people give me money for food...'(74)

Joe's linkage to the "optimistic" aqueous "metaphor of the destruction of apartheid" is ambiguous for several reasons. Joe has never had any relationship to the crowd and his over-all passivity, at least politically, reechoed in the last sequence where he would "*bear* (my italics) the relentness, consistent pounding..." Similarly Joe's encounter with the sea after having lost Michael Adonis is equivocal, the sea being both mysterious and attractive:

In the morning he would be close to the smell of the ocean and wade through the chill, comforting water, bending close to the purling green surface and see the dark undulating fronds of seaweed, writhing and swaying in the shallows, like beckoning hands. And in the rock pools he would examine the mysterious life of the sea things, the transparent beauty of starfish and anemone, and hear the relentless, consistent pounding of the creaming waves against the granite citadels of rocks. (96)

The attraction of the sea ("the chill, comforting water" and "the transparent beauty of starfish and anemone") is counterpoised to its darker sides, i.e. the dark seaweed hands which seem to beckon him to come closer. This balancing between "light" and "dark" between life and death (suicide?) project an image not only of a fragmented self, but of a political situation which is still unresolved.⁵⁹ The ambiguity is augmented by the fact that the beaches, far from remaining an oasis for everybody, may be subjected to the apartheid laws: " 'Joe: I hear they're going to make the beaches so only white people can go there,' he said" (10).

From this perspective Joe's situation is more precarious than ever. The sense of ambiguity is strengthened in the final scene where Grace, Franky Lorenzo's wife, is in bed feeling the knot of life within her. Balutansky argues that Grace Lorenzo

has within her the individual devotion and the collective strength of the crowd that will nurture her embryo to a healthy growth. The emphasis seems to be on the conjunction of the two 'pregnancies' and on the differences. Grace's aqueous womb will provide for the fruitful growth of the rage and anger. Thus, through the final image showing Grace restlessly feeling the knot of life within her, the novel ends with the same structural and thematic irony that shapes it. For, it is not Grace's real pregnancy which provides the positive resolution of the ending but the symbolic imagery which, in providing a contrast to Michael's embryonic and destructive rage, links the growing embryo in its watery environment with the sea and the crowd in their symbolic erosion of the repressive Apartheid system.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Michael Wade, "Art and Morality in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*" in *The South African Novel in English: Essays in Criticism and Society*, ed. Kenneth Parker (New York: African Publishing Company, 1978), 177-78.

⁶⁰ Balutansky, 28.

Balutansky's "fiercely" positive reading of the imagery at the end is questionable for several reasons. The naturalistic, tragic ending of the novel (with the murder of Willieboy, Joe's unresolved situation and Michael Adonis' leap into gangsterism) is not unambiguously counterbalanced by the "erosion of the repressive apartheid system."

The imagery of the embryo is linked both to Michael Adonis and Grace Lorenzo. In Michael Adonis' case the embryo or foetus symbolizes the repressed hatred against the system as it builds up gradually inside his stomach during his roaming around in the night:

And deep down inside him the feeling of rage, frustration and violence swelled like a boil, knotted with pain...(12)

...and the little knot of rage reformed inside him again like the quickening of the embryo in the womb...(16)

He said, aloud, 'Ah, hell', and cursed, climbing the stairs and nursing the foetus of hatred inside his belly. (23)

Balutansky correctly observes: "Since the seed of this embryo is itself infected and malignant, the foetus is hopeless and Michael's rage ends in random violence."⁶¹

In one sense the embryo in Grace's belly is undoubtedly contrasted to Michael Adonis' embryo of anger, her embryo identified as the knot of life within her. But Grace will recall only too well her husband's very ambivalent reaction to the news of the prospective new life, the embryo thus also signalling the inability of the oppressed to engage in planning their own future, in taking, so to speak, the future in their own hands. On receiving the news that his wife is expecting the sixth child, Franky Lorenzo "was trying to decide whether it was good news or bad" (35). The news forces him to critically examine how they, the subaltern, come to grips with their own situation:

They say, mos, it's us poor people's riches. You got no food in your guts, and you got no food for your children, but you're rich with them. The rich people got money but they got one, two kids. They got enough to feed ten, twenty children, and they only make one or two. We haven't got even enough for one kid and we make eight, nine - one a year. Jesus. (36)

The fact remains that one more baby means one more stomach to fill in an already impoverished environment. The embryo could mean the beginning of a new cycle of endless suffering and oppression, a walk in the night *ad infinitum* even though Grace, as everybody else who is oppressed, is "restlessly waiting for the dawn" (96). On the other hand, with the new beginning in Grace's belly, there is this hope of breaking the cycle of hopelessness so that out of the frustration and anger some form of resistance may emerge. Grace's belly could tentatively signal the romantic vision of what is desirable beyond the semi-determinism which seems to haunt District Six. This romantic vision is linked to Grace's husband, Franky Lorenzo, whose previous intervention signals a self potentially

⁶¹ Balutansky, 28.

capable of participating in the transformation of a new crowd or generation of people more consciously resisting apartheid, filling the imagery of “the water eroding the granite cliffs, sucking at the sand-filled cracks and dissolving the banks of clay” with political content. There is a sense that Franky Lorenzo’s dream or romantic vision, as he confronts the policeman’s eyes to replace the dominant ideology with the new order and break the impasse of laissez-faireism, might one day be realised through conscious and deliberate intervention. But such a vision is not wholeheartedly supported by the symbolic structure and even less by the surface structure, thus profoundly interrogating the grand narratives of liberation politics which totalise historical experience by reducing its diversity to a one-dimensional, all-encompassing logic. In a somewhat astonishing move for a liberation fighter so enmeshed in resistance politics La Guma, in a way which begs respect, posits a discourse which is deliberately localised in a terrain of micro-politics and where subaltern agency is critically and profoundly queried. For La Guma, writing back to the centre, whether it is in white Pretoria or in London, involves complex negotiations which imply contradictions and ambivalences in the representation of the Other and where there is sometimes coalescence, sometimes tension between the main narrative and its symbolic ramifications. The complexity is moreover confounded because purge and restoration in a cultural sense cannot be done in a clinically “clean” way since anti-colonial discourse is intersected with other discourses which make the confrontational stance in these counter-hegemonic texts anything but unequivocal.

In an almost postmodernist thrust, the text negates its position, at least to some extent, as privileged counter-hegemonic discourse by accepting the ambivalence and ambiguity of counter-hegemonic discourse, rejecting the totality of such a privileged discourse which, according to Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, tends to be “capable of situating, characterizing, and evaluating all other discourses, but not itself infected by the historicity and contingency that render first-order discourses potentially distorted and in need of legitimisation.”⁶² The consequence of such ambivalence and doubt is its similarity to a postmodernist project where notions of knowledge, truth, objectivity, so important for the liberation movement, are interrogated. The exposure of such complexity in a situation of liberation politics bespeaks an aesthetic concern which takes precedence, fictionally speaking, over the urgency of the political turmoil out there.

⁶² Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, “Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism,” in *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*, ed. Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1988), 87.

6. *And A Threefold Cord*

6.1 Introduction

The disparity between colonialist and counter-hegemonic discourse is grounded in the notion of difference where the colonialists' justification for proceeding with their colonial enterprise is at least partly premised on difference. Whereas difference is seen by the oppressed as a weapon in beefing up oppression, La Guma as well as Ngugi effectively undermine any notion of difference as a rallying point for describing the relationship between the coloniser and colonised. As we have seen this deconstruction is primarily done by exposing the fragile subject positions of the major colonial actors on the fictional scene. In Ngugi this stripping of individual colonial superiority is accompanied by the fall of colonialism in Kenya whereas the fragility of the apartheid representatives in La Guma's first novel is more detached from the development on the macro-political level. Besides reflecting the political situation of the time the lack of transformative cues in *A Walk in the Night* is partly counter-balanced by the tiny cracks in the solidity of apartheid hegemony. Similarly Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* soberly tones down the post-independent euphoria and exposes cracks, not only in the dying European colonialism, but among those Kenyans who are supposed to manage post-independent Kenya. Both Ngugi and La Guma thus invoke a double kind of counter-hegemonic response in the texts by resisting colonial imposition and simultaneously resisting a dogmatic inversion of the colonialist/apartheid discourse.

The notion of the invincibility of the apartheid state is not dramatically shaken in *And A Threefold Cord*. Since the action of the novel is contained within the borders of the Cape Flats with little *physical* interference from the apartheid regime, the representatives of the apartheid system play a rather peripheral role in the novel. But the physical isolation of the oppressed illuminates the practical, sinister consequences of apartheid as the Group Areas Act has effectively barred any proper communication between the different racial groups and has cemented, if not aggravated, the squalid conditions under which the oppressed people live. The only physical contact with the oppressors comes through their nightly raids where all human considerations are being neglected in the apartheid representatives' frantic hunt for criminals with dagga, weapons or the like.

6.2 Apartheid hegemony and its different representations

And A Threefold Cord renders a more nuanced picture of the South African white population than *A Walk in the Night* by offering quite contrasting representations of the whites. By exploring how these different representations are inscribed in the text the present section analyses the implications of such a variety of representations. In particular the section focuses on the ambiguous relationship between the coloured protagonist, Charlie Pauls and the white petrol station owner, George Mostert, projecting an image of a border-crossing exercise which is not easily completed in the muddy terrain of a binary world. There is,

however, some sort of change in the racial set up of this novel compared to the previous one in at least two ways: first the racial interaction between the coloureds on the Cape Flats and Misuss Nzuba, an African lady who is very positively portrayed, and secondly the liminal white person on the border between the Cape Flats and the white community, indicating the possibility of a contact zone between the whites and non-whites.

The contact zone between George Mostert and the predominantly coloured community of the Cape Flats is Mostert's petrol station where Charlie Pauls goes to get scrap material for his leaking roof. The crossing of borders is made possible, however, only because Mostert is an outcast in the white community, poor, almost out of business and as a consequence rejected by his wife. Not all that atypical in the apartheid state, George Mostert seems nevertheless to have escaped the mobilisation of economic resources to address the poor whites by the white community, probably both because he is English and because he is self-employed.¹ Although he seems to be somewhat better off economically than the inhabitants on the Cape Flats, he is worse off socially, inhabiting a no man's land with no real contact with anybody, be they white, coloured or black. And it is this solitude and loneliness which form the basis for his rapprochement to the coloured community. His initial approval of Charlie's invitation to join them is grounded in a desperate need for human contact and an instinctive understanding that such an encounter is without peril. George is thus about to question the very fundamentals of the apartheid state by opening up the compartmentalised terrain of apartheid policy. It signals the subversion of colonialist discourse without reversing the Manichean divide so common in combat literature. But crossing the line is not only a matter of individual preference, but of systemic resistance to a regime he is socialised into. Reversing the socialisation process based on the notion of difference proves therefore very difficult and cannot easily be completed despite Charlie's ingratiating and flattering remarks: "George Mostert felt a little stir of pleasure. It was somebody to pass a word to again, although he thought dismally, the fellow wasn't *his* kind, really" (38). His growing ambivalence to the transethnic negotiations results in a loss of courage to cross the borders; racial pride or some vague adherence to a supremacist ideology outweighs the loss of human contact and human encounters: "He preferred to go back and risk the sharp hooves of loneliness" (82). Not even Susie Meyer, who has escaped into fancy music and sex, can seduce George Mostert into crossing the racial border. This negative reversal of his previous decision to go and visit Charlie shows how apartheid ideology is impregnated in George Mostert's mind through efficient ideological interpellations and functions as a stimulus-response mechanism for even liminal persons like George Mostert. A similar or not-so-different class background is on the brink of levelling racial difference, but not quite, justifying JanMohamed's claim that "the function

¹ The mobilisation of economic resources was mainly geared at Afrikaner economic advance. Before the institutionalisation of apartheid in 1948 the Afrikaner business community addressed the poor white problem in order to rescue 300.000 whites from poverty. Only as late as in the 1970s was this Afrikaner economic policy in the process of changing into a more market-oriented approach. See i.e. Leatt, 4- 84.

of class is replaced by race.”² His situation of liminality makes either choice difficult: if he chooses not to cross the racial borders, he will remain lonely and desolate but will uphold his subject position as a white; if he chooses to mix he will lose his identity as a white person. The exposure of the fragility of Mostert’s subject position subverts the binarism of apartheid rationality and reveals that the accumulative interpellations of apartheid ideology have, despite their success on the behavioral level, not managed to smooth over the contradictions and uneasiness of the easily conceptualized, but equally irrational racial differentiation of the present regime. The irony is that George Mostert’s liminality is in one sense of a more serious character than that of Charlie’s since George is doubly excluded whereas Charlie can return to the coloured community of the Cape Flats. When JanMohamed claims that the colonised has a limited choice of “either petrification or catalepsy,”³ he speaks for the marginalised whites as well. The preliminary interaction between Charlie and George may thus be interpreted as an attempt of a low-key act of counter-hegemonic resistance, giving weight to Bhabha’s argument that resistance ‘is not always an “oppositional act of political intention.”’⁴ The net result is, however, that apartheid takes all, leaving behind the marginalised victims on both sides of that very system. In contrast to Doughty in *A Walk in the Night* who due to class reasons lives in the predominantly coloured District Six George eventually clings to the remnants of apartheid ideology by rejecting in the last instance any accommodation to a non-apartheid position.⁵ If there is an attempt to “understand” apartheid mentality through George Mostert, it is filtered through the lenses of anti-apartheid ideology where apartheid’s absurd consequences also on the whites themselves are exposed. In a sense *And A Threefold Cord* thus represents a development from *A Walk in the Night* where the white representatives (Raalt and Andries) do not transcend any apartheid frontier, neither in deed nor thought.⁶ In *And A Threefold Cord* the transgressing of boundaries is, from the dominant discourse, cartographically or spatially as non-existent as in the previous novel, but the rapprochement between George Mostert and Charlie, despite its ultimate breakdown, underlines the text’s subtle insistence on identity rather than difference. The George Mostert-Charlie relationship subverts the simple self-Other, or master-slave relation by projecting a more complex discursive relation in which they both appear simultaneously as just not adversaries but comrades-in-mind. Moreover the contrast between George Mostert and Van den Would, the Police Constable who heads the nightly raids against the people in the

² JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 7.

³ JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 5.

⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 110.

⁵ The situation of Doughty and George Mostert is not quite parallel since District Six at the time housed various ethnic groups while the Cape Flats was a consistently non-white housing area, giving George Mostert little choice but visiting the Cape Flats as a secretive affair.

⁶ Doughty’s special position does not detract from this assertion since he is completely cut off from apartheid ideology and policy. Doughty functions as a deracialized human being, even though he is used, totally unfounded, as a scapegoat for white supremacy by Michael Adonis.

shacks of the Cape Flats, is so striking that it subtly debilitates the metallic solidity of apartheid hegemony and unlocks the fixed, stereotypical position of the reversed Other by humanising segments of the white constituency. Producing meanings which expose contradictions and gaps in apartheid discourse the novel queries, in particular through George's behaviour, any essentialist demonisation of the white population group. On the other hand, however, the abusiveness of Van Den Woud, a replica of Raalt in *A Walk in the Night*, who conducts the raids without attention to the most basic rules of human decency, personal integrity or political and civil rights, underlines the overwhelming thrust and heavy hegemonical over-representation of the apartheid Other and the all-inclusive atmosphere of apartheid oppression in the novel. By reinstating the equilibrium of the apartheid state machinery it seems as if white potential for change is effectively being foreclosed.

6.3 Exploring the subaltern voice

Undoubtedly Alex La Guma's intention with *And A Threefold Cord* was to speak with the voice of the marginalized, transforming the medium of English into the local, albeit self-constructed dialect of the down-trodden and focus the attention on those people who had been totally repressed and neglected by the apartheid regime. Many critics have noted that one of La Guma's aims for writing *And A Threefold Cord* was to act as a social historian. La Guma himself remarked that the novel "is a matter of recording history or recording situation."⁷

I was interested in recording creatively the life of a community under various conditions. I thought it would help to bring to the reader an idea of what goes on in the various black areas of the Cape and that through a novel this would be done. And having had some experience of the Cape Flats and having met some of the people there and having had some idea of their lives, well I just got stuck into *And A Threefold Cord*.⁸

La Guma tries to render "reality" by creating a sense of "referential illusion" where the author, as Barthes states in another context, "give(s) the impression that the referent is speaking for itself by absencing himself."⁹ By doing so La Guma attempts to authenticate the fictional characters by stripping them of the intellectual, political luggage the author himself might have. This authentication and deconscientisation of the actors in *And A Threefold Cord* (as well as in *A Walk in the Night*) may further explain the total absence of specific references to political incidents in South Africa that made national and international headlines in the late fifties and the early sixties. Accordingly the world beyond the squatter camp did simply not exist, it seems, to most squatters in a conscious, political sense.

⁷ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 70.

⁸ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 70

⁹ Roland Barthes, "Historical Discourse" in *Structuralism: A Reader*, ed. Michael Lane (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 149.

And A Threefold Cord is written within a realist fictional framework which does not mean a mimetic representation of Cape Flats reality as this “reality” is only accessible through the representation by others. This is in line with Paul Ricoeur who, by reworking the concept of mimesis, shows how a narrative discourse “can be both symbolic and realistic at one and the same time.”¹⁰ This means that

narrative discourse does not simply reflect or passively register a world already made; it works up the material given in perception and reflection, fashions it and creates something new, in precisely the same way that human agents by their actions fashion distinctive forms of historical life out of the world they inherit as their past.¹¹

Like section 5.3 of *A Walk in the Night*, this section is concerned with the consequences of the oppressive political and socio-economic living conditions of the subaltern, in this novel in the basically coloured community of the Cape Flats at the outskirts of Cape Town.¹² By examining the oppression in basically spatial categories the present section engages in a discussion of how oppression influences the very nature of subaltern character formation and self-construction, first in relation to the Pauls’ family and then in relation to the whole community on the Cape Flats. Moreover the section queries the notion of solidarity in the novel’s epigraph and its potential materialisation in the community of the subaltern.

La Guma’s recording of the “here and now” of the Cape Flats functions as a harsh indictment against the apartheid government, not only because of the brutal nightly raids, but also due to the picture the text paints of the socio-economic conditions and human deprivation under apartheid. The transformative powers of poverty are portrayed as basically destructive.

And A Threefold Cord leaves no doubt about the fundamental deprivation and oppression of the people in the shanties and *pondokkies* on the Cape Flats:

The people of the shanties and the pondokkie cabins along the national road and beside the railway tracks ... watched the sky and looked towards the north-west where the clouds, pregnant with moisture, hung beyond the mountain. When the bursts of rain came, knocking on the roofs, working-men carried home loads of pilfered corrugated cardboard cartons, salvaged rusted sheets of iron and tin to reinforce the roofs. Heavy stones were heaved onto the lean-tos and patched roofs, to keep them down when the wind rose. (2)

6.3.1 Spatial constraints and oppression: the members of the Pauls’ family

By exploring how the squatters’ oppression in the novel is textually expressed in the severe spatial constraints under which they live¹³ this subsection focuses on how these constraints

¹⁰ White, *The Content of the Form*, 148.

¹¹ White, *The Content of the Form*, 178.

¹² See also my article, Anders Breidlid, “Resistance and Reaction in Alex La Guma’s *And A Threefold Cord*,” *SOAS Literary Review* 1, no.1 (1999), <<http://www.soas.ac.uk/soaslit/home.html>>

¹³ In this connection Ramphela’s multi-dimensional concept of space is a useful parameter as she distinguishes between physical, political-economic, ideological-intellectual and

have a detrimental effect on the personal relations in the family. Foucault's linking of space to the concepts of power¹⁴ can be seen in relation to the apartheid regime's use of spatial restrictions to impose its powers on the subaltern. According to Ramphele physical space "sets the limits to one's physical location in the world and defines the parameters of the space one can legitimately appropriate for use."¹⁵ The physical spatial limitations of *And A Threefold Cord* refer both to the segregated community of the Cape Flats and the domestic spatial restrictions due to economic deprivation. Clearly an affront to human dignity, the consequences of both communal and domestic physical constraints contribute to defining the oppressiveness of the situation under which the central characters in the novel, the members of the Pauls' family, live:

The kitchen, like the rest of the house, was small and cramped, and everybody moved cautiously in it, retreating and advancing with care to avoid collisions. The bench and a few boxes, all of which could be stored under the table, took the place of chairs, and the walls were hung with blackened utensils. The walls were of old corrugated iron, patchily painted inside, held upright by salvaged wooden supports... The cardboard ceiling bulged and the menfolk walked with a stoop under it, and it was dark and mouldy with dampness. (12)

Predictably such a cramped existence is the cause of conflict, in *And A Threefold Cord* in particular between Ronald and Charlie. The spatial constraints enforce a certain pattern of interaction where privacy and the possibility of solitary reflection are effectively blocked. The dilapidated state of the restricted private physical space (the house leaks and is about to fall apart) is paralleled with the squalor of the surroundings:

It could hardly be called a street, not even a lane; just a hollowed track that stumbled and sprawled between and around and through the patchwork of shacks, cabins and wickiups: a maze of cracks between the jigsaw pieces of the settlement, a writhing battlefield of mud and straggling entanglements of wet and rusty barbed wire, sagging sheets of tin, toppling pickets, twigs and peeled branches and collapsing odds and ends with edges and points as dangerous as shark's teeth, which made up the fence work around the quagmires of lots. (21)

The private physical space is not even safe from intruders, blatantly shown in the apartheid regime's nightly raids where the police, totally unexpectedly, force their way into Charlie and Frida's place while they are asleep.

Charlie Pauls woke up slowly... Somebody outside was yelling, 'Open up, jong, or we'll break the ... door down.' And Charlie sat up, disentangling himself from the woman, and shouted: 'Awright, awright, I'm coming.' Beside him, Fred was whispering, frightenedly: 'What is it, Charlie?' 'Law,' he growled. 'Got a blerry raid again.' (86)

psycho-social space. The line of demarcation between the various spatial categories are however not that clear-cut, which Ramphele herself recognizes: "There is a constant shift in focus in social interaction from one spatial field to another." Mamphela Ramphele, *A Bed Called Home: Life in the Migrant Labour Hostels of Cape Town* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1993), 9. In my analysis I draw on the categories wherever they can cast light on the novel.¹⁴ See e.g. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nutall, *Text, Theory, Space* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 2.

¹⁵ Ramphele, 3.

This lack of respect for private, personal space and the verbal abuse following in its wake is a telling tale of dominant ideology:

He (the sergeant) sneered at the woman (Frida), 'Blerry black whore'...He (Charlie) said, frowning, 'Hell, what you crying for? They didn't do nothing, did they?'... 'He said I was a whore.' (88)

Impairing the inhabitants' self-image and self-esteem, the accumulative effects of both physical constraints and violent transgressions encourage a self-deprecating attitude which inhibits the role of the novel's characters as agents of transformation. The attempts at negative subjectification and reification by apartheid ideology is being resisted, but is at the same time to be reckoned with since apartheid imposition and intrusion is both ideological and material/physical. In other words, there is a severe limitation on their inhabited space, or as Ramphele states, their psycho-social space:¹⁶ "It could be argued that one is given certain cues by one's environment that encourage one either to expand or to narrow one's expectations and aspirations in life."¹⁷ The problem is captured by the Marxist alienation thesis that "the animal becomes human and the human becomes animal"¹⁸ and by Fanon who refers to the use of animal terms to describe the oppressed under certain conditions:

At times this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal. In fact, the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms... When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary.¹⁹

6.3.2 *Questioning solidarity in the community: the dehumanisation of subaltern self*

The terrain which these people inhabit, this subsection argues, accelerates a dehumanising process where romantic ideas of subaltern communal living and solidarity is being seriously questioned. Poignantly La Guma's description and representation of the characters in *And A Threefold Cord* is very often linked to animal or robot imagery, thus underscoring the alienation and sub-human conditions of the characters discussed above.

Ronny is described as "wild like a horse" (14), and his killing of Susie is described in animal-like imagery: "Under the savage, enraged, cutting caresses of the blade she could do nothing but surrender as to another lover(94)." Susie Meyer "devours" one man after the other in an insatiable, almost animal-like lust: "'Always blerry men. If it not one is the other one. Just staying with men, men, men.'" (61) ... She laughed a shrill, unnerving sound, something like a cross between a crow and a jangle... (63). And even Caroline, Charlie's seventeen year old sister is portrayed in a robot-like way: She was "married and great with pregnancy... a machine ...wound up and set to perform an automatic

¹⁶ Psycho-social space "is delineated by the 'inhabited space' that one finds oneself in... (and) has a major impact on the self-image of individuals and their perception of their place in society." Ramphele, 7.

¹⁷ Ramphele, 7.

¹⁸ Ramphele, 7.

¹⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 42.

function”(43). Jorny Pauls, Charlie’s younger brother, has been infected with the ghetto disease, proclaiming Ronald’s murder in a way which tells of a social animal already stripped of human compassion or understanding.

‘Hell, man, my other brother, Ronny-boy, killed a goose. He’s in jail now, reckon and think. Chopped her dead with a knife.’ And he stabs himself in the belly with a grubby finger and screams in a mockery of assassination, staggering about the hill of muck. Everybody laughs, and he cries proudly: ‘Further, Charlie reckon they might hang Ronny-boy up on a rope. He clasps his hands about his throat, choking and gurgling, while the others shout and chuckle with glee.’ (100)

And there is Roman who competes with Ronald about Susie and mistreats his wife and kids:

He beat his wife’s head with faggots, or her face with the his fists. He kicked her ribs and broke her arms. When he became tired of beating her, he whipped the children. Most of the time he was in a state of drunken savagery, and when he had no wine, or the means of procuring any, he was as dangerous as a starved old wolf ready to turn on anybody who got in his way. (64)

In one of the “interchapters”²⁰ Drunk Ria is described as a “parody of a female” and similar to a

shopwindow dummy...first abandoned for years in a sewer, then rescued, crudely stuffed with odds and ends, dressed in a gown of sewn-up dish-rags, and finally, with the use of some faulty clockwork, made to walk. (27)

When Charlie and Roman fight, the text resorts to animal imagery: “They circled each other like terriers. Charlie fainted, and then hit the other, left and right, in the belly, bringing Roman’s guard down” (25). Not even George Mostert in his liminal situation escape animal characteristics: “So he potted around the service station like a stray dog sniffing at a familiar scent...” (37). The accumulation of animal-like imagery is coupled with a situation in the squatter camp almost devoid of grace and solidarity. When Drunk Ria appears “as a sub-human shopwindow dummy” the children naturally laugh at her, but even the grown-ups seem mischievous as the evil, societal pecking order is in full operation: “the inhabitants of the tin shanties...shoo-ed the children, scolding them when ignored, and then joined in the laughter at the woman’s inebriated antics” (27). This is a far cry from the threefold cord of the epigraph whose ideological content seems antithetical to the general mood of the Cape Flats:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour.
For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow;
but woe to him that is alone when he falleth;
for he hath not another to help him up
Again, if two lie together, then they have

²⁰ I call the chapters in the novel which transcend the main narrative and deal with the more general situation on the Cape Flats for “interchapters.” Compare the use of interchapters in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Pan Books with Heinemann, 1975).

heat, but how can one be warm alone?
And if one prevail against him, two shall
withstand him, and a threefold cord is not
quickly broken
Ecclesiastes iv: 9-12

As La Guma explains, the title signals the necessity of solidarity:

The title (*And A Threefold Cord*) comes as an excerpt from a biblical quotation. I think it is Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12. This excerpt emphasises the idea that the individual alone cannot survive, that he has to have somebody around him to which to cling in times of difficulty and adversity and I tried to convey the idea that loneliness of people, loneliness of individuals is one thing, but at some time or another they've got to turn away from their loneliness and try to associate with other people. And I try throughout this novel to show that while people have got their own problems, these problems are not actually entirely their own but they are shared by other people.²¹

The illusion of the threefold cord is "reinforced" in one of the "interchapters" (chapter seventeen) where, ironically, the struggle for water takes on an ominous note.

Water is precious, and in the yards of those whose sand-lots had been laid with plumbing, the queues of scarecrow children (note the description) form up with buckets and cans and saucepans. Those who owned the plumbing and the taps sold the water to those who lacked such amenities. Because a man has got to live, hasn't he? (71)

There are two things to be noted here: first the unscrupulous exploitation by those who have water against those who do not. There is no grace, no willingness to accept delayed payment even though the situation is serious, like getting water to a funeral. In short the solidarity of the threefold cord is definitely broken again. Some sort of hierarchical order is established between the deprived and the less deprived, captured for example in the following exchange: " 'One tin of water, mister.' 'Say, please. Haven't you got no blerry manners?' "(72) The text is extremely harsh on the exploiters among the shack dwellers:

Water is profit. In order to make this profit, the one who sells the water must also use it to wash his soul clean of compassion. He must rinse his heart of pity, and with the bristles of enterprise, scrub his being sterile of sympathy. He must have the heart of a stop-cock and the brain of a cistern, intestines of lead pipes (72).

The other point is the exceedingly ironic, albeit tragic situation where the slum-dwellers have to pay for water when the sky pours down with rain almost every day in the winter: "There is water in the threatening sky, and water in the healthy earth; water in copper pipes and iron cisterns" (71). The unanswered question is of course why those with no plumbing are unable to collect any of the fresh water from the sky during the winter for consumption. Admittedly they are very poor, but it remains somewhat of an enigma that there is no way for them to collect and store the free water. Given La Guma's authorial emphasis on solidarity and communal responsibility ("they've got to turn away from their

²¹ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 71.

loneliness and try to associate with other people”), the text implicitly queries if not a concerted effort from the “waterless” community could have dispensed with their “double” oppression during the rainy season. At this point, however, the textual agenda seems to underline, aligning itself with the rigid determinism La Guma wanted to fight, the vicious cycle of poverty, making the squatters passive, apathetic and individualistic and totally incapable of alleviating or changing their own dismal existence.

Ronald’s stubbornness is not atypical for the attitude of the community:

Ronald had said, ‘I’m not asking you to fight my battles, understand? You stay out of my business, hey?... Leave my business alone, man. Man, I can handle him myself,’ Ronald had said and left Charlie. (56)

That the question of solidarity is very critical in the community is again underlined when Charlie, after the death of the two children, returns to his ideological hero, the rooker.

‘He said something one time, about people most of the time takes trouble hardest when they alone. I don’t know how it fit in here, hey. I don’t understand it real right, you see.... Like he say, people can’t stand up to the world alone, they got to be together. I reckon may be he was right. A slim juba. Maybe it was like that with Ronny-boy. Ronald didn’t want nobody to help him. Wanted to do things alone. Never was a part of us. I don’t know. Maybe, like Uncle Ben, too. Is not natural for people to be alone. Hell I reckon people was just *made* to be together. I -’ (111)

6.3.3 *A community not at peace with itself*

There is a sense, then, that the text to a certain extent appropriates the essentialist notions of the non-whites expressed by apartheid ideology. Arguing that the introverted violence and laissez-faireism of the Cape Flats community reinforces the restrictions and limitations imposed by the apartheid regime this subsection queries the capacity of such a community to transcend both its territorial and mental borders, despite its redemptive moments.

An analysis of the characters in the novel exposes, not primarily as critic Jenni Tennant claims, “the ability of the human spirit to rise above hardship and denial,”²² but rather that the characters come close to how the representatives of the apartheid regime characterized the non-whites. The narrative approaches the whites’ characterization of the “Cape coloureds,” who, according to V.A. February, were “refer(red) to ... as children, indolent, ne’er do wells, happy-go-lucky, gregarious and shifty people.”²³ February is thus in many ways correct when insisting that “Reduced to this sub-human condition, La Guma’s characters can only love and hate, fight and kill with animal brutality.”²⁴ This attests to apartheid’s success in subjecting the colonial Other to apartheid’s own image as the subaltern unwittingly reinforces and reinscribes colonial, apartheid discourse. What the text

²² Jenni Tennant, “A threefold cord which cannot be broken”, *Weekly Mail*, 28 July - 3 August 1989.

²³ V.A. February, *Mind your colour: The ‘coloured’ stereotype in South African literature* (London & Boston: Kegan Paul International Ltd., 1981), 167.

²⁴ February, 156.

does, however, in contrast to apartheid discourse, is to illuminate the causal link between negative subjectification and material and psychological conditions. This is in itself not without its perils, however, since fixating the causal chain may project an image of the subaltern where the potentials for transformation and agency are negatively linked to rigid determinism. In the Pauls' family there is a sense that lack of initiative and laissez-faireism aggravates an already very difficult situation. Even though Ronald's job is extremely important to the whole of Pauls' family since he is the only breadwinner, Ronald is not willing to let the job govern his existence: " 'I'm not putting me out for that blerry old job.' 'They'll give you the sack, man.' 'Well, I am not married to the job, mos' " (7). While Ma is very concerned about Ronald and his sticking to his job (" And to Ronald: 'You better make quick. You'll miss that first bus.' "(12)... ' Keep quiet, *blikssem*, 'Ma Pauls threatened, holding a ladle like a weapon. 'Keep quiet and go to work.' "(13)) Ronald's response, if at all subversive, is in no way conducive to improving the lot of the Pauls' family.

Later Charlie and Freda's negligence and sloppiness are the direct causes of the death of Freda's children. Charlie has not come around to repair Freda's stove which she repeatedly has asked for whereas Freda left the house locked with the two children inside. The final catastrophe occurs as the stove tips and the two children are burnt alive in the shack. Their sense of remorse is overwhelming:

Freda stirred on the bed and moaned, and said in a whispering sob, 'I locked the door. I locked the door. Maybe - 'Freda, Freda' 'I Locked the door'...'Yes,' he told her, gently. 'Awright, you locked the door. But I could have fixed the stove. You asked me to, and I didn't.' (111)

Still La Guma is at pains to "explain" that the depravity in the squatter camp is the major cause for this attitude of negligence, as well as the deviant or delinquent behaviour among its inhabitants. Even Freda and Charlie's disaster can eventually be explained in terms of economic deprivation and sub-standard housing. Uncle Ben's ruined life through excessive drinking, to Ma's big dismay, is on a superficial level self-inflicted, but can easily be explained in terms of escape mechanisms in the hopelessness of squatter existence. Uncle Ben himself tries to rationalize his own situation:

'A man got to have his *dring*, don't I say? But with me is like as if something force me to drink, drink, drink. Is like an evil, Charlie, forcing a man to go on swallowing till he's fall-fall with liquor. An evil, man.' (48)

Ronald's sullenness cannot, however, be explained in terms of deprivation alone; in one way he is better off than the others in the Pauls family since he has retained some dignity by having a job. Nevertheless his anger explodes in the murderous attack on Susie Meyer. Introverted violence is explained, in another colonial context, by Zahar (interpreting Fanon) as

an uncontrolled eruption of pent-up aggression built up over long periods of unbearable pressure. During the pre-revolutionary phase such aggressions are not

yet aimed at the colonizer, whose military superiority makes him appear unassailable, but are discharged in unpolitical behaviour patterns of avoidance.²⁵

And as Fanon writes:

The native is being hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments, of the colonial world. The first thing the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits. This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess, his dreams are of action and of aggression.²⁶

This destructive violence thus functions reactively among the squatters, effectively distracting the attention away from the real causes of their poverty-stricken existence. While the squatter rarely meets the representatives of the apartheid state, the numerous encounters with the other inhabitants who are similarly oppressed reflects his/her own misery and effects aggression. As Fanon says:

While the settler or the policeman has the right the live-long day to strike the native, to insult him and to make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native; for the last resort of the native is to defend his personality *vis-a-vis* his brother.²⁷

Only in confrontation with the apartheid representatives does violence function as some sort of catharsis, for example when Charlie, at the policeman's provocation, hits out so the policeman stumbles to the ground. The blow relieves some of the tension inside Charlie as he ponders: "He thought. That was a nice blow, never ever got one in like that. Then he began to laugh. He laughed silently, his body shaking under the yellow oilskin" (92). There are, however, redemptive aspects of slum life which save the novel from bleak determinism, both in the Pauls' family and beyond. As JanMohamed points out about the Pauls' family:

Their proper manners, their sense of sexual and moral propriety, and their values and goals – the disapproval of drinking, the heavy investment in a decent funeral in spite of their poverty, and the consuming importance of a substantial and respectable house – are indistinguishable from European bourgeois ethos and practice.²⁸

Moreover after Pa's death some unity across borders can be noticed: "Relations and neighbours were assembled there, swarthy mulatto faces and very dark Africans, all looking solemn, for there is unity even in death" (73). And there is the African woman Nzuba, standing out as a prime example of compassion, warmth and solidarity in the midst of

²⁵ Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation* (New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 54 – 55.

²⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 41.

²⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 43. Sartre describes the same phenomenon as an example of alienated behaviour enforced by what he calls the Manichean structure of colonial society. See Jean Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 685.

²⁸ JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 241.

hopelessness, who offers both psychological and material help to the Pauls' family in time of crisis.

But not even Nzuba's comforting can break the pervasive spell of anxiety (not the least for the future) which for example Ma formulates:

'Ja, the children,' Ma sighed. 'The children. But I don't know, Nzuba. Is like there's something happening with the family. But may be is in all families, hey. Jorny-boy don't want to go to school no more, always turning sticks, playing truant. Scratching around the rubbish tip with other children whole day. And Ronny is getting wilder and wilder, I reckon, and I don't know what Charles is going to do.' (70)

It is Ma's articulation of a society not at peace with itself which dominates the mood of *And A Threefold Cord*, the above-mentioned redeeming traits notwithstanding.

There is a sense of oppressive constrictions and limitations which also relates to the limited political choices La Guma's characters can exercise in the apartheid world, reflecting the curtailment of public debate during the apartheid years which left little room for alternative ideological interpellations in the 1960s. Accelerating a subjectification process which is already propelling towards the bottom, the political and ideological constraints add to an oppressive situation which make transformative processes almost impossible. In this sense the text subverts the postmodern notions of border-crossings and more or less undermines the possibility, within the borders of the Cape Flats, of identities created within the experience of multiple narratives. In many ways the novel confirms the modern notion of border drawings which reproduce relations of domination, subordination, and inequality. There is a sense that Charlie's reconstitution of self beyond depravity is also being obstructed, if not completely blocked by the negative narratives in his home environment. This sense of stasis may effectively undermine any notion of liberating self-understanding indispensable to the creation of the collectivist spirit indicated in the epigraph.

The Charlie-George Mostert encounter offered, however, the possibility of a productive exchange of narratives beyond the self-contained borders of the Cape Flats. It is this transgression of borders by Charlie (and partly by George Mostert) and Charlie's proclamation of the arbitrariness of borders which initially strikes the text's flickering light.

6.4 Examining alternative narratives: Resistance and complicity among the subaltern

There is a sense that the low-profile subversions against apartheid oppression in *A Walk in the Night* is being duplicated in *And A Threefold Cord*, that there is a striking similarity in levels of resistance and (non-) agency between his first two novels even though JanMohamed may be right in claiming that *And A Threefold Cord* is "far more subdued in tone than its predecessor."²⁹ While the previous section queried the degree of solidarity and unity on the Cape Flats the present section explores the articulations of resistance and complicity among the subaltern. In contrast to *A Walk in the Night* there is no physical

²⁹ JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 238.

intervention against apartheid imposition in *And A Threefold Cord*, but the present section argues that the level of consciousness, as expressed by Charlie Pauls, is more articulated than that of Franky Lorenzo. By analysing Charlie Pauls' crossing of the mental borders the section questions to what extent the conscientisation process materialises itself in political praxis. The section goes on to exhibit how apartheid interpellations have internalised a certain perception of life which at best make change and resistance problematic and finally the section discusses how the text's symbolism impacts on the general ideological thrust of the novel.

6.4.1 *The border-crossings of Charlie Pauls*

It is Charlie Pauls, this subsection argues, who most explicitly explores alternative routes of existence on the Cape Flats, first by crossing the borders to George Mostert and then by investigating the possibility of extending his territory in a more explicit political sense. By focusing on intellectual and political territorial border-crossing or expansion spurred by the alternative interpellations signalled by the rooker, the present subsection explores in particular how Charlie involves himself in self-reflexive activities where self-construction and potential of resistance is based on other narratives beyond the Cape Flats environment. Moreover the subsection engages in a critical debate about the extent to which Charlie Pauls' new insights impact on the mood of non-agency on the Flats.

Partly written while La Guma was detained for four months in Maitland and Roeland street police station in 1963,³⁰ *And A Threefold Cord* like *A Walk in the Night* shows few signs of a direct link between La Guma's personal experiences with the raw power of the apartheid regime and the fictional text besides a general mood of gloom. La Guma was at the time already banned (under the Suppression of Communism Act) from publishing anything and could not take part in any political activity. On the political macro-level La Guma and the South African Coloured People's Organization (SACPO) had experienced a humiliating defeat when their candidate, as has been noted, lost heavily in the 1958- elections. Even though La Guma and his co-accused were acquitted in the Treason Trial, the Sharpeville massacre and the government's banning of the ANC shattered the SACPO (after the 1959 conference called the South African Coloured People's Congress or CPC) and many CPC leaders went into exile where a number of them either joined the PAC or the ANC.³¹

There was an attempt to heal the split in the coloured ranks which had been effective since 1943 at a convention in July 1961- the South African Coloured National Convention. The

³⁰ See Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 15.

³¹ For a comprehensive account of South African coloured politics, see Gavin Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall: A history of South African 'Coloured' politics* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1987) . The very controversial question of whether it is adequate to treat the coloureds as a separate group is also discussed in Lewis, but not explicitly touched upon in this thesis. La Guma himself was in this period undoubtedly very much occupied with political issues linked to the coloured people, particularly in the Western Cape.

convention adopted a moderate policy against the apartheid legislation and “in favour of negotiation, for a bill of rights, and for a capitalist economy.”³² Surely such a platform was not easily accepted among the radical, Marxist-oriented coloureds like La Guma. It is notable, however, that even this moderate alliance was crushed by the apartheid regime through banning its meetings and arresting its leaders. Since the ANC also was more or less in disarray, black opposition to the apartheid regime seemed more or less crushed by 1963-4. Briefly, the 1960s did not signal a time of change in South Africa. From a coloured perspective, there were in the 60s few political leaders among the coloured population to identify with. As R.E. van der Ross states:

But the price of participation in new jobs, of obtaining liquor licences, business opportunities, and so on, was often, if not political acquiescence, at least political silence and withdrawal. And so many of the Coloured middle-class were rendered ineffective or less effective for political purposes, even if their silence did not imply acceptance of apartheid. . . . Apart from the temptation in the form of social status or economic gain, there was the simple and understandable urge on the part of a large number of people to be left alone to conduct ‘normal’ lives. These people withdrew from the political maelstrom, or kept away from it, because they had no inclination toward the kind of participation, because the political developments, cross-fire and infighting of the past ten or twenty years had been bewildering and, to many, unproductive, or because they were afraid.³³

It is this lack of political commitment which La Guma addresses, both in *A Walk in the Night* as well as in *And A Threefold Cord*. The articulation of resistance or agency, although on a very theoretical level, is more elaborate in *And A Threefold Cord* compared to La Guma’s first novel since *Charlie*, in contrast to Michael Adonis and even Franky Lorenzo, is able to import and adopt, to a certain extent, intellectually “subversive” ideas that question status quo. Transcending the concrete troubles of everyday existence to a level of abstraction beyond the here and now, Charlie’s perception of life on the Cape Flats is more laboured than most shack dwellers. Helped by the rooker Charlie looks for viable ideological alternatives:

‘Know what he say? Always reading newspapers and things. He said to us, the poor don’t have to be poor. . . This burg say, if the poor people all get together and took everything in the whole blerry world, there wouldn’t be poor no more. Funny kind of talk, but it sounded awright,’ Charlie said. He continued, warming up: ‘Further, this rooker say if all the stuff in the world was shared out among everybody, all would have enough to live nice. He reckoned people got to stick together to get this stuff.’ (49- 50)

Drawing on his own experience and intellectually supported by the rooker, Charlie begins to question fatalistic attitudes among the coloured:

‘Listen, Uncle Ben, one time I went up to see Freda up by that people she work for, cleaning and washing. Hell, that people got a house, mos, big as the effing city hall, almost, and there’s an old bitch with purple hair and fat backsides and her husband

³² Lewis, 271.

³³ R.E. van der Ross, *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid: A Study of Political Movements among the Coloured People of South Africa, 1880-1985* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1986), 297-98.

eating off a table a mile long, with fancy candles and dingus on it. And a juba like me can't even touch the handle of the front door. You got to go round the back. Eating off nice shiny tables, plenty of roast meat and stuff.' Charlie scowled and swallowed some wine. 'Bible say love your neighbour, too. Heard that when I was a lighty in Sunday school.' (50)

Charlie's concern about the haves/have-nots- dichotomy surfaces again and again as he poses the crucial, existential questions:

'Is funny there got to be a lot of people like us, worrying about the blerry roof everytime it rain, and there's other people don't have to worry a damn. Living in wake-up houses like that house Freda work by, like I was telling Uncle Ben, or even just up the road here. . . . Some people got no money, some people got a little money, some people got a helluva lot. Rooker I was working with laying that pipe, he reckon poor people ought to form a union. Likely.' (54)

Bernth Lindfors is critical of how La Guma has integrated the political message in the last chapter:

And again La Guma's message seems to be thrust upon his novel instead of springing from it. His attempt to focus on the message in the last chapter is labored and clumsy. The novel would have been more powerful if La Guma had been content to paint a very vivid picture (which he does remarkably well) and had then left his readers to draw the appropriate lessons from it.³⁴

He argues further:

The work is marred only by the author's clumsy attempt to wring a political moral out of it, a moral which, even with the greatest straining, does not entirely fit the tale. It may be difficult to write about South Africa nowadays without taking a political stand, but an author who has control of his art, an author such as La Guma, should try to make his message an outgrowth rather than an appendage of his story.³⁵

It is difficult to see how Charlie's meditations in the final chapter is an appendage of the novel or comes as a surprise to the reader. Charlie's references to the rooker in the final chapter are consistent with his previous remarks about him throughout the novel. From this perspective, it is surprising that Charlie has not more fully developed the rooker's thoughts towards the end, particularly since the rooker's ideas comply with Charlie's feeling of injustice, given his own experiences with the enormous economic disparities in the country. Lindfors' misgivings about the message as political appendage must be seen in relation to his apparent misinterpretation of Charlie's final comments when he writes:

The real significance of Charlie's concluding remarks lies in his new willingness to endorse political views which had attracted him earlier but which he had been unwilling to put forward as his own. . . . This sort of human-togetherness—

³⁴ Bernth Lindfors, "Form and Technique in the Novels of Richard Reve and Alex La Guma," *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts* 2 (1966): 15.

³⁵ Bernth Lindfors, "Review of *And A Threefold Cord*" in *Books Abroad* 40, no.1 (1966), 116.

unification for the sake of revolution - Charlie Pauls finally accepts as necessary in South Africa.³⁶

There is nothing to substantiate Lindfors' claim that Charlie has moved from reiterating the gospel of the rooker to a new position where Charlie has integrated his message in his own mind and is going to act accordingly. Charlie likes what the rooker says, as he has done throughout, and he thinks that what he says is *maybe* correct, but he doesn't understand it fully:³⁷ "I don't know how it fit in here, hey. I don't understand it real right, you see. But this burg had a lot of good things in his head, I reckon'" (111).

The problem is, contrary to what Lindfors claims, that Charlie has not turned into a politically active person and there is no indication in the surface narrative that his praxis in the future will be different. Even though the burden of responsibility rests heavily on Charlie, since he cannot claim to be completely ignorant of the underlying causes of their deprived situation, he never proceeds to ask relevant follow-up questions like: If the rooker's views are important, what can actually be done to change our lot? There is, however, nothing unique about the seeming discrepancy in Charlie's knowledge and praxis. As Ndebele states:

we learn that knowledge of the existence of oppression does not necessarily enable one to fight it... People, without being actually organised, will not necessarily go out to fight for their rights.³⁸

While the interventions of the rooker have conscientised Charlie up to a point, there is little ideological backing on the Cape Flats for direct resistance against the unjust order. The idea of a union referred to earlier in the novel is for example never discussed again, implying that Charlie's new perspectives remain mostly in his head. The decolonising of Charlie's mind, important as it is *per se*, is thus not enough to help decolonise the whole Cape Flats community mentally. On the contrary, the next subsection shows how La Guma's text exposes a terrain where the counter-hegemonic struggle is fought in a landscape dominated by colonial thinking and ideology.

6.4.2 *The colonising of the mind: Ma and Uncle Ben*

While there is a sense that there is some sort of link between Franky Lorenzo's intervention and the subversive action by the crowd in *A Walk in the Night*, this subsection argues that the ordinary people on the Cape Flats, as textually portrayed in *And A Threefold Cord*, seem so informed by the apartheid government and the underlying ideology (hegemonical influence) that Charlie's imported, progressive ideas are not seen as appropriate or relevant.

³⁶ Bernth Lindfors, "Form and Technique," 15.

³⁷ Gerald Moore interprets Charlie's situation similarly: "La Guma has sought to show in Charlie the dawning of an ideological consciousness, but he has weakened this by making it only a recollection of some half-understood words spoken by a 'slim rooker' with whom he once worked." Moore, 112.

³⁸ Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, 50.

This lack of understanding of what is politically pertinent or important, ideologically interpellated as the Cape Flats inhabitants are by dominant discourse, is clearly closely related to the intellectual spatial constraints on the predominantly coloured Cape Flats. Ramphele defines intellectual space as

The capacity for intellectual awareness of one's environment and the position one occupies in the power structure of one's society. It helps individuals to demystify ideology and to limit the impact of the constraints of a hegemonic order in social relations.³⁹

This space sets the norms for "legitimate" discourses - oppositional discourses being of course illegitimate by the apartheid regime - but they are also reckoned to be illegitimate by family members like Ma and Uncle Ben. As Uncle Ben says when Charlie refers to the revolutionary ideas of the rooker:

'Sound almost like a sin, that. Bible say you mustn't covet other people things... I heard people talking like that,' Uncle Ben said. 'That's communi' things. Talking against the government.' (50)⁴⁰

Ma and Uncle Ben's reading of the Bible, for example, doesn't, as Charlie implies, help them to understand their situation any better:

Charlie said: 'Ma read the Bible every night. It don't make the poor old toppy any better...' 'We got to trust in the Lord, Charlie,' Uncle Ben said. 'Your Ma read the Bible because she got troubles. She got family troubles. You, and your pa sick, and young Ronny going wild, and Ca'line with her body going to have a baby, and everybody poor.' (49)

The hegemonical order so ingrained in the inhabitants of the squatter camp plays on the appeal to Christianity and government as non-negotiable, sacred, unchanging social realities and comes close to what Marx called "fetishism," "a belief that the existing society, its institutions and ideology were natural and unending."⁴¹ Even Charlie's reflections after the calamity of the two children underscore a fatalist view which is the anti-dote of resistance and opposition:

'Hell, man, may be we is both to blame. Maybe it was just put out like that, the way some people say. Maybe is God, Uncle Ben and *ou* Brother Bombata talk like that. I don't know for sure, Freda.' (111)

By questioning the revolutionary spirit among his own people and by describing the extremely low consciousness level of those living in the disadvantaged areas the text comes close to Frantz Fanon's understanding of the unconscientised, alienated colonised:

³⁹ Ramphele, *A Bed Called Home*, 5.

⁴⁰ Only Aunt Mina dares to speak out against the policemen during the nightly raid: " 'I'm not frightening for your magistrate, colonel. I paid seven fines awready and I can pay seven more.' She possessed the ferocity of an old African buffalo' " (90).

⁴¹ Alan Swingewood, *The Novel and the Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 57.

which shows itself in their identification with a racial stereotype and causes all kinds of frustrations and complexes (and) prevents the exploited from gaining an insight into their economic plight and gauging it in terms of their own position as a class.⁴²

As the colonised is alienated, he/she

becomes more and more uncertain with the conduct he should adopt. His potential of revolutionary resistance decreases proportionately, since his acceptance of the colonialist ideology prevents him from realizing the causes of alienation.⁴³

It is this hegemonical domination or what Ngugi calls the colonising of the mind which explains why the novel's characters, apart from Charlie and Aunt Mina, are so silent and inactive on political issues despite the profound nature of their depravity. Like in *A Walk in the Night*, again in a remarkable gesture to the art of storytelling (and to "historical" representation⁴⁴), La Guma refrains from intervening politically in the text by not catapulting Charlie or anybody else into the domain of agency and resistance. While the poverty of the area and the depravity and oppression of the people should, materially speaking, provide a fertile ground for counter-insurgency given a spokesman, agitator or a leader with competence to channel all the bent-up aggression on the Cape Flats, but he or she is conspicuously absent in the text.

6.4.3 *The fly, the rain, the carnation and the bird: redemption beyond the apartheid discourse?*

While the previous subsections questioned the potential of political agency among the subaltern on the Cape Flats, the present subsection examines the symbolism in the text and queries whether the pervasive use of symbols counteract the general impression of political pessimism. Whereas the surface narrative is bleak and only marginally, if at all, optimistic some critics elicit a less bleak message either by employing some sort of futuristic projection of what might happen next or by resorting to an analysis of La Guma's symbolism. Gareth Cornwell's contends that the novel "dramatizes the hope that the instinctive loyalties among family and friends may in the course of time extend to the larger family of class, and thence to all humanity."⁴⁵ This carefully optimistic reading of the novel is problematic since the novel says nothing about "the course of time" apart from the bird imagery at the end (which Cornwell does not mention): the may's and the if's are thus only

⁴² Zahar, 15.

⁴³ Zahar, 40.

⁴⁴ Since all representations are biased, *And A Threefold Cord* is biased in its point of departure, the representation of the oppressed cut off from colonial representation. But *And A Threefold Cord* still transcends the constraints of combat literature where the political signals seem more unanimous, one-dimensional and oppressive and where political intervention takes place even without an historical basis, *And A Threefold Cord* refrains from such 'fictional' representations.

⁴⁵ Gareth Cornwell, "And A Threefold Cord: La Guma's Neglected Masterpiece?" (University of Western Cape: Seminar paper, December 5, 1995), 17.

conjectures with no basis in the textual material. That the hope is very faint and uncertain, is also underlined by Cornwell when he a bit later states that

The only challenge to the reader's suspension of disbelief lies in the vague realm of probability – the likelihood of the development in Charlie Pauls' consciousness, the likelihood of his interpreting and articulating his experience in the way that he does.⁴⁶

The point, however, is that what Cornwell calls La Guma's message, "as it finds expression in Charlie's impassioned exhortation at the end of the novel"⁴⁷, is not Charlie's exhortation, but a reference to the rooker's message, which Charlie reckons "maybe ... was right" (111). As Cornwell earlier correctly states: "he is wrestling with the more profound notion that the individual may find fulfilment only in community."⁴⁸ But as has been pointed out earlier there is no indication in the surface narrative that his wrestling with these thoughts will materialise in praxis - apart from the Marxian belief that history will run its determined course.⁴⁹

Kathryn Balutansky is the critic who elaborates a so-called optimistic vision most fully. As with *A Walk in the Night* Balutansky tries to establish a dichotomy between the surface narrative of the novel and the symbolism:

In spite of the seemingly overwhelming pessimistic outlook of the narrative, the same bent which inspired the symbolic images of *A Walk in the Night* also permeates those of *And A Threefold Cord*, La Guma's symbols puncture the narrative to counter its pessimistic impact. Here, as in the previous novel, the images function as a reminder that a portrayal of the desperate condition of Black people under Apartheid is by no means a surrender to it.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Cornwall, 19.

⁴⁷ Cornwall, 18.

⁴⁸ Cornwall, 17.

⁴⁹ Other critics (newspaper reviews) view the novel more as unequivocally optimistic. Rae Murphy writes: "More than a description of apartheid, it is a story of hope based on the indestructability of the human spirit and the quest for a better life that arises even in the corrupt cesspool of South Africa... One wonders how long the chain of man's inhumanity to man is and when the night will finally end... Brought out loud and clear is the message that as individuals, alone, the victims can only lash out, mostly at their own people and hardly ever at the real enemy, that alone they cannot defeat apartheid. But the necessity to stand together is only stated, not revealed in the novel." Rae Murphy, "*And A Threefold Cord*," *The Canadian Tribune*, 26 July 1965. Jenni Tennant sums up what she thinks is the underlying message: "Yet the novel is also essentially about the ability of the human spirit to rise above hardship and denial... The message steers clear of the obvious political connotations of unity and strength and deals with the day-to-day lives of an impoverished family living in a small corrugated-iron shanty in the Cape. Unity is strength against oppression, but it is no less a strength in the face of grief, hardship and desolation... Although the rain leaves the reader feeling despondent, in keeping with the general understated style of the novel, La Guma never allows the dark imagery to become overpowering. Just when the gloom threatens to obliterate it is broken by flashes of optimism: a flower growing on a rubbish dump, the birth of a child... What could have been a bleak novel is lifted by flashes of life and hope. It provides all the Charlie Pauls with inspiration and serves as a warning to those who would oppress them- a threefold cord cannot be broken." Jenni Tennant, "*And A Threefold Cord*."

⁵⁰ Balutansky, 51-52.

But the important symbol of the fly, struggling in the puddle of wine, pointedly illustrates the close link between the image and the surface narrative:

A fly, trapped by winter, crawled along a length of splintery planking and hesitated at the dusty edge of the sheer cliff to the floor far below. Its myriad eyes searched the room and its wings were dully iridescent in the gloom. After its initial hesitation, it launched itself into space, buzzing softly and, banking in mid air, it landed on the box between the beds. The fly wiped its wings, and its legs, then hopped forward a little, past a cylinder of flicked ash, and then stopped to rub its face with its forelegs. It seemed to tremble with a chill. Then it took off again, skimmed the bed where Uncle Ben sat and looped, heading towards the dim light beyond the tiny window. But it crashed into the pane and dropped away, recovering in mid air, then buzzed ahead to settle on the sleeve of Charlie's shirt. A hand brushed it away and it sailed across the box again, and settled there. It edged cautiously forward under the sound of voices and reached a drop of spilt wine, then it regurgitated into the drop and drank. (49)

And a little later:

The fly had overturned and was now drowning in the puddle of wine, its angled legs beating the air frantically, its wings trapped. Outside, the rain had reduced itself to a thin hiss, like escaping gas. Charlie reached out and wiped the fly off the box with the side of a hand. The fly fell onto the floor and lay in the darkness, struggling. (50)

In my opinion C. Abrahams sums up the fly imagery adequately:

The inhabitants of the slum are trapped flies who have been unconcernedly knocked down by the racist and class system of South Africa, and in their struggling, collapsing positions they are frantically attempting to save themselves from complete destruction. But the more they flail and thresh to survive, the more hopeless it seems.⁵¹

In Abrahams' interpretation of the fly image the fate of the fly is unambiguous. Despite its desperate fighting it falls to the floor, struggling in the darkness. Balutansky's interpretation is therefore problematic: When the fly is saved from drowning Balutansky writes: "Here the fly is like Charlie when he punches the policeman: the punch provides him with no real victory, but it allows Charlie to continue his search for the solution to the killing effects of Apartheid."⁵² The point is, however, that the fly is only temporarily saved, as it shortly after struggles helplessly on the floor, similar to Charlie's complete helplessness as he doesn't know how to transfer the gospel of the rooker into concrete action. It has already been noted that the punching of the policeman is a temporary relief to Charlie; some of his bent-up anger is liberated through the punch, but as Balutansky correctly observes; "it provides him with no real victory." It is therefore not credible when Balutansky concludes the example of the fly by asserting: "As shown in the preceding example, La Guma's symbols puncture the narrative to counter its pessimistic impact."⁵³ Neither the image of

⁵¹ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 78.

⁵² Balutansky, 51.

⁵³ Balutansky, 52.

the fly, nor the most prevalent symbols of all in the novel, the rain, gives any comfort as to the future. Balutansky correctly observes that

the rain is a symbol of Apartheid as the latter also permeates the lives of the poor people in every way: as surely as the rain, Apartheid has created muddy streets and leaking shanties, fostered illness and death with its accompanying grayness and dampness.⁵⁴

The two most important symbols in the book, the fly and the rain, are thus consistent with the general sentiment of the surface structure, whereas Charlie's political reflections, which potentially may vaguely signal a new direction, can be associated with the symbols of the carnation growing on the dump and the bird flying in the sky. Whereas the sombre symbol of the rain permeates the whole novel, the carnation and the bird appear as isolated instances, almost out of context, the carnation completely isolated on the dump and the bird appearing, to Charlie's big surprise, out of nowhere at the very end of the novel.

As he looked out at the rain, he saw, to his surprise, a bird dart suddenly from among the patchwork roofs of the shanties and head straight, straight into the sky. (112)

Admittedly, the imagery breaks the monotonous darkness of the novel and may symbolise hope, but the isolationist nature of the images cannot support Balutansky's claim that "an indomitable optimism permeates the symbolic images set in opposition to the effects of the rain."⁵⁵ C. Abrahams voices the true sentiment of the novel when he writes:

The novel leaves the reader with little hope that things will ever change for the better in the urban slum. Charlie Pauls is the only character who is able to grasp the meaning of the slum dwellers' fate, but he does not possess the force of character to transform the environment in any significant manner.⁵⁶

6.4.4 *Transcending combat discourse*

Like *A Walk in the Night* the narrative of the Cape Flats is held within an unrelenting realistic framework where the various characters are not reappropriated in reductive frames of reference to fit a simplistic, unambiguous resistance ideal. Most of the squatters seem to have, in Comaroff and Comaroff's term, succumbed to the "colonization of consciousness"⁵⁷, whereas both Charlie (and Aunt Mina) have acquired some sense of "consciousness of colonization."

The similarities and parallels with *A Walk in the Night* abound: Neither *A Walk in the Night* nor *And A Threfold Cord* seem to engage in constructing a "proper" counter-narrative, even if we account for the discursive complexity which a novel *per definitionem* is, as it may

⁵⁴ Balutansky, 52.

⁵⁵ Balutansky, 53.

⁵⁶ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 83.

⁵⁷ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 18.

contain both contradiction and subversion. This does not mean that La Guma's novels are conformist in a colonial discursive sense; the anti-apartheid tone in both novels is indisputable. But by portraying a fairly tarnished version of the Cape Flats (or District Six, for that matter) the texts may be seen to deromanticise the suffering people to a degree that leaves them victims of their own victimization. Similar to *A Walk in the Night* and *A Threefold Cord* describes the successful attempts of the oppressor to enforce hegemonical domination, even though cracks in apartheid hegemony have been noted. And *A Threefold Cord* explores a terrain of oppression, but simultaneously a terrain also grounded in resistance to change, thereby exposing contradictions which are not easily resolved in the real world of liberation and resistance politics and which La Guma refuses to resolve fictionally.⁵⁸ The immediate struggle against ideological, hegemonical domination is at best half-hearted and fragmentary, if at all. Even though Charlie's reiteration of the need for solidarity offers methods for the redemptive transformation of the oppressed, it is mainly theoretical and devoid of praxis. It is therefore of little subversive value that Charlie is, as La Guma underlines, "morally and psychologically higher than the characters in *A Walk in the Night*."⁵⁹

The question which can be posed in relation to both novels is whether the texts, by repressing the homogenising thrust of combat ideology, come close to reducing the "colonial" Other to a negative term in a system, not so much may be of Manichean duality, but of complex ambivalence and ambiguity, and sometimes negation. If that is the case, what are the consequences if the texts refrain from redressing this imbalance by naturalistic description rather than revolutionary prescription? Is La Guma's anti-colonial stance and call for unity among the oppressed (the latter expressed in the epigraph of *And A Threefold Cord*) being modified or even crushed by narratives which in many ways seem to negate the potentials of the oppressed in effecting any kind of change in their dismal situation? Or put differently: does the historical recording of life on the Cape Flats (as well as District Six) undermine any counter-hegemonical intention as the narrative seems to subscribe to Fanon's pre-revolutionary, hopeless "reality"? And finally, what is the effect of counter-hegemonic literature when the exposure of the inherent contradictions between the ideal of solidarity and the praxis of selfish individualism actually may indicate that the oppressor has little to fear from the oppressed?

The uncertainty is whether the disillusioned counter-narratives function reactively by exposing characters who are not "organically bound to historical, political and economic change."⁶⁰ Since the novels do not signal explicit potentials for transforming the society through political activism or insurgency (and even the symbolism is at best contradictory), the texts may in stead seem to evoke a kind of fatalism, conservatism and subordination

⁵⁸ See Cooper for a theoretical elaboration on the issue of contradictions in "reality" and the text. Cooper, *To Lay*, 1-30.

⁵⁹ See Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 84.

⁶⁰ Swingewood, 129.

among the subaltern. In a way there seems in many ways to be textual resignation to a situation where the subaltern are mostly passive, inert and animal-like and who take little or no part in the historical struggle against oppression. From a “resistance” perspective, there is no easy way out of the problematic given the lack of mythologization of the ability or will of the oppressed to initiate change. What can be said is that by inscribing the complex heterogeneity of the internal colonial situation of the apartheid state at the time and by focusing on subaltern non-agency more than real interventions *And A Threefold Cord* as well as *A Walk in the Night* transcend a simplistic combat discourse.⁶¹ A far cry from Albie Sachs’ a gun is a gun is a gun- syndrome⁶² both texts thus avoid the pitfalls of “illusionary” narratives by deromanticising the oppressed characters of the apartheid regime and thus the struggle itself.⁶³ By refusing to reduce complex historical dynamics to a simplistic dichotomy between evil oppressors and deified oppressed, the texts steer clear of what Ndebele calls “spectacular representation.”⁶⁴

It is this rejection of the unflawed, idealistic and unidimensional picture of the oppressed which gives credibility to the squatters. As in *A Walk in the Night* the text from the Cape Flats projects an almost post-modern stance by indirectly attacking a preconceived, foundational notion of the subaltern in combat literature as always already ready for resistance. It is this non-foundationalism of La Guma’s texts which destabilises subaltern identities and questions subaltern agency. By highlighting the helplessness of the subaltern to reproduce anything but the structures of their own subordination, clearly linked if not completely determined by apartheid oppression, La Guma’s first two novels expose a terrain beset with obstacles since there is no short-cut either to a redemptive political solution or to a human renaissance. In La Guma’s fictional account the inhabitants of the Cape Flats still walk in the night. The conscientization process has barely started, and the voice of the subaltern which the author claims to have given to the people who for so long were deprived of the right to speak for themselves is weak, contradictory and fragmentary.

⁶¹ In contrast to other protest or resistance literature in South Africa, La Guma never projected the idea that South Africa would be liberated within the very near future. As Ndebele says: “We all know how, at least in the last twenty-five years of our fully conscious life, South Africa was always going to be free in the next five years.” Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, 47.

⁶² See the first chapter where Sachs is discussed in more detail.

⁶³ Later, after independence in several African countries, many black writers were what Neil Lazarus calls “illusioned” by possessing the illusion that “the era of independence marked a revolutionary conjuncture in African societies.” Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial African literature* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990), 23.

⁶⁴ Interestingly enough, Ndebele accuses La Guma of spectacular representation in his short story “Coffee for the Road.” Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, 40-44

PART II. COMBAT LITERATURE AS POLITICAL COMMITMENT

7. General introduction

The counter-hegemonic fiction of Ngugi and La Guma discussed in Part 1 interrogated not only the binarism between coloniser and colonised, but the potential and problems of subaltern self-construction and resistance within the space of the colonial and postcolonial world. Part 2 sets out to analyse selected combat novels of the two authors where emphasis is more on confrontation with and dislocation of (post-)colonial and apartheid power structures. Contested areas of interrogation in combat fiction are for example the relationship and interaction between content and style and their potential impact on the intended displacement of dominant ideological and cultural codes and the issue of ideological closure.

My analysis of the two authors' combat fiction is structured around three thematic aspects. By first exploring the hegemonic terrain of post-colonial Kenya and apartheid South Africa, my study proceeds to examine the various faces of resistance to the hegemonic order. Finally my analysis discusses how the two authors, in a typically combat fashion, try to impose a determined meaning or understanding of the post-colonial and apartheid terrain by excluding competitive interpretations of the same terrain.

Devil on the Cross and *Matigari* impose, my sections (8.2 and 9.2) argue, a reading of post-colonial Kenya which sustains the binarism of colonial discourse by reversing it. The demonisation of dominant ideology is consistent in both novels, insisting on continuity as the signifying characteristics between colonial and post-colonial times. In La Guma's combat novels the apartheid landscape is portrayed in well-known terms. While the focus in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (10.2) is on the personal sufferings of the resistance fighters through physical and mental torture as well as racial and economic deprivation, *Time of the Butcherbird* (11.2) paints a picture of Boer ideology which is meant to explain the rationale behind the racial and economic oppression in the Karoo.

The sections on resistance reflect a shift in both authors' fiction towards confrontation and armed resistance. *Devil on the Cross* (8.3) projects a vision of a new order through the physical struggle of the masses, spearheaded by Wariinga and ideological old-timers like Muturi and Wangari. At the same time the section queries the credibility of mass agency as exposed in the text. In the section on *Matigari* and resistance (9.3) Matigari's call for armed resistance is meant to project a vision of the peasants and the workers as taking the lead in the revolution. Simultaneously the section discusses some of the representational problems of mass agency in a fictional text.

In the Fog of the Seasons' End (10.3) is La Guma's most direct exploration of the resistance movement on the grassroots level. By first analysing the daily struggles of the resistance fighter, and Beukes in particular, the section proceeds to discuss an issue also examined in

Ngugi's combat fiction: the issue of mass representation in the struggle. For the first time in La Guma's literary career his final novel, *Time of the Butcherbird* (11.3), focuses on black rural resistance and examines the potentials of the rural resistance army as it is portrayed in the novel. The section also discusses how the seemingly unmotivated killing of Edgar Stopes, of English extraction, is linked to the important issue of race versus class as the constitutive *raison d'être* in the resistance struggle.

In the final sections of Part 2 the characteristics of combat fiction are related to the insistence of a determinate meaning and thus the suppression of plural stories. Both *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* (8.4 and 9.4) by contesting the reality designed by dominant ideology, produce another reality with which they interpellate the reader. Whereas *Matigari's* ideological single-mindedness precludes a discussion of the dilemmas of resistance, my section on *Devil on the Cross* queries not so much the novel's coded representation as the lack of vision beyond the days of the new independence. *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (10.4), which exposes the dilemmas of participating in the resistance movement up to the point, there is still a sense, my section argues, that the novel homogenises resistance problematics and shies away from critiquing its own encoded representation. It is a narrational closure which is also seen in *Time of the Butcherbird* (11.4) where the text insists on its interpretation of history and the contemporary situation and suppresses other versions which do not envision a militant break with the historical situation.

The first chapter explained the rationale for Ngugi's reorientation both in terms of his political radicalisation and his profound disillusionment with the post-colonial situation in Kenya and Africa. It is a despair which is linked to the catastrophic failure of the new, indigenous elites to make use of the emancipatory potentials of liberation and nationhood. African nations after independence are, in Ngugi's opinion, *de facto* extensions of colonialism. Ngugi's new literary stance is thus grounded on the political premise that power and hegemony have not changed fundamentally since independence and that the Kenyan people have been deserted by their very liberators. In Ngugi's case this struggle is not only a struggle for political freedom as exemplified in the liberation movement; it is a struggle against the new mutations in the colonialist traditions and within the bourgeoisie. In Ngugi's view these mutations are only new in the sense that they are, at least partly, indigenous, and not in the sense that they constitute a break with colonial ideology, an epistemological revolution. They do not, as Foucault puts it, mark a break, but rather a torsion within the same anxiety.¹ The literary consequences of Ngugi's political analysis of the post-colonial situation are ideologically premised on the binarism between imperialism and neo-colonialism and resistance against those forces:

¹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988), 16.

I shall look at the African realities as they are affected by the great struggle between the two mutually opposed forces in Africa today: an imperialist tradition on the one hand, and a resistance tradition on the other.²

It is this situation that in Ngugi's opinion calls for a literature which confronts head-on the betrayals and the failures of a "new" order which is inextricably linked with the old.

Reechoing Fanon Ngugi insists on a national, combat literature which has to accommodate both form and content to communicate better with a new public: the peasants and workers in Kenya

The crystallization of the national consciousness will both disrupt literary styles and themes, and also create a completely new public... It is only from that moment that we can speak of a national literature. Here there is, at the level of literary creation, the taking up and clarification of themes which are typically nationalist. This may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It is a literature of combat, because it molds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space.³

The lack of epistemological revolution after independence necessitates a new literary epistemology which effects the most radical displacement of dominant cultural codes. Ngugi questions, as does Barbara Harlow in her book *Resistance Literature*, whether Western aesthetics are relevant to "the literary output of geopolitical areas which stand in opposition to the very social and political organisations within which the theories are located and to which they respond."⁴ This means, according to Benita Parry interpreting Harlow, that "traditional modes of assessing aesthetic value must yield to the insistence of ideological exigencies."⁵ It is this urgency of the post-colonial situation which defines Ngugi's new literary credo by calling for a disruption, in Fanon's jargon, of "literary styles and themes." Ngugi's rationale for switching to Gikuyu in his two latest novels is part of this disruption and is summed up by Balogun:

Ngugi switched to a native language-based literature because he wished to liberate his art from the constraints of the Western tradition and broaden its scope by situating it within the primary control of the less exclusivist and more accommodating aesthetic philosophy of the oral narrative tradition.⁶

It is this kind of abrogation which denies, as Wilson-Tagoe states in a different context, "the power and authority of the colonial language as well as its aesthetics, its standards of normative and correct usage and its assumptions of the fixed meanings inscribed in

² Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 2.

³ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 239-40.

⁴ Harlow, xvi.

⁵ Parry, "Some Provisional," 11.

⁶ F. Odun Balogun, "Ngugi's *Matigari* and the Refiguration of the Novel as Genre," in Cantalupo, 187.

words”⁷ which Ngugi’s conversion to Gikuyu wants to achieve. According to Kofi Anyidoho:

There is always a rupture or disjuncture between the intuitive apprehension of the African experience and its forced or transported expression through an alien language with its own aesthetics, models and ideological presuppositions.⁸

Apart from the ideological implications of the switch to a national language, this indigenisation of the language is also communicatively significant in facilitating contact with peasants and other marginalised groups in Kenya. However, his use of an ethnic language instead of the national, indigenous language Kiswahili raises the question of Ngugi’s communicative ambitions to the Kenyan nation as a whole.⁹ The attempt at coordinating the African experience within an African expressive mode is not, in Ngugi’s view, enough to indigenise the novel:

Writing in our languages per se- although a necessary first step in the correct direction- will not in itself bring about the renaissance in African cultures if that literature does not carry the content of our people’s anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control.¹⁰

The biggest problem, Ngugi writes,

facing the growth and the 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: that is, in my case, the people I left behind. There were two interrelated problems of ‘fiction language’ vis-a-vis a writer’s chosen audience: his relationship to the form, to the genre itself; and his relationship to his material, that is to the reality before him. How would he handle the form? How would he handle the material before him?¹¹

By more emphatically turning to indigenous traditions, and in particular orature, for technical assistance, Ngugi picks up, in *Devil on the Cross* and later *Matigari*, Fanon’s observations about the return of oral traditions in ‘combat’ literature:

On another level, the oral traditions-stories, epics, and songs of the people - which formerly were filed away as set pieces are now beginning to change. The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental.¹²

⁷ Nana Wilson-Tagoe, “Post-Colonial Literary Theory and the Theorizing of African Literature,” *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 43 (1995): 111.

⁸ Kofi Anyidoho, “Language and Development Strategy in Pan-African Literary Experience,” *Research in African Literatures* 23, no. 1 (1992): 50.

⁹ See e.g. Simon Gikandi’s articles “Ngugi’s Conversion: Writing and the Politics of Language,” *Research in African Literatures* 23, no.1 (1992):131 - 144 and “The Epistemology of Translation: Ngugi, *Matigari*, and the Politics of Language,” *Research in African Literatures* 22, no.4 (1991): 161-167.

¹⁰ Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind*, 29.

¹¹ Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind*, 75.

¹² Ngugi, *The Wretched*, 240.

The emergence of orature in Ngugi's fiction was also undoubtedly accelerated by the great Nairobi literature debate on the teaching of literature in universities and schools in the 60s and the 70s which questioned the centrality of Western literatures on the syllabus and which resulted not only in accepting African literature as the main focus, but underlined the centrality of African orature in the syllabus. The importance of orature was underlined by three African lecturers in the Nairobi debate, Owur Anyumba, Taban lo Liyong and Ngugi himself:

The oral tradition is rich and many-sided... the art did not end yesterday; it is a living tradition... familiarity with oral literature could suggest new structures and techniques; and could foster attitudes of mind characterized by the willingness to experiment with new forms.¹³

Parry, in her discussion of resistance literature, is concerned with what Fanon's insistence on "disrupting literary styles and themes" actually means: According to her it means

The fantastic and the fabulous, the grotesque and the disorderly, the parodic reiteration or inversion of dominant codes, the deformation of master tropes, the estrangement of received usage, the fracture of authorised syntax. These are among the many textual procedures that can act as oppositional and subversive, and without directly illuminating the struggle or ostensibly articulating dissent and protest.¹⁴

In discussing South African resistance literature, Parry expresses concern about its "mimetic modes that are testamentary and documentary,"¹⁵ claiming that this type of realist fiction

acts to exercise a constraint on literary production... (and that) inscriptions of the political may not be immediately visible in subject and representation, and oppositional discourses quickening liberation energies can reside in spaces where there is no obvious correspondence between image and social message, and in articulations which do not register a literal relationship of word to social referent.¹⁶

Here Parry and Ngugi, although seemingly agreeing on the effectiveness of "disruptive styles," differ substantially on the importance of content. While Parry does not insist on a visible correlation between political ideology and textual representation and emphasises the importance of style and genre as resistance devices, Ngugi is adamant that style is subordinate to content even though the one supports the other. It would therefore be inconceivable for Ngugi in his combat phase to write a novel without directly illuminating the struggle or articulating dissent and protest. Ngugi does not disagree with those who claim that resistance literature also, as Parry insists, must engage in another struggle, about form, idiom and style due to the non-neutral aspects of language. But even though Ngugi employs disruptive style (Gikuyu and orature) in his two latest novels to indigenise the

¹³ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 148.

¹⁴ Parry, "Some Provisional," 15.

¹⁵ Parry, "Some Provisional," 16.

¹⁶ Parry, "Some Provisional," 13.

narrative, these stylistic devices are not sufficient, according to Ngugi, to underscore oppositionality and resistance. Since indigenisation and resistance do not necessarily coalesce, Ngugi's use of orature and other "disruptive" devices must be coupled with a combat or resistance content to qualify as resistance literature proper. It is the urgency of redressing the neo-colonial quagmire which sets Ngugi's fictional agenda. If Ngugi has, as some critics claim, transferred his political essays into literary form, it is in the belief that the joint enterprise of selected, indigenous formal elements and a clear-cut ideological message have the potential to move the reader/listener. The prioritisation of content to form is dogmatically inscribed in Ngugi's fictional agenda:

I knew that form by itself, no matter how familiar and interesting, could never hold the attention of my new kind of reader for long....Content with which the people could identify or which would force them to take sides was necessary. Content is ultimately the arbiter of form...So the most important thing was to go for a subject matter, for a content, which had the weight and the complexity and the challenge of their everyday struggle.¹⁷

Ngugi's objective in his combat period is to establish, as Jane Watts puts it, "a narrative form that aims not merely at historical and social documentation, but also at bringing about a movement towards commitment on the part of the readers."¹⁸ There are in particular two interconnected areas related to Ngugi's subject matter and ideological content which have been critiqued and which need further scrutiny. The first questions post-colonial literature's epistemological break with colonial discourse since the orbit of discourse remains, as Wilson-Tagoe underlines, "centered in colonial reality even though decolonizing strategies themselves also implied a form of separation and opposition."¹⁹ Ngugi's particular discourse of resistance, even though it subverts "center" and "margin" in colonial discourse, can be seen to reside within the realm of colonial discourse since it only inverts the binarism which colonial discourse is/was based on. Ngugi's disruption of literary style and the choice of subject matter are not sufficient disruptions to transcend a colonial discourse since it takes into account the key parameters of that very discourse, even though in a disrupted shape.

The second area of contestation as an extension of the first questions the "correctness" of Ngugi's political analysis of the post-colonial situation and thus the literary elaboration of the ideological foundation on which Ngugi's literary subject matter is based. Lazarus explains African writers' disillusionment with post-independent Africa as "a preliminary overestimation of the emancipatory potential of independence."²⁰ This overestimation led to a sense of failed expectations which, like in Ngugi's case, sharpened the ideological knives against those who had failed. Even if African writers like Ngugi had too high

¹⁷ Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind*, 78.

¹⁸ Jane Watts, *Black Writers from South Africa: Towards a Discourse of Liberation* (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1989), 211.

¹⁹ Wilson-Tagoe, "Post-Colonial Literary Theory," 110.

²⁰ Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial*, 23.

expectations by believing “that the era of independence marked a revolutionary conjuncture in African societies”²¹, it is difficult to agree with Gikandi that “this notion of independence as a fraud was based on an ideological misunderstanding... of the possibilities of an epistemological revolution.”²² The point somewhat neglected by both Lazarus and Gikandi is that even people with very low expectations would be disillusioned by the lack of change in the post-colonial societies. Questioning the legitimacy of Ngugi’s disillusionment through “ideological misunderstanding” may thus seem to reintroduce a colonialist discourse modality which in its condescending way seems to underestimate the seriousness of post-colonial calamity and overestimate the complexities and contradictions in understanding the basic problems of the post-colonial situation.

A similar understanding of literature as defined by the urgency of the struggle occurs in the later novels of La Guma. Both *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* and *Time of the Butcherbird* can be defined as combat because they both reflect the connection between political consciousness and aesthetic ideology. As will be demonstrated, however, La Guma’s narratives have different artistic shapes from the traditional literature of combat and from Ngugi’s. La Guma’s two last novels are combat fiction in the sense that the main focus and the plot center around the more or less organized resistance against the apartheid regime. La Guma has changed focus from the depoliticised and unconscientised members of the coloured community (*The Stone Country* being a transitional novel) to more active and politically conscious members of the resistance movement, be they coloured or black in *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* and to rural resistance in *Time of the Butcherbird*.

Whereas Ngugi himself has, it has been noted, explained the urgency of the post-colonial situation in Kenya as the rationale for writing combat fiction, La Guma’s change of focus has been more open to debate. Chandramohan’s dismissal²³ of Moore’s claim that it is related to his choice of form (*A Walk in the Night* defined as a short story and thus unfit to be politically charged) seems fair since a politically active writer like La Guma would not have been constrained or inhibited by formal, aesthetic criteria if he had wanted to write differently. (Moreover *Time of the Butcherbird* is not substantially longer than *A Walk in the Night*.) It was suggested in Part 1 that it was La Guma’s subject matter and area of focus, the situation of the impoverished areas and people around Cape Town that imposed restrictions on his literary writing since he wanted to record the life in District Six and on the Cape Flats as “it really was” It was a life, it has been noted, almost completely deprived of political consciousness and political leadership.

²¹ Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial*, 23.

²² Simon Gikandi, “The Politics and Poetics of National Formation: Recent African Writing,” in *From Commonwealth to Postcolonial*, ed. Anna Rutherford (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), 379.

²³ Balasubramanyam Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South-Africa: The Writings of Alex La Guma 1925-1985* (Lewiston/Lampeter: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 136.

Clearly La Guma's shift of focus is in some way related to the macro-political situation where the struggle for liberation had gone underground after the banning of the ANC and the PAC. Whereas, as Clingman writes, "Peaceful methods had been the orthodoxy of the 1950s. Sharpeville itself had been intended as a peaceful demonstration."²⁴ The mood changed in the early 60s after Sharpeville. The resistance movement resorted to underground activities and started to take up arms in order to change the present order. The 60s, according to Lodge, "witnessed the painful and sometimes clumsy process of transformation from a loosely structured mass organisation to a clandestine insurgent revolutionary elite."²⁵ Moreover, after Sharpeville, political activism among the coloureds seemed for a while gradually to be picking up, when for example SACPO (South African Coloured People's Congress), in 1959 re-baptised to CPC organised, in co-operation with the ANC, a mass work and school boycott in May 1961. But the picture was contradictory. The response to the Emergency among the coloured was for example divided, forcing La Guma to implore the coloured population

to seriously assess their relationship with the struggle to liberate South Africa and the rest of the continent. Our place is with the active forces of progress so that we can honestly claim that we deserve our place in the sun.²⁶

But the offensive of the resistance movement was relatively short-lived as the transition to violence was followed by severe repression from the apartheid regime. Besides leaving the ANC markedly weakened when their principal leaders were arrested, also the African Resistance Movement (ARM), formerly the National Committee for Liberation, was crushed, and the underground Communist Party, of which Alex La Guma was a prominent member, was seriously incapacitated when its Central Committee chairman, Bram Fischer, was arrested.²⁷ The crack-down also forced many of the coloured leaders to get out of the country (among them Alex la Guma in 1966), leaving the organised resistance against apartheid more or less in ruins by the middle of the decade.²⁸ The political repression was accompanied by cultural repression:

Legislation providing for detention without trial simultaneously listed writers whose work could not be quoted or distributed while the Publications and Entertainments Act, promulgated in 1963, allowed for the banning of everything from scenes

²⁴ Clingman, *The Novels*, 92.

²⁵ Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1983), viii.

²⁶ Quoted from Odendaal and Field, xiii.

²⁷ For an extensive portrayal of Bram Fischer, see Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary* (Cape Town, University of Western Cape, Bellville, Amherst: David Philip, Mayibuye Books, University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

²⁸ The Labour party of South Africa of 1966 (a coloured party) was established primarily as a reaction to the reactionary-pro-apartheid policies of the federal Coloured people's party (FCPP) of 1964 was in the broader picture of less importance, even though the Labour party, headed by prominent coloured politicians like R.E. van der Ross and M.D. Arendse, rejected apartheid and wanted a "non-racial, democratic and non-communist South Africa" (Lewis, 273), but the party refrained from armed resistance.

depicting 'night life' and 'physical poses' to matters 'prejudicial to the safety of the state.'²⁹

In 1968 the Separate Representation of Voters Amendment Act completed the disenfranchisement of coloured in the Cape, stripping the coloured of the privileges they had had in the Cape Province.³⁰ La Guma himself was banned in July 1961. Implying that he was not allowed to attend gatherings, he was not officially prevented from writing until 1962 where he was "prohibited from publishing anything."³¹ While *In the Fog of the Season's End* was partly written before he went abroad for good, *Time of the Butcherbird* was entirely written while in exile.³²

Written in the context of severe repression, his new novel, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, is devoted to the underground struggle for the first time in La Guma's fiction career even though the movement was more or less militarily emasculated. In a way La Guma imposes the revolutionary movement on the text, because, as he says in the interview quoted below, "the movement has to appear somewhere in the picture."

Well, you are quite right in saying that the novel presents an attitude that we have now protested enough and that we should now fight... But, as I say, trying to convey a picture of South Africa one must also realize that apart from bewailing their fate, there are also people struggling against it, and that the political and revolutionary movement in South Africa was a part of the South African scene and that one way or another people have always been fighting against the situation. The political and revolutionary movement has to appear somewhere in the picture and I hope *In the Fog of the Season's End* is a start. I tried to present the underground struggle against the regime as part of the picture of South Africa.³³

In a sense La Guma had, as Roscoe claims, "become impatient with the subtleties of high art."³⁴ It is my contention that La Guma's political shift fictionally, making the underground movement more legitimate as a subject matter in his novels, can be understood on the basis of two developments in the 60s which seem to overshadow the political crackdown by the apartheid regime: First the fact that the ANC turned, however prematurely, to armed resistance and second that his group, the coloured community, were more involved in resistance after Sharpeville. Both these developments were in tune with La Guma's political convictions. In contrast to Ngugi, however, this fictional shift cannot be associated with any remarkable change in La Guma's political ideology during the period of his literary production. It remained basically the same throughout his career. As Maughan-Brown writes:

²⁹ Clingman, *The Novels*, 94.

³⁰ See Lewis, 272.

³¹ Odendaal and Field, xv.

³² Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 99 and 115.

³³ Abrahams, "The Writings of Alex La Guma," 163.

³⁴ Adrian Roscoe, *Uburu's Fire: African Literature East to South* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 255.

so changes in the political content and outspokenness of his fiction can be seen to have been a factor more of political circumstance and aesthetic ideology than of altered political conviction.³⁵

And as Clingman writes:

In *The Stone Country* and *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* La Guma explores in an unpretentious yet unremittingly realistic fashion the difficulties, strengths and triumphs of underground political activity... La Guma manages to fashion an unusually humane vision of political struggle. But this is also undoubtedly because he has access to a community and a social strength (in the 'coloured' world of Cape Town).³⁶

The late sixties only intensified the repression of the apartheid regime, the control of subversive activities were almost absolute and the underground organizations in exile had enough trying to recuperate after the blow they experienced from the government. Things changed, however, at the turn of the decade, and the first part of the 70s where the liberation struggles in Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe gained momentum. There was a sense that the apparent solidity of the apartheid regime in the 60s was not so solid any more as the situation of the border states was about to change. In South Africa this sense of insecurity manifested itself in increased military spending and severe attacks on the remaining liberal white institutions. The whites across the Boer- English spectrum were about to collect themselves.

A similar process of unification happened among the non-whites, both in exile and at home. In 1969 the ANC opened its membership to non-Africans and in the same year the National Union of South African Students (SASO) was established under Steve Biko. The student organization of the Black Consciousness Movement SASO stressed the unity of all non-whites, including coloureds and Indians. They wanted, in Lewis' words, "to develop their own 'militant self-reliance', overcome their feelings of racial inferiority, and rediscover the achievements of African history and culture..."³⁷ While the Labour party did not call for armed resistance it became, from 1972 onwards, increasingly radical and "endorsed frequently Black Consciousness concepts."³⁸ The Black Consciousness Movement had much influence on the coloured community, particularly among the youth and the urban elite, and while only blacks died in Sharpeville the situation had altered substantially at the end of the 60s and during the next decade. The unrest among the non-white urban groups culminated in 1976 when mass school boycotts, work stayaways and demonstrations swept across the urban centres in the country. The unrest had far-reaching effects on the resistance against the apartheid regime, also among the coloured. In the Western Cape the coloured high school pupils and students played a prominent role in the riots as these

³⁵ David Maughan-Brown, "Adjusting the Focal Length: Alex La Guma and Exile," *English in Africa* 18, no 2 (1991): 33.

³⁶ Clingman, *The Novels*, 107.

³⁷ Lewis, 278.

³⁸ Lewis, 278.

pupils and students were much more politically conscious than their parents, representatives of which La Guma described in his two first novels.

There is therefore good reason in the political events of the time for La Guma in his last novel to focus on the resistance struggle. In contrast to his previous novels La Guma in *Time of the Butcherbird* paints a multi-racial picture where the coloureds play no prominent role. The double *Verfremdung* of living in exile and writing about people he didn't know intimately causes problems³⁹ which La Guma both recognised and dismissed.

Acknowledging the problem of writing fictionally about another "party" he writes :

The problem is living in one set compartment and knowing only of your own life, and then trying to project yourself into the life or the environment of another part, of another party.⁴⁰

Living in exile and still being creative is not accepted, however, as a problem for La Guma:

I don't think that living outside of South Africa has affected my views very much or told on my vision of the world. Some of my colleagues are unable to create while they are way from the scene but I have not had this problem.⁴¹

While La Guma focuses explicitly on anti-apartheid resistance in his two last novels and acknowledges that his fiction expresses "an attitude that we have now protested enough and that we should now fight," rejecting, like Ngugi "art for art's sake,"⁴² there is a sense that La Guma was not to the same degree as Ngugi focused on issues linked to formal experiments with the novel. The change in La Guma's fiction relates to the explicitness of the political message, how the content of the novel was to effect a radical displacement of dominant, cultural codes. In contrast to Parry La Guma seems to affirm that "a rhetoric of solidarity and militancy, of protest and dissent, is a sufficient condition for constituting a revolutionary literature."⁴³

The lack of aesthetic affinity between Parry and La Guma is expressed in Parry's violent and quite unsubstantiated attack on La Guma's literary production. Parry characterises La Guma's fiction as a "recycling of stale and purple language, of received narrative practices and exhausted modes of address (which) normalize the fiction's ex-centric material and defuse a confrontational stance."⁴⁴ Whereas Ngugi in his two last novels introduces orature and Gikuyu to indigenise his literary expression, La Guma's narrative remains firmly within Western aesthetics, as Watts correctly states: "The revolution in values has not yet transformed the genre."⁴⁵ True as this may be, there is a definite correlation

³⁹ See Maughan-Brown's article, "Adjusting the Focal Length" for a discussion of the consequences of exile on *Time of the Butcherbird*.

⁴⁰ Robert Serumaga, "Alex La Guma," in *African Writers Talking*, eds. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (London, Heinemann, 1972), 92.

⁴¹ Alex La Guma, *World Marxist Review* 27 no. 2 (1984): 112.

⁴² See Odendaal and Field, xxiii.

⁴³ Parry, "Some Provisional," 12.

⁴⁴ Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1987): 47-48.

⁴⁵ Jane Watts, 216.

between form and content. This correlation manifests itself in the focus on fragmentation as the unifying principle which underlies both the narrative structure and the life of the main protagonists in the two novels. This fragmentation and lack of equilibrium in the selves of the protagonists is narrated within a textual structure which deviates from traditional novels like *A Walk in the Night* in the sense that the chronology of the narrative is constantly being disrupted.

The lives of the main characters are grounded in the political situation of the apartheid state and their imbalance has to be addressed through the overthrow of the present order. Clearly La Guma's novels were intended to be part and parcel of the liberation struggle and Parry's insistence on disruptive literary styles would in La Guma's case only be important as long as the texts are able to bring about a transformation of the reader's consciousness and arouse a compassion for change.

8. *Devil on the Cross*

8.1 Introduction

Devil on the Cross addresses the urgency of the political situation in post-colonial Kenya with its focus on the dilemmas of living in a world deformed by the forces of exploitation and fragmentation. Written in prison on rolls of toilet paper *Devil on the Cross*¹ is, as Simon Gikandi states, “clearly informed by strong emotions and deep personal feelings.”² Still in the phase of disillusionment where the failure of the potential emancipation of (first) liberation and (then) nationhood must be exposed, Ngugi writes against the post-colonialism of the African experience. As Wilson-Tagoe asserts:

Thus even in the context of disillusionment the focus of exploration is still the old opposition between empire and colony, and freedom and community are still asserted as ideal and given goals.³

This inversion of the Other can be viewed as an act of restitution where the African regains her/his subject position robbed by Western discourse. This restitution comes about in Ngugi’s novel by launching an ideological project premised on Marxist ideology and by focusing on the dependency link and its consequences for the subaltern in Kenya. In fictional terms Ngugi indigenises the narrative by borrowing, as he himself puts it

heavily from forms of oral narrative, particularly the conversational tone, the fable, proverbs, songs and the whole tradition of poetic self-praise or praise of others... (and) a biblical element, the parable.⁴

By employing an innovative, indigenous style not as a curiosity, but as a deliberate artistic intervention to situate the aesthetics of the novel contextually, Ngugi addresses the home public, and in particular the oppressed, in their own language. Ngugi’s use of orature manifests itself in the use of the Gikaandi singer who employs proverbs to punctuate, contextualise and decolonise the narrative. By giving the narrative a taste of orature and colloquiality that the indigenous listener/reader may recognise, Ngugi employs the proverbs and the songs as a stylistic device which not only adds substantially to the issues in question, but which has an intended alienating effect *vis a vis* the European novel. In particular the songs of resistance, including songs from the Mau Mau period, draw the important link between the present struggle for liberation and the struggle against the colonial power. These songs re-echo Maina wa Kinyatti’s *Thunder from the Mountains*⁵ (containing Mau Mau songs) which, as Patrick Williams points out, is regarded by Ngugi “as a milestone, and is concerned both to promote the Mau Mau songs as important

¹ See Ngugi’s own narrative of the production of *Devil* in Ngugi, *Detained*.

² Simon Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, 208-209.

³ Wilson-Tagoe, “Post-Colonial Literary Theory,” 113.

⁴ Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind*, 78-79.

⁵ See Maina wa Kinyatti, ed., *Thunder from the Mountains: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs* (Zed Press and Mid-Teki Publishers, London and Nairobi), 1980.

popular cultural texts and to retain the memory of what the struggle meant.”⁶ But traditional proverbs are not employed in the text merely to strengthen the struggle against the post-colonial regime; traditional values are also employed to link outrageous capitalism with indigenous values, for example during the Devil’s Feast where Gitutu wa Gataanguru refers to proverbs in his blatant defense of exploitation (100). The use of songs, proverbs and music signals a novel form which is not only meant to be read, but performed. *Devil on the Cross* exhibits traits of a *gikaandi* text which, according to Gititi

reveals the complex interplay of genres-riddles, proverbs, biographical ‘information’, historical commentary- and a performative dramatic quality which invests in voice, gesture and attention to the audience. As an event that takes place in the public square, *gikaandi* is not only a performance text but a site of performance, providing a model for interpersonal and public discourse.⁷

By presenting the European audience with alien themes and even with unfamiliar styles, Ngugi sticks nevertheless partly to the familiar language of the European realist novel and is closely linked to an established literary tradition. This is also confirmed by the frequent use of biblical narratives in the novel. As a matter of fact, there is striking affinity “between oral traditions derived from Gikuyu culture and the biblical traditions imposed during colonial rule.”⁸ As Gikandi argues: “It is a work that wants to maintain its generic identity as a novel in the European sense of the word while rejecting the central ideologies that have made this form what it is, including the assumption of an elite audience.”⁹ In this sense Ngugi situates his novel both inside and outside the dominant discourse.

8.2 Exploring the post-colonial hegemonic order: the economics of the exploitative classes

This section shows that *Devil on the Cross* does not, by conceiving post-colonial societies in terms of oppositional categories like empire and colony, centre and margin, self and Other, transcend the orbit of colonial discourse. The inversion of the colonial self to denote the neo-colonialist and (not the least) the bourgeois collaborators (who are the real obstacles to “real” freedom and nationhood) confirms this image even though the narrative in several respects is indigenised. The section explores how the dependency theory forms the ideological basis of the narrative and how the text essentialises and ridicules dominant ideology to serve the novel’s ideological project. Even contradictions within dominant, exploitative ideology are being repressed in order to streamline the ideological challenges from the national and international exploitative classes. Thus there is, the section argues, no interrogation of the feasibility of this continuous emphasis on polarities, retaining in this way some sort of essentialist assumptions about the colonial and post-colonial link.

⁶ Williams, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, 113.

⁷ Gitahi Gititi, “Recuperating a ‘Disappearing’ Art Form: Resonances of ‘Gikaandi’ in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*,” in Cantalupo, 122 and 124.

⁸ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, 213.

⁹ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, 210.

Althusser's notion of ideology as responding "to the individual's quest, conscious or unconscious, for knowledge about the complexity of the world"¹⁰ is premised on the idea that ideology does not tell the whole "truth" about man's relationship to society. Ngugi's ideological project in *Devil on the Cross* is to deconstruct the ideological underpinnings that inform the inscriptions of the dominant subject positions and representations, and initiate a reconstruction of self and society based on alternative ideological interpellations.

Structuring the novel around a disclosure-closure axis, Ngugi exposes the neo-colonial order and simultaneously paves the way for revolution. Ngugi's master narrative in *Devil on the Cross* is being nurtured by the ideological underpinnings of the dependency theory. Clearly influenced by Fanon, Amílcar Cabral and Walter Rodney (possibly also André Gunder Frank),¹¹ the underlying idea is the prevention of development in the periphery (developing countries) by the centre (the developed countries). The centre pulls out the capital in the periphery and controls the extraction by political and economic force and by technical know-how. The periphery is left to produce the raw material which is refined in the centre. The bourgeoisie in the periphery is thus not based on industrial production, but on collaboration with the capitalist forces in the centre which have the knowledge and know-how to preside over key technology. This comprador bourgeoisie is able to accumulate wealth, but they either lack the knowledge or are not interested in investing in money-generating activities in their home country. The indigenous capital is thus used to import consumer goods or to invest in developed countries. The indigenous bourgeoisie thus contributes to pauperising the country rather than developing it since the wealth is exported to the developed countries both through direct extraction, but also through the flux of bourgeoisie money out of the country.

The continued existence of this centre-periphery axis depends on the willing co-operation of the actors in the periphery unabashedly exposed at the Devil's feast. By dismissing the indigenous bourgeoisie as anti-nationalist as well as neo-colonialist, *Devil on the Cross* sharpens Fanon's critique of the bourgeoisie under colonialism.¹² Fanon distinguishes

categorically between bourgeois nationalism and another would-be hegemonic form of national consciousness - a liberationist, anti-imperialist, nationalist internationalism.¹³

¹⁰ See Althusser, 90 (referred to in the first chapter).

¹¹ See e.g. Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*, trans. Michael Wolfers (New York: Monthly Review, 1979); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Europe* (London: Bogle - L'Ouverture, 1972); André Gunder Frank, *Latin-America: Underdevelopment and Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review, 1969).

¹² Accepting the anti-colonialism of bourgeois nationalism Fanon nevertheless critiques their discourse aimed at the (re)attainment of nationhood through means of the capture and subsequent "occupation" of the colonial state, and which on Fanon's reading represented only the interests of the elite indigenous classes.

¹³ Neil Lazarus, "Disavowing Decolonization: Fanon, Nationalism, and the Problematic of Representation in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Research in African Literatures* 24, no.4 (1993): 72.

What is described in *Devil on the Cross* is a bourgeois class (the participants in the Devil's Feast) which only focuses on material accumulation and which accepts foreign domination as long as they themselves profit. The identification of the link between foreign and domestic exploiters is beyond dispute:

'The master of ceremonies has told the truth about the unity that exists between us and foreigners. They eat the flesh and we clean up the bones... The dog that has a bone is better off than the empty-handed... but make no mistake, it is a bone with a bit of flesh on it... That's true African socialism... Ujamaa wa Asili Kiafrika... not like that of Nyerere and his Chinese friends, the socialism of pure envy...' (86)

It is the combined exploitative efforts of the foreigners and the indigenous neo-colonialist (as the extension of the foreign imperialist) which constitute, the text argues, one of the most important reasons for the crisis in contemporary Africa. The indigenous neo-colonialist is "Caliban become Prospero." By invoking the internal conflicts between the indigenous haves and have-nots, *Devil on the Cross* also calls attention to the colonial concept of difference in a post-colonial situation that not only threatens, but undermines solidarity and unity. In this sense Ngugi, by importing the colonial divide between coloniser and colonised unto the domestic post-colonial scene as a class conflict, queries the complex issue of nationhood in post-independent Kenya. This ideological underpinning is consistent and coherent throughout, and it is therefore problematic when Cooper claims that there are

two warring tendencies in *Devil*... One is anti-foreigner and ethnic, the other socialist, seeking structural and historical rather than racial explanations... The dominant text is ethnic, and is only belatedly and weakly subverted by a repressed socialist subtext... The dominant text is a kind of extended parable of neo-colonial dependency, with the devil on the cross the major structuring symbol. The devil is, quite simply and crudely, the foreign capitalist.¹⁴

The primacy of the foreigner in the business of exploitation is clearly underlined in terms of who is in control when disputes arise and by describing the submissive attitudes of the indigenous exploiters. But this primacy does not have an explicit ethnic, i.e. racial dimension. The irrelevance of skin colour and race is reiterated several times (88 and 97) and it is the indigenous elite who saves the devil from the cross, thus underlining the reciprocal interdependence among the foreign and indigenous performers at the Feast. Clearly allegiance to capitalist, exploitative principles is much more significant than the ethnic factor, grounded as the capitalist ideology is in socio-economic and materialist principles. Admittedly Ngugi has, through his characterization of Wariinga, underlined the beauty of blackness and has simultaneously portrayed some of the foreign capitalists negatively: "The judge was a European, with a skin that was red like a pig's. His nose was peeling, like a lizard's body" (43). Any notion of ethnic underpinning that governs the dominant text is, however, effectively crushed:

¹⁴ Cooper, *To Lay*, 52.

Then a man stood up who was neither fat nor slim. He settled the dispute by saying: 'Let us not concern ourselves with thinness or fatness, whiteness or blackness, tallness or shortness. (97)

The indigenous capitalists are also portrayed in a way which undermines any notion of inscription of Negritude or "Black is beautiful" ideology:

Gitutu had a belly that protruded so far that it would have touched the ground had it not been supported by the braces that held up his trousers. It seemed as if his belly had absorbed all his limbs and all the other organs of his body. Gitutu had no neck-at least, his neck was not visible. (99)

This rejection of racist or ethnic ideology is also underlined in Ngugi's own political writing:

The root cause of Afro-American oppression lay, not in the sinfulness and biological depravity of Whiteness, but in the very system of social production of wealth.¹⁵

By focusing on the dichotomy between the indigenous Prosperos on the one hand (with its very strong foreign links) and the subaltern in Kenya on the other, the inscription of class and class struggle appears already in the *matatu* by Muturi and Wangari and later exposed at the devil's feast and in the confrontations between the capitalists and the workers. It is a class conflict which transcends national borders, but is reinforced as an internal struggle when Wariinga emerges as the heroine of the new struggle. It is therefore problematic when Cooper claims that it is only at a belated stage that Ngugi wishes "to recoup his focus on class struggle and his analysis of internal class forces."¹⁶ The exposure of the exploitative stakeholders of the centre-periphery struggle is pushed to outrageous proportions in Ngugi's description of the Devil's Feast. Gitutu wa Gataanguru's ideology sums up the mood and sentiment of the participants in the Feast: "Famine among the masses= wealth for a man of cunning" (104). The utterly outrageous, unrealistic and satirical description of the feast where the various participants enter a competition where they try to outnumber each other in boastful narratives about how to be the most innovative in exploiting the masses transcends classical realism, but it is in essence not very dissimilar from the confidence expressed by those in economic control in parts of Africa. The encounter between the realistically portrayed passengers in the *matatu* and the surreal description of the devil worshippers causes a suspense in the narrative, invoking a feeling of seriousness in the midst of satire: the outrageous exaggerations have a base in reality and can be recognized as such by the novel's new audience. The literary form in the cave has an alienating effect in the sense that it is alienated from truth and reason, but at the same time the text leaves no doubt that it is basically and fundamentally true. This message cannot be contained within a social science discourse, or rather, the latter discourse cannot arouse the anger and the resentment from the ordinary man and woman as this aesthetic alienation

¹⁵ Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, 134.

¹⁶ Cooper, *To Lay*, 54.

can. By exposing the dominant ideology in this way (and it is repeated throughout the Devil's Feast), the text deprives ideology of its dominant characteristic: its pretense of conveying and selling a positive, all-comprehensive vision of the world by which the reader/listener is interpellated and where contradictions and uncomfortable realities are smoothed over. The intention is to demask real capitalism and imperialism by penetrating their own positive narrative and by underlining the correlation between the outward manifestation of ideology and its true nature. In this way the text represents ideology as a material reality and erases any distinction between material reality and ideology. Clearly the alternative narrative is not a direct reflection of reality even though the author would insist on its truthfulness. The essentialising of dominant ideology as a caricature to serve the novel's ideological project is problematic in the sense that it is *proclaimed* and *heralded* from the mountain top similar to one-dimensional statements in a political campaign. Being puppets in the novel's political show, the participants in the cave are never given space as human beings to transcend the ideological walls of the cave and foreground their intentions and underlying assumptions. The portrayal of the "local watchdogs" is, as Cooper claims, "only partly correct."¹⁷ Even the image of the Western exploiters is grossly inaccurate, but the intention seems to be that the Devil's Feast as such is highly exaggerated and satirical in its concrete description of both foreign and indigenous exploiters in order to expose the consequences of the exploitative work to the common man in Kenya in such terms that it is understood by the very same grassroots. In *Devil on the Cross* there is no attempt to legitimise the system; instead the evilness of the system is magnified and any positive trait is minimised or annulled. Even contradictions among the exploiters are ridiculed and eventually eliminated, well illustrated in the fate of Mwireri wa Mukirai. Mwireri is, besides Muturi, one of the rebels in the matatu who invites people to the feast to get acceptance for his story which is counter-hegemonic in the sense that it proclaims a break with the foreign capitalists. Mwireri's problem is that there is nobody to legitimise his story since it implies the undermining of foreign power and the projection of indigenous uncertainty. Additionally Mwireri in an unfortunate statement links the activities of the foreigners and the nationalist capitalists to the incest story: " ' You foreigners will have to go back home and rape your own mothers, and leave me to toy with my mother's thighs!' " (168) This gives the devil worshippers a good excuse to reject Mwireri's alternative to dominant ideology by referring - rather moralistically - to Mwireri's canonisation of the Oedipal taboo of having sexual intercourse with one's mother. Ironically Mwireri's project is also untenable in terms of the novel's ideological project which in its binarism cannot tolerate some sort of in-between position like a nationalist capitalist economy. By "annulling" the resistance within the ranks of the capitalists (he is removed from the surface of the earth (193) by the matatu driver, Mwaura), the text regains control of its ideological project by

¹⁷ Cooper, *To Lay*, 53. See also Nyong'o, P. Anyang, "State and Authority in Kenya: The Disintegration of the Nationalist Coalitions and the Rise of Presidential Authoritarianism 1963-78," *African Affairs* 88, no. 351 (1989): 229 - 251.

confirming the strength of the dependency model as a *raison d'être* for the neo-colonial state. The post-modern notion of plural stories embodied in the struggle between international and national capitalism is not pertinent to the text's political agenda in the post-colonial situation of Kenya; any cracks in the explanatory power of the dependency theory is subservient to a master narrative which tries to impose a totalising concept of the representations of the dominant ideology based on exclusion and suppression. Complicating the attempt to project one meaning, the conflicting stories and even the multiphony within the ranks of the exploiters thus disturb and distort the oppositional master narrative beyond the text's clarity of vision and dogma. It is a vision which insists on the continuity and extension of the colonial experience into the post-colonial era, embodied e.g. in Mwaura's past as a home guard during the days of Mau Mau. Such a vision does not allow for other, sustainable representations which blur this strong notion of an ideological linkage between past and present. By embodying the various concepts like imperialism and dependency theory with concrete representations like the various manifestations of the devil, the text projects an image of a neo-colonial system where the various devils expose the outrageous evilness of the neo-colonial economic and political system. This embodiment of abstract notions is meant to communicate with the people which the novel addresses, notions which reinforce the dichotomisation between good/evil, God/Devil, as "he who lives by his own sweat and he who lives by the sweat of others" (57).

8.3 Resisting dominant discourse

While the previous section explored the text's focus on the political, economic and (un)ethical impositions of the post-colonial regime, this section analyses the various responses to dominant ideology within the parameters of an oppositional discourse. The section examines how resistance takes different forms, from the more ideological purists like Muturi and Wangari, via Wariinga who, the section argues, undergoes a metamorphosis from being exploited and unscientised to being the revolutionary heroine to Gaturia who is located in the grey zone of ambiguity and indecision. Discussing the problems of a univocal, determinate representation of oppositional discourse, the section also problematises the issue of grassroots agency and resistance and queries the authenticity of its representation in the novel. It is Muturi who functions as the oppositional ideologue in *Devil on the Cross* as he repeatedly elaborates on the connection between capital and labour. He is the one together with Wangari who confronts the local and foreign devil worshippers head-on as both refuse to barter their ideological views for biological existence; i.e. they both embark on a confrontational course even though they know the outcome, i.e. detention and what is worse. It seems, however, as if Muturi's ideological reflections are not contextualised as lived life, but are more a re-echoing of the author's political essay writing: And "our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it"

(53). Muturi is reminiscent of Fanon who underlines the binarism of the struggle to re-establish humanity: “therefore there are two hearts: the heart built by the clan of parasites, the evil heart; and the heart built by the clan of producers, the good heart” (53-54). But Muturi’s monologues do not very often transcend the domain of mere sloganeering, like in his song about the imperialists: “Kenya does not belong to you, imperialists!... Pack up your bags and go! The owner of the homestead is on his way!” (47) Similarly songs with a traditional cutting edge, hymns, freedom fighters’ songs and even pop-songs are used to elaborate on the themes in the narrative in a rather didactic way, like in the song below:

Famine has increased in our land,
But it has been given other names,
So that the people should not discover
Where all the food has been hidden...

Many houses, and acres of land,
And mounds of stolen money-
These cannot bring peace to a person,
Because they have been taken from the poor. (50-51)

Even though the moral tone is reminiscent of the Mau Mau songs the didacticism reinforces the ideological thrust of the novel and steers the novel towards political closure. Even the theoretical limitations of Muturi as an ideologue are striking.

Muturi was panting a little because of the fervour of his argument and the thoughts in his head. He had often turned over such thoughts in his mind, but never before had he managed to clothe them in words. He was surprised at himself, for he could not identify the source of those philosophical thoughts. (53)

The ideological gap between Muturi’s oppositional philosophy and dominant ideology is well taken in Mwauru’s response to Muturi’s binarism: “In this world there is no good and evil. In this world there are no good or evil hearts. A heart is a heart” (53). Even though Mwauru’s blurring of the divide between good and evil exposes the cynical interests of the oppressor, Mwauru’s response also points to an ethical topography which many will attribute to post-colonial Kenya. Muturi’s ideologically “correct” binarism precludes any avenue which transcends the fixed position of the neo-colonial divide. This means that Muturi’s logical call for armed resistance is based on a fairly dogmatic, militant conception of Kenyan post-colonial reality:

What about when the workers go on strike? And they have the audacity to talk about violence? Who plants the seeds of violence in this country?...I’m sure that the system of theft and robbery will never end in this country as long as people are scared of guns and clubs. We must fight and struggle against the culture of fear... (Wariinga and Gatuiria): Both were shaken by Muturi’s call to arms. (204-205)

Muturi re-echoes Marx’s famous words that ‘violence is the midwife’ of social change and historical transformation: “ ‘this country, our country should have given birth to its offspring long ago... What it lacks now is a midwife,’ he added” (46). Muturi’s fixed understanding of post-colonial Kenya and focus on high-profile violent resistance is

grounded in a fairly simplistic oppressor-oppressed dichotomy on the macro-level. No one can doubt Muturi's involvement, but since his political statements and his moral positions are more plagued by sloganeering than anything else, this type of representation tends, as Njabulo Ndebele contends, to

ossify complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good or evil, instead of leading us to necessary insights into the social processes leading to those finished forms.¹⁸

Muturi and Wangari's struggle, it is true, is based on the perceived discrepancy between what the Mau Mau movement fought for and the betrayals of the present generation and the present state of affairs:

(Wangari:) But these legs have carried many bullets and many guns to our fighters in the forest... and I was never afraid, even when I slipped through the lines of the enemy and their home guard allies. Our people, today when I recall those things, my heart weakens and I want to cry! (40)

But their revolutionary fervour seems superimposed by the author as a descriptive fact which may or may not impress the reader/listener. There is nothing in the narrative that hints at the possibility that Muturi and Wangari make history by, as Serequeberhan states about the colonised, reclaiming themselves, in the act of resisting, as human beings, and thus "assert(ing) the humanity of... (their) existence."¹⁹ Moreover there is a streak of naivism and over-optimism in both Wangari and Muturi's ideas of defeating the enemy. Even though Muturi knows very well "that the forces of law and order are on the side of those who rob the workers of their products of their sweat, of those who steal food and land from the peasants" (204), Muturi believes that they can chase "away the class of exploiters from their den in the cave" (203).

The suspicion that Ngugi's account of the resistance movement is not "the rounded truth" is confirmed in how the flat characters of Wangari and Muturi show no signs of self-doubts, fear or vacillation in their struggle and where there is no visible correlation between personal development and their involvement in the struggle. There is a sense that this essentialism of the revolutionary heroes prevents the construction of self (with the exception of Wariinga) as a deliberate and conscious response to conflicting, antagonistic forces and various ideological interpellations. Muturi and Wangari's opposition against the post-colonial regime is not seen as a gradual development where their selves are textually being harnessed or divided in the crossfire of conflicting interests; their selves are not *described* as being "constructed through the clash of contradictory discourses and

¹⁸ Njabulo Ndebele, "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on S.A. Fiction," *Staffrider* 6, no. 1(1984): 44.

¹⁹ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse* (New York & London, Routledge, 1994), 72.

demands.”²⁰ Their centered selves are not provisionally and historically confirmed, but are static and stable, transcending as it were ephemerality. Such a stasis is not only a rejection of solipsistic aestheticism and in favour of what could be called “committed art,” but, paradoxically, a negation of that very self due to its one-dimensionality. This emphasis on literature’s heuristic/dogmatic role confirms the notion of art as an extension of the liberation struggle. The theoretical rationale for this insistence on the unified self is the idea that a fragmented self forecloses the possibility of agency, of responsible action. In a way it reiterates a familiar post-colonial position which is “bounded, whole, unique and autonomous. It represents here, inside, and identity, while postmodernism belongs there, outside, and is a threat to identity from outside.”²¹

While Muturi clearly tries to pave the ground and to give space for those who have been excluded from articulations of universal humanity, there is a sense that the ordinary workers who Muturi is set to lead are strikingly absent from the narrative as individuals. Even though Muturi insists that “he would go around Njeruca awakening the workers and the unemployed, urging them to follow him so he could show them where all the thieves and robbers of the people’s wealth had gathered.”(157), the reader/listener is only exposed to them as a collective of peasants, workers and students:

A long procession of women, men and children met their eyes... ‘What a long procession,’ Gatuiria said. ‘It looks as if Muturi has collected the whole of Njeruca together,’ Wariinga replied (201)

‘This is really an army!’ said Gatuiria. ‘An army of workers?’ Wariinga asked. ‘Yes, and peasants, and petty traders, and students...’ ‘...led by workers.’ (203).

The big potential of the masses is shown when they actually drive the thieves and robbers away:

But when the crowd saw the foreign thieves about to leave the cave, their laughter turned into menacing roar. The people roared like a thousand angry lions whose cubs had been taken away from them, and they seized their sticks and clubs and iron rods and pressed forward towards the foreign thieves. (207-208).

But Muturi’s legitimate insistence that their struggle is a struggle for humanity is not echoed in the workers’ lives and commitment as persons; the purifying aspects of violence are never dramatised in the workers’ lives. The textual emphasis on worker potency and vanguardism in the struggle for liberation is thus problematic since it is constantly being crushed (even the march to the Devil’s cave fails its ultimate goal) by a narrative where the individual heroes and heroines create the space that can outmanoeuvre the oppressors. The agency of the peasants and workers is deflated and given little credibility since there is no

²⁰ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118.

²¹ Chris Prentice, “Some Problems of Response to Empire in Settler Post-Colonial Societies,” in *De-scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality*, eds. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994), 49.

narrational projection of counter-violence of the colonised as a “de-thingifying, life-enhancing project of human liberation.”²² The novel rests its moral and historical vision on the contradictory assumptions of the theoretical avant-gardism of the peasants and workers and the textually inscribed personal and political commitment which can transcend the vast social antagonisms the novel has described. As will be shown in the next subsection it is the committed individual, primarily embodied in Wariinga’s inflated and idealised image, that in the novel has the potential of being historically transformative, thus undermining the ideologically assigned role of the workers and peasants.

8.3.1 Conscientisation and the construction of Wariinga’s self

By posing Muturi’s intervention as morally and ethically superior to the dominant cultural codes, the text manages within the ideological world of the novel to replace the self- Other dichotomy of colonial discourse by inverting it. This inversion is reinforced in the existential journey of Wariinga where the Other, as this subsection shows, is transformed into a unified self of commitment and dynamics. By focusing on a single individual’s movement through history and the concentration on a single consciousness Ngugi attempts to escape one-dimensionality by exploring how the potentially ideological and committed self moves within the all-pervasive world of greed and exploitation on the one hand and revolt and idealism on the other even if her journey is more a result of accident than conscious choice or action. (Sacked by her employer, left behind by her lover, thrown out by the house-owner, attempting suicide and saved by a man who happens to be there.) As Gikandi states:

She appears to us as a victim of male games of rivalry and power, but unlike other famous Ngugi women... , she does not give in to the malevolent (male) forces around her, but embarks on the journey to Ilmorog.²³

Whereas Gatuiria consciously looks for the devil, Wariinga is being haunted by the devil, and they are both forced to ask existential questions like who is the devil and where does evil come from. Wariinga’s transformation occurs in the intersection between the dominant ideology and the new, alternative ideological interpellation, the latter being initially exposed in the *matatu* (by Muturi, Wangari and Gatuiria). Functioning as a micro-universe of this ideological struggle, the *matatu* provides a context which allows Ngugi to address a new audience involving peasants and illiterates who can share in the articulation of the novel’s critique of post-independent Kenya.

It is Wariinga’s encounter with the Voice, however, an initially ambiguous figure which eventually turns out to be the devil, which explicitly addresses the options at hand. Standing in a dialectical relationship to God (“God and I are twins” (193)), the devil explains the world to her in terms of a transcendental perspective which transgresses a

²² Serequeberhan, 78-79.

²³ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, 219-220.

mere Marxist discourse. The significance of the incident with the devil is thus not only a more explicit identification of existential options, but even more the inscription of ontological knowledge which transcends the concrete manifestations of evilness in the cave. The devil scene confirms the extension of a materialist discourse which pushes beyond an understanding of conscientisation which refers to social practice alone. In a scene reminiscent of the temptation of Jesus in the desert, Wariinga, on two occasions rejects the temptations of rampant materialism and exploitation where the Devil paraphrases the Bible directly: “Follow me, and I’ll take you up into the big Ilmorog mountains, and I’ll show all the glories of the world... All those wonders will belong to You.” (192) Wariinga’s response: “Go away! Leave me alone, Satan!” (193) and “Get thee behind me Satan” (194) indicates a beginning of a process of re-establishing a self based on completely different ideological values. Even though this rejection is negative in the sense that it is not an explicit confirmation of an oppositional ideology, the process has started.

Wariinga’s encounter with Muturi’s crowd accelerates this reorientation by forcing her to side with the workers or the oppressors. Confronted with questions like:

“We who work as clerks, copy typists and secretaries, which side are we on? We who type and take dictation from Boss Kihara and his kind, whose side are we on in this dance?”

(206), Wariinga is forced to interrogate the existential question of her very identity:

Who are we? Who are we? Who are we? Wariinga’s heart beat in time to her question, raising problems to which nobody could provide her with solutions because they concerned the decision she would have to make herself about the side she would choose in life’s struggle. (206)

But it is not an easy choice since siding with Muturi involves the resort to arms, a strategy she is not yet ready to accept: “Both were shaken by Muturi’s call to arms” (205). It is not until Wariinga is given the confidence of taking care of Muturi’s gun that she is pushed into the “right” side: “Listen, ... can I trust you with a small burden until tomorrow?” (210) The handing over of the gun coupled with the future invitation to the worker’s feast to be held some time in future (211) confirms a shift to the revolutionary side where Muturi’s confidence and trust gives Wariinga the push in the “right” direction. The gun transaction signals and symbolises a potential shift from dominant to non-dominant ideology, or at least an omen of what might come in the not too distant future.

Muturi gave Wariinga the gun and turned away. Wariinga felt a strange sensation come over her. Her heart trembled. Then she felt courage through her whole body. She thought that there was not a single danger in the world that she could not now look in the face. All her doubts and fears had been expelled by the secret with which Muturi had entrusted her. (211)

Later the ideological shift seems completed when she is referred to as “daughter of the Iregi rebels” (222) and when she confirms the significance of the “Holy Trinity of the worker, the peasant, the patriot” (230).

By exposing Wariinga as the ideological heroine, Ngugi seems to present and position subjectivity as something that can *become* fixed and stable. In contrast to Wangari and Muturi her subjectivity is a constructed identity based on her existential journey through the rough Kenyan landscape where she has found a point of exit out of the oppressive and exploitative system. Having departed from a position of self which is conditioned by dominant ideology and based on expulsion, patriarchy and oppression, she constructs her new self. Establishing her own subjectivity by privileging a discourse which is monolithic and impregnable Wariinga's final identity seems stable and unified in the midst of intersecting ideological impulses:

No, this Wariinga is not that other Wariinga. This Wariinga has decided that she'll never again allow herself to be a mere flower, whose purpose is to decorate the doors and windows and tables of other people's lives, waiting to be thrown on to a rubbish heap the moment the splendour of her body withers. The Wariinga of today has decided to be self-reliant all the time, to plunge into the middle of the arena of life's struggles in order to discover her real strength and to realize her true humanity. (216)

There is, however, a sense that Wariinga ends up as a stereotypical representative of the new Kenyan dispensation, inhabiting a job traditionally the privilege of men and in all ways conforming to the image of a true revolutionary. It is this essentialising of the new female avant-gardism which may be ideologically correct, but which seems too good to be true. Elleke Boehmer critiques Ngugi for his "neglect of both the gendered and the structural nature of power, whether that power is held by national or by proletarian forces."²⁴ Clearly Ngugi does not develop the gender issue beyond the stereotypical portrait of the ultra-feminist Wariinga, but the text seems to put more emphasis on the symbolic effect of placing a woman in the forefront of the resistance struggle. While Elleke Boehmer's criticism of the gender issue seems legitimate, her claim that Ngugi neglects the structural nature of power is indeed problematic, premised as such a reading of *Devil on the Cross* is on a total neglect of the dependency theories and the structural inequalities in the Kenyan society referred to earlier. By representing the ideal, revolutionary woman of the new Kenya, Wariinga works as a mechanical motor engineer, and cleanses her old self by resorting to arms in the dramatic killing of her former lover, Gaturia's father, who proves to be the old rich Man. Wariinga's killing of the old man is justified as a political murder: "Wariinga was standing exactly where she had stood since she had entered the room. She began to speak like a people's judge about to deliver his judgement" (253). In this way she becomes the symbol of the conscientised oppressed who turns the present order upside down. But the murder is also the individual Wariinga's personal revenge against her former lover, thus making her own erotic past an important reason for her murder. By combining the political and the erotic as a rationale for annihilating the representative of the oppressive system, Wariinga is permitted to use the theme of love as a weapon in the

²⁴ Elleke Boehmer, "The Master's Dance to the Master's Voice," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 26, no.1 (1991): 189.

political struggle. Simon Gikandi queries the genuineness of Wariinga's new life: Wariinga "would appear to have begun a new revolutionary life, but this life is called into question by two important formal features in the last section of the novel."²⁵ The formal features Gikandi refers to are Gatuiria and Wariinga's journey to Nakuru, which according to Gikandi is reminiscent of a Mau Mau song indicating that the journey to paradise is filled with dangers and threats, and the *gicaandi* player's final remarks, ending the story with ellipses:²⁶ "Wariinga walked on, without once looking back. But she knew with all her heart that the hardest struggles of her life's journey lay ahead..." (254) It is difficult to see how these features question Wariinga's new, revolutionary life. On the contrary, despite Gatuiria's hesitation, Wariinga proceeds on her new journey of life, "without once looking back." It is this determination which has marked Wariinga's personality after her "conversion," and the text is at pains to underline that there is for Wariinga no turning back, with or without Gatuiria. The *credibility* of Wariinga's transformation is a different matter, an issue which has been explored earlier. What the text does emphasise, however, is that the revolutionary struggle is no Sunday school and that the outcome as such is uncertain. But that the struggle is necessary and that Wariinga has joined the revolutionary band wagon is, despite Gikandi's query, beyond dispute.

The effects of Wariinga's uncompromising determinedness involve, however, unfortunate exclusions, perhaps most forcefully seen in the fate of Wariinga's boy friend, Gatuiria, whose natural, intuitive use of love in music strikes a discordant note because it is antithetical to the correct political position.

8.3.2 *Resistance and the strayed intellectual: The ambiguous life of Gatuiria*

It is the emergence of Wariinga as the revolutionary par excellence who causes problems, this subsection argues, for her lover, Gatuiria. Seeking, at least initially, to harmonise antithetical values instead of confronting them Gatuiria tries to find harmony in the polyphonic world of post-colonial Kenya:

"The way I see it is this: an artistic composition should be inspired by love...love of your country...a love that inspires the composer to sing hymns of praise to the beauty, the unity, the courage, the maturity, the bravery, the generosity of this country." (132)

²⁵ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 222

²⁶ In my edition of *Devil on the Cross*, there is only one instance of an ellipse as contrasted to the two ellipses in Gikandi's quotation from the novel. Gikandi's argument about the ambivalence of the ending is based on a fairly unorthodox interpretation of the ellipse(s). "The ellipses that end the novel are clearly ambivalent and can be interpreted in either of two ways: they can be seen as space in which the reader can provide an aftermath for Wariinga's story as it moves into the future; or they can function as the most visible sign of the author's uncertainty about the future." (222) Either interpretation does not in any way detract from the major contention of this chapter: that Wariinga is firmly rooted in her new life as a revolutionary.

But Gatuiria lacks, according to Wariinga, dialectical understanding: "there is no love that is not linked with hate. How can you tell what you love unless you know what to hate?"

(132) This dialectics is expressed best by Muturi:

'In the hands of the producer the sword of fire has the capacity to do good. And in the hands of the parasite the sword of fire has the capacity to do evil. Its actions illustrate both the evil and the good nature of the sword of fire. The same is true of the labour of our bodies.

'Gikuyu once said: The leopard did not know how to scratch, it was taught. True, but it always had the claws and the power to scratch. Does it scratch to kill its children? Or does it scratch to kill its enemies?' One thing is certain. What is done cannot be undone. Our actions are the bricks that we use to construct either a good or an evil heart.' (54)

Ideologically Gatuiria seems to move gradually closer to an understanding of the polarities of the society as he demasks the real role of the police: "So you, the police force, are the servants of one class only?" (198). Eventually it is not so much a problem of undertaking a "correct" analysis of post-colonial society as acting on that knowledge. As Gatuiria asked himself:

We, the intellectuals among the workers, which side are we on? Are we on the side of the producers or the side of those who live on the products of others? Are we on the side of the workers and peasants or the side of exploiters? Or are we like the hyena who tried to walk along two different roads at the same time? (205)

As the novel develops and the text epitomises Wariinga as the classical worker, everybody else seems to fall short of her heroic qualities. Exposing monomaniac tendencies Wariinga seems unable to generate much interest for Gatuiria's passion for music, pointedly underlined when she on two occasions is being distracted, in her conversation with Gatuiria, by her obsession with the workers and her work as a mechanic. When Gatuiria at great length tells about his musical *oeuvre*, he suddenly notices "that Wariinga is not listening. 'What's the matter?' he asks. 'You mentioned workers and peasants, and it reminded me of Wangari and Muturi and...and...'" (230) Later Gatuiria rejects Wariinga's proposal to start "a revolution in Kenyan music... For a minute Wariinga heard not Gatuiria's voice, but the voice of the lecturer at the Polytechnic..." (244) Composing a piece of music grounded in Kenyan culture and history Gatuiria's consciousness of national roots is voiced early in the novel when he asserts that

'Cultural imperialism is mother to the slavery of the mind and the body. It is cultural imperialism that gives birth to the mental blindness and deafness that persuaded people to allow foreigners to tell them what to do in their own country.' (58)

But Gatuiria's interest in national music does not seem to be a sufficient ideological platform in the present struggle, based as it is on the Western concept of oratorio.²⁷ There

²⁷ This scepticism against cultural nationalism is re-echoed in Ngugi's portrayal of Kenyatta while in London: "Professor Malinowski and Mbiyu Koinange had come into his life

is a sense that his music does not reflect the real interests of the workers, also signalled in Wariinga's response to the news that Wangari and Muturi might be released from prison: "That will be the day when real music will sound in my soul!" (232) As Cooper correctly observes: "A crucial distance is set up here between real music and Gatuiria's."²⁸ Added to this is Gatuiria's ideologically "suspicious" confession that his music is inspired by his love for Wariinga: "Your voice is sweeter than the sound of a thousand and one musical instruments. Wariinga, my love, you are the music of my soul." (225)

Although Gatuiria and Wariinga are heading towards a wedding based on equality and mutual respect it does not come as a surprise that Gatuiria, after Wariinga's killing of his father, "collapses" ideologically at the end as it has to a certain extent been foreshadowed by Gatuiria's lack of direction and ambivalence throughout.

Gatuiria did not know what to do: deal with his father's body, to comfort his mother or to follow Wariinga. So he just stood in the courtyard, hearing in his mind music that lead him nowhere. (254)

In fact Gatuiria remains in a political and existential no man's land after Wariinga's killing, his ideological confusion and lack of class consciousness colliding with Wariinga's present political position. From the perspective of the novel's ideological project Ogude is right when summing up Gatuiria's fate: "Gatuiria the intellectual fails in love, fails in patriotism and fails in commitment in the hour of need."²⁹ Gatuiria's failure is meant to show the ambivalences and the problematics of a counter-hegemonic position not steeped in the idiom of combat and resistance.

8.4 Querying the narrow ideological terrain: The suppression of plural stories

While Gikandi rhetorically asks whether *Devil on the Cross* "is to be grouped with his earlier works or does it really mark a break from his past practices,"³⁰ it has been the argument in our discussion of *Devil on the Cross* that the novel belongs to another category of fiction writing than the original *A Grain of Wheat*, departing from the counter-hegemonic phase of his early period by insisting on narrational and political closure. Some of the implications of these determinate, one-dimensional aspects of combat literature are discussed in this

reinforcing the reactionary tendencies of his own class. Professor Malinowski led him down the easy paths of cultural nationalism through a study of anthropology, which culminated in the publication of *Facing Mount Kenya* with its obvious attempts to hold back the political bitterness which progressive Africans necessarily felt then." Ngugi, *Detained*, 91. Ngugi also writes that Kenyatta (and Thuku) never quite transcended their petty-bourgeois class background "by fully and consciously immersing themselves in the fortunes of the peasantry and the working class." Ngugi, *Detained*, 90.

²⁸ Cooper, *To Lay*, 56.

²⁹ James Ogude, *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation* (London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 1999), 84.

³⁰ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 210.

section after first having explored the text's somewhat ambiguous relation to Christianity and Christian ethics in terms of the text's revolutionary vision. It is this revolutionary insistence which in particular makes Gatuiria's fate an inevitable, albeit problematic consequence of the narrow ideological terrain in which *Devil on the Cross* operates. Finally the section queries if the somewhat non-entrepreneurial interpretation of the parable of the talents is an indication of the text's unwillingness to probe beyond the limits of liberation rhetoric, thereby precluding any meaningful exploration of the potential practices of liberty. Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* viewed as combat fiction is a way of constructing a counter-narrative of liberation which reinscribes the ideological dogmatics of colonial discourse by reversing the subject and object position. By constantly repeating this inverted binarism, the text wants to endow with power the subaltern representations which were disempowered by colonial discourse. Whereas colonial discourse inscribed a reality which seemed natural, complete and fixed through dominant ideology's interpellation, Ngugi's combat discourse has aimed at exposing the hegemonical discourse and at highlighting its inherent strategies. *Devil on the Cross* is an attempt to create a new reality and to impress upon people that reality is not as given as colonial discourse conveyed, but something that has to be constructed.

While one of the primary intentions in *Devil on the Cross* is to critique dominant ideology and its religious underpinning and to show how Christian symbols and rites are used to ideologically polish the façade of the oppressors, the novel's Christian discourse is nevertheless not as simplistic as e.g. Ogude claims:

His presentation of religion is one-dimensional: For Ngugi, religion is a tool of oppression; a vehicle for lulling the poor and turning them away from the material reality of this world.³¹

Whereas the text clearly supports the notion of the oppressive implications of Christian ideology and practice, it also underlines the duplicity and ambivalence of the Christian message and seriously questions the exploiters' monopolisation of Christianity by showing that the Bible can be used on both side of the divide. Whereas Kareendi quotes Paul's letter to the Romans: " 'Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof...' " (23), Boss Kihara retorts by referring to another Biblical quotation: " 'Ask, and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find...' " (23) The text's inversion of the Cross image by substituting the devil for Christ is more a critique of dominant ideology's apotheosis of evil than a denigration of Christ: the celebration of theft and money is, according to the narrative, a worshipping of the Devil despite its professed god-centeredness. The text's harsh critique of the infiltration of Christianity into dominant ideology is remarkably balanced by the projection of an ethical universe with Christian implications. The ideological hero Muturi identifies himself with some sort of a secular priesthood: " 'Maybe I'm a priest, who has not yet been ordained... But I belong to an order that has been called to serve by the

³¹ Ogude, 41.

poverty of the people of Kenya? ”(27) And Wariinga’s journey is completed as a kind of religious conversion where Muturi, the secular priest, has given directions. In the encounter with Gatuiria after her political conversion she feels compelled to sing a song with clear religious overtones:

Now you see me!
Now you see me!
Dawn is breaking!
Death and life are the same to me
Dawn is breaking! (212)

and

‘One fall was enough for her, Wariinga resolved firmly, as if the secret she was carrying for Muturi had given her indomitable courage to fight and defeat the Devil with all his tempting propositions designed to persuade patriots to sell their country down the river.’ (213)

Thus re-echoing “traditional” Christian ethical rhetoric to fight evil, the use of Biblical images and terminology is undoubtedly intended to bring Wariinga’s revolutionary message home to people whose familiar terminology is Christian rather than Marxist. There is a sense, though, that this careful unlocking of the fixed binarism of revolution and Christianity (Christian ethics) goes beyond the ideologically strategic and introduces some sort of a fragile alliance between certain, radical elements of Christian ethics (emptied of its religious content) and revolutionary Marxism, thus solidifying the ideological foundation of the revolutionary struggle among the workers and peasants of Kenya. Ngugi’s dilemma is to expose and uncover religion which functions, as Cook & Okenimpke state “at once a façade for the unscrupulous and a narcotic for those who are suffering”³² and at the same time build on ethical values on which the new Kenya can be founded.

The new Kenya in *Devil on the Cross* is based on a determinate ideology which is premised on a clear-cut binarism which seeks to suppress contradiction on both side of the binary divide. The privileging of an oppositional ideology by interpellating the reader/listener with both formal and ideological signals confirms ideological closure. This insistence on a coded discourse in *Devil on the Cross* comes close to propaganda, which is differentiated formally by a mode of address which invites the reader to adopt a position of struggle rather than stability.³³ The text persuades the reader to identify with one set of discourse in opposition to other discourses, thus retaining this opposition rather than resolving it.

The text thus attempts, through the urgency of the political situation and through the novel’s understanding of the social struggle, to create a consistent and coherent fictional world where the text is a determinate representation set to convince the reader with

³² Cook and Okenimpke, 130.

³³ See Belsey, 91.

intelligible structures, meaning that there is an *intention* of arriving at a position of political or ideological closure.³⁴

Being a natural consequence of the text's highly coded representations, the novel inscribes this totalizing impulse, and dismisses, as seen in Gaturiri's untenable ambivalent stance, any challenges to it. In line with Jameson's concept of Marxism as the only "philosophically coherent and ideologically compelling resolution to the dilemmas of historicism,"³⁵ Ngugi's rejection of postmodernism's plural stories is due to its contestation of the entire notion of continuity in history and its writing. The question arises, however, whether Ngugi's imposed order can resist suspicions about such representations and in what way contradictions and ambivalences are consciously or unconsciously suppressed. The question is thus whether Ngugi's ideological inscription in the text is undermined by the text itself.

It is Gaturiria and his ambivalent position which queries the homogenising efforts of the oppositional master narrative. There is a sense that Gaturiria's indecision and passivity after his father's death only increases the feeling of marginalisation which has been noted throughout the novel, placing him outside the good company of revolutionaries. This ostracism occurs even though his response to the options available to him after his father's death in fact is quite normal. Imposing a set of "rules" which Gaturiria refrains from applying the text places the "strayed" intellectual in a political no man's land as he is unable or unwilling to act as a political robot in a disastrous situation for his family. By stigmatizing Gaturiria for not succumbing fully to its combat posture where everything is subordinated to ideology, the novel draws a tiny circle around those who can participate in the revolution. By subverting the interpellation of the Marxist ideology exemplified by Wariinga, Gaturiria is projected into a role where no deviation from the dogmatic, ideological line is tolerated. Gaturiria exposes the ideological rigidity and the inhuman demands of the oppositional master narrative and gives credibility to the Althusserian concept of ideology as only conveying partial truths. At the same time the text exposes the untenability of a dogmatic position combined with a "normal" life where love and affection usually problematise, if not transcends the strict adherence to political dogma.

It is *Devil on the Cross's* insistence on ideological and political closure by defining the post-colonial situation in terms of a Manichean binarism and by proclaiming violent resistance against the exploiters which in a sense precludes an extension of the number of real questions to be asked in a post-colonial situation before proclaiming doctrinal answers. As Macherey states in *A Theory of Literary Production*:

It is when the answers are mainly explicit that the question which gave rise to them is most often ignored; concealed under the answers, the question is rapidly forgotten. To discover the theory of a form of knowledge, that concealed central question must be rendered explicit. So rather than taking an inventory of critical

³⁴ See Steve Neale, "Propaganda," *Screen* 18, no. 3 (1977): 9 - 40 for a discussion of propaganda in the arts.

³⁵ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 19.

doctrines, the questions which they are supposed to be answering must be disclosed.³⁶

According to Foucault, discontinuity is a new instrument of historical analysis:

Instead of seeking common denominators and homogenous networks of causality and analogy, historians have been freed ... to note the dispersing interplay of different, heterogeneous discourses that acknowledge the undecidable in both our past and our knowledge of the past... we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners.³⁷

Whereas this post-modern understanding of history may de-politicise the real concerns of the oppressed by stressing epistemological uncertainty and fragmentation, Ngugi's epistemology in his combat phase is basically derived from a realist or naturalist perspective which conceives of representation if not as mirroring, as reproduction of truth itself. It is not Truth with a capital T, but an ideological truth which other stories are not allowed to subvert. Such a view of realism transcends Roland Barthes' more static view of realism as primarily one of mode of representation, that is representing the world through pre-structured lenses. For if realism is essentially complicit with the structure of reality it represents, then Ngugi's novel contests such a given social reality. Realism is in a sense purposively extended to challenge the veneer of Kenyan reality, and this challenge is supported stylistically, as we have seen, by disruptive styles bordering on surrealism and parody. Insisting on a master narrative which decidedly emphasises the continuity of colonialism into post-colonialism by encoding meaning through representation, Ngugi consciously composes a narrative whose constructed order is imposed upon the reader. It has been shown how the basic, binary conflict in *Devil on the Cross* is a class conflict where the text never envisages a contact zone between the various indigenous groups (with the exception of Gatuiria's initial programme). In theory Ngugi might agree with Fanon's insistence on the necessity of (as interpreted by Parry)

an historical and provisional affirmation of native identity that was free of essentialism, disengaged itself from notions of returning to an irrecoverable past, and that, as it were, accomplished the inscription and transcendence of this consciousness within the same move.³⁸

There is, however, a strong element of essentialism and stasis in *Devil on the Cross* which seems to preclude this type of transcendence. Although there is no strong naive romanticism or "back to the roots" ideology in *Devil on the Cross* which in principle precludes innovation and visionary action the text's ideological foundation moves best on the singular one-way track. The novel's interpretation of the Biblical parable of the talents sums up this lack of vision in *Devil on the Cross* as it inscribes an ideological pattern which

³⁶ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1978), 9.

³⁷ In Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 66.

³⁸ Parry, "Some Provisional," 21-22.

offers no alternative routes of transformation than the traditional, dogmatic revolutionary path. By failing to address the problem of the indigenous exploiters beyond its Western dependency and universal corruptedness, the text minimalises the complexity of this post-colonial quagmire. In the parable those who duplicate their five and two talents (500,000 and 200,000 shillings respectively) are identified with the indigenous oppressors who exploit the rural peasant, whereas the one who was given one talent has analysed the situation in a politically "correct" way and is unwilling to duplicate it by exploiting the workers:

'And so I went and buried your money in the ground to see if your money would yield anything without being fertilized by my sweat or that of any other man. Behold, here is your 100,000 shillings, exactly as you left it' (85).

The demonisation of those who duplicated their capital is ethically unproblematic as long as the duplication is a direct consequence of their unscrupulous exploitation of the workers. Much more problematic is the idealisation of the third who buried his talents and returned the same amount. Apart from being totally uncorrupt (which is a virtue *per se* in Kenya), the man is representative of a problem that is acute in many of the African countries: the unwillingness or inability to invest in any kind of business (the lack of entrepreneurial spirit). Ngugi's monomania in insisting on one set of political agency precludes the heterogeneity of solutions which Kenya might need. As Darby says,

the postcolonial model is essentially discursive, it does not sufficiently look beyond language and text... If one thing emerges clearly it is that Africans and Asians acted to change their situation and advance their own interests, but in so many instances their action did not produce substantial dividends; their agency failed to transform their economic and political environment.³⁹

The text's unwillingness to exploit the parable creatively confirms this ideological stasis. The failure to project agency beyond the overt political (like entrepreneurial agency) also forecloses a dialogue with potential allies, thereby narrowing down the basis for united action. In an analysis of *Petals of Blood*, Palmer writes that Karega does not seem to know what he wants, "But Ngugi ought to know."

While the analysis of the post-colonial Kenyan situation privileged in *Devil on the Cross* certainly is contentious (and even more so its proposed solution), it is difficult to ignore the moral and political urgency which is the driving force behind *Devil on the Cross*. But there is in *Devil on the Cross* no exploration of an alternative post-liberation era and what Foucault calls "the practice of freedom:"

this act of liberation is not sufficient to establish the practices of liberty that later on will be necessary for this people, this society and these individuals to decide upon receivable and acceptable forms of their existence or political society. That is why I insist on the practice of freedom.⁴⁰

³⁹ Darby, 225.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *The Final*

In *Devil on the Cross* the impression is that the novel's ideological journey terminates where Wariinga fires her liberationary shot and where Muturi asks the imperialists to pack their sacks so that the road can be paved for the new Kenya devoid of oppression and subjugation. The unwillingness and inability to look beyond the phase of liberation is problematic since *Devil on the Cross* is grounded on the huge discrepancy between the miserable situation of post-colonial Africa and the high hopes of political independence. The failure of the liberation struggle to reclaim the historicity of African existence - articulated in a multitude of documents and programs- means that a need, as Lazarus claims, "in the context of the contemporary capitalist world system... to construct a counter-narrative of liberation" is especially pressing.⁴¹ It is therefore not enough to articulate the notion of liberation as reclaiming history since a reclaiming of history without as it were projecting an image of a workable future may end in political naivete and post-colonial utopianism. Similarly *Devil on the Cross's* subversion of traditional styles meant to parallel opposition to the hegemonical order cannot, arguably, within the parameters of Ngugi's own literary combat credo, change that impression.

Foucault, ed. J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 2.

⁴¹ Lazarus, "Disavowing Decolonization," 93.

9. *Matigari*

9.1 Introduction

Matigari underlines, this chapter argues, the deceptiveness of any notion of an epistemological rupture between colonial and post-colonial society. It shows how the confrontational tone of *Devil on the Cross* is retained in *Matigari*, where the protagonist (Matigari), after some initial explorations, rejects the post-independent hegemonical order by emphasising the implacable enmity between the oppressor and the subaltern. The chapter shows how *Matigari*'s textual response to oppression is somewhat different than in *Devil on the Cross* in the sense that the response transcends, in a more articulated way than in *Devil on the Cross*, a simplistic materialist discourse. *Matigari*'s combat posture is moreover exposed in its insistence that there is basically only one story to tell about the post-colonial situation.

Writing in exile, Ngugi in *Matigari* deviates from his very contextualised previous novels by underlining, in his introductory note to the reader/listener, that everything about Matigari is imaginary: the story, the actions, the characters and even the country. Reminiscent of La Guma's *Time of the Butcherbird*, it is as if exile has distanced himself so much from the Kenyan scene that a very contextualised narrative would seem less than authentic. The story, according to the author, has no fixed time, place nor space. Matigari's journey through the land is thus in many ways a quest with clear mythical overtones. Matigari is a mythical character who initially moves between past and present and who is in some sense timeless and placeless as he appears in different shapes, both old and young, both a giant and small, both human and superhuman. But the very fact that the novel was originally written in Gikuyu, that the names of the characters are Gikuyu names and that the novel is based on the return motif (Matigari returns from the forest after independence) give enough clues to identify the main place of action to Kenya in the post-colonial era (the text refers to space flights and nuclear test ban treaties). The initial timelessness and placelessness is thus linked- paradoxically speaking- to time and place, and in contradistinction to other myths Matigari is employed to actively participate in the here-and-now of the liberation struggle. There is, in other words, no collapse into an individualised and universalised quest where the political questions related to resistance and change are ignored.

The novel's here-and-now relevance is reflected in the well-known panic reaction of the Kenyan authorities who conceived of Matigari, the fictional hero, as a real threat to the system (talking about peace and justice) and there was a call for his immediate arrest. Ngugi notes in his introduction to the English version of the novel, that "Matigari, the fictional character of the novel, was himself resurrected as a subversive political character" (viii). When the authorities later discovered Matigari's fictionality they confiscated all the copies of the novel all over Kenya. The political tracking down of the "real" Matigari underscores a Kenyan society at odds with itself and is important in the sense that it highlights the role

combat literature can play in the political struggle.¹ In some way this event must be credited Ngugi's new narrative practice, related both to the directness of the political message and not the least due to his use of the Gikuyu language. The incident echoes Mudimbe's suggestion that "Narratives presented in the truth of their language and authenticity become texts of real peoples and not merely the results of theoretical manipulations."² Ngugi tries to reach his potential peasant and proletarian readers by not only using Gikuyu, but also incorporating, like in *Devil on the Cross*, traditional orature and Biblical thinking and language in the text. Like *Devil on the Cross*, *Matigari* contains both the realistic and the more surrealistic mode, but the fusion of the two modes is more intertwined in *Matigari* and the surrealistic contains supernatural elements that are not part of the narrational design of *Devil on the Cross*.

9.2 Exploring truth and justice: disillusionment and betrayal

The present section explores how the truth-finding mission of *Matigari*, the character in the novel around which everything pivots, finds itself in a problematic, post-colonial terrain already from its inception. Surveying the ideological cartography of the country after independence the text, this section argues, confirms the impression from *Devil on the Cross* that the expected discontinuity between the colonial and post-colonial times is illusory. In fact, any idea about a new land as a result of the liberation struggle is being queried and eventually pulverised as a result of Matigari's numerous, depressing encounters after his return from the forest. Moreover the section explores how the hegemonical order interpellates the population through its highly coded radio broadcasts.

In *Penpoints* Ngugi claims that

Art has more questions than it has answers. Art starts with a position of not knowing and seeks to know. Hence its exploratory character. In fact art has hardly any answers.³

Ngugi even goes on to illustrate his point by using Matigari as an example,

who was going about asking questions related to the truth and justice of what was going on in the country. Actually Matigari was only asking one question: where

¹ Gikandi claims that the panic reactions of the Kenyan authorities were due to a misreading of *Matigari*, "by assuming that ideological intentions in the novel were intelligible and determinate." Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 230. Such a reading of *Matigari* neglects the significance of the novel's political effect and overlooks completely the revolutionary force embodied in *Matigari*. It is also worth noting that Ngugi never discredits the authorities' reading of the novel; on the contrary Ngugi seems utterly satisfied (and proud of) the Kenyan authorities' hunt for Matigari. Both in the preface to the English edition of *Matigari* as well as in his two books *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (London and Portsmouth, N.H.: James Curry and Heinemann, 1993) (157) and *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) (16) this incident is related. The relationship between art and politics is underlined by Ngugi: "Art and literature are full of ironies, and what happened to the book in real life had already taken place inside the fictional world of the novel." Ngugi, *Penpoints*, 16

² Mudimbe, 182.

³ Ngugi, *Penpoints*, 15.

could a person wearing the belt of peace find truth and justice in a post-colonial society?⁴

Ngugi's emphasis on art's and literature's function may in some way seem to contradict Ngugi's own development as an artist from a more counter-hegemonic to a more combat position. The idea of art as exploratory puts the literary perspective he adopts way beyond the didactic and absolute by positing literature not as a vehicle for providing a consensus about the nature of reality but as a mode of exploration which may ask questions, expose contradictions, ambiguities and uncertainties without necessarily smoothing them over to provide definite answers. Thus his statement presents a fluid view of literature in contrast to the didacticism of *Devil on the Cross*. In the first part of *Matigari* there is a sense that this Socratic, exploratory mood is being introduced where Matigari's quest is governed by two questions: where is truth and justice to be found and : " Had anything really changed between then and now? " (9). These questions are being tested in the first part of the novel as Matigari explores the ideological landscape. There is, however, little to comfort him in his encounters with the various segments of the post-colonial population as he experiences no fundamental discontinuity between his time in the forest and the present situation. After his encounter with the children who are being exploited by the adults, his Socratic query is already shifting to a more rhetorical one: "So a handful of people still profited from the suffering of the majority, then sorrow of the many being the joy of the few?" (12). The brutal attack on Guthera by the policemen makes Matigari almost forget that he is wearing the belt of peace:

A feeling of sharp pain and anger flashed through Matigari. His hand moved to his waist in a gesture he had often performed during his years of struggle with Settler Williams in the mountains. There was nothing there. No guns. He remembered that he was now wearing the belt of peace. But he was very angry. (30)

And after having listened to Guthera's story, Matigari reverts to the Manichean binarism of the resistance struggle:

'There are two types of believers,' Matigari said, breaking the silence that followed the end of Guthera's narrative. 'Those who love their country, and those who sell it. There are also two types of soldier. Some are there to protect the people, others to attack them' (37).

Guthera seems to confirm that if there is a change since the struggle, it is to the worse: " 'I have never seen even one of them protecting the people!' " she (Guthera) said (37).

In the prison the true story of the land is being told:

'Our country is truly as dry as this concrete floor. Our leaders have hearts as cold as that of Pharaoh. Or even colder than those of the colonialists. They cannot hear the cry of the people' (53).

⁴ Ngugi, *Penpoints*, 16.

The collapse of the dream for a better post-independence future has created an atmosphere of repression and fear, transforming people from truth-sayers to self-interested egotists, blatantly exposed in the student's and teacher's idealistic response in the cell and their cowardly rejoinder to Matigari's moral challenges later (54 and 89-92). It takes, apparently, Matigari somewhat by surprise:

When he had come out of the forest, he had thought that the task of bringing his family together was going to be an easy one. But now? It was already afternoon, and he had not yet made contact with his own. (26)

It is the woman in the wilderness who confirms moral confusion and fear:

'Right and wrong are embedded in what people do. But even among the people, you still have a problem in finding the answers to your questions. And do you know why?... It is fear. There is too much fear in this country. How does the saying go? Too much fear breeds misery in the land... Happy are they who suffer in search of truth, for their minds and hearts are free, and they hold the key to the future.' (87)

Clearly endangering Matigari's truth-finding mission fear and moral confusion paralyse the people and sustain the present social and economic order. Acknowledging the wisdom of the old woman Matigari repeats *ad verbatim* the woman's claims: "Too much fear breeds misery in the land.'" (112). Already in the first part of the novel, then, the answer to Matigari's questions are found. The promise of independence has not materialised: as Ayi Kwei Armah says in the title of his novel: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.⁵ The negative answer to Matigari's questions, which are consistently held throughout the text, is also consistent with Ngugi's remarks in the article from *Penpoints* referred to above where the close linkage and the continuity between the colonial and the neo-colonial regime is reiterated:

A neo-colonial system, equally, is erected on a structure of lies, for it acts as if it is free and independent while it is essentially a continuation of the hated colonial system by other even more pernicious means.⁶

Ngugi's insistence on the Socratic role of art seems therefore more theoretical than seriously related to *Matigari*. While questions can be asked, there is a sense that the answers are grounded in and premised on a fairly preconceived ideological foundation. This must be understood on the basis of the profound disillusionment with a concrete socio-economic, cultural and political reality in the 70s and the 80s from which both *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* are generated. In this sense already the first part of *Matigari* anticipates that *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* are ideological twins whose combat commitment is, as Ngugi clearly acknowledges, the *raison d'être* for writing in a post-colonial era. It has already been noted how Matigari articulates an understanding of Kenya's political and moral universe which is premised on the notion of the binary world. This Manicheism

⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1989).

⁶ Ngugi, *Penpoints*, 22.

is repeated throughout, like: “There are two worlds... there is the world of those who accept things as they are, and there is that of those who want to change things ’ ” (91). “One truth belongs to the oppressor, the other belongs to the oppressed’ ” (121) and “There are two types of people in this country. There are those who sell out, and those who are patriots’ ” (126). The terrain in which Matigari moves reflects the secular version of New Testament’s binarism of the heavenly Kingdom and the world of Satan, the whole novel being actually a version of the archaic morality play where the good and evil forces are pitted against each other in an infinite struggle. This binarism is similar to the dichotomisation in *Devil on the Cross* :

‘Heaven and hell?’... ‘Both exist, and there is a difference between them, just as there is a difference between good and evil, a good heart and an evil heart. Listen. Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it’
(*Devil on the Cross*, 53)

Matigari’s version of post-colonial Kenya is based on the fierce contestation of “whose reality counts.” By constructing “the reality” it wants to convey through dominant ideology’s various repressive and propagandistic means the neo-colonial state as experienced by Matigari represents a monolithic force which fights to maintain hegemonical control. The question of representation is consciously and deliberately dealt with by the representatives of the neo-colonial regime: “We have qualified professors who can write new history for us’ ” (118). The inherent instability and fragility of the colonial state and its incessant work through government acts and ordinances to stabilise this instability parallels the strategic endeavors of the neo-colonial state apparatus to enforce its elitist, corrupt interests on the people, as seen in the offensive role of the propaganda machinery in *Matigari*. It is this continuous reinscription of neo-colonial ideology which is being targeted by Matigari and his co-patriots. As the teacher says: “I also know that there are two truths. One truth belongs to the oppressor, the other belongs to the oppressed’ ” (121). Reflected in Ngugi’s use of various genres the fierce ideological battle is exposed in the oppositionality between the more or less “traditional” songs on the one hand and the “modern” radio broadcasts (“Voice of Truth”) on the other. Exposing the absolute tyranny of his Excellency Ole Excellence in a satirical, and sometimes absurd way, the radio broadcasts are reminiscent of the Devil’s feast in *Devil on the Cross* even though the focus in the broadcasts is more on the authorities’ perception of and representation of the international and national political situation than on the absurd excesses of the exploiters. The “Voice of Truth,” besides exposing the government’s links to the former colonial powers, markets the repressiveness of the authorities in an almost Althusserian way by trying to clothe the repressive ideology in a more sellable and acceptable form. But the real message is transparent: the broadcasts expose a government which insists on using all repressive means- whatever the costs- to clamp down upon any kind of opposition.

9.3 Resistance and agency: the prophet and the grassroots

While the previous section explored the post-colonial cartography in *Matigari*, the present section analyses Matigari's response to the repression and exploitation of the present regime. As a prophet Matigari not only passes judgement on the present state of affairs, but also projects a vision of a new Jerusalem. By widening the previous, one-dimensional materialist response to the powers of oppression to include super-naturalist aspects, this section shows how the text attempts to move the narrative beyond the inevitability of the post-colonial situation. The section underlines, however, that the dual and enigmatic nature of Matigari (moving beyond time and space and still having a material reality) does not detract from the over-all focus on the ethical and political realities of the novel. The section moreover analyses the problematic aspect of grassroots agency in the liberation struggle, and explores the effects of Matigari's interventions on the people. There is still a sense, the section argues, that it is Matigari who carries the burden of responsibility for confronting the unethical and corrupt post-colonial regime.

In a sense Matigari functions as the beautiful one who comes back from the bush and queries the healthiness of the post-colonial situation, captured in the heading of the second part of the novel: Seeker of Truth and Justice. As a prophet who tries to reinvigorate the spirit from the days of Mau Mau Matigari represents these ideals of resistance against oppression. Quite in line with the notion of combat literature as confrontational rather than dialogue-oriented, Matigari's purpose of returning from the forest after independence is, after querying the ethical and ideological basis of this post-colonial society, to establish a new order on the ruins of the post-colonial state apparatus.

While the radio broadcasts functions as the propaganda mouthpiece of the authorities, the songs project on the other hand a totally different reality which links in a somewhat idyllic way the communal spirit of pre-colonial times with the present struggle against oppression. Towards the end the Christ-like figure of Matigari is highlighted and the songs rise to a crescendo where the houses and other representations of the oppressors are burnt, signalling optimistically that "victory shall be ours" through a new struggle of liberation. The hegemonic struggle is, however, extended beyond these traditional and modern means of communication, and takes on a more ominous note when Matigari and his followers signal direct confrontation towards the end. It is Matigari who through the text's encoded world encourages a direct, uncompromising and one-dimensional reaction and opposition against the oppressor. Embodying the double-edged role of the prophet Old Testament style, Matigari both projects the Truth to the people and passes judgement on the present state of affairs. But Matigari seeks beyond the limits of a traditional prophetic role by claiming a Christ-like stature. This can be attributed to the various specific New Testament allusions coupled directly to Matigari like his words of communion in the prison (57), his imitation of Jesus' words: "I don't need signs or miracles" (63), his departure to "the wilderness," his admonition: "let the children come to me" (73), his prophetic statement about escaping prison after three days (79), even his doubts and regrets like Jesus in

Gethsemane (161), and his coming to Boy's house, riding in the Mercedes Benz like a VIP is reminiscent of Jesus riding into Jerusalem. In addition Ngugi also attributes Matigari with miraculous qualities like Jesus Christ. He appears and disappears at will (72), he can apparently go on without food and drink without tiring (41), he is protected by some magic power since the bullets don't hit him (173), and he miraculously escapes John Boy's burning house through a window (170) even if it is surrounded by the security forces. Matigari's departure from the novel in the midst of the thunder and lightning is reminiscent of the New Testament's rendering of Jesus' death and ascension. Whereas Ngugi earlier has been focusing on objectifying the reality of grim post-colonialism with an underlying aspiration for revolution, he seems in *Matigari* - even though the idea of revolution is by no means forgotten - to realise the historical limitations of Marxism and its resultant lack of elasticity. By straying away from a strict materialist discourse by this heavy inclusion of non-materialist, supernatural elements, Ngugi lifts the novel beyond a mere reiteration of Marxist jargon to challenge the present order. Clearly Ngugi's supernatural device helps to widen the scope of combat strategies in confrontation with dominant ideology and to move the narrative beyond the inevitability of the neo-colonial situation, even though Ngugi's supernatural, religious inclusion causes, as we shall see later, political and ideological problems as well.

9.3.1 *Transgressing Marxist discourse: The role of super-naturalism and Christian imagery*

This subsection argues that Ngugi's use of super-naturalism and Christian imagery transcends the fixity of the post-colonial situation and is thus more complex than Cooper's somewhat condescending remarks about "the biblical tone of tilling and reaping and the exaction of godly vengeance"⁷ attest to. Even though Ngugi's use of biblical allusions and the very similarities between Matigari and Christ certainly fall into the category of accommodating his audience, there is a shift in how these biblical allusions are used which signal a vision of a new order after the armed struggle. While the biblical allusions in *Devil on the Cross* often turned sour and negative, the positive ethical implication of Christianity was tentatively put on the agenda. In *Matigari* this is taken a step further and I agree with Maughan-Brown who sees *Matigari* as "a new departure based on a reassessment of the cultural, and thereby political significance of religion."⁸ Ngugi's characterisation of individual church people are as harsh as before, with Guthera's father as a very notable exception. Characterised as a devout Christian and a church leader with high moral principles who support the children altruistically, he is at the same time politically very active in the liberation struggle. Coming as a shock to Guthera his activism leads to his death:

⁷ Cooper, *To Lay*, 177.

⁸ David Maughan-Brown, "Matigari and the Rehabilitation of Religion," *Research in African Literatures* 22, no. 4 (1991): 174.

'Is it true?' (that you are an activist - my insertion) '... Yes, for there is no greater love than this: that men and women should give up their lives for the people by taking to the mountains and forests.' (35)

Here the biblical reference (the gospel of love) is contextualised into the political and economic situation of the neo-colonial state, projecting visions about the ideological foundations on which the new Kenya must build. Admittedly old wine in new bottles, it nevertheless underlines Ngugi's perception of a post-colonial situation which desperately calls for moral rearmament based on age-old principles. Referring exclusively to religious principles in a non-transcendent,⁹ here-and-now context, Matigari emphatically refutes that he is "the one whose second coming is prophesied" (156). Ngugi admitted long before the writing of *Matigari* the rationale behind the use of the Bible: "I have also drawn from the Bible in the sense that the Bible was for a long time the only literature available to Kenyan people that has been available to them in their national languages." ¹⁰ Ngugi uses religion in a secularised version to facilitate his message of change:

'The God who is prophesied is in you, in me and in other humans. He has always been there inside us since the beginning of time. Imperialism has tried to kill that God within us. But one day that God will return for the dead...and liberate us who believe in Him...But...if you let your country go to the imperialist enemy and its local watch-dogs, it is the same thing as killing that God who is inside you...' (156)

It is liberation theology in a new, very secular fashion¹¹ as Ngugi wants to reinvigorate values like peace, justice, equality and brotherly love that are solidly based on Christian ethics. Moreover such values are concomitant with the traditional values which are expressed in the traditional songs of the novel. In this way *Matigari* offers another alternative than Fanon's view of religion as detrimental to revolutionising the masses:

The colonialist bourgeoisie is helped in its work of calming down the natives by the inevitable religion. All those saints who have turned the other cheek, and who have forgiven trespasses against them, and who have been spat on and insulted without shrinking are studied and held up as examples.¹²

Maughan-Brown lists various reasons for Ngugi's "return" to Christianity or Christian ethics¹³, the decisive reason being Ngugi's desperate search for peace and justice in a society where all "decent values" are perverted by the neo-colonial oppressors ("Our leaders have hearts as cold as that of Pharaoh. Or even colder than those of the

⁹ Matigari's transcendence of time and place is of a different, mythical order.

¹⁰ Ngugi, "An Interview with Ngugi." *The Weekly Review* 9 Jan 1978: 10.

¹¹ Maughan-Brown seems, however, to go a bit far when asserting that Ngugi is 'theologizing the impulse towards a socialist revolution in the terms of a liberation theology' (Maughan-Brown, "*Matigari*," 177) since his references to God seem to exclusively relate to a non-transcendent, here-and-now reality.

¹² Fanon, *The Wretched*, 67.

¹³ Maughan-Brown mentions cultural receptiveness among the peasants, encounters with liberation theologians, the more progressive roles of the churches in Kenya in recent years, the important role of religion in any culture and that many African religious movements implicitly challenge the existing social order. Maughan-Brown, "*Matigari*," 177.

colonialists.’” (53)) and where he reckons that any transformation of the social order cannot come about unless the people, the grassroots, “convert” to these ideals. The novel’s paradigm of a new national culture is akin to Appiah’s definition of the establishment of a national heritage, “constructed through the invention of traditions, the careful filtering of the rough torrent of historical event into the fine stream of an official narrative, the creation of a homogenous legacy of values and experience.”¹⁴ In such a perspective it is hardly ironical, as Ranger claims, that “those like Ngugi who repudiates bourgeois elite culture face the ironic danger of embracing another set of colonial inventions instead.”¹⁵ The eclectic nature of Ngugi’s counter-discourse can be said to be determined, as Appiah postulates with reference to *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, “by the dictates of the west’s own Herdian legacy- its highly elaborated ideologies of national autonomy, of language and literature as their natural substrate.”¹⁶ This tension between rejecting Western imperialism and colonialism and exploiting areas of Western ideology to achieve that rejection is a well-established tradition in African resistance from the days prior to independence.

Matigari’s ideological journey not only transcends a mere materialist discourse, but his representations do not always, as Wilson - Tagoe asserts in another context, “assume the order and coherence of historicism, that, rather, they open avenues for mediation and transformation instead of being accepted as a given progressive order.”¹⁷ Ngugi, by transcending his own materialism, opens a terrain which takes into account or acknowledges other perceptions of reality deeply ingrained in the people he wants to address. It is a way of acknowledging the cultural roots and the epistemological horizon of the Kenyan peasants and workers, and a way of linking up with a cultural environment which the exiled Ngugi has been somewhat alienated from.

9.3.2 *The identity of Matigari and the problem of grassroots agency*

While Matigari first questions the state of the post-colonial situation and then tries to redress the imbalance of the post-colonial quagmire with encoded messages or meanings, Matigari’s identity is shifty in the sense that he moves both among the “real,” suffering people of the post-colonial state and (in the next moment) beyond time and space, appearing both as some sort of a ghost and simultaneously as a material reality grounded in the here and now of the post-colonial situation. Exploring the meaning of Matigari’s elusive identity, this subsection proceeds to analyse Matigari’s multiple role as both an

¹⁴ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 59. See also Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihehukwu Madubuike, *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1980).

¹⁵ Terence Ranger, “Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 262.

¹⁶ Appiah, 59.

¹⁷ Wilson-Tagoe, *Historical Thought*, 79.

individual and collective and analyses the complex relationships between Matigari and the representation of the crowd beyond Matigari.

Gikandi makes a point of the novel's emphasis on the elusive substance of Matigari's identity by claiming that it is "frustrating to those who seek a definite identity and meaning for Matigari and for the history he engenders."¹⁸ While there is no disagreement about the elusiveness of Matigari's *identity* as such this elusiveness should not be mistaken for a lack of determinate meaning in Matigari's various appearances; on the contrary, the text endows Matigari with an encoded message which is closely linked to his prophetic function. As Gikandi correctly writes in the same chapter on Matigari:

His target is often described as a house, but he visualizes this as something more than a dwelling: Matigari's "home on top of the hill" is clearly intended to recall Jerusalem: His mission is described in the familiar rhetoric of patriotism and nation restoration ("I must rise up now and go to all the public places, blowing the horn of patriotic service and the trumpet of patriotic victory."¹⁹ (6)

Moreover, Gikandi later confirms that Matigari's identity is less important than his message:

the defining question is no longer who Matigari is, but his capacity to undermine the official discourse by presenting a narrative of virtue as an alternative to the empty rhetoric of state power (123-25)²⁰

It is true, however, that the representation of Matigari as both an individual, collective and a supernatural entity complicates the novel's ideological project as Matigari's various roles are, if not mutually incompatible, difficult to combine, but these different roles are not contradictory in the sense that they emit different or ambiguous ideological, political signals. As Patrick Williams very significantly underlines: "the fluid spatial and temporal parameters of his (Matigari's) quest are of little importance compared to its ethical and political content."²¹ Whereas Matigari as a prophet and as a Messiah signals the necessity for a transformation of or an armed revolt against the post-colonial society (after a preliminary exploration of the post-colonial terrain), it is Matigari as the collective which is to spearhead the revolution. Matigari's real name is not known and Matigari is a collective label denoting the patriots who survived the bullets"- the patriots who survived the liberation war, and their political offspring.²² The importance of mass agency is underscored through authorial interference:

No government, not even the most repressive, has ever managed to silence the voices of the masses. The songs spread like wildfire in a dry season. They spread through the villages. The people sang them day and night. (127)

¹⁸ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 235.

¹⁹ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 230.

²⁰ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 245.

²¹ Williams, 130.

²² Ngugi, *Matigari*, 20.

In *Matigari* the ambiguity of mass agency is somewhat camouflaged and disguised by Matigari's triple roles (prophet/ Christ-like, liberation fighter and peasant/worker), inhabiting individual, heroic qualities which are simultaneously transferred to his collective function. The fictional dilemma of representation by centering on Matigari the individual when the ideological focus is on the collective consciousness is in principle insoluble, but is tentatively solved by the text's individuation of the collective, As Mazrui and Mphande contend:

While in early works like *A Grain of Wheat* combatants are usually portrayed as brave individuals displaying their bravery against overwhelming odds, Matigari faces the minister of Truth and Justice, who is flanked by an awesome paramilitary force, by standing right in the middle of the crowd. Yet he is the crowd, too. In a typically collective style, the individual stands for the whole.²³

But there is a tension in the novel here which arises out of a theoretical dilemma of representation, of giving the individual a collective consciousness, but also out of the ideological problem of mass versus individual agency. Reminiscent of the tension in *And A Threefold Cord* where the epigraph's insistence on collectivity is counteracted by the general, individual thrust of the text, *Matigari* the novel is undoubtedly, albeit unwillingly, projecting Matigari the prophet as the genuine hero of the novel and not the crowd or the workers, i.e. the representation of the crowd beyond Matigari's collective role. Whereas the crowd in the beginning are completely pacified and insensitive to the needs of their fellow men there is, however, a development in the novel where the revolutionary potential of the masses to a larger degree coalesces with that of Matigari. Several events problematise the notion of grassroots agency before the impact of Matigari's ideological interventions are being felt. In the first scene the workers ignore Matigari when he lies wounded on the ground:

The shopkeepers went about their business, and the workers walked by, talking about the factory, and particularly about the strike they were going to stage that day. They were not interested in the old man lying on the grass. (18)

The only one of the workers who pays attention to Matigari is the strike leader, Ngaruro wa Kiriro. It is in contact with Matigari that Ngaruro develops into a true revolutionary: "Ngaruro wa Kiriro sprung up as if new strength and confidence had been instilled in him by his brief contact with Matigari" (24). The second scene refers to the incident when Guthera is attacked by the policeman's dog. The crowd watching the brutal assault are completely passive with no authority, courage or the power to chase the policemen away. Matigari's angry response is in line with his call for moral and political rearmament in the country:

He (Matigari) turned to the crowd and shouted angrily: 'What is going on here? Are you going to let our children be made to eat shit while you stand around nodding in approval?' (30)

²³ Alamin Mazrui and Lupenga Mphande, "Orality and the Literature of Combat: Ngugi and the Legacy of Fanon," in Cantalupo, *The World*, 175.

Moreover the lack of conscientisation makes the masses more focused on the supernatural consequences of Matigari's quest than on the struggle itself:

they just stared at him as though they did not understand what it was he was asking. They would turn their attention to the much more exciting tale about Jesus, Gabriel, Matigari ma Njiruungi, about prison doors opening mysteriously, about the escape of the prisoners, such stories. (85)

Reminiscent of Marx' slogan of religion as the opium of the people, the people's preoccupation with the supernatural *per se* overshadows the text's exposure or use of religion as a way of moral cleansing, thus perverting in some sense the straightforward, linear ideological course staked out by the text. The failure of the student, the teacher and the priest to stick to truth and justice only reinforces the impression of grassroots non-agency and cowardice.

But there is a shift in attitude and behaviour as Matigari's call for change is being heeded. While the workers' attempt at agency through the strike is a high-risk activity which is very quickly clamped down upon by the brutal police (60) Matigari has inspired the leader of the workers, Ngaruro wa Kiriro, to talk back to the regime: "Foreign exploiters and their local servants must now back up their bags and go. The patriots, Matigari ma Njiruungi, are back" (60). This resistant attitude effects also a change in the behaviour of the crowd who on several occasions violate the code of conduct described by the regime, twice described in a language reminiscent of how the crowd is characterised in *A Walk in the Night* :

The people rose as one and heaved towards the minister, still singing as though they wanted to go into the small room to free Matigari ma Njiruungi, Ngaruro wa kiriro and all the other political prisoners. (125)

And later the crowd threaten the soldiers of the regime:

Suddenly a ball of fire burst out of the windows of the house. And now it was opened as though the people's mouths were also suddenly opened. They shouted and scrambled! The crowd surged forward towards the house. The soldiers were completely taken by surprise. They could not hold back the surging crowd. (166)

Besides Ngaruro Guthera and Muriuki develop to become the disciples of Matigari:

Most of all, he (Matigari) was inspired by the depth of Guthera's and Muriuki's commitment to him... Their agony had become his agony; their suffering, his suffering (88)

'Let's go! Let's go and get the gun now!' Muriuki said excitedly, already imagining himself wearing a gun... 'I will come too,' Guthera said. 'One can die only once, and it is better to die in pursuit of what is right.' (139).

It is Guthera's life history which penetrates beneath the surface of grassroots resistance and agency and humanises and gives some credibility to the revolutionary project. Guthera's life both "explains" and "illustrates" the almost impenetrable hurdles the people face in confrontation with the neo-colonial state. Her story, reminiscent of Wariinga in *Devil on the*

Cross, about the consequences of keeping her moral integrity (which kills her father), and her relinquishment of these same ideals to save her brothers and sister (becomes a prostitute) is a tale of outrageous cynicism and degradation imposed upon her by the neo-colonial regime. Being the only person in the novel who exposes a self which is consciously being established (a self based on the moral principles of her father), Guthera is also the only person who dismantles the very self she has consciously built up. Her decision to eventually walk the streets is, despite its moral degradation, a conscious, willed act on Guthera's part and is simultaneously the only act possible if another moral principle is to be maintained, the survival of her closest kin. It is only when Matigari saves her from the policemen that she embarks on a new course and possibly builds up a new self linked to the liberation of the oppressed: "She thought: I will go with him, support him, until he finally finds his people" (39).

Similar to La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* the text thus poses the moral, existential dilemma of an oppressive state where there seems to be no morally acceptable exit apart from revolutionary agency. Moreover the problem from a revolutionary perspective is that circumstances deconscientise people and it is only through the external intervention of Matigari that the course is set right. Guthera's development from purity to degradation to revolutionary agency is therefore problematical in the sense that the last transformation is utterly dependent on the intervention of Matigari, and is an individualised act of resistance which does not necessarily have implications for the participation of the masses.

Still Guthera's conscientisation process is important in the sense that she not only describes the situation of the subaltern, but also suggests that understanding the situation does not *per se* generate change. Using animal imagery reminiscent of Fanon and *And A Threefold Cord* Guthera acknowledges that "the life I have been leading is not that of a human being. It has been more like that of an animal... my life has not been any different from that of an animal" (140). Stressing in particular the situation of women she advocates change: "I want to do something to change whatever it is that makes people live like animals, especially us women." (140) Whereas Charlie Pauls in *And A Threefold Cord*, through the rooker, was conscientised, but unable to turn his knowledge into practice, the motto of the activists in *Matigari* is: " 'Saying is doing is our motto.' " (141) And Matigari's response to Muriuki and Guthera's commitment is clearly positive: "Most of all, he was inspired by the depth of Guthera's and Muriuki's commitment to him... Their agony had become his agony; their suffering, his suffering" (88).

Ideologically the novel seems to be on a par with Fanon's view of the masses: " We have seen that it is the intuition of the colonized masses that their liberation must, and can only, be achieved by force." ²⁴ But there is a sense that the novel's ideological insistence on the spearhead function of the masses and grassroots agency to a certain extent is imposed upon the text, serving as the *deus ex machina* or as puppets for the author's ideological

²⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 73.

project. The inflation of Matigari's role as the symbol of the collective and the dependency on Matigari by the real representations of the collective, the peasants and workers, complicates the ideological project. There is a suspicion that it is Matigari who carries the brunt of the confrontational efforts and on whom the others are dependent or refer to until his disappearance towards the end. It is seen in Matigari's intervention in the meeting with the minister, an intervention which evokes admiration among the people: "What a long time it had been since they had last seen such courage!" (114-115). And the dependency syndrome is exposed when the workers, during the strike, in their desperateness seem to depend on intervention from the outside as they, somewhat passively, agree to Matigari's call.

As the strike leader Ngaruro wa Kiriro says:

The patriots, Matigari ma Njirungi, are back, and the workers agree with Matigari's call. He who sows must be the one who reaps. We refuse to be the pot that cooks but never eats the food. (60)

Even in the midst of the violent confrontations between the people and the security forces Matigari is referred to:

But above all the activity and commotion, they were all asking themselves the same question: Where was Matigari ma Njiruungi? The security forces were asking themselves the same. (169)

As Ogude states: "What Ngaruro wa Kiriro, the worker leader in *Matigari* is doing in organising workers only finds its concrete expression in the violent attempt by Matigari to win back his house and land."²⁵

While the sense of dependency on Matigari in terms of political agency is indisputable, there is also a suspicion that Matigari, despite his dual role, is ideologically cut off from the masses he is set to serve, at one time articulated in a scene, reminiscent of Jesus in Gethsemane or in the desert, where Matigari's feeling of desolation is acute:

What frightened him was the feeling that he was perhaps the only one preoccupied with what was happening in the country - indeed as if he was alone in the whole country... He felt so lonely. Thoughts of saving himself only and forgetting all the rest crept into him and weakened his resolve. (85 - 86)

While the question of grassroots agency, problematic in this novel as it is in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Devil on the Cross*, is tentatively solved by Matigari's multiple roles, this multiplicity of roles also causes representational problems since Matigari is supposed to contain everything, leaving very little space for the other characters in the novel. The price to pay is thus high: by restricting the individuation to the shifty identity of Matigari and to Guthera, Ngugi is hardly penetrating below the surface in his analysis of the forces at work in the process of resistance agency. Ngugi's critique of Soyinka is in this perspective quite interesting, and in view of Ngugi's combat fiction, quite misplaced:

²⁵ Ogude, 32.

Soyinka's good man is the uncorrupted individual: his liberal humanism leads him to admire an individual's lone act of courage, and thus he often ignores the creative struggle of the masses. The ordinary people, workers and peasants, in his plays remain passive watchers on the shore or pitiful comedians on the road.²⁶

9.4 The apotheosis of Matigari and the rejection of the decentered voice

This final section on *Matigari* explores the novel as combat fiction by emphasising its determinate content and its repression of plural stories. Matigari's authoritative role as a prophet and truth sayer stands in clear contrast to the decentered and problematised voice of post-modern writing, and while the present section acknowledges Ngugi's use of political and ideological closure, it also critiques the novel for not allowing a broader spectrum of issues within the political framework of the novel. By transgressing the orthodox economy of Marxism by including a non-materialist discourse, the novel attempts, this section finally argues, both to refute the fragmentation of Western, post-modern discourse and to give direction to a continent in deep crisis.

What places *Matigari* in the class of combat fiction is the crucial and unambiguous role of Matigari as the ideological mouthpiece. The ambivalent and rather superficial portrayal of the masses notwithstanding the text, by employing the image of the prophet as the main representational figure, has already crushed any notion of multiple representations as equally authentic or true. As Ngugi himself recognizes, the prophet is linked to concepts like truth and authority (since art is prophetic and truth-saying, Ngugi underlines "the impossibility of reconciliation between art and the state in a class-structured society"²⁷), concepts which are not apotheosised in post-modern criticism, but which are urgent in Ngugi's political and, it must added, aesthetic struggle.

Unlike Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*, Matigari, despite his multifaceted roles and transcendental qualities, thus comes out as a fairly one-dimensional character who rarely questions, like prophets seldom do, the legitimacy of his truth-finding mission or the truth value of his answers. Also towards the end the binary understanding of the post-colonial world is reiterated: Matigari spoke again: " 'There are indeed two worlds,' he said, as echoing Guthera's words. "The world of the patriots and that of sell-outs' "(152). Matigari, by embodying the novel's ideological location, emerges as a centered, unified self who as a prophet distinguishes truth from false and maintains that there is basically one story to tell: "The world is turned upside down, but it must be set right again. For I have seen that in our land today lies are decreed to be the truth, and the truth decreed to be a lie" (137). The plural stories in the beginning of the novel, focusing on grass-roots passivity and treason, thus function in the novel as the ideological legacy of the neo-colonial regime which Matigari, through his ideological mission, seems to have converted into a single story of

²⁶ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 65.

²⁷ Ngugi, *Penpoints*, 33.

armed resistance against the regime. Matigari's crucial, ideological function as the epitome of the new Kenya is thus to attempt to repress alternative stories and thereby to cover up - up to a point - the dilemmas of meaning-making through representation. The selection of a single narrative is in principle not very different (although more transparent) from what historians also do: "they suppress, repeat, subordinate, highlight, and order those facts, but once again, the result is to endow the events of the past with a certain meaning."²⁸ Matigari as the ideological mouthpiece means countering the detotalising thrust from a post-modern stance of non-closure, fragmentation and colonial/post-colonial discontinuity by positioning, in Slemon's words, his "oppositional and reiterative textual responses of post-colonial cultures in dialectical relation to their colonialist precursors."²⁹ The text's epistemological and ontological basis thus differs, according to Craig Tapping, from that of metropolitan critics whose

refutation of such absolute and logo-centric categories as these-'truth' or 'meaning,' 'purpose' or 'justification' - the new literatures... are generated from cultures for whom such terms as 'authority' and 'truth' are empirically urgent in their demands.³⁰

By presenting one version of history or the contemporary political situation with no time for an elaborate construction of self (Guthera being the only exception) the text hardly challenges its own totalising conception of reality, thus imposing a certain meaning on the reader/listener by stating the "real" state of affairs in the post-colonial situation in Kenya. Conscious of the fact, through colonial and post-colonial history writing, that narrating the past becomes a question of representing, that is, of constructing and interpreting, not of objective recording, the text foregrounds the self-conscious post-colonial inscription of history, but shies away from exposing or critiquing its own encoded interpretative representation. Whereas post-modern fiction exposes "that events no longer speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose constructed, not found order is imposed upon them, often overtly by the narrating figure"

³¹ *Matigari* focuses, not on the act of imposing order, but on narrating a story with an encoded message with which it interpellates the reader. *Matigari* has an ideological function which attempts to repress alternative stories and thereby to cover up - up to a point- the dilemmas of meaning-making through representation. Since there in *Matigari* are no multiple endings the text does not suggest suspicious continuity or relativised finality. The novel is concerned with truth and with linking past to present, shying away from "the tensions that exist between the pastness (and absence) of the past and the presentness (and

²⁸ Quoted in Hutcheon, *The Politics*, 67.

²⁹ Stephen Slemon, "Modernism's Last Post," in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 4.

³⁰ Craig Tapping, "Literary Reflections of Orality. Colin Johnson's Dr. Wooredy's Prescription for Enduring of the World." Paper delivered at MLA Convention, New Orleans, December 1988.

³¹ Hutcheon, 66.

presence) of the present and... between the actual events of the past and the historian's act of processing them into facts." ³²

Whereas Hutcheon asserts that "to accept unquestioningly such fixed representations is to condone social systems of power which validate and authorize some images of women (or blacks, Asians, gays etc.) and not others," ³³ *Matigari* focuses on fixed representations as a necessary tool to expose both post-colonial power and its oppositional elements. This insistence on fixed representation is part of the combat code: whereas *A Grain of Wheat* in the original version was concerned with the analysis and reflection of the fragmented self of the colonized and the reconstruction of that very self, there is a sense that *Matigari* focuses on the direct, uncompromising and one-dimensional reaction and opposition against the oppressor.

The text tries to restore, as Ngugi confirms, also in *Penpoints*, "voices to the land. It tries to give voices back to the silenced." ³⁴ The implication is not necessarily that Ngugi rejects Spivak's query about the subaltern's potential/possibility to speak, but that "A neo-colonial state tries to impose silence on the population as a whole... Art gives voice to silence in the great prophetic tradition." ³⁵ Ngugi is thus not so concerned with the theoretical problem about the reconstruction of the subaltern voice, but focuses on *giving* the subaltern a voice like La Guma does in his fiction. It is this urgency of addressing and speaking for the people who feel betrayed and long for "a new Kenya" which is the engine of the novel. Old concepts like the failures and betrayals of independence are used because Ngugi insists on their appropriateness in a new era.

While there may be some truth in Simon Gikandi's claim, in an article from 1992, that *Matigari* doesn't understand "the new Kenya because he has been for too long in the forest," ³⁶ the real reason for his incomprehension seems more due to, as we have seen, his initial confusion about the lack of epistemological rupture which independence promised rather than any complexity and novelty brought about by a new order. At one point *Matigari* even exposes moral confusion: "The line that divided truth from lies, good from bad, purity from evil, where was it? What was the difference between right and wrong? Who was the evil one?" (85) But it is not a confusion about his own ideological message, but about who "was the evil one? Was it the one who led another into sin, or the one who actually sinned?" (85). Gikandi questions in the same article referred to above the relevance of *Matigari*'s fact-finding mission even if *Matigari* may find the truth: "*Matigari*'s words may resonate with the truth, but the ideological machinery of the state determines the realities of the nation." ³⁷ By privileging the contemporary material practices without, it seems, questioning the legitimacy of those very practices, Gikandi here seems to belong

³² Hutcheon, 73.

³³ Hutcheon, 17.

³⁴ Ngugi, *Penpoints*, 25.

³⁵ Ngugi, *Penpoints*, 27.

³⁶ Simon Gikandi, "The Politics," 382..

³⁷ Gikandi, "The Politics," 382.

politically and epistemologically to another world than Ngugi. Gikandi's criticism is grounded on the ideological premise that the paradigms have changed since *Matigari* was in the forest. Whereas Ngugi stresses continuity and linkages, Gikandi underlines discontinuity, accusing Ngugi of filling the new bottles with old wine, resulting in an ideological dead-end street:

Writers who still seem to believe that the post-colonial situation is simply the continuation of colonialism under the guise of independence, or that the narrative of decolonization can be projected into the post-colonial world, seem to be entrapped in an ideological cul-de-sac.³⁸

Critiquing *Matigari* and thus Ngugi for insisting that *Matigari* is the voice of the nation, he is "the crystallization of the collective desires of the nation"³⁹ Gikandi projects a picture of a post-independent Kenya which cannot be reduced to a single ideological formula.

Gikandi's critique is premised on his denigration of Ngugi's ideology which he calls "primeval (expressed through Gikuyu legends and Christian allegories)."⁴⁰ True as some of his criticism against the text's simplicity and one-dimensionality may be there is a sense that Gikandi's own (post)modern ideology is suspiciously unpolitical and non-agency oriented. His "analysis" of the international and national scene is at best very resigned as well as abortive, unwilling, it seems, to invoke the subaltern voice or analyse subaltern agency. Whereas Ngugi wants to fight the present material practices also in fictional terms Gikandi sees literature as an arena of exposing the plural stories of post-colonial realities, thereby reducing the urgency of addressing what Ngugi sees as the moral and political disease in post-colonial Kenya.

Gikandi's very critical analysis of *Matigari* from 1992 has been supplemented by a much more sympathetic reading in the chapter on *Matigari* in his recent book on Ngugi.⁴¹ In his book on Ngugi Gikandi tones down his explicit political criticism of Ngugi by maintaining that *Matigari* privileges form over content and "reality:" "reality has become secondary to the forms in which it is represented"⁴² While my reading of *Matigari* has, in direct contradistinction to Gikandi's new reading, emphasised *Matigari*'s political message as the engine which drives the narrative, it is not possible for Gikandi to rule out the significance of the political implications of the novel. In his recent reading of *Matigari* Gikandi correctly writes:

And before the end of the first part of the novel, he has confronted all the risks that have come to define postcoloniality - economic decline, the abuse of political power, and the crisis of culture. The overriding question for him now is how he can meet the challenge posed by these unexpected experiences.⁴³

³⁸ Gikandi, "The Politics," 379.

³⁹ Gikandi, "The Politics," 382.

⁴⁰ Gikandi, "The Politics," 381.

⁴¹ See Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* referred to earlier.

⁴² Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 246.

⁴³ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 243.

Insisting on the importance of Matigari's identity Gikandi writes:

while the novel ends by affirming the familiar themes about revolution and change, such affirmations are made against the background of doubt and uncertainty triggered by Matigari's mysterious identity which the ending of the novel confounds rather than resolves.⁴⁴

Against such a reading of *Matigari* my earlier contention that the uncertainty of Matigari's identity must not be linked to any confusion about Matigari's political message is supported by the final pages of the novel, where - after Matigari's ascension - Muriuki digs up "all the things that Matigari had hidden" (175), picking up Matigari's cartridge belt, the sword and the AK 47. Clearly Muriuki is in the process of following in the ideological footsteps of Matigari (and thus confirming grassroots agency - for the first time- without Matigari), re-echoed in the last slogan where Muriuki seemed to hear "the voices of the students and of other patriots of all different nationalities of the land, signing in harmony:

Victory will be ours!

Victory will be ours!

Victory will be ours!

Victory will be ours. (175)

This somewhat romanticised ending confirms the novel's ideological closure and Ngugi's paradigmatic stance which, according to critics like Wilson-Tagoe (and Gikandi, as already noted) are inadequate because the individual narrator, in this case Matigari, remains assured and convinced of the truths he is expressing. By employing Nuridin Farah's *Maps* to illustrate the new paradigm Wilson-Tagoe shows how the authority of the single narrative voice is decentered and problematized and where the concepts of freedom and community are interrogated which, according to Wilson-Tagoe,

the earlier nationalist perspectives had taken for granted... Farah's *Maps* destabilizes the often grossly romanticized and stridently patriarchal idealism that surrounds liberationist politics and their construction of national and ethnic identities... The logic of the narrative rejects any unified or assured notion about nation and ethnicity.⁴⁵

The call for new paradigms is summed up by Wilson-Tagoe:

The questioning of assumptions about subjective consciousness and continuity, of the homogeneity of culture, and the recognition of ambivalence in all cultural enunciation are aspects that one encounters in the often self-reflexive texts of post-colonial writing.⁴⁶

Cathrine Belsey interprets the post-modern text in the following way:

The interrogative text differs from the classic realist text in the absence of a single privileging discourse which contains and places all others... the interrogative text

⁴⁴ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 243.

⁴⁵ Wilson-Tagoe, "Post-Colonial Literary," 114.

⁴⁶ Wilson-Tagoe, "Post-Colonial Literary," 115.

refuses a single point of view... but brings points of view into unresolved collision and contradiction.⁴⁷

The problem of representation is not necessarily "solved," however, by resorting to post-modernism's self-reflexivity and plural stories. Having been carefully selected the plural stories are also ways of encoding meanings which seemingly shy away from absolutes and the truth. Plurality and fragmentation may also be interpreted as an ideological imposition of a universe which is quite contrary to the universe as conceived e.g. by the Azande of the Sudan where meaning seems to be fixed.⁴⁸ The post-modern idea of globalising plural stories as the right perception of reality comes close to a neo-colonial imposition which is derived from the Euro-American epistemological crisis. Globalisation has a positivist streak to it which ignores the call from anthropologists for a more interpretative mood which analyses societies on their own premises.⁴⁹ It is true that "multiple and peripheral perspectives offered in the fiction's eye-witness accounts resist any final meaningful closure,"⁵⁰ but it offers, paradoxically speaking, instead a post-modernist closure which is apotheosised: a non-closure, fragmentary, pluralistic closure. For even a post-modern plot or a narrative structure is, in Hutcheon's words, "a totalizing representation that integrates multiple and scattered events into one unified story."⁵¹ A view which maintains that one master narrative of plural stories is valid for all narratives is close to disregarding the differential economic, class, and cultural formation of the countries in the third world. The implications of such a view is, as Kumkum Sangari notes, that

The writing that emerges from this position, however critical it may be of colonial discourses, gloomily disempowers the 'nation' as an enabling idea and relocates the impulses for change as everywhere and nowhere. Because it sees the West as an engulfing 'centre,' it perpetuates the notion of the 'Third World' as a residue and as a 'periphery' that must eternally palpitate the center... (It) does not take into account either the fact that the post-modern preoccupation with the crisis of meaning is not everyone's crisis (even in the West) or that there are different modes of de-essentialization which are socially and politically grounded and mediated by separate perspectives, goals, and strategies for change in other countries.⁵²

The inherent contradictions in post-modernism's focus on plurality and plural stories as the globalized parameters of literary criticism are well summed up by Elizabeth Ferrier:

In spite of the identification of post-modernism with difference, discontinuity and fragmentation, it tends to be marketed globally as a general movement which addresses global concerns... (This) perpetuates an emphasis on 'global culture' masking European and American metropolitan biases even as they describe this

⁴⁷ Belsey, 92.

⁴⁸ See E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁴⁹ See e.g. Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society" in *Rationality*, ed. Bryan R. Wilson (London: Blackwell, 1970), 78-111.

⁵⁰ Hutcheon, 68.

⁵¹ Hutcheon, 68.

⁵² Kumkum Sangari, "The Politics of the Possible," *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 183-184.

culture as de-centered, fragmented and marked by difference in opposition to the totalizing culture of modernity.⁵³

The post-modern critical position tends to impose, in Tiffin's words, "a cultural and intellectual hegemony in relation to the post-colonial world and over post-colonial cultural productions."⁵⁴ Whereas, as Tiffin says,

the disappearance of 'grand narratives' and the crisis of representation characterise the Euro-American post-modernist mood, such expressions of 'breakdown' and crisis instead signal promise and decolonisation potential within post-colonial discourse.⁵⁵

From a combat perspective such an abandonment of an oppositional 'grand narrative' and a single point of view is incompatible with combat literature's political function. By "losing faith in both the inexhaustibility and the power of those existing representations,"⁵⁶ post-modern critics are being critiqued for also losing faith in the possibility of change and that they are more concerned about the decentered and fragmented self than in the possibility of man to change his surroundings. Whereas Hutcheon tries to counter such criticism by expressing concern about "the devaluing or ignoring of the 'marginalized' challenges (aesthetic and political) of the 'ex-centric,' those relegated to the fringes of dominant culture - the women, blacks."⁵⁷ Gikandi seems in his criticism of *Matigari* to succumb to a depoliticized version of post-modernism where the legitimacy of those in power and the pressing political problems in the novel are not properly addressed.

In Ngugi's ideological project certain truths are inviolable and are not subject to negotiations or interrogations. *Maps*, to the take the example referred to above, is simply written from another ideological and political perspective where a decentered focus dilutes the political, social and moral issues at stake. Ngugi's rejection of what he would term the perverted values of neo-colonialism, and his insistence on an alternative economic and moral order which stresses equality, justice, truth and moral rearmament may seem obsolete in the post-modern era, but is seen by Ngugi as mandatory in the struggle for the poor. Whereas Gikandi seems more interested in explaining and representing the complex and often confusing post-colonial reality by a conscious selection of certain sociological or development theories, Ngugi is capitalising on strategies which can change a political situation which may have become more complex, but which nevertheless needs to be rectified by a dramatic overthrow of the present order. Ngugi questions if the proposed complexities and contradictions of post-colonial reality which post-modern and post-

⁵³ Elizabeth Ferrier, "Mapping the Space of the Other: Transformations of Space in Postcolonial Fiction and Postmodern Theory." Ph. D. diss., University of Queensland, 1990), 17.

⁵⁴ Adam and Tiffin, x.

⁵⁵ Adam and Tiffin, x.

⁵⁶ Hutcheon, 8.

⁵⁷ Hutcheon, 17. According to Hutcheon the postmodern enterprise includes both a post-modernism of resistance and one of reaction.

structuralist theories outline blur and undermine any possibility of profound change of a situation which is dismal for the majority of the people in Kenya.

To acknowledge Ngugi's use of ideological closure and apparent unambiguity in his resistance struggle is not the same, however, as to condone one-dimensionality or oversimplification. Even though the urgency of the political situation in many African countries, Kenya included, does not, in Ngugi's view, allow for a fragmentary political and cultural vision which does not give any sense of direction, interrogations of central issues like the nation state, the national consciousness, identity, ethnicity, grassroots agency and the post-revolutionary situation are clearly legitimate items on the post-colonial agenda. Ngugi's clinical cutting of everything which is not directly related to the revolutionary struggle also causes a kind of monomania that may distress and tire the reader/listener. As Ndebele writes:

In societies such as South Africa where social, economic, and political oppression is most stark, such conditions tend to enforce, almost with the power of natural law, overt tendentiousness in the artist's choice of subject matter... artistic merit or relevance is determined less by a work's internal coherence ... than by the work's political preoccupation.⁵⁸

Matigari's single-minded absorption in the ideologically "correct" liberation themes leaves no space to "speak truly" about the dilemmas of resistance, about the complexity of the historical situation and about areas with a human touch: loving and caring in the midst of struggle. The subordination of everything to the Cause means pitting universal values like love, compassion against socialist values, ditching the former on the altar of big words like Truth and Justice, Ngugi can to a certain extent be said to trivialise the complexity of the post-colonial quagmire. Inclusion of potential gender and ethnic differences would only have added to the multi-faceted picture of a resistance movement which has to live with internal divisions and conflicts. When Ngugi simplifies the analysis of post-colonial Kenya by e.g. heralding that "Poverty and sorrow shall be banished from our land" (124),⁵⁹ one can legitimately query the adequacy of such one-dimensional sloganeering.⁶⁰

It is not *Matigari's* lack of *multiple, mutually exclusive* endings which are problematic, but its lack of *problematized* endings which in principle are antithetical both to the truth-finding mission *Matigari* has embarked upon and the problems of grassroots agency exposed early in the novel. By suppressing more *problematized* endings Ngugi confirms a representation of the post-colonial situation which is fixed and one-dimensional, but which at the same time runs against the suspicions of complexity in the narrative. Even though in line with the novel's ideological project the imposition of an unproblematized, heroic ending exposes

⁵⁸ Njabulo Ndebele, "Turkish Tales," 44.

⁵⁹ Sorrow can certainly not be declared banished by a political manifesto.

⁶⁰ See Gikandi who approves of "a new African literature (is) emerging in which notions of betrayal and the failure of nationalism are seen as inadequate strategies for representing and explaining a post-colonial." Gikandi, "The Politics," 379.

a terrain where the previous anxieties and fears are miraculously deleted. According to Cooper the end result is depressing: “But *Matigari* sadly provides an example of what it means to go too far with undiluted didacticism within literary discourse, producing propaganda rather than fiction.”⁶¹

While Ngugi’s neglect or rejection of the “new” paradigms of the post-colonial era blurs complexity and diversity, it is at this juncture again worth recalling that the effect of *Matigari*’s determinate, revolutionary vision has been more powerful than any other book ever produced for the Kenyan market. Moreover Ngugi’s obsession with change and agency enforces a paradigmatic shift in his latest novel whose focus on reclaiming national autonomy is not his resort to Western ideology as such, but his inclusion of a non-materialist discourse. Ngugi’s counter-discourse is an attempt to prevent the Western crisis of representation from spreading to a continent already distraught by fragmentation and anarchy, and it is Ngugi’s legacy in *Matigari* to highlight areas of a resistant order which the author thinks can reclaim historicity and dignity to the African continent.

⁶¹ Cooper, *To Lay*, 176.

10. *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*

10.1 Introduction

In contrast to Ngugi's combat novels La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* is written in the midst of the concerted struggle against the oppressive regime. The novel represents a major shift in La Guma's writing by giving non-white and in particular coloured resistance a face and by focusing more directly on the various aspects of the liberation struggle. Whereas *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threefold Cord* "record" the dismal life of the oppressed in District Six and on the Cape Flats without as it were involving the characters in the resistance against their oppression and where the texts focus on the inability of the characters to raise beyond their own destiny, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* has, arguably, a clearer ideological goal; it is not any longer enough to describe the gross violations of human rights in the black and coloured quarters, but the text involves itself in the struggle against the evil of the apartheid. As La Guma himself states:

Well, you are quite right in saying that the novel presents an attitude that we have now protested enough and that we should now fight. Well, I believe that I had earlier set down to a certain extent anyway the protest against the situation in our country. All of us have bewailed this situation and others will continue to do so. But, as I say, trying to convey a picture of South Africa one must also realize that apart from bewailing their fate, there are also people struggling against it, and that the political and revolutionary movement in South Africa was a part of the South African scene and that one way or another people have already been fighting against this situation. The political and revolutionary movement has to appear somewhere in the picture and I hope *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* is a start. I tried to present the underground struggle against the regime as part of the picture of South Africa.¹

There is a change, then, in La Guma from a compassionate, but still detached observer in his two first novels to a more direct interventionist participator in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. There is no logical or necessary shift from counter-hegemonic to combat writing in the sense that counter-hegemonic literature would necessarily be untenable and ineffective at the time, but for La Guma the new political situation generates new necessities even though there is not basically a change in his ideological thinking.

10.2 Exploring the terrain of oppression

In the Fog of the Seasons' End, by exposing an apartheid terrain of mental and physical torture, of racial and economic deprivation, gives the resistance struggle, this section argues, legitimacy, and explains the almost existential necessity to fight the regime. Claiming that the text explains the conflict in terms of racial categorisations the section discusses in what way the Native Republic Thesis has impacted on the text and in what way the ideological climate of the sixties was instrumental in suppressing the militant white voice from the text.

¹ Abrahams, "The Writings of Alex La Guma," 163.

It is the various economic, social, political and personal ramifications of apartheid atrocities which kick off the involvement of the grassroots members of the resistance movement portrayed in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, the growing recognition of racial and partly material power differences being the prime motivating factor for their commitment in fighting the regime. But the rebellion against the apartheid regime often starts on the personal level. It is apartheid's exclusions and systematic demolition of and fragmentation of the Other's self which ignite a sense of rebellion in Beukes, the main character in the novel. For Beukes apartheid's denigration of the coloured self started already as a boy when he went to circus with his aunt (40), but couldn't see anything because the actors primarily performed for the white audience who were seated in a different section of the circus. His way of resisting this imposed, unfair racial segregation was to never go to a circus again while the removals of the primarily coloured population from District Six were decisive in starting his political career. The unacceptability of this total lack of subject position and the extreme fixity of his object position due to race under the apartheid regime is well summed up by JanMohamed:

the predicament of nonwhite South Africans manifests itself in La Guma's fiction primarily and most forcefully in the dialectic opposition between his assumption that each individual has the right to live a decent life and his depiction of the actual deprivation of that right.²

The text's exposure of the black community - an extension of his previous fictional non-white settings - underlines the dichotomy between basic human rights on the one hand and the violations of those rights on the other. Elias' movement towards resistance is predicated on the same sense of racial harassment and colonial Othering as in the case of Beukes, but the heavy socio-economic deprivation is more explicit in Elias' rural environment. After his father's death in a mining accident, for example, his mother experiences that her pension is restricted to 40 pounds in installments of 2 pounds per month, whereas the widows of white miners get fifteen pounds a month for the rest of their lives (74). When a white official orders Elias to take down his pants to determine his age, Elias realises that the whites

have command of everything now, even the length of time one is entitled to live in this world. If they do not do it with the gun or the hangman's rope, they can easily write it out on a piece of paper, ending days, years, life, like a magician... (128)

By objectifying the Blacks in this manner the text reiterates how whites are empowered to control the very being of the Blacks, even imposing some sort of non-being on them while physically alive.

'If these things are not followed with care, then into the prison with you or all permits cancelled so that you cease to exist. You will be nothing, nobody, in fact you will be decreed...' (82)

² JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 227.

It is by reading a book on the scrap yard that Elias realises that “the Whites were the same as his people, except that their skin was different” (77). By revolting against the meaningless victimisation he is subjected to Elias starts the process and struggle of creating a new history for himself and his people: “Anger grew inside him like a ripening seed and the tendrils of its burgeoning writhed along his bones, through his muscles, into his mind” (79). By refusing to accept that the violations of his own being are historically pre-determined, Elias transcends his own historical predicament by rendering Black representation possible. The rationale behind Isaac’s participation in the movement is similarly grounded in the dominant ideology’s imposition of non-being on its non-white population. In the case of Isaac the notion of non-being is spelt out in terms of invisibility. Reminiscent of Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man*³ Isaac’s overwhelming feeling of oppression as a type of objectification completely dehumanises him. In the oil company where he works “they were part of the furniture, like the grey typewriter covers, the coat rack, the tiny bottles of liquid eraser, copies of memos” (111). The humiliating and condescending attitudes of representatives of the apartheid regime only confirm the justness of the resistance struggle and elide any question of inter-racial or multi-racial communication:

(The major:) ‘I do not understand the ingratitude of your people,’ he went on...
 ‘We have allowed you people to get education, your own special schools, but you are not satisfied. No, you want more than what you get. I have heard that some of your young people even want to learn mathematics.’ (4)

Beukes’ and Elias’ involvement in the resistance movement is a way of transcending the non-representational strategies of the apartheid regime. Whereas *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* rejects the liberal thesis that only commitment and conscientization can transcend the vast antagonisms of South-Africa (only armed struggle can), the novel rests much of its moral and historical vision on racial categorisations and dichotomies. San Juan, by referring to Albert Memmi and Anthony Giddens, defines racism “as having to do with the false attribution of inherited characteristics of personality and behaviour to individuals on their basis of physical markers, and using this to judge inferiority or superiority. Note that racism is a property of dominance relations between groups.”⁴ Such racism reflects the mood of the novel, the binarism between self and Other operating in a dialectical and binary way where, as San Juan says “the negative representation of Others reflect/refract the positive characteristics of Self. These representations with their supposedly inherent, different characteristics is used to legitimise the racial and social barriers to the one group’s advantage.”⁵

³ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York:Random House,1952).

⁴ San Juan, 129. See also Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989), for a comprehensive discussion of a contested concept.

⁵ San Juan, 126.

10.2. 1 *The rationale of the struggle: Race and class*

Whereas the narrative thrust of the novel insists on racial dichotomisation as the major rationale behind the resistance struggle, both Beukes and Elias pay lip service, this subsection argues, to a more comprehensive understanding of the struggle as fundamentally based on class.

Their dogmatic message is, however, somewhat undermined by a narrative whose non-white bias cannot be overlooked and where worker agency in a union sense is all but absent. Elias' assertion that "we are not only humbled as Blacks, but also as workers, our blackness is only a pretext" (131), resonates poorly with his own experiences where his very Blackness has been, as we have seen, synonymous with deprivation in terms of self and manhood and where his family experiences that white and black working class people are systematically treated differently. The problematic case of a class bias or basis is underlined in a novel which never addresses in its narrative structure the question of multi-racial militancy where whites are included. This is somewhat striking since it blurs the main characteristics of the 60s which demonstrated, according to Clingman, that

apartheid was as much a matter of sheer political power and systematic economic exploitation as it was of racial discrimination.⁶

The race-class issue had been, however, a contentious issue in the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) from the late 20s when Alex' father, Jimmy La Guma, strongly backed the so-called Native Republic Thesis which according to Bunting was "a switching off from class struggle to race struggle."⁷ In his biography of Jimmy Alex supports his father's stand by underlining the necessity for South Africa to undergo a two-stage revolution by "putting national liberation, democratic rights and racial equality above that of social revolution and the class struggle, albeit for the first part of the revolution."⁸ In the biography it was important for Alex to justify this two - stage revolution and to refute the allegations that the thesis in reality was anti-white or racism in reverse. Since La Guma in the novel widens his ethnic basis to include Blacks as representatives of the resistance movement, the exclusion of a white voice in the resistance movement reechoes in some strange ways the Communist Party debates some 40 years later. By exposing the coloured (and black) voice and suppressing the white the text reemphasises the underlying assumptions of the Native Republic Thesis, that the white working class could never spearhead the South African revolution. This was in line with a change of sentiment in parts of the South African opposition movement in the early 60s: multi-racialism as the dominant ideology of the broad opposition to apartheid was being questioned by for example the PAC,⁹ which in stead underlined the importance of the Blacks collecting

⁶ Clingman, *The Novels*, 70.

⁷ Quoted in Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, 24.

⁸ Mohamed Adikhari, "Introduction," in Alex La Guma, *Jimmy La Guma. A Biography*, ed. Mohamed Adikhari (Cape Town : Friends of the South African Library, 1997), 11.

⁹ PAC was at the same time strongly anti-Communist and thus not La Guma's cup of tea.

themselves against the oppression of Blacks. Similar sentiments were voiced by the Black Consciousness Movement at the time when *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* was published (1972). On the other hand La Guma's own political organisations like the CPSA and the ANC remained firmly within the multi-racial ideology of the Congress Alliance of the 50s. The suppression of a white oppositional voice is clearly not due to a lack of representational models: the leader of La Guma's own Communist Party, Bram Fischer, to mention only one example, figured prominently in the liberation struggle in the 60s and had eventually to go underground.¹⁰

The absence of a white voice can thus be explained in terms of the sentiments among some influential groups of the time ("multi-racialism is out") or as Nadine Gordimer does in *Occasion for Loving*, by acknowledging "that the ultimate current of history in South Africa... is black, and not white: that the latter is a subset of the former."¹¹ It is a way of inverting the self-Other dichotomy and of reinstating the non-white on the stage of humanity without interference. The problem with La Guma's exclusion of the white militant is not the exclusion per se, but the fact that it, unlike in Gordimer's novel, is never addressed as such in a text which projects-unintentionally- a contradictory or confusing image of the struggle as primarily a class conflict or essentially a racial conflict or both. The textual contradictions are thus at one and the same time established along racial and class barriers. A central member of the Communist Party in South Africa (Walton) argued in 1928 in the following way:

It becomes increasingly clear that as the mass of native workers advance to the struggle, the white workers function proportionately less as a revolutionary factor in the class struggle of South Africa... The slogan of a South African Native Republic is clearly a challenging cry from the vast majority of the proletariat to sweep away the privileged minority positions occupied by the white workers.¹²

As chairman of the ANC branch in London and a prominent member of the Communist Party, however, Alex La Guma had, at least officially, to acknowledge that the revolution in South Africa had reached stage two where multi-racialism was the dominant ideological jargon.

10.3 Resisting the apartheid regime: The anatomy of a resistance movement

It has already been noted how combat literature in contrast to counter-hegemonic fiction is more focused on being directly involved in the resistance movement as such. Using *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* as a weapon in the resistance struggle La Guma seems to adhere to, this section argues, the gun is a gun is a gun paradigm. Exploring what kind of ramifications this more confrontational literature has on representation, the section

¹⁰ Clingman, *Bram Fischer*.

¹¹ Clingman, *The Novels*, 78.

¹² Quoted from Bunting, 9.

analyses the avenues towards resistance involvement (e.g. conscientisation through education). Beukes' life as a resistance fighter is analysed in terms of the home metaphor where Beukes' ambivalent attitude to home signals his fragmentary existence, making the re-establishment of self a cumbersome and shaky affair. But it is through resistance that the subaltern can regain some sort of dignity and self-respect. Analysing also low-profile resistance and reluctant resistance, the section finally examines black representation in the text and in what way the text manages to give the crowd representation through resistance. The text's interest in the ordinary man who is involved in resistance work on the grassroots demystifies liberation politics, and transports the novel beyond the heroic and superhuman qualities which attempted to instill hope in *Matigari*. In contrast to his first novels *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* focuses on agency on a different level than what Geurts refers to:

Ordinary people, in their homes and villages, can and do make political decisions all the time. They choose how to use, or abuse, their power, how to wield it in relation to other people. They choose to oppress, or submit to, other people, or to establish a cooperative mode of interaction. These sorts of events are 'political' although they are occurring in ordinary people's 'personal' lives. This issue of how to use one's own power, or where to place one's energy and commitment, is often referred to as 'personal' politics.¹³

The low-key resistance in La Guma's counter-hegemonic fiction is replaced by a text which thematically deals with resistance in a militant, revolutionary sense and which explores the daily struggles of those taking part in the resistance against the apartheid regime. Strikingly different from Ngugi's combat fiction *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* explores the inner lives of the resistance fighters in another sense than the mostly typified and stereotypical figures of *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*. These differences notwithstanding the texts of the two authors share the ideals related to revolutionary militancy and the creation of a utopian, socialist state. La Guma explains the rationale for "militant resistance literature":

Already the democratic spirit that is present in every true culture is showing its restlessness to emerge in our country. Juxtaposed with oppression, it has developed the democratic movement whose voice is heard in the songs, the writings and poetry, the militant literature of resistance. As long as racism and oppression last in Southern Africa, culture will take this form. When the oppressed have freed themselves from the shackles of economic, social and political limitations, flowers will bloom anew in an environment of happiness in a life lived in dignity, a life of freedom and comradeship among our peoples.¹⁴

In La Guma's case and as Maughan-Brown has succinctly commented, writing itself becomes a cultural manifestation, part of the struggle itself, not separate from it:

This carries the implication that the militant literature of resistance is a cultural manifestation appropriate to the barren ground of oppression, and that only when

¹³ Kathryn Geurts, "Personal Politics in the Novels of Bessie Head," *Presence Africaine* 140 (1986): 47-48.

¹⁴ Alex La Guma, "The Conditions of Culture in South Africa," *Presence Africaine* 80 (1971): 120.

freedom is obtained will the 'flowers' of an implicitly superior flourishing of culture be produced.¹⁵

Without reiterating the Albie Sachs' debate from Part 1 here, La Guma's very insistence on the appropriateness and significance of using art as a weapon in the struggle reflects his artistic and paradigmatic shift which in some ways may seem to place him squarely in the camp of the adherents of the gun-is-a-gun-paradigm. *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* is a novel whose role is seen as part of the larger struggle for liberation where La Guma never seems to problematise the issue which Ngugi raised in *Penpoints* about art's Socratic role, taking for granted at this point in his literary career the legitimacy of ideological closure in his fiction. By not questioning the realist mode as the most adequate way of representing the liberation struggle La Guma seems never to problematise the novel's verisimilitude. Artistically La Guma insists on mimetic accuracy, but defies at the same time deterministic naturalism which deflates human agency. La Guma uses realism to portray potentiality and agency within self despite dismal contextual circumstances.

So ingrained in the revolutionary movement himself, La Guma speaks through Beukes and seems unaware of any problems connected with giving the coloured or Black subaltern a voice. If Linda Alcoff is right that speaking for others is always "a desire for mastery" which means "erasure of others and a reinscription of sexual, national, and other kinds of hierarchies,"¹⁶ La Guma is also involved in some sort of power discourse and cultural hegemony when he represents the Other, even though the Other is also himself. For, as San Juan jr. queries: "If the hegemonic censor always screens thought and culture overdetermines speech, can we even claim to represent ourselves justly and with adequate fidelity?"¹⁷ R.S. Khare sums up the dilemma: "the practical question now is whether such a power and privilege can be consciously rendered genuinely reciprocal (and put to good use), rather than be totally eliminated."¹⁸ La Guma's privileged position (if being in exile can be said to be privileged) is used to focus on the racial and economic system under which the protagonists live, the political awareness of the characters and the nature of the political resistance movement. This is a way of breaking the silence of the subaltern even if it means a sort of discursive control; the reinscription of some sort of hierarchy between the author and subaltern representation is subordinated the focus on the hierarchies grounded in racial (and economic) oppression. It is the recognition of racial and partly material power differences which is the prime motivating factor of solidarity and practicable alliances and where La Guma's political and artistic life coalesce.

¹⁵ Maughan-Brown, "Adjusting the Focal Length," 34.

¹⁶ Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991-92): 29.

¹⁷ San Juan, 101.

¹⁸ R.S. Khare, "The Other's Double- The Anthropologist's Bracketed Self: Notes on Cultural Representation and Privileged Discourse," *New Literary History* 23 (1992): 5.

10.3.1 Resistance against oppression: Coloured and black representation in the movement

In Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* the representation of coloured politics and coloured activists is posed as a major problem, even articulated in the title of her novel. As shown in my readings of *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threefold Cord* La Guma was conscious of a similar problem in his early writing career where no coloured activist can be found. La Guma was unable to tell a story that he felt could not be told due to the spectator role of the coloureds in terms of liberation politics. Wicomb Zoe is right when asserting that the minimal participation of coloureds in the liberation struggle "is not simply a matter of postmodern scepticism of grand narratives of emancipation."¹⁹ The question cannot, however, be confined to a matter of revolutionary language (the native language of many coloureds was Afrikaans, identical to the language of the Boer oppressors) as Zoe seems to do, but to the complex marginality of the coloured in all spheres of life.²⁰ With *The Stone Country* and even more articulated in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* La Guma imposes some sort of activist representation, this subsection argues, partly due to an ideological *force majeure* on the part of La Guma, but also due to the changing political situation. Even though La Guma does not give specific time and location details, it is clear that the main action in the novel takes place during and after the Sharpeville (and Langa) riots in 1960 and the removals of District Six. After the banning of the ANC and the PAC the military wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe, Poqo (closely linked to the PAC) and the African Resistance Movement (ARM) started to embark on campaigns of sabotage, also encouraged by the independence of colonial nations all over the continent. Even though coloured activists at that time still were few and far between, La Guma could from his vantage point in London observe a change in coloured participation which makes coloured representation in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* credible. Even though La Guma's artistic focus with its strong fidelity to realism is on the trajectory of the emergent non-white militant politics, the novel is a complex textual manipulation by means of retrospections and provocative juxtapositions, reflecting the integrated links between past and present in the struggle and the bizarre contradictions between deadly serious matters (arrests, torture, murder) and banal triviality.

Furthermore it impacts on representation in the sense that there is an exposure of resistance fragility, anxiety and doubts absent in Ngugi's combat texts, which does not undercut the combat narrative, but in stead strengthens its credibility. At the same time lack of straightforward chronology is a way of undercutting or challenging the imposed chronological order by the master narrative.

¹⁹ Zoë Wicomb, "Shame and identity the case of the coloured in South Africa," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, apartheid, and democracy, 1970-1995*, eds. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1998), 97.

²⁰ Nkosi asserts that an "African writer without a connection to African languages, even with a deep sympathy with people and place, could only express the intimations of this other separate, irreducible experience." Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (Harlow: Longman, 1981), 3.

La Guma's artistic change from observation to subaltern agency and resistance is important, not only in the sense that La Guma for the first time employs coloureds as representatives of the resistance movement, but also in the way it explores the ontological understanding and portrayal of subaltern man.

Gramsci's description of the subaltern was clearly reflected in La Guma's first novels:

deprived of historical initiative, in continuous but disorganic expansion, unable to go beyond a certain qualitative level, which still remains below the level of the possession of the State and of the real exercise of hegemony over the whole of society.²¹

In *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* subaltern passivity is paralleled with the stasis of the first people in the museum:

Isaac had stared at the figures in the glass cases, his prominent eyes serious, for a moment no longer surprised. 'They been having their own bloody way too long. I hope we can give them a great scare this time, it'll help the people, too... The still figures of the first people had not been disturbed; an outstretched hand still held a trapped hare by the ears.' (17)

In the conversation between Beatie Adams and Beukes the text signals in a nutshell the shift in representation from *A Walk in the Night* to *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. Beatie Adams is reminiscent of the subaltern passivity of District Six whereas Beukes at this stage projects a hope and possibility into a narrative which later exposes Beukes' combat position in full bloom:

(Beatie:) 'You raise the kids, change the nappies, give them the bottle... Because we are black they think we good enough to change nappies.... Because we're black they think we good enough just to change their nappies. That's life, isn't it?'...
(Beukes:) 'Life? Why should it be our life? We're as good or bad as they are.'
(Beatie:) 'Yes ... But what can us people do?'... (Beukes:) 'There are things people can do... 'm not saying a person can change it tomorrow or next year. But even if you don't get what you want today, soon, it's a matter of pride, dignity. You follow me?' (Beatie:) 'It's so hopeless. You only get into trouble.' (11)

10.3.2 Transcending subalternity: the importance of organisation and education

How the transcendence of subalternity takes place is never fully elaborated in the text, but it seems to follow, this subsection contends, Gramsci in two important respects: the importance of organization and education:

Organized in this way, the peasants will become an element of order and progress; left to themselves, incapable as they are of waging any systematic and disciplined action, they will become a disordered rabble, a tumultuous horde driven to the cruellest barbarities.²²

²¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 395- 96.

²² Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings*, 86-87.

Besides exposing a well-organized, but fragile resistance movement, the text underlines that the interpellation of dominant, apartheid ideology is systemic in the sense that it permeates the whole education system. When Flotman in the novel describes the situation in school (“ ‘Do you know that we are told to teach that everything that happens is ordained by God and that it’s no use, even sinful, trying to change the order of things’ ” (86)), Beukes’ ideological response is crystal-clear: “ ‘But there is also the matter of political education for these young people. I will see that you get more material for them, as soon as I can lay hands on some. Prohibited stuff is scarce’ ”(88). Paulo Freire’s critique of schooling as an ideological mechanism to impose subaltern silence reechoes Flotman’s and Beukes’ concern, but as the novel shows in its portrayal of the various coloured characters and which was clearly evidenced in *And A Threefold Cord*, understanding the very nature of their oppression does not translate immediately into transformation or agency. Freire sums up his own experiences:

There can be no conscientization (which necessarily transcends a simple process of awareness) separated from radical and transforming action on social reality... Humanization, permanent liberation, is not accomplished with consciousness. It is found in human history where human beings have the task of creating and transforming without interruption... Liberation becomes concrete only when society is changed, not when its structures are simply modernized.²³

This is in line with the text’s ideological project: it is the joint union of experience with action which can break the imposition of white supremacy and oppressive, apartheid interpellations and the cycle of silence. Power, of which textual evidence in *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* abounds, can be said to be embodied, in Althusser’s terminology,²⁴ in the Ideological State Apparatus, in this case the apartheid state, but the combat text rejects a deterministic version of Althusser’s concept of subject formation, a marked shift from *A Walk in the Night* where the text borders on, if not being complicit with naturalistic predeterminism. The shift involves another interpretation of power in the sense that autonomous, independent subject formation is possible despite the monolithic imposition from the apartheid regime, i.e. how it is possible, through conscientisation and education, to subvert the imperatives of reproduction and counter the notion of the State Apparatus’ invincibility. The text stubbornly upholds this possibility of intervention, in some contrast to La Guma’s two first novels, for social subjects and collectivities in the shaping of their lives. According to Harlow it is essential that narratives of resistance insist “on its own historical specificity and the significance of the events which describe it...”²⁵ La Guma’s way of exploring South African resistance history is to focus on the liberation trajectory from the “underground,” or from the grassroots, avoiding as it were the spectacular representations of heroic resistance literature. This implies that La Guma only loosely links

²³ IDAC (Institute of Cultural Action), Freire/Illich: The Pedagogical Debate (Geneva: Institute of Cultural Action, 1974), 24 and 27.

²⁴ See introduction where Althusser is being discussed.

²⁵ Harlow, 80.

his story to identifiable historical incidents (Sharpeville, the voortrekker history etc. being some of the exceptions), thereby opening up an artistic terrain which is cast in the anti-apartheid struggle, but not predetermined by specific historical events. This is in contrast to South African writers like Sepamla (*A Ride on the Whirlwind*) or Mzamane (*The Children of Soweto*) who consciously link documentary to fiction.

In line with the text's ideological thrust the main character Beukes repeatedly underlines the importance of armed resistance:

It is a good thing that we are now working for armed struggle. It gives people confidence to think that soon they might combine mass activity with military force. One does not like facing the fascist guns like sheep. (143)

And: " 'There's no point in talking violence if you can't put it into effect,' Beukes said" (89-90). Towards the very end Beukes sums up the situation of combat:

What the enemy himself has created, these will become battle-grounds, and what we see now is only the tip of an iceberg of resentment against an ignoble regime, the tortured victims of hatred and humiliation. (180)

There is, however, no flirtation with violence as the text underlines the very serious implications of the armed struggle: " 'the penalty for urging the armed overthrow of the government could be death' " (61). Armed resistance is not, as San Juan claims, "just seen as a cathartic or cleansing force, restoring self-respect to the subaltern. Fanon anticipates that the process of armed struggle... result(s) in the demystification of all state authority... so that democratic participation of the masses can somehow be assured." ²⁶ The importance of this demystification process is ground-breaking and is what sets Beukes apart from the passive on-lookers in District Six and on the Cape Flats. The process helps to transcend subalternity by reconstructing the fragmented condition of the subaltern and insisting on hope even in the face of abject oppression. This totalising conception of reality is conceived of, as Paulo Freire states, "the authentic union of action and reflection." ²⁷ As fragmentation is the very basis of apartheid ideology the violent assault on its "rationality" is, besides trying to dismantle its political foundation, a way of bridging the dislocated parts of subaltern identity. It creates the urgency of an aesthetic of cognitive mapping which would seek to grasp unifying elements in social life rather than fragmentation. It is in this sense that *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* can be seen as combat literature. In contrast to Michael Adonis in *A Walk in the Night* and Charlie Pauls in *And A Threefold Cord* Beukes rejects the notion of "accepting" the intolerable subject position (by either resorting to crime or giving up to fight the status quo) by fighting the institutionised racism which effects this experience of non-self and existential fragmentation.

²⁶ San Juan, 210.

²⁷ Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Educational Review and Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, 1970), 48.

10.3.2 *The concept of home*

The concept of home defines in many ways the situation of the coloured population. Bearing in mind that the category coloured was established by the Nationalist Government's Population Registration Act of 1950, defined negatively as not a White person or a Black, this authorized marginality has rendered Beukes and the coloured population "homeless." Whereas this marginality fostered complicity or evasion in La Guma's counter-hegemonic novels and goes a long way to explain the non-agency of the coloured population, the imposed identity as non-self furthers in Beukes' case subversion, and not complicity. Very early Beukes' sense of homelessness is being reinforced by a personal disaster: his parents' tragic death. Then when he finally establishes his own family and home by marrying Frances, he has to move underground. Beukes' notion of home is therefore fragmentary, ambiguous and contradictory, a place of solace and comfort, a place of anxiety and frustration and a place he only at certain times can return to:

Francy is out there, he thought, old Francy, Francy, Francy. He realized that he had almost forgotten her, and love and nostalgia mingled for a while and walking along the footpath through the grass, he thought, why the hell am I doing this? (71)

He thought, sleepily, that he would like to go home to Frances. (92)

In the dark he saw Frances and their child. He was glad there was a child, in spite of everything...now he still dreamed about Frances and their daughter, but not with such horror. He dreamed of Frances falling through space, Frances falling from a high tower, falling, falling, falling, with no-one to catch her. Sometimes he would be falling with her. But those dreams were not as bad as the others had been, although he still woke up with a feeling of fear. (135)

Exile or migration creates, as Boyce Davies claims,

the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home or the longing for home become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it. Still home is contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation.²⁸

Beukes' farewell to home catapults him into a double placelessness where he tries to seize control over his own alienated being. By attempting to dissociate himself from the shackles of the fixed identity imposed upon him by the authorities he enters some sort of a "border" or liminal identity which counterhegemonically searches for a totalizing identity which can attack, as McLaren states in another context, "the overdetermined structures of race, class, and gender differences."²⁹ The fragmentation of both the novel's structure and the life of Beukes reflect the dilemmas and problems of the resistance struggle and is given narrative shape in Beukes' incessant movements from one place to another with the real

²⁸ Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), 113.

²⁹ Peter McLaren, *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 137.

(or imagined) security at/on his heels ("They had the whole organization of the authoritarian state ranged against you" (23)).

La Guma exposes how resistance is an exercise in mental torture:

Life had become mysterious rides, messages left in obscure places, veiled telephone conversations. The torture chambers and the third degree had been transferred from celluloid strips in segregated cinemas to the real world which still hung on to its outward visible signs of peace... (25)

Being in many ways a semi-existence on the fringes of society, Beukes' life is nevertheless, as JanMohammed puts it, a deliberate choice "to become a marginal subject"³⁰ which on the other hand is not so voluntary after all since it is imposed upon him by the apartheid regime and his own political consciousness and conscience. His fragmented, almost subhuman existence is his option as he fights for another, non-fragmentary life in the future. In La Guma's combat novel, then, the oppressed, coloured protagonist can challenge and fight the ontological placelessness of the non-white, not necessarily because Beukes' experience of oppression is stronger than that of Charlie Pauls, but because the conscientisation process which started with Charlie Pauls is in the case of Beukes being materialised in action, reflecting the changing political situation which makes such representation viable and credible, if not inevitable.

It is in the position of internal exile that Beukes- paradoxically enough- is in the position of fighting the ontological placelessness of the non-white population as his role as a freedom fighter challenges the fixed identity and homelessness which the apartheid state has enforced upon them. By taking part in the resistance movement Beukes' identity is stabilised in the midst of instability, fragmentation and liminality: his former oppressed position of imprisonment and "imposed stability" in the racially and economically fragmented South Africa yields to a self-imposed stability which fights to redress the situation of the non-whites. Taking part in the liberation movement enforces some sense of stability of self despite the feelings of anxiety, loss, shakiness and desperateness because the struggle as a focused activity has a liberatory function. As Olausen claims:

In order to forge unitary and homogenous groups certain identities are stabilised at certain times in history. This is of course the starting point of all efforts to work against oppression. Without the stabilisation of certain identities there would be no exclusions.³¹

10.3.3 The re-establishment of a fragile self

Reminiscent of André Brink's *An Act of Terror*,³² *In the Fog of the Season's End* signals a belief in action and agency which purifies and re-establishes a self on the basis of a non-fragmentary epistemological vision. But La Guma never refrains from exposing the

³⁰ JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 259.

³¹ Olausen, 19.

³² André Brink, *An Act of Terror* (London:Minerva,1991).

shakiness of Beukes' stable self. The stabilisation of self is costly and subsidised by other members of the movement as he is utterly dependent on their solidarity and loyalty. Watts seems to misconceive this relational dialectics by underlining the presentation of La Guma's characters as isolated individuals,³³ thereby neglecting the interdependence and solidarity between the cell members. Both Elias and Beukes are very worried about the other's security in time of crisis. (Elias:) "He hoped Beukes had got away from them (153) (Beukes:) "Damn, damn, damn, I hope they didn't get Elias. Did they get Elias?" (150) Even though the members of the cells embark on isolated missions, Beukes's "journey" serves a purpose beyond the attempts to evade the police; it is through his more or less committed helpers that the underground activities can continue. Beukes acknowledges this interpersonal relation later:

There were very good people in the movement and the fact that they still operated bucked you up when you started feeling that it was all useless. They were like aspirin for fatigue or a bad headache. (49)

It is these networks of insurgent subalterns which make agency possible. This is in line with Chatterjee's observation of peasant insurgency in India: the fundamental social character of subaltern agency is the notion of community³⁴ and it is this feeling of togetherness which is fundamental in effecting the vast range of transformations which defy objectification and othering. By seizing control of his own self through resistance Beukes is still crippled by the impositions of the apartheid state which tries to control and arrest all his movements, thus instilling a feeling of anxiety and worry in him which almost become a *leitmotif* through the novel:

'Who says I'm not worried? I got a wife who's in the family way for the first time. We got a strike coming off in a few weeks. Just now the cops will start farting around. You reckon I'm not worried? You bloody well right I'm worried. But what's the use worrying? Nothing will get done that way.' (15)

The psychological and physical strains of the struggle sometimes send Beukes into complete *laissez-faireism*:

'We will win' ... He wished the taxi driver would stop talking; right then he did not give a damn about politics, the resistance, the revolution; all he wanted to do was get some sleep. (27)

When Beukes is shot in the arm the concern is not only with the physical pains of the wound, but as much with the psychological repercussions: Feeling utterly abandoned Beukes, reminiscent of Matigari's loneliness, is close to what Michael Novak would call an experience of nothingness³⁵: "He still felt hollow but it was not the hollowness of hunger,

³³ Watts, 216.

³⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

³⁵ Michael Novak, *The Experience of Nothingness* (New York, Harper & Row, 1970).

and he realized, with tears pricking his eyeballs, that it was the hollowness of abandonment”(147).

Elias' fate dramatically exposes the very high odds the resisters of the regime encounter. Strangely reminiscent of Steve Biko's death years after the publication of *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, the security police have caught the “right” person, but are unable to force a single secret out of his mouth. Epitomizing and symbolising all those who fought and died for a just cause, Elias, showing dignity in the face of torture, is transported into the realm of heroism, but without losing his human features. The text's realistic, detailed description of the inhuman treatment of Elias not only casts a dark shadow over the apartheid regime, but underlines that the struggle is no Sunday school. The centrality of Elias's death scene is moreover underlined by his hallucinations during torture which link his present struggle with the struggle of the ancestors: “The ghosts of the ancestors beckoned from afar.”(174) For the first time La Guma resorts to the African, ancestral past to add perspective to the present fight. By acknowledging the symbolic links with the ancestral past, the text enlarges the scope of its own vision beyond the contemporary scene. The annihilation of Elias's self is at the same time a re-establishment of his African, traditional self as he, by sticking to his integrity as a human being without telling on others, reunites, on the border between life and death, with his ancestors. The present liberation struggle is, arguably, a continuation of the struggle against the settlers:

Far, far, his ancestors gathered on the misty horizon, their spears sparkling like diamonds in the exploding sun. Somebody came out of the bright haze, and touched him with a hand. His mind called out 'Mother.' (175)

10.3.4 The economics of low-key resistance and passivity

By showing the costs of resistance also beyond the activities of the freedom fighters the text places the resistance struggle in a wider political context. La Guma's message is clear: resistance springs out of the racial, social and economic deprivation and abandonment of *non-white* selves both in the townships as well as in the coloured quarters. But whereas armed resistance is the declared tool of the resistance movement, the text exposes how resistance takes various shapes and forms: the removal of the primarily coloured population (26) from various places in Cape Town through the Group Areas Act effected in some cases resistance in terms of physical self-annihilation (“Beukes ignored her, saying, “That poor bloke in Sea Point went and hanged himself when they had to move, after living there God knows how long.” (21)). In other instances low-key resistance in stead of surrender against the attempted denial of self takes place, captured brilliantly in the defiant attitude of the old woman who has been forced out of her house and onto the street:

The shifting crowd gathered around and looked at the old woman sitting there inside the barricade of furniture, but she did not notice them, crouched there in the canvas chair with her bright, moist eyes and her impregnable dignity (29).

In his bent for realistic detail La Guma describes the deserted and dilapidated environment from which the old woman and the rest of the coloureds have to move:

and climbed into the back of the slum area. The town had the look of a town cleared after battle. Whole blocks had disappeared, leaving empty, flattened lots surrounded by battered survivors. (26)

The passive resistance of Abdullah's woman is yet another manifestation of low-key resistance which is personal and private, but still very political in the sense of mental feet-dragging:

'but I think in my mind, you go to sleep, you White rubbish. All they know is order you about, so I put on an extra two or three pounds on the price. Let them pay if they want to chase one on.' (92)

Whereas La Guma through Beukes introduces a new narrative of the coloured which so far has been destined to be suppressed, he tones down the potential ramifications of such a move. By singling out Beukes as the coloured activist and by exposing the in-between, at best ambiguous situation of some of his helpers, the novel addresses the critical question of (in this case coloured) participation in resistance. Laclau attempts to explain the opposite reactions to political oppression:

The struggle of any group that attempts to assert its own identity against a hostile environment is always confronted by two opposite but symmetrical dangers for which there is no logical solution, no square circle – only precarious and contingent attempts of mediation. If the group tries to assert its identity as it is at that moment, as its location within the community at large is defined by the system of exclusions dictated by the dominant groups, it condemns itself to a perpetually marginalized and ghettoized existence. . . If, on the other hand, it struggles to change its location within the community and to break with its situation of marginalization, it has to engage in a plurality of political initiatives which take it beyond the limits defining its present identity.³⁶

Most of Beukes' helpers seem to occupy a double marginality in the sense that they in addition to being marginalized in terms of racial categorizations also are in a marginal position by situating themselves between full commitment and complete laissez-faireism. It is a deeply unsatisfactory role as its ideological placelessness imposes a schizophrenia and an opportunism which it is not easy to handle. But Beukes seems to accept that people prefer a marginalized and ghettoized existence due to considerations of families, jobs and material possessions:

'Never mind, I understand. You don't have to worry, man. Each of us, we do what we can, isn't it?' And he thought, who am I to judge him? How long will I last in this? (138)

Admired by his not-so active friends for his profound commitment (Flotman):

³⁶ Ernesto Laclau, "Subject of Politics; Politics of the Subject," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 7, no. 1 (1995): 149.

“ ‘Am I like you? I could be teaching in Canada. I’m not like you. Your heart is too big, Beukes. Too big.’ ”(87)), Beukes is unprecise, non-philosophical and elusive when he responds to Flotman’s questions about the rationale for his resistance:

Nothing seems to stop you. What drives you? ‘Drives? Nothing drives us... We understand our work, so we enjoy it. It is rarely that one is happy in one’s work.’ (87)

And a little earlier Beukes ponders:

But it’s shaky as hell, Beukes thought. It’s like shivering in the cold. But you hung on, sometimes because you understand why, often because there was nothing else to do. You couldn’t say, the hell with it, I’m going home. (49)

The shakiness of the situation is reflected in Beukes’ quite accurate description of the movement in the mid-sixties:

The movement writhed under the terror, bleeding. It had not been defeated, but it had been beaten down (48). And: ‘He had said desperately: ‘I don’t have to. But, well, there’s so few, so damn few now to do the work. With all those people in prison we got to almost start all over again. We’ve got to keep it alive, see?’ (136-37)

Even though the turn to violence in the early sixties among the resistance movements was a landmark in the liberation struggle, it has already been noted how the apartheid regime retaliated in a way that almost meant the annihilation of the resistance movements. Often referred to as the period of silence, this repression became even more spelt out in the last part of the 60s and the resistance movements were crippled and licking their wounds, both inside the country and abroad. On the other hand, however, the very fact that the liberation movements gained momentum in Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe helped to invigorate a South African movement on its knees as there were efforts by the ANC to infiltrate South Africa from the neighbouring countries. This resurgence of the movement is in the novel captured by the announcement by the Minister of police who confirms the revival of the Movement: “ ‘The republic is facing a new wave of guerilla incursions on its northern borders... African nationalist infiltrators are stirring up the local population’ ”(62). In a stroke of artistic ingenuity La Guma measures the ups and downs of the movement by means of the changes in the hegemonical newspaper’s headlines. When the movement seems to represent no threat to the regime, the headlines are splashed with the irrelevant sensations of a white murder case; when the movement is on the offensive, the headlines reflect as top priority the uncertain mood of the regime in power.

10.3.5 Black representation- the anonymous members of the Sharpeville crowd

By exposing the fragility of coloured activist representation by identifying Beukes as the only fully-committed coloured activist and by widening the ethnic scope of the novel to

include black activists as central protagonists La Guma places the novel on safer historical and representational grounds.³⁷

In a vigorous counter-discursive move La Guma focuses, in the chapter on the Sharpeville incident, on the problem of black representation and the apartheid regime's imposition of non-representation. By anonymising the representations of the grassroots activists (the Messenger, the Child etc.) in Sharpeville who evidently are Black, La Guma manages to underline the very nature of their protests: the demonstrations against the pass cards are a way of rejecting the imposition of non-individuality on the oppressed population, rendering proper representation, even for Blacks in this specific context, meaningless. By stripping the blacks of a face, of an identity, the apartheid regime with its colonisation of the African mind has superimposed a policy which the faceless can no longer accept. La Guma's link between pass laws and non-identity, or decreation, is not only restricted to Sharpeville: La Guma employs the representation of everyman when the whole ritual of pass regulations is being exposed. The facelessness of the protesters in Sharpeville also helps to de-emphasise the fates of the individuals in favour of the common fate of those in the resistance movement. The subordination of the individual and the stress on the collectivity has been La Guma's political credo throughout his literary career; in *And A Threefold Cord* the epigraph from the Ecclesiastes insists, as we have seen, on transcending individualism and egotism to change a hopeless order, but it never materializes in the text. Whereas the tension in *Matigari* between the crowd on the one hand and the individual on the other seems fictionally unresolved, La Guma manages in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, within the limits of the novel as a genre, to give narrative credibility to the crowd as an important force in the resistance movement.

10.4 The evaporation of the fog: the vision of the promised land

Even though *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* clearly spells out differences between activists and 'onlookers' in resisting the apartheid regime, the minefield of conflicting interests and opinions *within* a very heterogeneous resistance movement of all colours and nationalities is, this section argues, hardly ever exposed. The section nevertheless concludes that *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, although safely placed within the parameters of combat fiction, is less one-dimensional and unambiguous than Ngugi's combat fiction, penetrating to some extent beyond the resistance surface by elaborating on the personal dilemmas and problems of participating in the movement.

While *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* problematises, as we have seen, the role of the resistance fighter up to a point where anxieties, worries etc. are the order of the day, thus giving the novel a less monolithic and totalizing expression, the very role and function of the resistance fighter or the resistance movement's resort to violence is never being seriously interrogated. *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* never enters into a critical discussion of resistance

³⁷ Clearly any attempt of coloured representation in Sharpeville would have taken La Guma back to square one: there was nobody to report about.

strategies between the protagonists Beukes, Elias and Isaac; the problem of race within the resistance movement is glossed over and there is a mutual common understanding of what is at stake even though they are isolated in their various combat cells. Understanding the racial divisions which the government wants to create, Elias dismisses the whole idea as he wishes Beukes, the coloured in the movement welcome:

'Our rulers are trying hard to create divisions among us. We are each supposed to have our own this and our own that. Even a sort of democracy, our own councils which we shall elect ourselves, under *their* supervision.' (131)

The only sign of disapproval between Beukes and Isaac is almost too marginal to be mentioned: "Beukes was all right, Elias thought. He was something of a flag-waver, but he understood and was sincere" (130). By suppressing the different interests between the racial groups the text both empties the movement of vibrancy and casts a dubious light on the text's willingness of authentic representation for it is, as Harlow insists, the "self-critical controversies that sustain the movement's active agency in the historical arena of world politics..."³⁸ There is an overlap here between La Guma's resistance fiction and his ideological /political thinking which accentuates La Guma's *intended* non-contradictory discourse:

Within the indigenous society the action of the liberation movement on the cultural plain entails cultural unity, corresponding to the moral and political unity necessary for the dynamics of the struggle. With the opening up of closed groups, tribal or ethnic, racist aggressiveness tends to disappear and give way to understanding, solidarity, and mutual respect, a unity in struggle and in a common destiny in the face of foreign rule. These are the sentiments which the mass of the people adopt readily if the process is not hindered by political opportunism.³⁹

By smoothing over cracks in the resistance movement in order to get across a certain message, the text signals a political agenda which makes Rabkin complain that La Guma's characters consist of a

a set of typical figures... Where characters are provided with a personal history, its function is to illustrate how they came to adopt their present stance. The characters are necessarily static, since the author's concern is here not with the quality of their response, but with the actions that flow from from the choices they have *already made*.⁴⁰

S. O. Asein, on the other hand, claims that La Guma in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* "has moved one step further in his articulation of a radical perspective without any injury to the artistic integrity of the work itself."⁴¹ Admittedly the message of revolt in *In the Fog of the*

³⁸ Harlow, 29.

³⁹ La Guma, "Culture and Liberation," *World Literature Written in English* 18, no. 1 (1979): 31.

⁴⁰ David Rabkin, "La Guma and Reality in South Africa," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 8, no 1 (1973): 60.

⁴¹ S.O. Asein, *Alex La Guma: The Man and His Work* (Ibadan: New Horn Press Ltd.:1987), 120.

Seasons' End becomes at times abundantly clear, for example in the propaganda-ridden content of the hand bills or as Asein points out, "in the elaborate dramatization of the operation of the pass system."⁴² The resistance fervour is also supported by the inclusion of historical elements with a determined meaning which are meant to underline the grave injustices of the present situation, for example by summing up the origin of South Africa's oppressive history from a fairly unproblematised, dogmatic point of view:

"The *voortrekkers* wanted to go on keeping slaves and did not agree with the emancipation, so they decided to trek into the interior of the country'"(88). The somewhat simplistic rendering of Boer historiography here is in line with the ideological thrust of the novel, and is concomitant with other, if not all, radical and "biased" histories of the great trek. This rejection of multiple stories in the context of a resistance struggle of life and death is made more persuasive by the text's emphasis on apartheid brutality, for example in the portrayal of the barbaric treatment of Elias:

He felt a blow in his back and went headfirst onto the floor. The two detectives went out and the heavy door was locked. The prisoner rolled over and sat up, his handcuffed wrists before him, and sat with his back against a grey wall. His cheekbone burned where the stone floor had grazed it. He had been anticipating a test of endurance for a long time, but now he realized that he did not really know what was going to happen to him. Behind the ugly mask of the regime was an even uglier mask face he had not yet looked on. You went through the police charges in the squares, the flailing clubs, the arrogant rejection of all pleas and petitions, blood dried on the street like spilled paint where a short body had lain, but here behind the polished windows, the gratings and the Government paint work, was another dimension of terror. (2-3)

Refraining from mythic representations in the sense that there is no detour, like in *Matigari*, from the beaten track of a materialist and realist discourse, the text nevertheless opens up for a combat discourse which on the symbolic level reinforces the novel's political agenda by transcending the fixity of the internal colonial situation. In contrast to *A Walk in the Night* where the symbolic may seem to project a meaning beyond the dismal surface structure of the narrative, there is in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* no such transgression. The recourse to a symbolism in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* is linked to the final scene where Beukes bids farewell to the van with the resistance fighters, projecting an image of the next generation in a positive setting as a way of impregnating the text with its revolutionary meaning.

Beukes stood by the side of the street in the early morning and thought, they had gone to war in the name of a suffering people. What the enemy himself has created, these will become battle-grounds, and what we see now is only the tip of an iceberg of resentment against an ignoble regime... He stood there until the van was out of sight and then turned back to where the children had gathered in the sunlit yard. (181)

⁴² Asein, 139.

As combat fiction *In the Fog of the Season's End* never queries the inverted binarism between the coloniser and the colonised and the absolute evilness of dominant ideology or the strategic dispositions and ideological underpinnings or the justness of the freedom struggle. Although addressing the grey zones between full commitment and careless laissez-faireism there are no alternative avenues of understanding the South African situation apart from that of the monolithic, one-dimensional representation of dominant ideology, which is completely discredited. By shying away from exposing or critiquing its own encoded and interpretative representation, the text is not very different from the narrational closure of the colonial text, its inversion succeeding in undermining the master narrative of colonialism. Thus, this closure is systemically identical, but ideologically antithetical to the narrational closure of colonialist texts. This is problematical in so far as the smoothing over of controversies within the movement contributes to weakening the movement's image of vibrancy and the romanticising of the combat networks problematises the notions of authenticity and credibility, creating suspicions of a stylised narrative whose verisimilitude rightly could be questioned.

While Roscoe is correct that the text lacks ideological subtlety (and to which the author would probably agree), it is to La Guma's credit that the novel transcends the dogmatics of Ngugi's combat fiction by structuring the novel around a set of rounded truths about split loyalties, the dilemmas of family life and the dangers of resistance, thus giving credibility to a resistance struggle which escapes complete romanticism. While Beukes, according to Asein, "remains superlatively human and speaks with the warmth of feeling of a living individual capable of fluctuating intensity of feelings and commitments..."⁴³ it is also symptomatic that neither Beukes nor Elias duplicates Muturi's monotonous, dogmatic preachings in *Devil on the Cross*, thus transporting the novel beyond the clichés of resistance sloganeering which appears in the pamphlets Beukes and his co-patriots distribute.

There is a sense, then, that *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, despite its encoded meaning and call for armed resistance, avoids the abyss of dogmatic monomania. It energises a narrative which nonetheless in no uncertain terms not only nurtures the idea that there is no way back from getting rid of the oppressive regime but armed resistance, but embodies this idea of combat in characters who in their low-profiled way betray commitment as well as revolutionary spirit. The foggy night "with its walking ghosts is about to be burned away."⁴⁴

⁴³ Asein, 136.

⁴⁴ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 112.

11. *Time of the Butcherbird*

11.1 Introduction

Time of the Butcherbird is, like *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, placed in the midst of the liberation struggle and advocates armed resistance, but focuses to a somewhat lesser degree than the previous novel on the mechanics of the resistance movement as such. On the other hand, *Time of the Butcherbird* widens the racial panorama of his fiction by focusing in much more detail on particularly the white population group, opening up a terrain of Manicheism and binarism which decisively steers the lives of the human beings inhabiting this universe. It is a world described by Fanon in the following way:

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but none in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity.¹

While *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* employs the notion of placelessness both to signify the physical marginalisation of the non-whites through the removal policies of District Six and the existence of the resistance fighter exemplified by the incessant journeys of the main protagonist, Beukes, the placelessness in *Time of the Butcherbird* both refers to the removals from ancestral land and to the vague description of location which places the setting of the novel in some sort of a no-man's land. It is only through the description of the landscape and its vegetation that it is possible to locate the novel to somewhere in the Karoo. The issue of representation raises other problems in *Time of the Butcherbird* than in La Guma's previous novels since La Guma's narrative is set in a place almost unknown to him and inhabited by people outside the coloured population group. In *Time of the Butcherbird* the problem of identification is moreover reinforced by the lack of tribal identity of the Blacks living in the area. The Blacks in the novel thus transcend the representation of an identifiable, specific ethnic group and become more a symbol of inter-ethnic Blacks in South Africa. Whereas proximity is no guarantee of clarity of vision, distance and unfamiliarity may well project stereotypical and pre-determined images and notions. Mphahlele reflects on the problems of exile in the following way:

Having been thrown into the bigger milieu of ideas outside your homeground, your writing registers ideas more readily than it dramatizes concrete experience. How to resolve this dilemma becomes a painful preoccupation.²

La Guma himself acknowledges his authorial limitation in the writing of *Time of the Butcherbird*:

The characters in the novel are more symbolic than the characters in the other novels. I suppose because the characters in the previous novels are people whom I

¹ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 38-39.

² Chandramohan, 151.

knew directly: Here I portray people whom I hoped were representative of the South African scene... I tried to combine symbolism, character and action.³

Clearly this “hope - for - the - best” formula is not the soundest basis for the type of “authentic” realism which has been La Guma’s trade-mark from the very beginning, and his shift to a more symbolic (and allegorical) style, reminiscent of Ngugi’s only piece of fiction in exile, *Matigari*, is therefore a legitimate move for an exiled writer and politician who has not touched base in South Africa during the last twelve or thirteen years. The novel can therefore be viewed as “resistance from the outside to the inside,” a form of resistance literature which is located in the midst of the armed struggle, but yet is involved in the struggle on a more abstract representational level. If Taylor is right in contending that the difference between the literature of combat and the narrative of liberation is that “the former places itself directly in the resistance struggle whereas the narrative of liberation is more concerned with transcending the oppressive situation and the transformation to freedom”⁴ *Time of the Butcherbird* seems to encompass both definitions. Focusing on the struggle against land estrangement in the Karoo⁵ the novel at the same time attempts to transcend the barrenness and limitations of the Karoo environment by presenting the major ideological underpinnings of the Afrikaners’ rationale for the apartheid policy. By selecting a more symbolic and transformative narrative, La Guma can more comfortably inject an ideological discourse where the text constructs contexts and analyses relations within them without as it were stressing verisimilitude as in his previous realist fiction. Since two of the main black characters in the novel, Mma Tau and Hlangeni are not given a specific tribal identity. Chandramohan indicates a connection with the Swazi or Pondo⁶ - the somewhat vague links to any identifiable tribe only reinforce their symbolic function as Black Africans. Similarly La Guma avoids, as Chandramohan puts it, “using any specific Nguni language,”⁷ thereby sustaining the symbolic patterns of the novel. By embodying the various characters with a representative function far beyond their historical presence La Guma never involves the characters in active self-formation or subjectification as in his previous novels. Even though La Guma traces the history of the Boer family Meulen, the focus is more on the ideological characteristics of the clan history and Boer mentality than on the various members’ self-formation and identity-creation. In this respect the postmodernist project of destabilisation of centered selves and authority is transcended by homogenising categories which place the various racial groups in totalising entities. As we shall see, however, within this totalising narrative, the textual discourse offers, if not several meanings, at least ambiguity and ambivalence.

³ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 117.

⁴ Taylor, 19.

⁵ The issue of the forced removal of the blacks from their ancestral lands was one of the most serious problems in South Africa.

⁶ Chandramohan, 163.

⁷ Chandramohan, 165.

11.2 Exploring Boer ideology

By exploring in particular how the Boer universe is exposed in *Time of the Butcherbird*, this section identifies difference as the exploratory mechanism which sets the Boers apart from the blacks. Often defined in categories of darkness and evil the blacks are given few redeeming qualities beyond their function as servants or slaves. Upheld by Boer theology the white society in the Karoo is grounded in the firm conviction that the Afrikaner people is the work of God, not man and the section discusses the political and ideological implications of such a view.

The idea of removing the black population from their ancestral lands is the immediate cause of direct, black resistance in the novel, but is really only the last straw in the long history of antagonism between the whites and the blacks. In the novel this antagonism is textually inscribed in the fairly extensive elaboration of white, and in particular Boer ideology, and the exposure of a master-servant relationship where the many physical contact zones never yield to a communicative relationship based on human equity and mutual understanding. The land conflict thus functions as a catalyst in exposing the heterogeneous population universe of the novel and the attitudinal topography on the veld, clearly projecting the most comprehensive picture of the political situation in his literary career as he manages, as Asein asserts, "to transcend the limitations of a political occasion."⁸ Responding to the Africans not in terms of identity, but difference, the Boers project an image of the Blacks where Otherness is the only qualifying characteristic. In this way the white response to the Blacks is grounded almost exclusively in the security of their own cultural basis. By hardly ever questioning the moral superiority or the moral foundation on which the Afrikaner society is built, they waste little time in understanding African thinking and ways of behaviour. The difficulty of such a task is underlined by JanMohamed:

Genuine and thorough comprehension of otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture...this entails the virtually impossible task of negating one's very being, precisely because one's culture is what formed that being.⁹

In the case of Boer ideology, however, Otherness is not only defined in terms of unintelligibility and incomprehension ("But what can be done by with people who a century ago had not discovered the wheel? Countries overrun by barbarism sink to barbarism, that is the experience of history. Look what happened on this continent, in the north, when the Europeans withdrew"(63-64)), but in terms of a dogmatic fixation on the evil, dark aspects of the Other. As Fanon states:

the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil...The native is declared insensitive to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the

⁸ Asein, 142.

⁹ JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 84

negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil.¹⁰

There is, however, a reciprocity here which Fanon is at pains to underline: "On the logical plane, the Manicheism of the settler produces a Manicheism of the native. To the theory of the 'absolute evil of the native' the theory of the absolute theory of the 'absolute evil of the settler' replies."¹¹ As Mma Tau, the peasant revolutionary, underlines:

"The evil is the law and the guns who ransack our homes, frighten our children, mistreat our women, humiliate the elders, arrest and jail the breadwinners and protectors. Must we obey the evil or must we obey the blood which is life... Can a people be obedient to evil? Bah, there is no dignity in that.' (47).

Later she reiterates their grievances: " 'They are getting tired of it, she thought. Tired of the tiredness... They are getting tired of hunger, she thought' " (88). Clearly the novel confirms that the Afrikaner finds meaning through this imposition of power and that the fear of losing control of the Blacks is not only an anxiety coupled to economic exploitation, but as much a fear of losing one's identity, one's culture. As Hannes Meulen, the present generation of Boers confirms:

'It all depends on what they mean by change. We should be willing to see things in a new light, but nothing should be done at the expense of our kultuur, our honour.' (63).

In short, Afrikaner concessions do not contain any syncretic cultural possibility. The inauthenticity of a culture based on oppression, racism and superiority is well summed up by Mma Tau:

'They exist in a false happiness of guns and laws, they exist with false laughter, for the laughter is not really theirs. Do you know the meaning of their laws and their false happiness and their undignified laughter? The meaning is this: that men are of two kinds, the poor who toil and create the riches of the earth, and the rich who do not toil but devour it.' (47)

Representing Afrikaner ideology based on this master-slave dichotomy, Hannes Meulen is the prototypical Afrikaner whose relationship to the Other causes a complex situation of dependency (for self-confirmation) and indifference. Even though better educated and in some way more modern than the two other generations prior to him (Oupa Meulen and Christofel Meulen) Hannes Meulen is unable to fathom any moral dilemma in the eviction of the Africans from their home land. Also Hannes Meulen is stuck in reactionary Boer ideology to an extent which, within the ideological parameters of the novel, is beyond redemption: this is reflected in Meulen's and his wife's biased, restricted vision, apparently more concerned about the harsh conditions under which the plants and flowers live (62) than in the socio-economic situation of the Africans in the same harsh area.

¹⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 41.

¹¹ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 41.

The killing of the black protagonist Shilling Murile's brother; Timi, is a confirmation of Meulen and his white foreman Opperman's power base, and is a logical enactment of their imposition of non-being on the Other. Almost like a crucifixion scene Timi and Shilling are fixed to the fence, not because they represent an imminent danger to white control, but because any deviation from what the whites consider as normal must be rectified:

Rage made Opperman cruel and he thrust them against the fence posts in turn, while Meulen covered them with the shotgun, lashing them fast with the flex, jerking the bonds tight in his anger so that they cut into the flesh, gouged at bone, lashing them to the posts while he cursed them. (75)

When Hannes Meulen is fined for the murder, the cosmetics of the response of the authorities underlines the basic white feeling of superiority and lack of human empathy: "Nowadays everybody was very conscious of the necessity to show the white people in a good light in relation to the black population"(77).

By enforcing psychological or physical non-being on the Blacks, the whites invite to no meeting ground between the two population groups, There is no contact zone, as JanMohamed says, between "the social, historical creatures of Europe and the metaphysical alterity of the Calibans and Ariels of Africa."¹² Boer ideology is so grounded in a metaphysical conviction that remonstrances are non-existing: " 'The Afrikaner people is not the work of man, it is the work of God. We shall prevail' " (64).

Not even in time of crisis is the basic foundations of Boer ideology shattered, theological deliberations notwithstanding. Dominee Visser's juxtaposition of the hearts and minds of Boer mentality with their political practice is here a case in point, not without an authorial touch of irony. By acknowledging that his people have committed sinful acts linked to non-political, individualistic behavioral patterns especially linked to the sinful life in the cities, Dominee Visser manages to project the soul-searching into an absolutely irrelevant individualistic domain, exempting the Boers from any kind of socio-political thinking and completely neglecting the atrocities committed by the people of his congregation. By calling for the purity of the race and return to old Boer life style, Dominee Visser elegantly and brutally confirms the impossibility of any kind of transcendence of the fixed binarism. And as one of the members of the congregation says: " 'As for me, I would rather be accused a thousand times of being a racist than of being a traitor to the cause of the white man' " (107). Undermining any possible redeeming capacity for Boer-style Christianity to bridge the binarism of the Karoo society, the text focuses on the incomprehension of the grassroots that something is fundamentally wrong: " 'What have we done to be punished? We are a God-fearing people, is it not?' " (25). Clearly *Time of the Butcherbird* is unwilling, in contrast to Ngugi's combat texts, to attach any revolutionary potential to at least Boer Christianity in his fiction, insisting on its reactionary force in the South African society. By

¹² JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 87.

linking Boer ideology to Hitler and the Nazis the text puts the conflict in the realm of racism which is the underlying episteme of Boer domination and oppression:

The men (the Boers) opposed a war against Germany. The Germans stood for unity of the race, of the chosen people of God. Any war against Germany would uphold ideas of miscegenation, of bastardisation, of liberal thoughts entertained by the British and the Jews. Thus the ideas of Hitler coincided with those of the men at these meetings. (58)

11.3 Resistance against apartheid imposition

By analysing the blacks' response to Boer imposition this section first exposes the split in the Black ranks between the conservatives, headed by chief Hlangeni and the revolutionaries where Hlangeni's sister, Mma Tau, is in charge. The section proceeds to discuss the revolutionary role of the peasantry in South Africa and underlines that *Time of the Butcherbird*, like *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, ascribes race to be the constitutive factor in explaining the conflict in South Africa. This view is textually supported by Shilling Murile's random killing of Edgar Stopes. Moreover the subordination of class to race is reinforced by analysing the effects of the class divisions between the Oppermans and Meulen in the novel. While much textual space is allocated to Shilling Murile's act of personal revenge, it is Mma Tau and her followers who initially constitute a threat to Boer territorial encroachment. The section concludes by discussing the potentials of this rural resistance movement.

This panoramic exposure of colonial, white fixation and ideological rationale for the Afrikaner's stress on difference is paralleled and contrasted to the Blacks' perception of the white world whose scepticism is less articulated and more grounded in anxiety about land security and economic disparity than in ontological difference. It is a scepticism and antagonism referring to the specific evil acts of the whites, not an antagonism based on racial or genetic difference. This difference in the conception of the Other between the two antagonistic groups naturally gives the story a certain bias by way of "explaining" the Manichean fixation in terms of racial and economic arrogance, thereby adding oil to the latent fire that the only exit out of this situation is resorting to arms.

While La Guma confirms that the political conflict in *Time of the Butcherbird* focuses on "one of the most serious social problems in South Africa... (is) the mass removal of millions of African peoples from their well-established homes and the government program to establish or reinforce 'Bantustans,'" ¹³ resistance against apartheid impositions is, however, far from axiomatic. The chief of the land, Hlangeni, is not able to generate any resistance, accepting tacitly the fate of history by not revolting against his removal from the ancestral lands:

'It is bitterly known that their laws and weapons make all brotherhood impossible, that they can penetrate and destroy even manhood. So we must bow our heads

¹³ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 115.

before this and our people must kneel and sink even as the sun sets upon another day.' (45)

'The times are different,' Hlangeni cried, 'They rule us now.' (48)

As a prototype of the unscientised oppressed in *Time of the Butcherbird*, Hlangeni is seen as a victim of a process which he is unwilling or unable to understand. The undermining of Hlangeni's authority is inextricably linked to the land issue. The importance of land cannot be undermined or underrated. As Fanon states: "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land will bring them bread and, above all, dignity."¹⁴ This is in line with Mma Tau's insistence: " 'All this was our land, since the time of our ancestors. In that my brother was right. Are not the fields still ours, the soil, the hills? All that is our home, in spite of the white man's law' " (83). The problem is that this almost mythical, ancestral link to the land is shared with the whites:

The father loved the land: to him country was not only a geographical entity, an anthem, celebrations of Dingane's day, the Day of Blood river... This was a heritage which had been gained through the sacred blood of their ancestors and the prophetic work of God. It had come to their fathers through the musket and the Bible: they had come into this land like the followers of Joshua. Any other conception was anathema. (57-58)

But the reason for the whites' decision to remove the Blacks from their ancestral lands is not so much linked to the sacredness of the land as to the material potentials of that land. Holding certain mineral deposits the land is too valuable to be left untouched: "Meulen smiled. 'As soon as the Bantu have been moved, the development of that era will commence' "(61).

11.3.1 Rural resistance: *The role of the peasantry*

Opposing her own brother and chief, Mma Tau rejects Hlangeni's submissive attitude by calling for resistance against the eviction from their lands:

'The evil is the law and the guns who ransack our homes, frighten our children, mistreat our women, humiliate the elders, arrest and jail the breadwinners and protectors. Must we obey the evil or must we obey the blood which is life? My brother Hlangeni says we must obey the law and the weapons, the evil. Can a people be obedient to evil? Bah, there is no dignity in that.' (47)

'But I say this clearly, I shall not go from this land. That is what the times mean for me...' (48)

The novel's focus on the rural scene, in contrast to La Guma's previous occupation with urban issues, means by implication a focus on the peasantry and their role in the freedom fight. The role of the peasantry in the liberation struggle is, according to Fanon, unique:

¹⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 44.

And it is clear that in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays.¹⁵

Fanon's perception of the peasantry is similar to the view expressed by Bakunin who characterises the peasantry as pure, integrated and oppressed.¹⁶ Fanon's somewhat romanticised view of the peasant notwithstanding, it seems fairly obvious that the peasantry has had a more significant role as a progressive force in Africa than in Europe. Fanon therefore also clearly distinguishes between European peasantry and peasantry in the developing countries, and the revolutionary potential of the peasantry is clearly limited to the developing world. Fanon's view of the peasantry was supported by the high-profiled Africa expert, the French agronomist René Dumont, who views the peasantry as "the proletarians of modern times."¹⁷

Whereas the revolutionary potential of the peasantry in a South African setting is potentially more problematic than in other African countries due to its industrialised nature, there was, according to Lodge, "a succession of bitter localised conflicts between peasants and authority in the African reserves of South Africa"¹⁸ from 1940 to the mid-60s. "The reserves were needed for new economic and political functions, and a series of attempts was made to restructure them accordingly."¹⁹ As in the novel the chiefs played an important part in these conflicts. The feeling that the chief had lost authority and meaning was not La Guma's invention. Clearly the undermining of customary rights and privileges meant that the security of the people in the country-side was jeopardised, especially the security linked to land rights and subsequent food production. As Atwell Mopeli Paulus states: "The chief is a chief when he can give land to his people to plough and food for them to eat. A man's home is where he can fill his stomach."²⁰ Reechoing Mopeli, Mma Tau in the novel reiterates a similar message: "My brother, a chief is not a chief merely by custom and heredity, he is also a chief out of respect earned from his people..." (48). The resistance was not only a protest against removals from land, but also a protest against what could be called forced proletarianisation where the regrouping of people on the reserves in non-agricultural villages was seen as to establish "labour dormitories for decentralized industry."²¹ Most probably La Guma's fictional universe originates in the

¹⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 61.

¹⁶ "they have retained in all integrity the simple robust temperament and the energy germane to the folk nature...They live from the labour of their hands, and are morally conditioned by this labour, which fosters an instinctive hatred for all the privileged parasites of the state, and for all the exploiters of labour...they share common interests with the city workers, from whom they are separated by their prejudices." Quoted in Eugene Pyzuir, *The Doctrine of Anarchism of Michael A. Bakunin* (Chicago: Regenery, 1968), 75.

¹⁷ René Dumont, *False Start in Africa* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1966), 21.

¹⁸ Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London and New York: Longman 1983), 261.

¹⁹ Lodge, 261.

²⁰ Atwell Mopeli Paulus, "The world and their people," unpublished manuscript, University of the Witwatersrand, Mopeli Paulus papers, A 974, 114. Quoted from Lodge, 272.

²¹ Lodge, 263.

Mpondo revolt in the Transkei which was the best organised of all the rural revolts and where an organisation (*Intaba*) outside the traditional structure established itself

as an alternative political authority to the prevalent order, assuming, for instance, the functions of chiefs' courts in settling land allocation matters and other disputes, but in particular exerting great pressure on chiefs and headmen in the area to denounce and reject Bantu Authorities.²²

Indaba is referred to twice in the novel, thus reinforcing the likelihood of an Mpondo link, even though the term is used in a slightly different way: a tribal meeting where chief Hlangeni's authority is utterly undermined. Still there is no indication that *Time of the Butcherbird* emphasises the role of the peasants in the same way as Fanon does. Based as he is in an urban setting and with a solid base in Communist, if not Marxist ideology, La Guma's focus on the peasants is more an effort to paint a more comprehensive picture of the South African scene than singling out the peasant as the avant-garde in the revolution. It would be inconceivable for La Guma to invert Marx's dictum that the proletariat alone is revolutionary. But the clear-cut line of demarcation between the urban proletariat and the rural peasantry is also somewhat problematic in South Africa where the reserves served as a basis for the development of the South African industrial economy. As Lodge states:

The original function of the reserves was to subsidise the costs of mine labour. In other words, mine owners could pay migrant black mineworkers' wages which were set below the minimum subsistence needs for themselves and their dependants. The balance would be made up by agricultural production carried out by the miner's family and himself between contracts.²³

What role the industrial workers at home between contracts played in rural resistance is not to my knowledge well documented, but it goes without saying that there were not watertight compartments between town and country-side in South-Africa as in other African countries.

11.3.2 Race and class revisited

Like in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* *Time of the Butcherbird* is premised, this subsection argues, on the view that the conflict in the Karoo can primarily be explained in terms of race relations, class analysis and conflict being subordinated to the analysis of racial domination. This inversion of Marxist analysis is similar to how Ato Sekyi- Otto perceives Fanon:

What Marxian ontology and theory of capitalist society identify as the determinative foundations of social being and social conduct, namely productive activity and, by derivation, class relations of production, emerge in Fanon's theory as contingent consequences of the political coercion of colonized man based upon a race structure of power.²⁴

²² Lodge, 279-80.

²³ Lodge, 261-62.

²⁴ Ato Sekyi-Out, "Frantz Fanon's Critique of the Colonial Experience" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1977), 212.

Transferred to the South African scene Fanon's emphasis on race as the constitutive factor in the internal colonial conflict gained ground in the sixties and the seventies. Mphahlele in *The African Image* sums up his view on multi-racialism in the following way:

The idealism I shared with the political movement of the fifties that advocated a non-racial society died with the treason trial, the Rivonia trial and Sharpeville. We the black people now feel that we should cultivate a distinctive consciousness to buttress and direct the African humanism that dissipated itself in all that rhetoric of the fifties and the politics of non-racialism.²⁵

The representation of Black freedom fighters inaugurated in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* is in *Time of the Butcherbird* extended to a singular focus on the Africans as the spearhead of the revolution, paralleling La Guma's political reflections as they for example appear in his "Apartheid: The Imperialist Monster:"

The main contents of the present stage of South African revolution is the national liberation of the largest and the most oppressed group- the African people. This strategic aim must govern every aspect of the conduct of the struggle. It demands in the first place the maximum mobilization of the African people as a dispossessed and racially oppressed nation.²⁶

The text's focus on non-white resistance and resistance as a race rather than a class conflict only reinforces our contention in the chapter on *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* that the influential Native Republic Thesis of his father, Jimmy La Guma still loomed large in La Guma's artistic and political mind.²⁷ Additionally the intellectual climate created by the rise of Black Consciousness reinforced La Guma's perception of the Native Republic Thesis and La Guma's concern with the problems of Africans. In contrast to Lembede of the Youth League of the ANC who in the forties emphasised the exclusion of all non-Africans, the Black Consciousness movement redefined, as we have seen, blacks to include all of African, coloured and Indian descent. By re-defining Blackness as a not exclusive Black African movement it was able to collect large sections of Africans, Coloureds and Indians under a single political umbrella of Blackness. It is therefore inaccurate when Chandramohan claims that La Guma "envisages a community of poor people oppressed by another community of privileged people. This division is not exclusively racial. The division is seen as a polarisation of class interests rather than a fight between one racial group and another."²⁸ Even though there are examples in La Guma's texts where persons transcend racial barriers or borders (e.g. Donald Harris, a white who gets imprisoned for helping the Blacks to organise a trade union in *Time of the Butcherbird* (52), the white, revolutionary voice is still almost as suppressed in *Time of the Butcherbird* as in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. Chandramohan's somewhat peculiar notion of trans-ethnicity is thus a theoretical notion

²⁵ See Chandramohan, 152.

²⁶ Alex La Guma, "Apartheid: The Imperialist Monster," *Tricontinental* 26 (1971): 53.

²⁷ See Chandramohan, 152-53 and my review of Alex La Guma's biography of his father.

²⁸ A. La Guma and M. Ahikari, *Jimmy La Guma: A Biography*. *Kronos*, 25 (1998-99), 301-303.

²⁸ Chandramohan, 29.

which may be similar to the ideas of multi-racialism of the ANC-programme, but which is given little textual support in any of La Guma's novels. This impression is reinforced in *Time of the Butcherbird* where the social stratification within the white community between the Meulens' and the Oppermans' points to a potential interracial class conflict.

Chandramohan's assertion that "The emphasis that La Guma gives to the dispossession of different races, rather than the dispossession of one group, constitutes a key trans-ethnic factor"²⁹ is problematic, however, because the class division within the white ranks does not have any destabilising consequences for the present order or does not enforce any contact zone between the oppressed on both sides of the racial barrier. On the contrary, it cements the conflict along racial and not class lines:

The Oppermans were small farmers - a patch of land, a few cows and sheep, some chickens. After old Opperman had been stomped into the dust by an infuriated bull, the farm had passed to the wife and Jaap... Farming interrupted schooling; then later they had found the farm too much and too profitless to run, so it had been sold to the Meulens to be annexed, and young Jaap had accepted paid employment which eventually led to the foremanship of the Meulen estate. It was not a vastly responsible position as all he had to do, really, was to see that the numerous blacks did their work keeping the farm going. (99)³⁰

This theoretical ambivalence in La Guma between the strong notion of the importance of the Blacks to collect themselves in order to effect change (native republic) and the idea that South Africa belongs to all races (multiracialism), is therefore difficult to sustain in *Time of the Butcherbird* where Stopes, the white, naïve businessman, is killed by Shilling even though he had no connections with Shilling's project of personal revenge. His attitude to the Afrikaners is, however, nothing but condescending:

Here in the countryside he was like a foreigner and he had learnt that he would make no headway with these people unless he submitted to their narrow arrogance. (4)

Portrayed as prejudiced as the Boers vis à vis the Blacks Stopes' condescending attitude to the black houseboy at the Karoo hotel and his remarks which implicitly explain the poverty of the Blacks in terms of them not having brains (36) attest to an attitude of racial superiority similar to that of the Boers. La Guma's comment that "the attitude of the English settler to the blacks is not dissimilar to the Afrikaners and Stopes' death is as inevitable as Meulen's if South Africa is to be cleansed of negative forces"³¹ only reinforces the textual message, no matter what discrepancy there is between the ANC's official stance on multi-racialism which La Guma officially endorsed and the underlying assumptions of *Time of the Butcherbird's* textual discourse. For Maughan-Brown La Guma's political interpretation of the accidental killing of Edgar Stopes is unsettling:

²⁹ Chandramohan, 172.

³⁰ When Chandramohan quotes from the same paragraph, he leaves out the last line which emphasizes the racial dimension of the conflict.

³¹ Cecil Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 133.

The suggestion that the death of all English-speaking white South Africans is inevitable 'if South Africa is to be cleansed of negative forces' is entirely out of character with the political analysis of the African National Congress... Oliver Tambo's New Year message in *Sechaba*, January 1979, the year in which *Time of the Butcherbird* was published... addresses the question of the political desirability of targeting individual representatives of the system:³²

While La Guma is not saying that the death of all English-speaking white South Africans is inevitable, he stresses the necessity of cleansing South Africa of negative forces, and the prejudiced Stopes is among them. La Guma's comments must not, however, be pushed into the domain of the ridiculous. Even though the ideological thrust of *Time of the Butcherbird* is militant, it does not mean that all whites literally must either be killed or flee the country. What La Guma talks about in the interview is "the cleansing of negative forces," and within the symbolic parameters of *Time of the Butcherbird*, Stopes is another representative or image of the "negative forces" that must be eliminated. Shilling's murder of Meulen and Stokes signals that difference cannot be adequately transcended within a colonial, apartheid context. Moreover Maughan-Brown completely overlooks the fate of the previously mentioned English-speaking white communist, Donald Harris, jailed by the apartheid government for his trade-union activities, who as a representative of the positive forces has a role to play in a new South Africa, although not in the driver's seat. Maughan-Brown dismisses any suspicion that La Guma had become "a closet convert to a racially exclusive Africanism"³³ by referring to his 1976 essay "Culture and Liberation" where he writes:

The revolutionary programme of the African National Congress with which this writer identifies, states: 'A democratic government of the people shall ensure that all national groups have equal rights, as such, to achieve their destiny in a united South Africa.'³⁴

It is therefore problematic to label La Guma a racially exclusive Africanist, but both *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* and *Time of the Butcherbird* undoubtedly privilege black resistance and the importance of the blacks to collect themselves in order to get rid of white tyranny. There seems to be a contradiction here between La Guma's official statements on the one hand and his comments on the novel and its textual message on the other which is not easily erased. Reminiscent of La Guma's impatience with the lack of agency among the coloured as it is textually exposed in *A Walk in the Night* and partly in *And A Threefold Cord*, an impatience which he never explicitly formulated in his political essays, La Guma seems to use *Time of the Butcherbird* as a leeway to express deep-felt convictions which he as a

³² Maughan-Brown, "Adjusting the Focal Length" 28. Tambo stated in 1979: "The experience of our lifetime... teaches us that the issue of power and peace in our country, as elsewhere, will be resolved in our favour only by an effective combination of political and armed activity, activity, however, targeted, not on persons, but on the racist system -except when persons go out of their way to defend the system." Oliver R. Tambo, "January 8 Message," *Sechaba*, Jan. 1979, 4.

³³ Maughan-Brown, 29.

³⁴ La Guma, "Culture and Liberation," 35.

prominent ANC and Communist representative had to suppress. It is apparently his father's Native Republic Thesis which was given an outlet in his two last novels even though it was ideologically incorrect.³⁵ S. P. Bunting, one of the opponents of the Native Republic Thesis and thus an opponent of Jimmy La Guma, underlined how he felt the Native Republic Thesis would have a negative effect on both black and white in South Africa:

The policy of the Communist Party had been to split the whites on class lines and stress the fundamental community of interest of white proletarians and semi-proletarians with the blacks...and we therefore quarrel somewhat with the wording of the resolution where it says that there will be an ever sharper 'division of interests between the black and white population', i.e. treated as one whole, without class discrimination.³⁶

The text's emphasis on race rather than class does not, as we have seen, in any way mean that the novel is not concerned with the socio-economic conflicts in the Karoo. By stressing the land issue as the fundamental, underlying background of the novel's conflict, the novel explores, as has been noted, the economic disparities between the blacks and the whites, testifying to the conflict's class-like implications. But socio-economic disparities notwithstanding it is the racial binarism which is the principle which defines the *raison d'être* of the Boers in all their undertakings, the land issue included.

11.3.3 *Querying Otherness and difference*

The white's ideological rationale for Otherness and difference is in the novel subtly broken down, this subsection shows, by describing parallel situations and parallel reactions between the Blacks and the whites in two important areas besides the land issue: rationality and sexuality. Whereas one of the main foundations for binarism and Otherness is the mythic perception of white rationality and black superstition, a different story is told in the novel even though there is a fixed impression both among whites and blacks that blacks are more superstitious, poignantly expressed when the coloured girl responds to Jaap Opperman's inquiry: " 'Bygones,' the girl said. Superstitions. For a white man you are very superstitious.' " (100) But superstition is not only restricted to Jaap. Jaap Opperman's mother, the late Tant' Philippa

was a Christian believing fast in the Living God, and went to church regularly until rheumatics caused her attendance to turn sporadic...But she also believed in the Devil and all his works, in witchcraft, spells, curses and ghosts because they were the other side of the spiritual coin, as it were ... (97)

Even Maisie flirts with the Devil in her struggle to escape the boredom she finds herself in (53). La Guma seems to be saying that the whites are rational as long as they feel they have

³⁵ It is in this connection worth keeping in mind that in Alex La Guma's biography of his father, Jimmy, which recently was published, the Native Republic Thesis occupies 2/3rds of the text.

³⁶ Quoted from Bunting, 7-8.

control. But as soon as things go beyond them, their behaviour is as irrational as that of the natives: “ ‘It’s strange,’ she said frowning, ‘them praying for rain. I remember, when they used to mock us when we sang the rain songs’ ” (89). The binarism of the colonial encounter is also linked to the perception of the wild, untameable African libido as contrasted to the rational, structured and civilised behaviour of the whites. Maisie’s mother is worried about her daughter’s fate, telling her: “ ‘In the future it’ll be straight home from the pitchers for you. One night the kaffirs will get you, you’ll see’ ”(34). The attraction and repulsion of the sexual prowess of the Africans is seen in the exchange between Maisie and a lady at the gun club: The lady: “ ‘One never knows when some terrible kaffir will run amok’...Maisie thinks: ‘You’ll probably enjoy it, you bitch.’ ” (50) But it is the whites, and in particular Maisie and Jaap Upperman who are unable to control their sexual urge within accepted limits, Maisie by running away, at least temporally with Wally Basson even when she is married to Stopes, and Upperman by enjoying a relationship to a coloured girl even if it is against the moral codes of the rural society. Their inability of repressing their sexual appetite is paralleled with their real or symbolic man-slaughter of husband and “slave;” Maisie repeatedly wants to see Edgar dead while Upperman kills Timi by brutally binding him to the fence.

The parallel sequences thus effectively undermines the racial binarism on which the Boer ideology is based. There is, the text implies, a schism which is superimposed upon the people in the Karoo which is historically and ideologically determined, transferred from one generation to the other. But whereas the credo of racial differences is textually dismissed, it is the same credo which sustains the conflict among the population groups in the Karoo.

11.3.4 The personal revenge motive

One basic problem with *Time of the Butcherbird* is the racial and political conflict of dispossession and removal is being challenged by the private conflict of Shilling Murile, a conflict which clearly has political overtones and is racially predicated, but which by critics is interpreted as Murile’s personal revolt more than anything else. In this perspective the murder is first and foremost seen as an act of purification to restore the balance in Shilling Murile’s mind. Driven by a compulsion that overrides everything else, Shilling Murile’s self is at least initially unable to transcend his obsession of individual revenge: “I will do this one thing, and then I shall be finished with all the people, the man thought” (16). By killing Hannes Meulen he has eradicated the evil that has overshadowed his life since the fatal day at the wedding when his brother was killed. On one occasion his revenge seems to transcend the personal: “It was as if rage had always been there, like the scarred knees of childhood, the horniness of feet from years barefoot in the gritty soil. But his rage was a personal thing...” (41)

It is Shilling Murile’s obsession with revenge which seems to singularly sustain him as a human being as there is a lack of equilibrium that has to be restored in order for him to

proceed as a man, insisting on an eye for an eye retribution. Thus Shilling Murile's insistence on seeking revenge is predicated on a strong personality who is very conscious of what he wants and determined to stick to that course. By comparing his own situation to that of the ant in the grass, Shilling comes out as a very self-conscious actor: "He has somewhere to go and he knows that he is going there. He is like me, that little ant, knowing where he will go, what he will do"(15). Undoubtedly the personal dimension of the murder is textually reinforced time and again by Shilling who is challenged to translate his personal act into the collective domain. The text thus reiterates an old theme in La Guma's fiction about the relationship between the individual and the collective and where the text places Shilling Murile in an ambiguous position which in a way complicates, if not threatens the whole resistance project. The ambiguity is both linked to Shilling's responses to the call for solidarity and the images the text employs in relation to the conflict. The exchange between Mma Tau and Shilling highlights this ambiguity:

(Mma-Tau:) 'There are many debts to be collected. It is not for me to stand in your way if you wish to collect your debt, but hear this. A whole people is starting to think of collecting a collective debt, the time for collecting this debt is drawing on...' 'It is my thing,' Shilling Murile said morosely. 'Wasn't my brother killed?' ... he did not want to give any thought to what she was saying, but he listened out of basic politeness, not wishing to offend her. (80- 81)

Even though Shilling develops some sort of companionship, solidarity and intimacy with the shepherd Madolene, any potential extension of this solidarity to the blacks on the veld is steeped in vagueness and ambiguity. When Madolene asks towards the end: "Are you coming with our people?" Shilling Murile responds: "Let's say I am coming with you, old man, he said. 'Remember, you have my tobacco'" (118). Shilling's ambiguous position is moreover reinforced by La Guma's introduction of the butcherbird as a central symbol in the novel. La Guma's note on the butcherbird is clarifying:

The title of the novel comes from African folklore. One of the riddles from the oral tradition indicates that the butcherbird represents something which not only cleanses the cattle but also cleanses the society. It does away with the wizards, the sorcerers, and those people who have a negative effect on the society. What I'm trying to say is that conscious resistance of the people heralds the time when the butcherbird will cleanse South Africa of racism, oppression, and so on.³⁷

The linking of Shilling to the image of the butcherbird is concomitant with his role as a butcher in relation to his slaughtering of Meulen and Stokes. Clearly Shilling Murile knows the function of the butcherbird as is confirmed when the shepherd asks him: "Do you know the butcherbird?" "Yes, I know the butcherbird. That he is a hunter and smeller-out of sorcerers, because he impales insects'" (42). But it is not obvious that, as Balutansky claims, "At this point, the transformation of the butcherbird begins... (and that) Murile is transformed from a single-minded ant- or alienated individual- into a butcherbird."³⁸ Just

³⁷ Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 118.

³⁸ Balutansky, 116-117.

after the discussion about the butcherbird, Shilling Murile is asked where he will go: "The one called Shilling Murile shrugged. 'Who knows? I do not care, after I have done what has to be done.' (43) Shilling Murile underlines the gap in perception between himself and Mma Tau: " 'It is her thing,' the one called Shilling Murile replied. . . 'I have a thing of my own' " (49). It is true that he later in his conversation with Koos, Oubaas Meulen's black servant, conveys a general consciousness of the unjust master-servant relationship between whites and Blacks and tries to conscientise Koos about his slave-like situation, but it does not at any point mean an overall commitment to the collective struggle (94). In fact it is Mma Tau who is the real butcherbird by deprivatising the struggle and by thereby lifting the cleansing from the private to the collective domain.

'Doesn't the countryside have grievances? They send home workless men who starve in the city to starve in the country. So we will work to join the people of the country with those of the city. It is a trap they find themselves in each time, and one day the trap will snap shut, eh?' (81)

Helped by the crowd Mma Tau stops the sergeant and his men from removing the black people from the village. Here the crowd, reminiscent of the crowd in *A Walk in the Night*, plays, at least transitionally, a much more interventionist role by forcing the sergeant and his people to send for reinforcements. Moreover, Mma Tau's resistance is grounded in an analysis of global inequity where the white South African is seen as a lackey of Northern colonialism, not unlike Ngugi's analysis of the dependency paradigm in *Devil on the Cross*:

They exist in a false happiness of guns and laws, they exist in a false laughter, for the laughter is not really theirs. . . The meaning is this: that the people demand their share of the fruits of the earth, and their rulers, of whom the white man is a lackey, a servant, refuse them a fair portion. (47)

Interpreting Shilling's act as a single act of personal retribution only is, however, problematic since it undermines the symbolic significance of Shilling's killing which La Guma himself was eager to underline in his interview with Abrahams. It is Shilling's killing of Stopes, seemingly accidental, which transports the personal act into the symbolic realm and confirms that the cleansing of unwanted elements is a prerequisite if the revolution is to succeed.

Two incidents may indicate a shift in Shilling Murile's attitude. The first relates to the image of the ant towards the end where the ant's expansion of territory may indicate a similar territorial border crossing on Shilling Murile's part: "An ant came out of its hole and trundled across a stretch of sand. It was merely a patch, but to the ant it probably seemed an expanse of desert" (117). The second relates to his response to the shepherd's query: Are you coming with our people?

Shilling Murile got up, holding the shotgun wrapped in his blouse. He looked at the shepherd and his broad perspiring face moved slightly in a smile. 'Let us say that I am coming with you, old man,' he said. 'Remember, you have my tobacco.' (118)

The somewhat ambiguous answer notwithstanding, coming with the shepherd has political implications as the shepherd has chosen to join the movement (The shepherd): “ ‘Then you must join with us, the villagers, and be lost among us’ ” (117).

11.4 The eradication of difference: utopia envisaged

This politicisation and possible conscientisation of Shilling brings him reluctantly in line with Mma Tau whose revolutionary optimism is supported by the final images of nature:

It seems that the air, heavy with heat, begins to move. It has weight; it moves soundlessly and heavily, gathering momentum. . . the veils of dust cross the land like the smoke from lines of artillery and the moaning of the wind rises to a roar that is the sound of a blast furnace carrying a myriad needles of fire.’ (119)

Later the images seem to signal a time after the revolution where the conflict has subdued and we look into the promised land:

Then the thrust of the wind lessens and the difference in air makes life possible again. The roaring dies away. The yellowing afternoon light puts a golden colour on the land. A flight of birds swoop overhead towards a waterhole. (119)

While it is this vision of the liberated South-Africa in the horizon which closes the novel, there is a sense that the birds’ journey towards a water-hole (119) can be a cumbersome one. The rural resistance headed by Mma Tau seems ill equipped to engage in armed resistance; Shilling Murile’s stolen shotgun seems to be the only one available and Murile himself senses that the resistance “will only be a showing” (118). Maughan-Brown’s “doubts about the political implications and potential ideological effects of this novel”³⁹ is in one way well-founded if one forgets that the apparent weakness of the rural resistance reflects the reality on the rural ground and that peasant resistance could only play an important role if co-ordinated with urban resistance. This is addressed in the novel where Mma Tau’s experience and link with the city (47) obviously has conscientised her to a degree that she as a woman is able to “steal” the rural leadership role, and where her speech on global inequity (“that men are of two kinds, the poor who toil and create the riches of the earth; and the rich who do not toil but devour it. . .” (47)), reminiscent of Ngugi’s combat messages, reflects an understanding of the situation of the subaltern which transcends regional borders. So while Murile’s reluctance and the doubts about the peasants’ revolutionary potential rejects a rosy, uncomplicated journey to the promised land, the deromanticised text nevertheless insists on the necessity of an armed confrontation with the apartheid regime. Mma Tau’s resistance movement signals the beginning of the roaring wind and suggests, as the shepherd says: “They will have showed their unwillingness to be enslaved.”(118)

³⁹ Maughan-Brown, “Adjusting the Focal Length,” 26.

Offering a critique of myths, in Taylor's words, which impose "finite closure on human possibility"⁴⁰ the text recreates, as has been noted, a series of antagonistic situations, from the very private level of personal revenge to the more systemic level of land ownership and dispossession, where the various implications and meanings of man's explicit choices and the monopoly of colonial constructs are being rehearsed. By opting to fight the strong correlation between the negative past and the oppressive present, Shilling Murile and Mma Tau in their differing capacities confuse the static order, thereby offering possibilities and meanings which, this section argues, in reality are inconceivable and suppressed by the apartheid regime. La Guma has exploited his privilege as a fiction writer cum historian to operate in the way Hayden White suggests,

How a given situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in making up a specific plot situation with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with meaning of a particular kind.⁴¹

Sticking to the traditional notions of the historical novel by constructing a plot around the historical event of removals, the text never experiments with any imaginative interpretations of history beyond the liberation discourses in circulation abroad or at home. But the text, by countering a deterministic sense of the colonial situation with representations of an alternative vision of history which transcends colonial discourse, moves beyond the surface of a traditional historical novel by probing into the "why's" and "how's" of the political development in South Africa, exposing, as has been explored, an understanding of the relationship between the oppressed and their economic and racial circumstances and a possible solution. But this understanding is not presented as equal to any other understanding of South African reality; on the contrary the text rejects not only the Boer conception of history, but suppresses other versions which do not vision a militant break with the historical situation as well. Thus the text's rendering of history is never a post-modern version of multiple historical meanings or versions, insisting instead of a history predicated on a conviction of a future dissociated from the present oppressive system by resorting to arms.

While *Time of the Butcherbird* does not, like *Matigari*, offer a mythic representation of history which provides alternative routes, but relies completely on a material, linear conception where revolutionary upheaval is offered as a possibility, *Time of the Butcherbird* transgresses the boundaries of the professional history text by its use of the symbolic. It has been noted how signs of nature and elemental images parallel, reflect and sometimes go beyond the historical situation and in its projection of a future based on negotiations with the past and the present, thereby putting a different meaning to a historical situation by linking it to a future possibility.

⁴⁰ Taylor, 19.

⁴¹ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 85.

Since Manichean binarism is an organic part of apartheid ideology, and the eradication of difference, the possible area of encounter between self and Other, is not possible within apartheid's racial, social and economic framework, the text's militant construction of a vision of a changed order is an insistence of a reversion of the self - Other binarism of the apartheid state which transcends the historically predetermined.

12. Conclusion

Achieved through social engineering and ideological control, utopias are sustained by a vision of constructing a rational world on the ruins of chaos and disorder. The grand narratives of the modernist endeavour utopias project an image of a restored world which is controllable and predictable. As Delanty states, "The utopia of a society that could be reconstructed by a rational and political imagination lay at the heart of the modernist venture."¹ While it is the utopias of the oppressed and colonised which are constantly being queried and sometimes embraced by the representatives of the oppressed themselves in the early novels of Ngugi and La Guma the projection of these restored worlds is seen against the backdrop of and as a reaction against the projects of colonialism and apartheid ideology. Zygmunt Bauman claims that Holocaust is a product of modernity and treats Holocaust, according to Delanty,

as the test of the hidden possibilities of modern society, the most complete process of rationalization... In Bauman's estimation it was the highly rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable... Divested of moral content, modernity becomes sheer instrumentalist rationalism and can link up with antimodern ideologies, such as racism...²

Seen from this perspective the construction of apartheid can be viewed along the same lines as a rational, modernist project where the construction of utopia started after the 1948 elections. La Guma's involvement in anti-apartheid politics was by definition based on a completely different type of utopia, grounded in a social and political struggle to recognise the sameness of self and Other in order to eradicate difference. From a radical political platform one could say that the anti-apartheid struggle and apartheid represent modernity and its negation where both parties in their different ways promised redemption through politics. Similarly John Thompson's colonialism in *A Grain of Wheat* is clearly grounded in a modernist, rational enterprise intending to reconstruct the so-called irrational world of the Other. While Kihika's utopia is not so much a reaction against the fruits of modern civilisation, it is a confrontational attack on a colonial utopia where the colonial Other is objectified and relegated to a completely subordinate position on their own land. Whereas both Kihika and Gitu embrace the notion of utopia as something desirable to be fought for in resistance and liberation, there is a sense that both Mugo, Gikonyo and Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat* and Michael Adonis and to lesser extent Charlie Pauls in La Guma's novels either problematise utopia as a desirable or workable concept or have difficulties in projecting any alternative, restored world which transcends present misery and oppression. Since there seems to be no redemption through politics in District Six or on the Cape Flats the challenge for both Michael Adonis and Charlie Pauls, who have been shaped by domination and oppression, is to create their own subjectification. By underlining that this

¹ Gerard Delanty, *Modernity and Postmodernity: Knowledge, Power and the Self* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli: Sage Publications, 2000), 52.

² Delanty, 52.

subjectification beyond the domain of colonialist/apartheid domination is beset with hurdles, not the least because positive, alternative ideological interpellations on the Cape Flats and in District Six are in very short supply due to all kinds of spatial constraints, *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threfold Cord* expose a terrain filled with subdued, and sometimes open desperateness where alternative worlds are difficult to envisage, and even harder to materialise.

Whereas alternative subject positions within the coloured community in District Six and on the Cape Flats thus are almost beyond reach, there is in Ngugi a sense that subject positions in resistance are available and being negotiated. But while the liminal persons in *A Grain of Wheat* are given space to propose or take part in the struggle for an existence outside colonial discourse, the projection of such restored worlds is being queried, interrogated or even found repulsive, primarily out of personal concerns. The projected utopia of a Kihika or a Gatu is in other words not seen as necessarily given or "god-inspired." Whereas hope is a constitutive element in Kihika's utopian vision, hope is hardly being promoted and is thus not easily marketable in the streets of District Six or on the Cape Flats. In a seemingly contradictory situation, it is in the places where the need to relativise the contemporary scene is urgently needed that hardly anybody seems willing to, in Beilharz' words, "to take stock of where we are, and where we are heading."³ In short, where there is no hope, there are no utopias. In such a situation the coloured inhabitants are an easy prey to apartheid's hegemonical control.

In the resistance struggle of Kenya the leadership projects horizons of comparison by referring to history where similar liberation struggles were fought and won.⁴ In the coloured communities of Cape Town such comparable horizons are few and far between: Michael Adonis' comparison with life in the US is not only misconceived (the illusion that racism hardly exists over there), but in essence non-transformative: "'Go to the States, maybe.' 'Must be smart over there. You can go into any night-club and dance with white geese. There's mos no colour bar'" (16). Although one should not reduce the significance of Michael Adonis' articulation of deep-rooted frustration and urge to leave for a colour-free society, the reference to the American utopia (a utopia which incidentally is crushed by Greene in his dialogue with Michael Adonis) seems to have no transfer value to a struggle for utopia on domestic grounds. Moreover Charlie Pauls' unfulfilled project (at the inspiration of the rooker) is only challenged by the supporters of status quo as there are no competing projects for another future on the Cape Flats and no competing assessments of the present apart from the misinterpreted and thus fatalistic Biblical "love thy neighbour" slogan. The absence of utopias on the Cape Flats and District Six is grounded in the apolitical, unconscientised characters of the coloured communities since utopias are political

³ Peter Beilharz, *Zygmunt Bauman: Dialectic of Modernity* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli: Sage Publications, 2000), 59.

⁴ See in particular Kihika's reference to Gandhi and the liberation struggle in India, 102-103 in the original version, 88-89 in the new edition.

projections of what a good society is all about. Reinforcing the non-dynamic character of these communities the lack of viable utopias moreover sustains stasis since utopias have an activating and energising influence on the present order or the contemporary scene. Clearly exposed in *A Grain of Wheat* where there is some sort of vibrancy in the midst of crisis and resistance Kihika's well-formulated utopia offers relief - after a period of sacrifice and suffering - from colonial oppression. It is the tension between Kihika's utopia and Mugo's vague, individualistic vision (at least initially) which energises the narrative beyond the programmatic combat literature, but which also inflicts profound anxiety on the Gikuyu society where Kihika's modernist project is in direct confrontation with Mugo's a-political, if not anti-political insistence. By advocating epistemological relativism and by rejecting Kihika's grand narrative, Mugo in fact involves himself, initially, in what could be called an almost post-modernist project which undermines the need of the Gikuyu society for certainty, reliability and non-contingency. Mugo's rejection of Kihika's utopianism is spatially expressed in Mugo's political and intellectual departure from the Gikuyu society at a point when the resistance movement, offering a dramatic alternative to colonialism, is gaining ground. Questioning the viability of any discourse that insists on the foundationalism and the basic rootedness of human existence, Mugo, a rebel in the liberation movement, exiles himself also from the Gikuyu society of which he was a part. While Kihika is constructing the utopia of another Kenya on the utopias that are constructed elsewhere Mugo flees involvement in the struggle for utopia and becomes a political and intellectual refugee among his own tribe. By comparing the rebel with the experience of exile Raymond Williams claims that

The exile is as absolute as the rebel in rejecting the way of life of his society, but instead of fighting it he goes away. . . . (Usually) he will remain in exile, unable to go back to the society that he has rejected or that has rejected him, yet equally unable to form important relationships with the society to which he has gone.⁵

While Mugo is unable to, or is not given the possibility to appropriate colonial discourse or ideology, he returns to a Gikuyu community steeped in confusion and anxiety, expecting Mugo to deliver in the absence of Kihika. Mugo is rejected by the Gikuyu society he left behind because he does not live up to the expectations of the Gikuyu society even though he, by exposing his own betrayal, sets the moral standard for the Kenyan utopia. As Mugo's utopian vision of a new Kenya does not allow for reticence he faces death even though it is, ironically, the new Mugo who sustains Kihika's vision for a new Kenya. In *And A Threefold Cord* it is Charlie's physical and intellectual border-crossings which challenge the utopia of apartheid discourse. By invading the petrol station of George Mostert, Charlie questions both the apartheid model of order and the truth claims of apartheid discourse by wanting to localise and relativise the rational, modernist project of apartheid dichotomisation. Charlie questions the normative standards on which apartheid

⁵ Quoted from Peter Wagner, *Theorizing Modernity* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli: Sage Publications, 2001), 105.

builds in his attempt to smother the idea of difference as the constitutive principle on which human interaction is to build.

His probing of apartheid "rationality" in terms of racial and economic inequality and injustice takes him one step further in his border-crossing activity by articulating political and sociological concern about the very assumptions on which the apartheid system is constructed.

Similarly (but to a much lesser extent) Franky Lorenzo's questions the status quo and also the authority of the apartheid regime in maintaining law and order in District Six. Moreover by reflecting, self-critically, on the enormous economic disparities in the society they live, there is a sense that Franky projects ideas, at least implicitly, of a restored world beyond apartheid misery.

But it is not, as we have seen, the utopia of such worlds which sets the tone in La Guma's first novels as the texts are on the brink of consolidating what Wilson Harris in another context calls a "consensus of bestiality; monolithic helplessness, monolithic violence."⁶

There is, arguably, an ocean between the reality on the ground signalled for example by the animal imagery in *And A Threefold Cord* and the utopias of the rooker, and this discrepancy and tension is not fictionally resolved decisively in favour of the latter. By refraining from mythical representation to suggest another dimension of the world beyond the control of the realistic narrative the text exposes a historical consciousness containing few cosmetic changes to fit a pre-conceived political conviction. In *A Grain of Wheat*, on the other hand, the text rehearses, as we have seen, several versions of history in determining the meanings we put on the past and the kinds of future we may project. It is in this complex terrain of utopian projection and visionary rejection and abandonment that the characters of the two novelists move, and where there is no *carte blanche* allowance for revolutionary euphoria or panegyric jubilation. As the terrain is full of hurdles, it is important, the texts insist, to acknowledge resistance to resisting dominant interpellations and not to minimise the complexity of transgressing the borders of dominant ideological patterns and structures. In the combat phase of the two authors the post-modern paradigm of ambiguity, plurality etc. has lost ground, as we have seen, to a much more confrontational, combative phase. In Ngugi the disillusionment of the post-colonial elite turned into a kleptocracy, an elite who originally were to be the pioneers of rationalisation, industrialisation, of rationality and modernity, manifests itself in a political urgency and desperateness which is oppositional, non-dialogue-oriented and binary in its characterising features.

Ngugi seems very much to follow in the footsteps of the young Marx who interpreted, in Hannah Arendt's words, "the compelling needs of mass poverty in political terms as an uprising, not for the sake of bread or wealth, but for the sake of freedom as well."⁷ The liberation of the poor is a political question, and Ngugi, in line with Marx, insists that

⁶ Wilson Harris, "The Interior of the Novel: Amerindian/European/African Relations," *Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966-1981* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 14.

⁷ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 62.

poverty, as seen in the Devil's feast, is a result of political decisions, not a natural phenomenon, "the result of violence and violation rather than of scarcity."⁸

It has been noted how Ngugi offers a fairly simplistic dichotomisation of the Kenyan society along fairly clear-cut, traditional class lines and where the ethnic or race dimension is more or less altogether absent. In *La Guma* the race card is exposed against the rhetoric of multi-racialism even though the texts' suppression of the white voice did not reflect the situation on the ground. Such a privileging of black representational patterns did not mean a racially grounded utopia, but was, in the vernacular of the Native Republic Thesis, the first phase in the struggle towards utopia where social revolution and the class struggle belonged to the last phase.⁹

While Marx believed that the poor have nothing to break but their chains, we have seen how *La Guma* in particular, in his counter-hegemonic phase, problematised this perception, and even in the combat phase the texts of both authors underline conscientisation as inevitable if liberation is to succeed and the subaltern is to combat their subalternity and subjugation. Ngugi's combat novels are, as Appiah states in a more general, African literary context, novels

of delegitimation: rejecting the Western imperium, it is true, but also rejecting the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie. And so it seems to me, the basis for that project of delegitimation is very much not the postmodernist one: rather, it is grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal; indeed, it is based, as intellectual responses to oppression in Africa largely are based, in an appeal to a certain simple respect for human suffering, a fundamental revolt against the endless misery of the last thirty years. Ouloguem is hardly likely to make common cause with a relativism that might allow that a horrifying new-old Africa of exploitation is to be understood- legitimated- in its own local terms.¹⁰

By interrogating both the indigenous power elite and its link to the international centres of power, *Devil on the Cross* posits, like *Matigari*, a vision of a utopia which must be obtained through armed struggle, a utopia which is based on what one could call an "ethical universal," in Ngugi's case premised on the ethical principles of Gikuyism, Christianity¹¹ and Marxism. The combat texts are thus a rejection of a Western postmodernism and its antagonistic relationship to any totalising entity. We have already noted, however, that there is a sense that beyond the ethical principles referred to above, neither Ngugi nor *La Guma* (with his traditional, orthodox Marxist principles with no transcendental, religious undertones) project a vision of a utopia which reads modernity into a specific, African context beyond the rhetorical stage. Pechey's reference to competing utopias in the South

⁸ Arendt, 63.

⁹ According to Brian Bunting S.P. Bunting, one of the founders of the first Communist Party in Africa, "certainly regarded the Native Republic resolution... as a departure from Lenin, a switching off from class struggle to race struggle..." Bunting, 24.

¹⁰ Appiah, 152..

¹¹ Ogude's contention that Ngugi's "presentation of religion is one-dimensional" is, arguably, inaccurate. See Ogude, 41.

African apartheid state¹² is problematic in the sense that even though a negotiated settlement took place between de Klerk and Mandela, it is difficult to see that the result was clearly inside the territorial borders of a National Party scenario of utopias. The competing utopias in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* and *Time of the Butcherbird* as well as *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* are of such a different ideological order (Boer utopia as expressed in apartheid and post-colonial, elitist utopia as expressed by the exploiters at the Devil's Feast) that none of the texts proposes a contact zone, a negotiating space where difference can be ironed out or deleted. The gulf between the two perceptions of reality in Ngugi is well summed up by Gikandi:

Indeed, while Ngugi and his contemporaries on the political left assumed that neo-colonialism was the betrayal of the dream of independence, the Kenyan state...saw the political economy of the neo-colony, to the extent that it represented a commitment to modernity and modernization, as the *raison d'être* of national liberation...the very political culture which Ngugi attacked was being celebrated by the Kenyan bourgeoisie as the ultimate fulfillment of the state of independence.¹³

In the terrain of La Guma's combat novels the systemic, racial deprivation institutionalised in 1948 with its multiple oppressive ramifications is perceived to be too monolithic for any bridge-building activities, textually inscribed in the brutality of the apartheid authorities in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* and the reactionary Boer ideology of *Time of the Butcherbird*. The pivotal role of the subaltern masses in the resistance to post-colonial and apartheid repression has an influential predecessor in Fanon.

The peoples of Africa have... decided, in the name of the whole continent, to weigh in strongly against the colonial regime. Now the nationalist bourgeoisies, who in region after region hasten to make their own fortunes and to set up a national system of exploitation, do their utmost to put obstacles in the path of this 'Utopia'... (they)... have decided to bar the way to that unity, to that co-ordinated effort on the part of two hundred and fifty million men to triumph over stupidity, hunger, and inhumanity at one and the same time.¹⁴

But while this *romantic* version of grassroots agency cannot, as Lazarus argues, withstand close historical scrutiny¹⁵ the importance of subaltern agency at several historical junctures is well documented.¹⁶ It is worth noting that the revolutionary zeal of the subaltern, in this case the peasants, is/was grounded in the harsh realities of everyday life. As James Scott says:

¹² See Graham Pechey, "Post-Apartheid Narratives" in Barker, 151-172.

¹³ Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 34-35.

¹⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 164.

¹⁵ See Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 92.

¹⁶ See e.g. Allen F. Isaacman, "Peasant and Rural Social Protest in Africa," in *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin-America*, eds. Frederick Cooper, Allen F. Isaacman, Florentia E. Mallon, William Roseberry, and Steve J. Stern (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 205-217. Claude E. Welch, jr., *Anatomy of Rebellion*, (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1980) and Gary Y. Okihiro, *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).

Peasant resistance ...begins...close to the ground, rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience...The values resisters are defending are equally near at hand and familiar. Their point of departure is the practices and norms that have been proven effective in the past and appear to offer some promise of reducing or reversing the losses they suffer. The goals of resistance are as modest as its values. The poor strive to gain work, land and income; they are not aiming at large historical abstractions such as socialism...Even when such slogans as 'socialism' take hold among subordinate classes, they are likely to mean something radically different to the rank and file than to the radical intelligentsia.¹⁷

While the subaltern's lack of theorising their own situation raises important questions about how "the radical intelligentsia" represents the subaltern, Ngugi seems, however, more concerned about how to conscientise the subaltern than the Spivakian concern about the possibility of subaltern representation whereas La Guma focuses on "reporting" the various aspects of apartheid oppression without problematising the authenticity of the subaltern voice in his fiction. Both authors seem to be in line with Lazarus who claims that the proposition "that intellectuals cannot talk about 'the masses' without guiltily romanticizing and/or implicitly disparaging them strikes me as empirically indefensible."¹⁸ While unbiased representation is, arguably, impossible, recording events and narrating stories which position the subaltern in an oppressed position which is inhuman and degrading is not.

It has been noted how both *Devil on the Cross* and even more so *Matigari* (and even *Time of the Butcherbird* in one particular instance) transcend the orbit of a Marxist discourse by including magic and super-natural elements. The magic involves, as Brink states

an acknowledgement of a more holistic way of approaching the world, an awareness of more things in heaven and earth than have been dreamt of in our philosophy, a free interaction between the living and the dead...¹⁹

Linking the magic to post-modernism Brink perceives the holistic way of perceiving the world in terms of choice:

In the suspense of disbelief the reader, after all, does not relinquish his/her faith in right or wrong, but finds him-/herself confronted with the text itself as choice: and each act of choice is inevitably informed by value systems.²⁰

This is a problematic statement because, as *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* show, the pervasiveness of moral degradation also among ordinary people, due to the systematic undermining of ethical standards, makes it difficult to make the right ethical choices. In La Guma choices are not always based on the people's value systems, but often on political and personal expediency. The question is, simply put, if the reader or listener can be expected to assume responsibility for the choice that are exposed in the post-modern

¹⁷ Scott 348-49.

¹⁸ Lazarus, *Nationalism*, 102.

¹⁹ André Brink, "Interrogating silence: new possibilities faced by South African literature," in *Writing South Africa*, Attridge, 25.

²⁰ Brink, "Interrogating," 22.

narrative, or if such ethical deliberations are privileged the educated, elite reader.²¹ If literature is to have a political and ethical function in a society where the majority of the people live on and below subsistence level and can barely read and write, the question of the feasibility of a fragmentary, uncertain, plural post-modernist story must be posed. While the combat narratives of Ngugi can be viewed as another way of colonising the natives' mind, i.e. reverting the colonial binarism, it is Ngugi's conviction, it seems, that such reverse colonising practices are needed where hegemonic interpellations are ideologically similar to those of the exploiters at the Devil's Feast. The danger of patronising and colonising has to be weighed against societies which are systematically heading towards disaster. This is also acknowledged by Brink who states that there "was certainly a phase during the apartheid years when eye-witness accounts in the form of a more or less 'realistic' literature stimulated a sense of solidarity among the oppressed while also conscientising those not immediately involved or implicated in the struggle."²² While Ngugi employs these non-realist elements to communicate a determinative message to the Kenyan people La Guma never, with the exception of Elias' linkage to his ancestors in time of death, deserts his allegiance to realism. The magical elements in the combat novels are thus not linked to the very essence of post-modern thinking since post-modernism is "irreducibly plural, with every perspective essentially contestable from other perspectives."²³

In Ngugi's works, and *Matigari* in particular, there is a sense of an apparently somewhat paradoxical agenda of imposing a modernist, rational world view on the peasants by introducing supernatural and magical elements. Not an untenable position, however, this fusion of a rationalist world order with transcendental aspects only crushes the myth that there is any one-to-one relationship between secularization and modernity.²⁴ By not relinquishing determinate meaning or ideologies which indicate fixed values, the magical elements are not used to outline alternative interpretations of the Kenyan post-colonial map or apartheid South Africa, but to offer a more comprehensive foundation on which a new land must rest. In a sense Ngugi has responded to the *stylistic* demands of Parry and Brink in a post-colonial world, but his shift of style has not meant an ideological pluralism absenting the committed writer. While Brink is right in contending that the surreal and the inexplicable expose "an awareness of an altogether different, African, dimension"²⁵, this dimension, Ngugi seems to be saying, must not distract us from the grim post-colonial reality. Colin Bundy argues, in the cultural climate of the post-apartheid era in South Africa, along the same lines:

²¹ Clearly La Guma's novels, even though written within the realist, non-experimental tradition, did not have the same focus on subaltern readership, also because he knew that his books would be banned in South Africa.

²² Brink, "Interrogating," 21

²³ Appiah, 143.

²⁴ On the contrary the whole imperialist mission is often interpreted, however awkwardly, as a rationalist enterprise.

²⁵ Brink, "Interrogating," 26

This pattern- of intellectuals despairing of radical change, abandoning macropolitics and finding justification in selected tenets in postmodernist thought- should provide food for thought for left academics in South Africa today. The shift here is still a shuffle rather than a stampede, but it is a move in the same direction. To historicise postmodernist thought in this way (especially when one is painting with such broad brush-strokes) is not to reject its insights, emphases, concepts and approaches tout court. It is a way of suggesting that some of the excesses, biases, tendencies and political implications of some poststructuralist and postmodernist analyses reflect larger political, cultural and historical developments.²⁶

And later Bundy in the same article reinforces his scepticism about postmodernism:

Marxists should

be properly wary of the rampant relativism of much postmodernity which denies critical thought any ethical or political points of vantage. Marxists should be prepared to let me take a deep breath here- to defend the totalizing powers of Marxist analysis.²⁷

Without referring to the totalising thrust of combat fiction, Bundy's interrogation into the new post-modern paradigm of instability of meaning and knowledge, and the dislocation and dispersion of power and domination concurs with the necessities of determinate meanings and ideological conviction which are textually inscribed in Ngugi and La Guma's combat fiction. In the jargon of much post-modernist criticism such fiction is outdated. Lazarus' criticism of the leading post-modernist critics is harsh:

Such prominent figures in the field as Bhabha, Robert Young, Sara Suleri, and Trinh T. Minh-ha have all written at length to condemn as naïve or, worse, tacitly authoritarian, any commitment to universalism, metanarrative, social emancipation, revolution.²⁸

In view of the pressing social, economic and political challenges in the new Africa where the suffering of ordinary people is on the increase rather than the opposite and where many leaders seem unwilling or unable to address these issues in a constructive and meaningful way, the production of literature and fiction cannot be isolated from these harsh realities. The problems in contemporary post-colonial Kenya have only aggravated since the chasing of Matigari more than a decade ago, and La Guma's vision of another South Africa after apartheid is up for a tough uphill struggle. While the "gun is a gun is a gun" paradigm of apartheid cultural resistance is out of fashion, the need for counter-narratives of freedom and liberation seems as urgent and necessary as ever.

²⁶ Colin Bundy, "Sharing the Burden?" in *Transgressing Boundaries: New directions in the study of culture in Africa*, eds. Brenda Cooper and Andrew Steyn (Cape Town and Athens: University of Cape Town Press and Ohio University Press, 1996), 36.

²⁷ Bundy, 38.

²⁸ Lazarus, *Nationalism*, 9.

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¹ Not all titles are referred to in the thesis. The editions given are those used in the study.

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