

MOTHER TONGUE: THE USE OF ANOTHER LANGUAGE AND THE IMPACT  
ON IDENTITY IN BREYTEN BREYTENBACH'S *DOG HEART*  
AND NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O'S *MATIGARI*

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that *MOTHER TONGUE: THE USE OF ANOTHER LANGUAGE AND THE IMPACT ON IDENTITY IN BREYTEN BREYTENBACH'S DOG HEART AND NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O'S MATIGARI* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## SUMMARY

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This dissertation examines Breyten Breytenbach's memoir *Dog Heart*, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's novel *Matigari*, with particular attention to the use of a mother tongue or another language in the texts, and whether these reflect or impact on the writers' sense of personal, cultural and political identity. It compares and contrasts the authors' views on, and experiences of, culture, language, translation and exile, and whether these aspects appear in the two primary works. Dilemmas associated with the authors' choice of language in their creative works, preferred audiences, and affiliations to their mother tongue speech communities are also explored. By drawing on Breytenbach's and Ngũgĩ's diverse stances on these issues, and following their respective publishing decisions, it is hoped an interesting conversation is created between these significant political activists and their writing.

Key terms: mother tongue, identity, Breytenbach, Ngũgĩ, second language, codeswitching, self-identification, translation, acculturation, exile, South Africa, Kenya.

## **CONTENTS**

<b>DECLARATION</b>		i
<b>SUMMARY</b>		ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>		iii
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	.....	1
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	<b>IDENTITY AND SELF-IDENTIFICATION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	<b>MOTHER TONGUE AFFILIATION AND IDENTITY.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	<b>TRANSLATION AND CREATIVE PROCESS.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	<b>EXILE AND RETURN.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	.....	96
<b>SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	.....	99

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## INTRODUCTION

Breyten Breytenbach, a South African poet, artist and writer, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, a Kenyan writer and theorist, represent different facets of the postcolonial literature in Africa. Breytenbach’s minority ethnic group, the Afrikaners, dominated the political, economic and social landscape of South Africa at the time of his early works, while Ngũgĩ’s majority indigenous group, the Gĩkũyũ, wanted to achieve political autonomy along with other Kenyans from the British colonial establishment.

While Breytenbach attended Afrikaans-medium schools and an English-medium University, writing originally in his mother tongue, Afrikaans, and later publishing in English, Ngũgĩ was educated in English-medium schools in Kenya, Uganda and the United Kingdom, and initially wrote in English before deciding to return to his mother tongue, Gĩkũyũ.

The authors seem to share many tribulations: both writers from Africa have endured imprisonment, conflict with the governments of their day, criticism of their political and social views, and exile. Born only a year apart (Ngũgĩ in 1938 and Breytenbach in 1939), the writers have experienced extended physical isolation from their ethnic groups and speech communities, and spent the majority of their lives among populations that do not speak their mother tongues. Their brief returns to their home countries have been short, traumatic and disappointing, but they both still look to Africa for validation, immerse themselves in Africa-related work, and are dedicated to expressing the African narrative.

The aim of this dissertation is to examine Breytenbach’s *Dog Heart: a memoir*, and Ngũgĩ’s novel *Matigari*, with particular attention to the use of a mother tongue or another language in the works, and to whether these languages reflect or impact on each writer’s sense of identity.

By bringing these two pillars of African literature together and examining their works through the prism of postcolonial theory and migrant themes, this dissertation endeavours to compare and contrast their views on, and experiences of, language,

identity, translation and exile. The dilemmas associated with choice of language and creative expression, as well as the writers' relationships with their respective speech communities are also discussed in the hope that an interesting conversation is created between these politically active writers and the selected works.

This dissertation is divided into six sections: the overall introduction to the dissertation outlines the aims, validation, methodology, hypothesis and course of action followed throughout. Chapter One addresses cultural, political and personal identity, self-identification, and sense of belonging with regards to both authors and the two primary texts. Chapter Two discusses a mother tongue and identity, in particular, second language (L2) acquisition, bilingualism and biculturalism, codeswitching, and links to speech communities. The impact of other languages in the colonial context in Kenya, and the Apartheid and post-Apartheid setting in South Africa, are also incorporated.

Chapter Three briefly outlines the authors' views on translation; the necessity of it as a tool for sharing one's story, its limitations and positioning with regards to one's mother tongue and identity. Focusing on separation, acculturation and homecoming, Chapter Four focuses on the effects of exile and return on one's mother tongue and identity. The conclusion summarises the findings of the dissertation and brings together salient points of comparison between Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ.

I have used a qualitative method of research in this dissertation and have examined secondary documentation such as journal articles, newspaper clippings, books, library catalogues, previous theses, census data, books and journal articles for evidence of the authors' and their critics' opinions on language, identity, translation and exile. Previous interviews with the authors, their selected texts, and Internet footage were also analysed to understand their motivation to write in, or abandon, their mother tongues.

I argue that the authors did not choose the language of their works based on their proficiency in that language. Further, it is assumed that both writers had free choice when deciding which language to use in their creative works and were not forced to publish in a particular language.

I contend that identity is affected by the use of a second language as well as the writers' attitude to their mother tongue. The creative process is also significantly shaped by these factors. Further, the socio-political circumstances, relationship with speech communities and alienation from the home culture also impact on the writers' political, cultural and personal identities.

Both authors have significantly different styles of writing and it has been difficult to create a unified or parallel comparison. Breytenbach's *Dog Heart* is a memoir written in lyrical, almost poetic prose form, while Ngũgĩ's *Matigari* is a novel with structured setting, characters, narrator, storylines and themes. Yet, both works are concerned with similar topics such as: past/present, memory/reality, home/exile, genealogy, language, identity, politics and violence. I considered first completing an analysis of Breytenbach and *Dog Heart*, and then approaching Ngũgĩ and *Matigari* as a whole, but felt the similarities and obvious contrasts would be diluted. I have, therefore, opted to address the authors separately but under each theme. This avoids duplication between the chapters and hopefully creates a more relevant and connected account for the reader.



## CHAPTER ONE

## IDENTITY AND SELF-IDENTIFICATION

The next four chapters cover the central themes of this dissertation, namely: identity and self-identification; mother tongue affiliation and creative expression; translation; and exile. In each chapter I refer to relevant excerpts from *Dog Heart* and *Matigari* and the writers' views on each theme.

This chapter focuses on identity: who we are, how we see ourselves, and what we align with. It also examines the role of land, the need to belong and the concept of home.

Identity is an elusive concept which is difficult to compartmentalise, however, for ease of analysis I have used three main areas of identity for this dissertation: personal, political and cultural. There are many more facets involved in formation of a person's particular identity, such as gender, sexuality, religion, customs, education and so on, and each individual has a unique prism through which all their life experiences pass before being encapsulated in this notion of 'identity', but I have generalised in order to limit identity to these three areas.

For each author I attempt to understand how political, cultural and personal identities are prioritised. This is important in setting the base for the next chapter, which analyses the authors' use of a mother tongue or another language and the impact that has on their identities. In order to appreciate Breytenbach's and Ngũgĩ's positions on identity, I briefly look at the political background in their respective countries as these acted like an incubator for their political thinking and views on identity, culture and land.

Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ both have very strong positions on their cultural affiliation and their need to be a part of, or exempt from, a particular ethnic group and speech

community. Their creative works reflect these often fraught relationships with their home countries<sup>1</sup> and communities.

Breytenbach's memoir was originally published in 1998 and is about the writer's return to his home town, Bonnievale, after many years in exile. It traces his family tree and the regional history, and is full of flashbacks, anecdotes, memories and imaginings. At the core of *Dog Heart* is the notion of who we are and where we belong; whether we can really be part of a people, culture or country.

The setting is the Western Cape where Breytenbach grew up and spans a period when he returns, full of hope, to post-Apartheid South Africa. He envisages the small house they set up and name 'Paradys' (Afrikaans for paradise), will serve as a base for him and his family to enjoy this new political dispensation, but he leaves it and the country disillusioned and disappointed.

The narrative style shifts between first person narration and informal interior monologue, interspersed with poetry. Breytenbach's perceptive use of imagery and personification, such as: 'squatter camps and informal settlements rowing ever closer over the rise' (Breytenbach, 1999:13), and 'it drags you from sleep and beaches you soaked with a cold fear' (52), his formation of compounded adjectives like 'long-lipping' (16), and the use of synaesthesia, for example: '[h]e knows about the sounds of colours' (113), all demand that the reader approach the memoir more as poetry than as a linear narrative or regular prose.

This is not a traditional linear-type memoir or recalled autobiography. Instead, in *Dog Heart*, thoughts are triggered in a non-linear manner between conscious storytelling and almost unconscious accounts of past events, imaginings, and experiences. Just as the heading of every three or four chapters is 'memory' or a variation thereof, for example: Memory/father, Memory/lorry, Memory/moon, Memory/runner, Memory/tree, Memory/mother, Memory/name, so too the author lapses in and out of a state of

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<sup>1</sup> I originally used the word homelands but was reminded of the loaded implications that this word carries in South Africa dating from the Apartheid era where 'homeland' was government jargon for the artificially created Bantustans (Gordon, F, 2009).

conscious recall, or as Breytenbach intimates, imaginings. These ‘memories’<sup>2</sup> are dotted throughout the memoir and weave in between socio-political opinions, beliefs pertaining to language, identity and death, and views on deception, change, and violence.

This continuous movement is reminiscent of Breytenbach’s outlook on personal identity which seems to be a grey area, a dynamic state that shifts and changes, develops and morphs over time. He describes this ongoing process in *Dog Heart*: ‘One has to keep on making and finding oneself, and then *situate* and *orientate* that temporary find’ (original emphasis, 179). In other words, we must experience the now in the most conscious, mindful state with an awareness of where we are and where we have been.<sup>3</sup> By inference, we must also understand that the new orientation is not permanent and will imminently change. Like a GPS device, our minds are constantly recalculating our position, aligning our current bearings accordingly, and suggesting the best way to move forward or at least informing us where we have been.

This continuous adjustment or tweaking is manoeuvred by self-awareness and introspection, as Breytenbach describes: ‘Within myself I too have to mediate the various components and strains which I embody...’ (180), and he acknowledges the loss that this constant change creates: ‘There will be an awareness of *loss*, of leaving behind, of divesting yourself’ (original emphasis, *Ibid.*). This shape shifting or fluid identity is similar to what Pedri calls the self ‘both being and becoming’ (Pedri, 2002:308; Ngũgĩ, 1986:78) and this echoes Breytenbach’s Eastern-based philosophy which strives for non-attachment. Brink refers to Breytenbach’s ‘almost obsessive preoccupation with transience’ (Brink and Hope, 1979:75). There is no constant, static state for Breytenbach, but rather circumstances change, languages develop, perceptions evolve and these all affect and contribute to who we are essentially as spiritual beings in a specific moment in time.

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<sup>2</sup> Here I had written ‘memstories’ - the combination of memory and stories but later I could not be sure if it was a word Breytenbach had used somewhere, in which case I was unable to reference it, or if I had indeed made up this word. I therefore deleted it. A very example it seems of the blurring of lines between memory, reality and imagination that Breytenbach alludes to.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said refers similarly to a cultural work as a vision of a moment and says we must view it with the various revisions it later provokes (1994:67).

For Breytenbach, the personal, political and cultural dimensions of self do not seem mutually exclusive but rather intercept and overlap to form an organic whole. Much has been written on Breytenbach's ability to adopt different identities in his works as evidenced in his use of numerous pseudonyms (see Viljoen, 1993), variances in names, pronouns and abbreviations (Schalkwyk 1994, Reckwitz 1993:14), extensive use of mirrors (Pedri 2002, Sienaert 1993), and inclusion of self portraits in his artwork (Pedri 2002).

In an interview with Sienaert, Breytenbach explains his focus on change and movement: 'We have fluctuating identities, or even multiple identities. Multiple in the sense that we are hybrid and that we adapt and that we live at various levels of intensity' (Sienaert, 2004:269). These fluctuations are apparent in Breytenbach's transformations over the years from an anti-Apartheid Afrikaner, to a South African French-speaking, self-declared non-Afrikaner, back to an Afrikaans-speaking returnee, and now an African nomad based in West Africa.

Jacobs supports the rhizome idea, as presented by Deleuze and Guattari on language, with regards to Breytenbach's nomadology (Jacobs, 2004:171-173). However, a rhizome image, where smaller, different offshoots are created, suggest that the 'original' still exists somewhere, whereas Breytenbach's outlook, I believe, supports a continuous transformation of the original. Thus, using a more mundane image, if identity for Breytenbach is like a knitting creation, a row is defined according to the thread, colour, stitch, and tension used but once off the needle, the next row then becomes a variation thereof. All rows are part of a constantly changing entity where new elements are added, different decisions made, multiple outcomes possible but they form, alter, and refer to the original, not a separate rhizome entity.

With all these shifts, Breytenbach pointedly asks in *Dog Heart*, what is retained: 'What do you take with you of the old as you go over to the new?' (Breytenbach, 1999:179). He uses a typography metaphor<sup>4</sup> to explain that change is 'the discipline of drawing maps over the body of the other' (180). This metaphor illustrates the method (discipline) used to outline the contours of a new identity on top of a previous

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed overview of typographic aspects of Breytenbach's works, see Jacobs (2003).

identity, and implies that the former self is now dead (body) and ceases to exist in that form. As the landscape is read off a topographical map, so too a life journey is read off the various maps of the self. The old contours and features may still be visible but they are superseded by the latest version. This new identity must be embraced and accepted in order to continue the journey.

Thus, Breytenbach's personal identity is a collage, or as he vividly outlines, it is 'made up of the bits and pieces which we remember from previous encounters, events and situations, memory hanging from the branches...' (10). This metaphor of memory illustrates how, as we change, grow and move on, a casing of our former identity is left behind like shed skin, abandoned. It infers the transitory nature of memory, identity and life. This image strongly evokes one of Salvador Dali's paintings, 'Persistence of Time', where a distorted clock hangs over a dead, rootless branch, symbolising the warped concept of time and the limitations of the physical dimension, concepts familiar to Breytenbach.

Memory is supposed to compile and order our events and emotional experiences. We depend on memory to glue fleeting experiences and identities together, to form a trail of who we are and where we have been 'like periwinkle shells to indicate the spot where the dust is buried. It makes it easier to find myself' (77), as Breytenbach remarks. Memory is the barometer of the internal changes we undergo. In *Dog Heart*, an example of this internal landscape that we carry, however fragmented, is depicted when Breytenbach sees a quote on the wall of the Mayville House that reads: 'My Grace is sufficient for thee'. He imagines his mother seeing it as a child and it being no coincidence that the words reappear on her tombstone, albeit in Afrikaans: '*My genade is vir julle genoeg*' (original italics, 186). The original experience is carried within our internal landscape and is integrated into later manifestations and events.

However, as we change and accumulate layers of identities the very tool we rely on, memory, often fails us. Breytenbach highlights memory's shortcomings, like its illusiveness: 'Maybe memory is an illusion' (11); its trickery: 'Memory is Kaggen, the trickster god' (182); unreliability: 'my memories got mixed up with those of others' (9); and uncertainty: 'Maybe one was told all this' (14). While we presume memory truthfully stores past information and history, Breytenbach brings its capabilities into

doubt: 'It says there is *one* certainty: nothing is what it seems. It says there is *one* finality: change' (original emphasis, 182). Instead of documenting facts and experiences, memory can actually become part of the creative process: 'Distance is chronology and memory is imagination', and Breytenbach describes how writing 'makes memory visible' which then 'uncovered a new landscape' (9-10). This discrepancy between what is real memory and what is 'remembered' imaginings, allows people to have similar, but not unified, experiences and opens the door to storytelling and multiple versions of events.

Thus, history also becomes unreliable and inconsistent. It is often recorded by chroniclers such as Babsie van Zyl (83), relocated to the back of an old museum ('A room of forgetting'), stumbled upon by strangers, or re-written to assuage our own fears: 'So we invent history to give us substance and presence. We find a thread of continuity to hang on to over the abyss of absence and nonexistence' [sic] (11-12). We do this because 'it is painful to have neither before nor after' (96). In other words, it is difficult to have no sense of identity or belonging.

Within the flexibility of memory, history, and identity there is still a fundamental need to belong. Breytenbach remarks in *Dog Heart*: 'Surely identity is at least partially affirmed by belonging, by being a member of a family or a clan or a tribe?' (177). Ironically, these are the very memberships he has adopted and rejected intermittently over his writing career and life. His internal battle with these relationships is chronicled in his essays, poems, novels and artwork, and evident in his language choices and publishing decisions as discussed in the next chapter.

Invented or not, history can form a handrail to mark or navigate a route already taken. Breytenbach comments tongue-in-cheek that if you do not know your story, a dream merchant 'for a stiff price' can create a family tree; 'You will be somebody' (96). Fabrication of personal identity is illustrated by two incidents in *Dog Heart*: the story of James Barry who was physician to the governor but found to have 'the unused and shrivelled body of a woman!' when he died (156), and the esteemed grandmother of the Mayville House family, who when her wig was removed on her death, was found to have 'the crinkly hair of a half-caste' (187).

Do we really ever know someone else's true identity and story, and how much can we trust what we see of a person or what they let us see? This is a crucial point for Breytenbach and he breaks with the narrative to address the reader directly, warning that all is not as it seems: 'Reader, I'm leaning forward to whisper to you, not to bother you or to ask you to hand me up a book, but to tell you that the ways of the mirror are dark to the eye. As you've noticed: not everything is 'true'!' (166-7). Throughout *Dog Heart*, the refrain 'Look high, look low' (100, 123, 132, 195) reminds us to beware of danger, to search for the truth, and remain vigilant as things are not as they seem and change can come without warning.

Not only do we re-create and alter our identities and personal stories, but we are easily deceived, betrayed and tricked by others. Breytenbach uses various metaphors to illustrate this theme of deception: the dog that we pet and befriend turns on us unexpectedly and viciously chews our hands off without warning (52, 106, 113, 123); the praying mantis (100, 105, 151) represents ultimate betrayal as it eats its mate after breeding; and the chameleon (117, 133, 144) symbol of adaptation and change. Many of the mythological references also symbolise the concept of trickery and deceit including: Heitsi Eibib, the Khoi god who changes form, repeatedly dying and coming alive; Kaggen, the ancient god-trickster; Ariadne, Theseus and the Minotaur's labyrinth story from Greek mythology; and the Mizpah locket which refers to a pact between Laban and Jacob in the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

In a recent interview, Ngũgĩ comments on the trickster element which is prevalent in tales worldwide and its significance:

The trickster is very interesting because he is always changing. He always questions the stability of a word or a narrative or an event. He is continually inventing and reinventing himself. He challenges the prevailing wisdom of who is strong and who is weak. (Olende, 2006:n.p.)

For Breytenbach, the writer is in fact the trickster, becoming part of the writing process in an almost shamanic, ritualistic way where one dabbles in magic, engages in the unknown and in powers beyond one's control (Dlamini, 2008). Perhaps then Breytenbach is the ultimate trickster or chameleon, shifting personas, changing

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<sup>5</sup> Jacob worked for seven years to marry Rachel only to be tricked by Laban into marrying his other daughter Leah. Jacob agreed to work an additional seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage.

stories, breaking conventions, and adopting identities in the labyrinth of his personal, creative and political life.

While his personal identity is patchworked and fluid, Breytenbach's cultural and political identities prove less accommodating. These seem to be greatly dictated by the political events played out in South Africa at the time.

The political background was such that, while many countries were gaining independence and liberation from colonial occupation after the Second World War, South Africa was retreating into restrictive, legislative segregation that was to last over forty years and cause irreparable damage. Despite the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 outlining individuals' rights on a platform of international law, the National Party in South Africa systematically ignored these rights, and stripped people of their political identity and ability to self-identify. It divided people by cultural-racial lines dictating where they could live, travel, work, and with who they could have personal relationships. These statutes were imposed by segregation laws such as the Group Areas Act, stringent influx control and passbook laws, Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, and the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950 (<http://www.apartheidmuseum.org>, 2009).<sup>6</sup>

This web of political, social and legal restrictions was instrumental in shaping relationships, attitudes and sense of self in South Africa. These draconian laws were implemented by strong military, police and secret services, as well as tight Afrikaner cultural brotherhoods. Forced removals and the destruction of vibrant cultural hubs, such as Sophiatown and District Six, tore people away from their cultural bases, community structures and family homes in order to make room for other – whites-only – neighbourhoods.

The Apartheid regime also created ten Bantustans or 'homelands', namely: the Transkei, Ciskei, KwaZulu, Lebowa, Venda, Gazankulu, Bophuthatswana, QwaQwa, KaNgwane, and KwaNdebele (Omond, 1985:97), which became home to 'citizens' who then lost their political rights in South Africa. It is important to mention that none

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<sup>6</sup> Segregation laws were brought in as early as the 20s and 30s such as: The Native Trust and Land Act 1936/7 and The Native Laws Amendment Act 1937 (<http://www.apartheidmuseum.org>, 2009).



of these classifications were self-defined but rather imposed by government. This situation not only physically divided families and communities but created psychological and physical trauma.

Breytenbach pointedly observes the implications of classification in an article, 'The South African Wasteland', which appeared in *The New Republic* in 1985: 'Imagine what it is like to be, naturally, by birth, an alien in your country...' (Breytenbach, 1985:37).<sup>7</sup>

In this environment, Breytenbach's political stance became increasingly active against the South African Apartheid regime. He had left Cape Town University's Art School in the early 1960s to travel, eventually settling in Paris.<sup>8</sup> There he met Yolande and they married in 1964. According to the racial segregation laws of South Africa this marriage was deemed an illegal union as Yolande was of Vietnamese origin. Breytenbach was thus denied his right to live and work in his home country with his wife as a couple, and this further alienated him from his South African identity.

The couple was granted a short visitors' visa in 1973. Meanwhile, Breytenbach had become more involved with the ANC abroad and, in 1975, supposedly on secret underground business for an anti-Apartheid group called 'Okhela' and while travelling in South Africa on a false French passport, he was arrested. He was tried for terrorist activities and sentenced to prison for nine years, of which he served seven, mostly in solitary confinement. Obviously, this would have far-reaching and significant effects on his life.

Breytenbach's political stance was pro-revolution and he saw Black Consciousness as a 'rehabilitatory answer' to what he terms cultural colonialism, humiliation and alienation from one's culture (Breytenbach, 1986:68). However, this cultural awareness, he argues in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*, is not the purveyor of reform,

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Said talks about Mahmoud Darwish's poem 'Identity Card' which describes how many Palestinians have 'undetermined' noted under nationality, not Palestinian (2003:188).

<sup>8</sup> The biographic information, publication dates and awards relating to Breytenbach in this dissertation have been gleaned from Van Wyk (2000), UNISA Library catalogue, as well as Von Assel (2003), New York University website (2009), and correspondence with UNISA Subject Librarian.

but rather, it is the ‘hard struggle – political, military, the people, the trade unions, the international community...’ (Breytenbach, 1990:163), that brings about change.

A clear-cut revolution in South Africa would have ended Apartheid, as, according to Fanon, an armed uprising brings about an end to colonialism and the ‘colonized’[sic], and creates a ‘new humanism’ (2004:178). Fanon warns that if the national consciousness stage is omitted, attainment of this desired ‘international dimension’ is impeded (179). The fact that such an overt revolution did not occur in South Africa contributes to Breytenbach’s disillusionment with post-Apartheid South Africa and the current political dispensation. These sentiments are conveyed in his recent interviews, works and in his open letter to Nelson Mandela which appeared in *Harper’s Magazine* in December 2008.<sup>9</sup> *Dog Heart*’s setting is a perfect platform for discussion on the political reality of the New South Africa and there are many references to developments and failings of the system. In his latest work, *A Veil of Footsteps*, Breytenbach goes even further calling the country ‘Fuck-land’ (Breytenbach, 2008:163), and adds that his mind now becomes ‘darkened with despair when thinking about Africa’ (297).

The issue of land and the emotional bond to it are significant elements in the identity mix for Breytenbach. While land may appear to be apolitical, it is ultimately the stage on which the human drama plays out and so it *must* reflect socio-political realities. South Africa seems to be witness, foil and survivor in this charade of political history, cultural dominance and personal narratives that have unfolded in South Africa. The land becomes a conduit of experiences and a gauge of belonging as Breytenbach writes of the British soldiers who fought in the Anglo-Boer War: ‘Is it because they have neither died enough nor killed enough to belong here?’ (Breytenbach, 1999:179).

Land defines and shapes, restricts and confines people, and in many cases they are prepared to sacrifice their lives for a particular piece of earth. Breytenbach questions this attachment to the land that nationalism fosters and wonders where it comes from. Is this nationalism learned or innate: ‘Does the child have flags in the head?’ he asks

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<sup>9</sup> Breytenbach declares it ‘was probably my own naive [sic] expectation that a new dispensation ushered in by a liberation movement would realize [sic] at least some of the objectives we fought for: economic justice, an ethical public life’ (Breytenbach, 2008b:44).

in *Dog Heart*, and wonders if these ‘souvenirs of others’ exist, like Atlantis, ‘[j]ust below the amniotic fluid behind my face in the mirror [where] the submerged mountains are still visible’ (11). In other words, do we carry in our veins the dormant collective unconscious of our ancestors, the cell memory of their national experiences, and do these in turn influence our identity?

It is possible, but Breytenbach also remarks that a large part of this attachment to land is of our own conscious or unconscious making, where ‘ordinary Boland soil’ becomes ‘the flesh of sanctified experience’ (16). This seems to be so for Breytenbach: Wood comments in ‘Anger and atonement’ that Breytenbach’s ‘sense of locatedness only comes from the land itself’ (Wood, 1994:A6).

It is through this land that Breytenbach links himself to all that has come before him and, by inference, all that will come after, as he puts it: ‘I know I’m looking through my grandfather’s eyes. And when I put a blade of grass in the mouth to chew I taste my father’s spittle’ (Breytenbach, 1999:62). This bond to ‘heartland’ (Ibid.) correlates to the Afrikaner sense, politically and culturally, that one is ‘inescapably part of the land’ (Schalkwyk, 1994:31).

This attachment to the land also links in with African mysticism and a spiritual relationship with the earth. The link to the people of Africa and the land is both powerful and painful for Breytenbach and he warns his daughter, Gogga, against it: ‘But choose some other part of the world, I want to say... Become attached elsewhere [...] don’t let this décor, these expanses of light and darkness, enter your memory. Look at the surrounding as pleasant postcards’ (Breytenbach, 1999:145). While we can look at a postcard, photograph or rendition with detachment it proves more difficult when human emotion, blood ties and nostalgia are involved. Interestingly, Breytenbach uses a French word here – décor – perhaps to try and create the distance, linguistically and emotionally, that he proposes.

Further, Breytenbach urges Gogga not to become enticed by the mountains, river, land, and smells for, he explains, ‘[w]e are only visiting here. It must die away’ (Ibid.). This connection to place and the material must end: if not because one’s ethnic group is endangered ‘painted in the colours of disappearance here’ (Ibid.), then

because one ultimately cannot exist forever in the physical dimension. It seems Breytenbach's hope is that, like the whales teach their young to swim out 'a little further every day, until they do not return' (187), so too, people can learn not to cling to the land of their birth, restricted by geography, history or sentiment, and instead live in the realm of the whole world. Like the birthmark that has passed down on his father's side of the family (61) but bypassed himself and his daughter, his wish is that she can escape this attachment to a set place, which shapes his personal, political and cultural identity and brings so much heartache.

Still, at the end of the memoir Breytenbach adopts a grave for his maternal grandmother, Rachel Susanna Keet, to whom the book is dedicated. They cannot find her original gravestone so Breytenbach consciously creates a connection between her and the land saying: 'I'm planting a beacon in Africa. A landmark. Am I not allowed to mark out my history?' (196). Here, the full circle of life is symbolised by allocating a grave for a woman who was a midwife and bringer of life. By claiming a piece of the country Breytenbach wants to assert his family's right to belong but at the same time he implies that one can never really belong to a place. He suggests that underneath the soil 'surely only soil is left' (Ibid.), but the reader may well suspect that that is not the case for Breytenbach, that land is rarely 'just' soil and, in fact, '[o]ur earth is full of skeletons' (21).

*Dog Heart* portrays scenarios and references that reflect the historical and political environment of South Africa and the changes taking place. Binaries and Apartheid labels appear throughout the memoir but the dichotomies, like the black and white bonnets in his grandmother's satchel that indicated a live or dead baby (195), seem less overt in South Africa nowadays. There is some hope of local integration in the memoir, particularly when Breytenbach sees a woman and boy at the cemetery and comments that they are 'too indigenous to this area for me to know whether they are brown or white' (55), and at his old all-white school he hints that 'brown and white now move together effortlessly' (4).

Yet, remnants still remain: in a police dog handler enactment, Breytenbach describes the underlying thoughts that 'the thief, though white, is supposed to be brown, the dog handler white, one feigns not to notice' (Ibid.). In *Dog Heart* Breytenbach is sceptical

about a mythical political, social or cultural ‘rainbow nation’, a term adopted by most locals to encapsulate the hope of a non-polarised New South Africa. Instead, in the memoir Breytenbach juxtaposes this ‘Paradys’ illusion with inane violence, meaningless murders<sup>10</sup> and superficial political changes. One of the characters in *Dog Heart*, Herklaas, refers to the local stories concerning the screams heard at Eyssen House as those of a madman, a slave’s ghost or a peacock, and he states: ‘I have picked up a rainbow feather in the kloof, but I’ve also seen footprints’ (119). This rainbow feather, metonymy for the nation, implies the New South Africa is part fantasy (feather) but it is also part history (footprints) – with all the human endeavours, tribulations and triumphs that encompasses.

Breytenbach strives to move away from binaries, especially of the Apartheid era: Zen philosophy, which he follows, does not favour polarised thinking but rather, as Sienaert explains, supports the notion that part of one exists in the other. This creates a more integrated and balanced picture where each party depends on the other for existence (1993:144). It is this ‘permanent state of interrelatedness with all in the universe’ (145) that forms the base of Breytenbach’s relationship with others, and as Brink points out, for Breytenbach, ‘...people were, quite simply, people’ (1976:5).

While Breytenbach relates to personal identities independent of race, ethnicity, and socio-linguistic criteria, he is more guarded and wary when it comes to cultural identity. He questions the integrity of the term ‘culture’ in an interview with Dlamini, and says culture can be an obstacle, where people take ‘notions of difference and call it culture’ and hide behind it to justify them doing unacceptable things (Dlamini, 2008b). He remarks that people must have had other ways of knowing they belonged to an area before this term was coined.

Aligning with a place or a people implicitly excludes others from the select group, delegating them instead to outsiders or observers. Berking maintains that ethnicisation creates ‘islands of identity’ and sense of belonging but also allows for the ‘construction of foe images of the highest intensity’ (2003:257).

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<sup>10</sup> Violence is a major theme in the memoir and has not been discussed in depth in this dissertation as it falls outside the proposal – but there are over 30 gruesome murders and deaths detailed in the work.

Breytenbach questions this construction of differences and wonders: ‘Are these lines of tension edges of creativity or barriers of exclusion?’ (Breytenbach, 1999:180). Said discusses similar concepts of demarcation in *Culture and Imperialism* where he states:

Lines between cultures, the divisions and differences that not only allow us to discriminate one culture from another, but also enable us to see the extent to which cultures are humanly made structures both of authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote. (1994:15)

This sensitivity to exclusion makes Breytenbach more conscious of words selected and their connotations. Trengove Jones maintains Breytenbach dislikes the term ‘origin’ and prefers the less rigid ‘beginning’ (2004:280), commenting that Breytenbach veers towards ‘bastardy and beginnings rather than purity and origin’ so to prevent exclusion and hierarchy (288).

Instead, the essence of cultural identity and ethnic make-up for Breytenbach is an accrual of histories and traditions, accumulation of DNA and genealogy. In *Dog Heart*, local history illustrates this seemingly-haphazard coming together of occupiers, visitors, and indigenous people. The maps at the Landdrost’s Mansion (Breytenbach, 1999:184) record names in various languages that correspond to the different periods of colonial settlement. These maps seem to chronicle local occupation and join the dots of people’s overlapping lives.

Breytenbach implies no one’s story is pure or unique, that ethnic groups are made up of inter-married, inter-languaged and interdependent people. This is reflected in his own family tree with its mix of poor, gentry, English, Khoi, local, and foreign people and he refers to this blend as the ‘glorious bastardisation of men and women’ (35). He embraces this mongrelisation – he signs his open letter to Mandela in 2008, ‘Your mongrel son’ (Breytenbach, 2008b) – and sees it as ‘our most potent antidote to apartheid’ (Breytenbach, 1990:163). He suggests we aspire to hybridity (Sienaert 2004:269) and, in *A Veil of Footsteps*, describes this mixture of cultures and identities as a boon, as Golden Lotus explains: ‘When you are plural you cannot be racist’ (Breytenbach, 2008:239). This ‘awareness of texture, which is an expansion of consciousness’, leads to an understanding that ‘we are all movement and change’ and in his view, this brings about a ‘deeper humanism’ (Breytenbach, 1999:181).

The end of Apartheid brought about a new recognition of South Africa's culture, heritage and 'mongrelisation' outside of the previously 'pure' and racially-demarcated parameters. However, within this atmosphere of political and cultural change, identity can become confusing and unclear. In *Dog Heart* it is a peripheral character, the painter, who asks the most pertinent questions particular to the South African context: 'Who am I?' (Breytenbach, 1999:43). Breytenbach answers that he is surely a 'pioneer South African, veritable rainbow person, the full product of our painful past' to which the painter says: 'No, no...tell me now, what race am I?' (Ibid.). This Yorick-type character or 'everyman' acts as a foil to the major existential issues in the memoir and echoes Breytenbach's question in *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*: 'Who am I? Where and who was I before this time?' (Breytenbach, 1984:156). Similarly, Fanon remarks in *Wretched of the Earth* that colonialism and its pursuit of the 'negation of the other' forces the colonised people to constantly ask: 'Who am I in reality' (2004:182). This search for identity is ongoing due to the destructive and disruptive forces of colonialism and Apartheid.

Gogga also wonders about ethnic belonging and cultural criteria: 'What's the difference between an Afrikaner and an Englishman?' she asks, to which Breytenbach replies 'Afrikaner children don't wear shoes' (Breytenbach, 1999:146). This simplistic answer becomes farcical when they then see a group of brown children running around without shoes and Gogga shouts 'Look! Look! ... Afrikaners! (147). Sedingler quotes Fanon's experience where someone called out 'Look! A Negro!' and the effect this 'epidermalization' [sic] had on understanding how others viewed him and how he viewed himself (Fanon, 1967, cited in Sedingler, 2002:47). It seems Breytenbach is imitating this psychological moment when we become, or are made aware of how others view us. We begin to understand how their views can contradict with our internalised definition of self. This can unhinge everything we understand about ourselves and the world around us, and a scene in *Dog Heart* exemplifies this clearly: referring to a photograph of what Breytenbach thought was himself with his grandfather, Breytenbach's brother, Kwaaiman, says to him: '...it's not you at all, it's *me* there between his legs' (original emphasis, Breytenbach, 1999:100). Breytenbach remarks that '...all of a sudden I look strange to myself' (Ibid.). A different perception has been thrust on him and nothing seems the same again. His personal identity has been crowbarred open.

Breytenbach's approach to, and understanding of, cultural identity was obviously diametrically opposed to that of his minority cultural-ethnic group, the Afrikaners. They comprised only a small percentage of the total population of South Africa, dominated the political, economic and social landscape, and supported and implemented Apartheid. Afrikaans subsequently held a privileged and powerful position in South Africa during that time. Breytenbach saw the white people of South Africa as 'cultural settlers' (Breytenbach, 1976:22) whose totalitarian system had imposed new forms of colonialism (Breytenbach, 1985:33) on the country. In 'Vulture Culture: The Alienation of White South Africa' he wrote that the 'tribe' had become like 'a closed fist' (Breytenbach, 1976:25) and in his view was accountable for Apartheid 'collectively and individually' (24).

These opposing attitudes to culture and community created a complicated relationship between Breytenbach and the Afrikaner group. Van Oudenhoven et al. maintain that cultural identity relates to 'a sense of pride and belongingness to one's cultural group' (2006:647), essentially sentiments Breytenbach could not feel during the Apartheid era. His place as an Afrikaans writer within Afrikaner-perpetuated culturally-segregated South Africa, produced intense conflict between himself and the Afrikaner group and vice versa. In fact, as far back as 1965 Breytenbach had said: 'As ek my Afrikanerskap sou kon opsê, sou ek dit doen. Ek skaam my vir my mense' (*Die Burger*, 2.6.1965 cited in Galloway, 2004:10) [If I could give up my Afrikaner identity I would. I am ashamed of my people – my English translation]. This sentiment is clarified later in 1976 when he explains the difficulty of being part of his ethnic group in such a segregated environment: 'If you write or paint or film as an Afrikaner you have to compromise the only raw material you have, yourself, your own integrity. You become alienated from yourself which is worse than being cut off from the tribe' (Breytenbach, 1976:30). He outlines how censorship loomed over writers during the Apartheid era, where those that toed the line were then rewarded with literary prizes, commissions, and inclusion in school syllabi (26).

His bitterness towards Afrikaners and Afrikaans, and his attempt to distance himself from both particularly after his jail sentence, are exemplified in an interview with Van Dis after his release from prison: 'I am not an Afrikaner anymore' Breytenbach says,



‘Not out of rebellion, not because of shame. I no longer feel attached to that concept. At most I remain a South African’ (Van Dis, 1983:6).

Yet a year later, in *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*,<sup>11</sup> it appears that it is a sense of shame that prompts Breytenbach to disassociate himself from the Afrikaner group: ‘To be an Afrikaner in the way *they* define it is to be a living insult to whatever better instinct we human beings may possess and struggle to maintain’ (original emphasis, Breytenbach, 1984:280). Schalkwyk suggests that by calling himself a ‘self-acknowledged “terrorist”’ enabled Breytenbach to distance himself from the values of white South Africa and exclude himself from that cultural group (Schalkwyk, 1994:25). Indeed, for Breytenbach the very nature of identity involves moral choices as he explains in *A Veil of Footsteps*: ‘Identity is an ethical journey, a collage of scars and a work in progress spurting from the original void of “self”...’ (Breytenbach, 2008:72). Staying true to his personal identity thus meant Breytenbach had to redefine his cultural identity and his position in relation to his cultural-linguistic group.

But is it that simple to extricate oneself and redefine cultural borders, and has Breytenbach been successful in his endeavour to detach from his ethnic group, to attain cultural amnesty? Nearly fifteen years after he made many of the above statements, he writes in *Dog Heart* that he has a sympathy with the Afrikaner because he shares the language and the memory of the place. Yet, it is clear this sympathy falls short of reconciliation, as he puts it: ‘But there’s an ambiguity here, a painful uncomfortableness’ (Breytenbach, 1999:178).

After the demise of Apartheid, Breytenbach’s stance flip-flopped from outspoken anti-Afrikaner to supporter of his minority group, voicing concerns for the future of the Afrikaner and Afrikaans. During this period, some Afrikaners also tried to realign the group’s identity in relation to Africa, attempting to connect with local geography, language and history. New dual terms were coined within the Afrikaans-speaking

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<sup>11</sup> Breytenbach uses the term albino, a person who lacks pigment or melanin, to describe himself. This implies his white skin does not pertain to his ethnicity but rather to a physical condition. Ironically, the word albinism contradicts Breytenbach’s situation on several scores: albinism is inherited and a lack of pigment does not seem to be prevalent in his genealogy, and what is more he chooses to be an albino. Besides, Breytenbach actually embraces his mixed DNA and pigment, not his lack of pigment.

community, such as: 'Afrikaanses' which encompasses 'all Afrikaans speakers, regardless of their race'; 'Afrikaner African' which contextualises the Afrikaner to Africa; and Breytenbach's preference, 'Afriqua', which means the people or sons of Africa (Kennelly, 2005:12-13). Viljoen points out the irony in this reconnection process as the original intention of the Afrikaans and Afrikaner labels was to create this very association with the continent, but this was then undone by Afrikaner nationalism distancing the group and its language from Africa and claiming racial purity (2001:5). So, it seems sections of the Afrikaner cultural group had come full circle with regards to self-identification and affiliation, much as Breytenbach had.

Breytenbach and his cultural group have since had a major falling out and seem unable to reconcile. This serious rift is discussed in more depth in the next chapter on language and speech community. After much public argument between the two sides, Breytenbach seems to have thrown up his arms in frustration, once again tried to extricate himself from the Afrikaner group, and has removed himself from South Africa.

Despite his efforts to redefine his cultural identity, Breytenbach will never be invisible to his cultural group: his views, words and observations into the very heart of what it is to be human still shackle him to the Afrikaner literary scene, and thereby to the people and the place.

One wonders when the anger and resentment die down – the hurt, rejection and frustration experienced between him and his cultural group and South Africa – whether he may eventually reach a point of forgiveness and serenity with regards to his cultural identity. For, can attachment to land and people truly be severed? As he writes in 'Dusk Poem' at the end of *Dog Heart*, '...when night is a shed of old old moments / you may expect us at Paradys' (Breytenbach, 1999:197). Perhaps his ashes will finally be strewn over a quiet place in the Western Cape and he will finally be at peace with his identity?

Breytenbach's focus on a fluid, changing personal identity has enabled him to live through demanding political circumstances and, to a degree, escape from or rebel against cultural expectations. At times this has meant that he has been caught in the

net of Afrikaner condemnation, while at other times he has been decorated as one of their best poets. He has tried to place personal identity before political or cultural identity and to live by his own moral compass, despite the consequences.

When considering Ngũgĩ, it is apparent that he too has wrestled with identity throughout his career. Unlike Breytenbach, Ngũgĩ consciously links his personal identity to his mother tongue, cultural group and political aspirations, and has remained steadfast in this respect since the early 1960s. For him, political and cultural identities supersede personal identity and his novel, *Matigari*, demonstrates this position through its protagonist.

The novel is about Matigari ma Njirũngi who returns home after years of fighting Settler Williams Senior, his former employer, and John Boy Senior in a bush war. Claiming victory, he now searches for his people, and hopes to reclaim the house he originally helped build. The protagonist is full of hope, carrying a belt of peace as symbol of his commitment to non-violence and a new future. Yet the reality he finds in his home town contradicts his dreams and he soon realises the duplicity, corruption and disparity that exists in his, unnamed, country. Matigari's search for his people, truth and justice leads him on a journey of understanding who he is, what has become of his land and people, and what needs to be done to rectify the situation.

The narrator uses direct discourse and repetition of situations or events, such as the fight in the forest between Matigari and Settler Williams, the injustice of the status quo, and his search for truth and justice, to create links between the past, present and future. Ngũgĩ employs prolepsis whereby he uses the images of a horse and of washing in the cold river at the beginning of the novel, and repeats these images at the end, effectively bracketing the novel.

Although Matigari sees a commonality among people, saying that some faces are similar to others and that people have the same roots but have 'been dispersed by time and space into different camps' (Ngũgĩ, 1989:146), it is cultural ties and political affiliations that are more salient to him. Most of Ngũgĩ's novels reflect central themes like a sense of belonging, land ownership, independence, colonialism, hegemony, God, and mythology, and *Matigari* is no exception.

The loss of the Kenyan national home, social system and core family unit is not only heartbreaking for Ngũgĩ but for all Kenyans. Land is strongly linked to the African outlook and, as Ojaide explains, there is a mystical link that binds Africans to their land and thereby to their ‘ancestors and gods’ (1992:49). Thus, it makes sense that detachment from the land brings with it a loss of status, wealth, food and housing. It would also affect the community’s wellbeing, as Loflin remarks, the ‘landscape of Kenya’ is itself linked to the ‘community’s spiritual, social, and political identity’ (1995:76).

For Ngũgĩ, the issue of land is a political one and Matigari’s struggle is aimed at regaining possession of the land. After a long search for truth and justice, Matigari finally becomes despondent at the ineffectiveness of dialogue. He confronts John Boy Junior and the political establishment, demanding restoration of his home. Finally, he turns to an armed uprising in order to repossess his birthright and dignity.

Colonialism had a dramatic impact on Africa and its people. When Matigari asks John Boy Junior for the key to his house, he mentions the long line of colonial occupation that Matigari and his country have been subjected to: by the Portuguese, the Arabs, and the British (Ngũgĩ, 1989:45). According to Said, imperialism and colonialism differ in that the former is where a metropolitan base rules a distant territory whether by practice, theory or attitude, and colonialism is where settlements are formed on that distant territory and is almost always as a result of imperialism (1994:9). Further, Ngũgĩ distinguishes two types of colonialism: protective colonies and settler type colonies, the main difference being the issue of land (Ngũgĩ, 2004b). He maintains, in the case of settler systems there was almost always an armed struggle in order to gain independence rather than political protests and agitation, which were more common in the administrative-type colonial system.

All these imposed systems, whether economic, political, religious, social or cultural, changed the local identity and how indigenous people saw themselves, their cultures and country. In *Writers in Politics*, Ngũgĩ outlines how culture holds a community’s values, world outlook, their image and self-definition (Ngũgĩ, 1981:9) and how ‘cultural imperialism’ then controls a people’s literature. By dominating the narrative,

the coloniser's influence becomes wholesale and literature complicit in the colonial agenda: it conveys the colonial message and reinforces the colonial powers' economic and political exploitation (15). Thus, Ngũgĩ maintains that political and economic emancipation must involve a cultural struggle to ensure restoration of 'the African personality' and its potential (26).

Although the land and government are non-specific in *Matigari*, events seem strikingly similar to those that took place in Kenya. There, British settlers had taken control of the 'White Highlands' that had traditionally been Gĩkũyũ land. In the 1950s, the Kikuyu Central Association demanded political change and encouraged civil disobedience. Members took an oath of allegiance to this movement that was later coined Mau Mau, and eventually took up an armed struggle for independence from British rule. Indangasi maintains that the uprising was basically a Gĩkũyũ effort and that the divisions that resulted within this ethnic group 'were not duplicated in other communities' (1997:198).

The British response to the uprising was brutal: troops were brought in and, Kenya's Human Rights Commission today maintains 90 000 Kenyans were executed, tortured or maimed, and 160 000 detained during that time (Mitchell, 2006:n.p.). Finally in 1956, Dedan Kimathi, the last Mau Mau leader was caught, tried and hanged. Despite the military defeat of the uprising, Kenya did become independent in 1963 and Jomo Kenyatta, from the Gĩkũyũ group, became its president.

The violence perpetrated by the British troops, loyalists, and that of the Mau Mau fighters in the 1950s and 1960s left profound scars on the people of Kenya and deeply affected Ngũgĩ.<sup>12</sup> His brother had joined the Mau Mau fighters, another brother was shot, his mother imprisoned, and his family house and village destroyed. Displacement is understandably a central theme in *Matigari* as well as in Ngũgĩ's other novels where the homestead becomes 'a metonymy for the nation' (Lovesay, 2002:140; Balogun 1995:145).

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<sup>12</sup> Biographic information and publication dates pertaining to Ngũgĩ have been collated from Ngũgĩ's official website (2009), UNISA Library catalogue, Maughan-Brown (1993), Sichertman (1995), Ngũgĩ (1986), and correspondence with UNISA Subject Librarian.

Ngũgĩ's life, writings and critical thinking reflect the political events and issues of the time, and political and cultural identities seem to overshadow individual identity. Born in 1938, Ngũgĩ was educated in English-medium schools in Kenya, and attended university in Uganda and in the United Kingdom. His first play, *The Black Hermit*, which was performed in Uganda in 1963, launched his prolific and influential career. That year, Ngũgĩ attended the 'Conference of African Writers of English Expression', in Uganda. At that time Makerere was seen as 'the intellectual capital of East and Central Africa' (Ngũgĩ, 1993:164). This conference brought together regional African writers such as Ngũgĩ, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Lewis Nkosi among others, and is seen as a defining moment in African literary history and a touchstone for many African writers. Intense debate ensued regarding the effects of colonialism, indigenous languages, language choice, and which writers and works represented African Literature. While some, like Achebe, felt that European languages were effective mediums to carry their local message (Ngũgĩ, 1986:7), Ngũgĩ began to identify more closely with his mother tongue as an indispensable tool to convey his cultural-political stance and his African identity.

These were times of change in East Africa: the new leaders of independent Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika pledged allegiance to regional unity in 1963, and Ngũgĩ describes the hope of real regional identity and power: 'Africa, Our Africa was coming back' he exclaims in *Moving the Centre: the Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (Ngũgĩ, 1993:166). Alas, these aspirations were dashed as Ngũgĩ goes on to explain that Tanzania and Uganda were at war by 1978 and the Kenya-Tanzania border was closed from 1977 until 1983 (169). Nonetheless, this concept of an East African Union remains one of Ngũgĩ's dreams and further links his political identity to that of regional unity.

Ngũgĩ meanwhile was lecturing English Literature at the University of Nairobi, and was a Fellow in Creative Writing at Makerere University. This time in Uganda, he says, enabled him to discover his Kenyan identity ('my sense of being a Kenyan') and gave him the space to view and understand his Kenyan experience (165). By this stage he had written three novels in English: *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965) and *A Grain of Wheat* (1967). In the early 1970s, Ngũgĩ published short

stories, plays and essays including *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* with Micere Githae-Mugo (1976), which encouraged audience involvement and participation.

His cultural and political identities were beginning to change: his next play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*, was performed in his mother tongue Gĩkũyũ and attracted a large local following. However, after this production, Ngũgĩ was arrested in December 1977 and imprisoned in maximum security jail: no formal charges were ever laid against him. This experience had a lasting effect on him, his language policy and his career direction, and more on this matter is discussed in the next chapter. When released in December 1978, Ngũgĩ was banned from teaching at universities or colleges in Kenya and this effectively stifled his budding academic career. He published *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* in 1981, but his play, *Mother Sing for Me*, was denied permission to perform in 1982. Ngũgĩ strongly objected to this censorship and the Kenyan Government responded by destroying the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre, the open air theatre that had enjoyed enthusiastic support from the Gĩkũyũ locals.

The Kenyatta and then Arap Moi governments had become contentious issues for Ngũgĩ. His criticism of, and political stance on, the corruption, ineffectiveness and neo-colonial nature of these regimes made him a government target. Lazarus maintains that Anglophone African literature in the 1960s seemed obsessed with 'independence as failure, with what independence did *not* bring' (original emphasis, 1993:13). Even though *Matigari* was written in Gĩkũyũ and thus not an Anglophone piece as such, this concern is indeed a major theme in the novel. For Ngũgĩ, the political emancipation of the hard-won independence had soured: 'the cool Uhuru drink had turned insipid in his mouth' (Ngũgĩ, 1967:243). Some of the reasons for this political failure may be due to the fact that the nation-state model is an importation and thus flawed from the start (Raditlhalo, 2000:81-82), or that nationalism only brings a temporary bond between people that momentarily suspends ethnicity in the quest to free people of colonialism, but which cannot be maintained once statehood is established (79). In other words, people become more homogenous during their struggle for independence against the colonial power but once this is attained they revert back to splintered cultural or ethnic groups. This schism between

people and state is increasing, according to Berking, due to cultural globalisation and the ethnicisation of cultural identities (2003:255).

There are other factors that can be partly attributed to this failure of government such as: hegemony, corruption, poor leadership, mimicry of colonial powers, multinational exploitation, international arms and natural resource trades. The need for effective, restorative African governments representing the people and creating wealth for African communities is illustrated throughout *Matigari*. The protagonist bemoans the fact that their first independence has been ‘sold back to imperialism’ by the people the imperialists put into power (Ngũgĩ, 1989:172).

Ideally, true national independence should bring about freedom, justice, hope, healing and a renewed pride in indigenous people’s history, culture, languages and achievements. But in order for this to come about, people need to first be aware, and acknowledge the effects, of colonialism, as Ngũgĩ puts it: ‘...to coldly and consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe’ (Ngũgĩ, 1986:88). This awareness is demonstrated in the novel when Matigari describes how he finally realised the extent of his exploitation and rose up against Settler Williams Senior with a rage ‘...of a newly found dignity that comes from having the scales of a thousand years fall from one’s eyes’ (Ngũgĩ, 1989:22). This metaphor not only suggests lifting the weight (scales) of centuries of enslavement, but also implies the removal of the membrane (scale) that can form over one’s eyes like a reptile’s. This membrane protects but can also prevent one from really seeing. Later, Gũthera understands that she too has been ‘wearing blinkers like a horse’ and had not had free choice in her life (140).

In *Matigari*, free choice comes with national and social consciousness, self-awareness, a solid belief in one’s identity, and fearlessness. This awakening of political identity can happen to any people in any place: *Matigari* is set ‘in no fixed time [...] no fixed space [...] in the country of your choice’ (ix). This universal tone parallels Fanon’s point in *Wretched of the Earth* where he describes how storytellers’ narrative and style change from the wistful ‘a long time ago’ to ‘[w]hat I am going to tell you happened somewhere else, but it could happen here today or perhaps



tomorrow' (Fanon, 2004:174). In other words, from distant hope of change to the very real option of imminent revolution.

Political independence and national consciousness are crucial for Ngũgĩ's sense of identity, and throughout the novel the message comes through that true freedom is possible as '[t]here is nothing that a people united cannot do' (Ngũgĩ, 1989:16), and that '[n]o government, not even the most repressive, has ever managed to silence the voices of the masses' (127).

Hope in political and social justice is physically portrayed in Matigari himself. Ngũgĩ uses a recurring method whereby Matigari becomes more youthful with each confrontation with injustice: 'It seemed to have wiped age off his face, making him look extremely youthful' (31); 'All the creases on his face had gone, and youth had once again returned to him' (43); and 'Youth seemed suddenly to come over him again' (124). Yet, Matigari ages physically when he loses hope: 'Age seized him' (41). It is as if standing up for his rights pumps oxygen through his veins, transforming him almost magically from the weak person he is when filled with doubts and despair.

For Ngũgĩ, fairness, social justice and equitable leadership are integral to political freedom. Matigari questions the unfairness of the socio-political status quo saying: 'Imagine: the tiller dying of starvation, the builder sleeping on the veranda; the tailor walking about without clothes and the driver having to go for miles on foot. How could such a world be?' (38). He calls for immediate rectification of the problem and gives an ultimatum:

The builder demands back his house, and the tiller his land. Who does the white-man-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed think he is? [...] For, from this day on, the builder refuses to beg for a place where he can lay his head; the tiller refuses to starve; the tailor refuses to go without clothes; and the producer refuses to part with his wealth. (46)

Matigari reiterates how illogical it is that the nation's wealth remains in the hands of a few while those that create that wealth live in poverty. The rubbish tip of the country's pickings is all that is left for the local children to scavenge and they are even charged for that privilege! (11). He challenges those in power to distribute what

is due to the people, saying: 'The tailor demands his clothes, the tiller his land, the workers the produce of his sweat. The builder wants his house back. Get out of my house' (20-21).<sup>13</sup>

While Matigari goes head-to-head with John Boy Junior confronting him over the house and wanting to settle 'who the real master' (22) of the land is, Settler Williams Junior says he will observe and leave it up to the two of them: '*I will be the audience and you two the actors*' (original italics, 44).<sup>14</sup> Tobias maintains Settler Williams Junior is not an observer here but rather a 'director' or 'stage manager' of the play (1997:167).

Interestingly, Matigari's battle is not directly with Settler Williams Junior but instead with John Boy Junior, reflecting an issue that arose in the Mau Mau uprising where loyalists sided with the colonialists and not the fighters: 'The settler was nothing without the support of his servant. Settler Williams could never rock the foundations of my home without a collaborator' (Ngũgĩ, 1989:114). Matigari's fight is also with those local people who help corporate imperialism, bleeding the country of its assets and robbing the people of its wealth: 'scum of the earth who are even prepared to sell the sovereignty of [the] country!' (82). Matigari sees John Boy Junior as a collaborator: he is painted as an almost caricature-type figure who has excelled through the settlers' education and economic systems, and to a degree the socio-political structure, reaping its rewards. Amoko notes that Waiyaki, in Ngũgĩ's *The River Between*, is the 'colonial mimic man' who mediates between the two sides within his ethnic group (2005:44). Here, however, John Boy Junior, despite being a mimic is no mediator; he has definitely crossed the line between his people and the settlers. His cultural identity has changed so much so that he is now a clone of Settler Williams Junior. Ngũgĩ emphasises the similarities between the two: they have the

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<sup>13</sup> Critics have noted, and some criticised, Ngũgĩ's homogenising of the colonial people and/or romanticising their experience (Arnove 1993, Ogude 1997, Slaymaker 1999), while Osei-Nyame suggests Ngũgĩ does so to pursue 'nationalist ideological consciousness' and purge any remnants of 'local divisions' due to colonialism (1999:127).

<sup>14</sup> This 'play-within-a-play' mechanism is traditionally used to expose a truth in English dramas such as *Hamlet*, where people are indirectly confronted with a portrayal of their behaviour in an often comic manner. According to Ngũgĩ, plays were integral to African oral traditions, storytelling and drama. They were an opportunity for participation, entertainment, moral instruction, and communal survival (Ngũgĩ, 1986:37).

same horses, same clothes, same posture, they both hold their whips in the same way, speak in the same manner ‘...the only difference between the two men was their skin colour’ (Ngũgĩ, 1989:43). They were ‘like twins born out of the womb of the same ogre’ (65), and both are described as ‘worse than those who were there during the colonial days’ (110). Ngũgĩ is clearly indicating his disdain for John Boy Junior and his loss of cultural affiliation and national identity.

In an interview in 2006, Ngũgĩ explains that ‘the most debilitating illness is “whiteache” – an incapacitating desire to be white’ (Olende, 2006:n.p.). This mimicry of the colonial culture is relayed throughout *Matigari* and is a common feature in hegemonic states where locals often merely replace colonial officials without significantly changing political agendas. Frequently in these neo-colonial states, the masses are seen only as a source of labour with no political clout. In *Matigari*, the Minister of Truth and Justice remarks that all a country needs is the wealthy, the soldier, the leader (Ngũgĩ, 1989:116), conveniently omitting the masses who generate that wealth. Ngũgĩ implies that the workers have become invisible, their stories unheard, their power lost.

When told that ‘The play is over [...] This house belongs to another’ (49), *Matigari* begins to understand that he may not be able to regain his house by peaceful means. His commitment to non-violence, symbolised by his belt of peace, prevents him from reacting aggressively in a few situations where he normally would have: breaking up a fight between the children (12); intervening when the dog attacks Gũthera (30); confronting Settler Williams and John Boy Juniors (47); and at the meeting with the Minister of Truth and Justice (115). *Matigari* offers to share the house with John Boy Junior saying: ‘let us light a fire in the house together!’ (51) but this is rejected and he is told: ‘... what is mine is mine’ (49).

*Matigari* thus begins a search for truth and justice: initially in his country (72, 75, 77, 79, 82, 89, 92), then he wonders where he can find these in life (86), on this earth (95, 88, 113), in the world (98), and in society (73). He questions many people and frantically searches throughout the land for an explanation for the social and political malady prevalent in the country. He looks for someone who can untie the knot, reveal

the secret of the Universe (88) and answer the riddle (96). He soon realises that ‘[l]ooking for truth and justice is truly a hard job’ (88).

After being arrested, thrown in jail, escaping and later being tried and put in a mental hospital, as well as speaking to the student, teacher, priest, women, workers, murderers, thieves, and others, Matigari comes to understand that words are not enough, and only ‘words of truth and justice, fully backed by armed power, will certainly drive the enemy out’ (138). The answer for Matigari lies in ‘the organised armed power of the people’ (160), ‘the armed might of the united dispossessed’ (161) and ‘*a sharpened spear*’ (original emphasis, 131). He finally understands that reconciliation is not possible in the struggle for political identity: ‘He and I cannot share the same roof’ (144) Matigari says and removes his belt of peace (131, 160).<sup>15</sup>

For Matigari, the current neo-colonial nation-state structure must be annihilated in order to replace it with a system that truly represents their cultural heritage. He declares he would rather ‘build a new house from scratch’ (157), ‘a new house with a better foundation’ (139) that will be ‘a paradise on this earth’ (16).

This concept of tearing down the old and building anew is reinforced at the Truth and Justice meeting where the priest delivers a verse from the Bible, Matthew chapter 24, verse 23, (105) which warns against believing in false messiahs. However, the same chapter of Matthew also relates to Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the temple, stone by stone, and the coming of the Messiah and it reads as follows: ‘But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into’. It goes on to warn that ‘[t]he master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of’ and ‘He will cut him to pieces...’ (<http://www.biblegateway.com>, 2009:Verses 43, 50, 51). Ngũgĩ, no doubt, carefully chose the verse from Matthew to convey his covert message that, had the people of the land known what was to befall them, that they would be robbed of their

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<sup>15</sup> Fanon explains how a colonised writer experiences three stages: the first stage is where they assimilate the colonisers’ culture, the second is where they gain awareness of the situation and remember back to their own culture, and the third combat stage is where the writer galvanises the people (2004:158-159). Ngũgĩ’s *oeuvre* reflects several of these stages but *Matigari* appears to correspond to the latter combat stage.

belongings, and their house taken over and misused, they would have taken extreme precautions. Further, the true master of the land will return, without warning or announcement, to reclaim his house and to exact revenge, and that day of retribution is sooner than expected: 'Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door' (Ibid.: Verse 33).

Political emancipation is imminent and ordained. Ngũgĩ employs the metaphor of a car to illustrate the liberation movement, means of revolution and conveyor of change. Matigari had previously been Settler Williams' chauffeur and this reflects the colonial experience where the local 'chauffeurs' are not in charge of the journey their country is undergoing or its destination. While in the city, Matigari sees many foreign occupants of cars symbolising the European, Asian and African wealthy corporate owners getting a 'free ride'. As this country is purposefully unnamed, Ngũgĩ could be implying that these scenarios take place everywhere where the rich north bloc of countries plunders from the poor south bloc. This north-south problem results in the southern producers being left with the toxic waste, world debt and poverty while the north bloc enjoys end-products, luxury and capital gain. This is typified in *Matigari* where the homeless children are living in a car graveyard among discarded foreign vehicles (Ngũgĩ, 1989:15), an image of having to make do with the scrapheap left behind by the foreign corporate owners.

The car metaphor is extended further: when they are on the run Matigari, Gũthera and Mũriũki hijack the Mercedes Benz, the symbol of foreign opulence which transports the Minister of Truth and Justice's wife (145), and this car becomes a *matatu* (a local form of transport). This represents them taking control of (stealing back) their own destiny, re-appropriating and localising the means of transport of their own political future. This empowerment is channelled to the new generation of fighters like Mũriũki, who must take the revolutionary baton from the older generation. Mũriũki visualises the car gaining momentum and sees himself racing towards his future, dreaming that he is in an aeroplane which then changes into a winged horse (155). Both these powerful images show he is gaining the ability, means, momentum and power to propel himself into his own future. People gather at the house waiting for Matigari, but they do not know how the revolution is going to be delivered or in what form exactly: 'not even Gũthera or Mũriũki knew the means by which Matigari was

going to arrive' (164). Matigari eventually crashes the car into the house which is set alight and destroyed. This represents Ngũgĩ's political belief that indigenous people can 'drive' or take control of their own future, stop foreign exploitation of their resources and labour, and destroy the structure that is too damaged to house the nation.

What seems to be stopping this political revolution is fear. 'Too much fear breeds misery in the land' is a refrain that Ngũgĩ uses throughout the novel (31, 76, 87, 90, 92, 112). It is fear that keeps the masses tied into the current situation without confronting it or demanding change: 'Fear itself is the enemy of the people. It breeds misery in the land' (171).

Putting fear aside, political change can take place at any time. Indeed, in *Matigari*, the day when the house is reclaimed, when political self-determination begins, is an ordinary day and Ngũgĩ goes to great lengths to show this: 'There was no sunshine. There was no rain. It was neither warm nor cold. A dull day' (71); 'and the day remained dull. Not hot, not cold. No sunshine, no rain. Just lukewarm' (85, also see pages 89, 101, 137). Everything seems ordinary, nothing seems amiss. There are no forewarnings, no unusual natural phenomena that precede the event; it is just an ordinary day when ordinary people stand up and say 'Enough'.

Throughout the novel, Ngũgĩ probes who is the bringer of political change by repeatedly asking: 'Who is Matigari?' (32, 66, 72, 127, 158, 169). Ironically, as explained in the introduction to the novel, the authorities in Kenya issued a warrant for Matigari's arrest thinking that he was a real person and rabble-rouser. When they realised their error, they banned the work instead.<sup>16</sup>

By repeatedly asking this forthright question, Ngũgĩ seems to indicate there are only two options, to either be Matigari or to be an 'other'. Ngũgĩ exemplifies this in-group or out-group approach by adopting binaries and dividing many of his descriptions into

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<sup>16</sup> Incidentally, Breytenbach underwent a similar incident when he was interrogated about one of his fictional characters, Panus (see Van Dis, 1983:5).

two opposing camps.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the novel one can find two types of believers: ‘those who love their country, and those who will sell it’ (37); soldiers: ‘[s]ome are there to protect the people, others to attack them’ (Ibid.); modern students: ‘those who love the truth, and those who sell the truth’ (90); worlds: ‘[t]here is the world of those who accept things as they are, and there is that of those who want to change things’ (91), ‘[t]he world of patriots and that of sell-outs’ (152); wise ones of the stars: ‘those who love the truth, and those who sell the truth’ (92); truths: ‘[o]ne truth belongs to the oppressor; the other belongs to the oppressed’ (121); people: ‘[t]here are those who sell out, and those who are patriots’ (126); and camps in the country namely, the imperialists versus the working people, with their values, their culture, their history (161).

It is important to know what you believe in and which group you support. These two camps offer the people and the readers an ethical choice, and Ngũgĩ directly asks them to self-identify: ‘Which world do you belong to?’ (91). Further, he specifically defines which side Matigari represents, calling him a patriot (126), implicitly suggesting people choose where their allegiances lie. Are they with him or against him – as Matigari declares to John Boy Junior: ‘It’s either you or me and the future belongs to me!’ (124).

How do people recognise Matigari and how will they know when they meet him: ‘What did he look like?’ (72, 170) and ‘[w]here is the sign?’ (63) they ask. He takes on a multicultural and universal identity, is rumoured to be multilingual (159), yet people do not recognise him when he is right in front of them. He has different forms and fits different profiles, and they wonder if he is ‘the One prophesied about?’, ‘The Son of Man?’ (81) or whether he is ‘A patriot? Angel Gabriel? Jesus Christ? Was he a human being or a spirit? A true or false prophet? A saviour or simply a lunatic? ... a man or a woman? A child or an adult? Or was he only an idea, an image, in people’s minds?’ (158). It is difficult for people to decipher what is real and what is fantasy. This mythical icon ties in with religious beliefs of a Saviour, Messiah, as well as the ancient Gĩkũyũ prophecy centred on Mugo wa Kibiro where a ‘saviour would come to liberate them from English colonial occupation’ (JanMohamed, 1983 cited in Tobias,

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<sup>17</sup> Fanon describes the colonised world as being divided into two (2004:3), and here it is similar, albeit the neo-colonial world that Ngũgĩ paints as being in two opposing camps.

1997:174) or of a superhuman hero (Balogun, 1995:143). Ngũgĩ previously used this saviour perspective in *The Black Messiah* where Waiyaki is portrayed as a descendant of the Gĩkũyũ seer, Mugo wa Kibiro (Maughan-Brown, 1993).

In *Matigari* though, Ngũgĩ infers that it will not be a prophet, a multi-lingual warrior that will deliver the people nor any of the hypotheses they fabricate, instead it will be ordinary people on an ordinary day that will bring about freedom: ‘I don’t need anything to prove who I am,’ Matigari says, ‘I don’t need signs or miracles’ (Ngũgĩ, 1989:63). Further, Ngũgĩ hints that we are all Matigari, that the potential to be the deliverer of true political independence is within us and already exists in our community and psyches. He writes: ‘*Who was He?*’ (original italics, 158). Here, Ngũgĩ uses a capital letter ‘H’ to imply a reference to God, and traditionalists may read this as a religious saviour who will imminently come and free the people. However, this question comes after Matigari’s speech to the children in which he explains that God exists within everyone and a time will come when that God, when called on, will rise again:

The God who is prophesied is in you, in me and in the 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 from the dead. Yes, one day that God within us will come alive and liberate us who believe in Him. I am not dreaming. He will return on the day when His followers will be able to stand up without worrying about tribe, race or colour, and say in one voice: Our labour produced all the wealth in this land [...] But that God lives more in you children of this land; and therefore if you let the country go to the imperialist enemy and its local watchdogs, it is the same thing as killing that God who is inside you. It is the same thing as stopping Him from resurrecting. That God will come back only when you want Him to. (156)

Thus, the political saviour is part of an internal psyche and not a *deus ex machina* type hero that will swoop in and save the people.

Political identity is essential for Matigari but finding his people is more imperative and synonymous with homecoming. He resists going to see the house alone (12) before connecting with his family as for him the point of having a home is sharing it with the people who are integral to it: ‘We shall enter the house together. We shall light the fire together. After all, the struggle was for the house wasn’t it?’ (10). This approach resembles the African concept of *ubuntu* which outlines how we are only a



person because of other people. What use is a house without people? What use is there achieving political emancipation if the cultural group cannot share it?

There is an incident in the beginning of the novel where the homeless children throw stones at Matigari and he experiences intense pain, almost passing out. It seems curious that a hardened freedom fighter who spent years fighting a war in the bush would react so strongly to a few stones. Perhaps Ngũgĩ is showing that because it is his own cultural group that injures him, it causes him the greatest pain and seems so unbearable.

Matigari's need for social unity is contrasted with John Boy Junior who criticises his attitude towards community and lectures Matigari on the notion of individuality:

Our country has remained in darkness because of the ignorance of our people. They don't know the importance of the word 'individual', as opposed to the word 'masses'. White people are advanced because they respect that word, and therefore honour the *freedom of the individual*, which means the freedom of everyone to follow his own whims without worrying about the others [...] But you black people? You walk about fettered to your families, clans, nationalities, people, masses. If the individual decides to move ahead, he is pulled back by the others [...] what belongs to the masses is carried in a bottomless pail. (Original emphasis, 48-49)

Whereas African traditions placed community first, the West's and nation-state's emphasis on individuals has relegated community welfare. This has created a dysfunctional arrangement as material wealth cannot replace moral values, culture and mutual concern. In one scene, John Boy Junior and Settler Williams Junior give a donation to the disabled children's fund and personal shares in the company to the minister and to the ruling party, stating it is in the spirit of '*true African socialism*' (original emphasis, 108). Ironically, the reason they do this is to close a judicial loophole so that people opposing the company now become guilty of opposing the government, not for any altruistic socialistic attempt at giving people a share in the profits of their labour, which is what Ngũgĩ would ultimately favour happening in an African state.

Throughout *Matigari*, Ngũgĩ's focus is on political, cultural and social identity. On a secondary level there is in fact no functional family unit in the story. Genealogy and

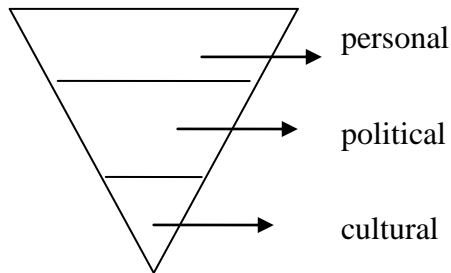
family history is portrayed as merely decorative. The Minister of Truth and Justice has a family coat of arms depicting a coffee bush, two whips and a motto that reads ‘Destroy Terrorists’ (103). Contrary to generations of kin passing down a coat of arms symbolising their family, culture, values and history, he has created one representing status and wealth. The three main characters Matigari, Gũthera and Mũriũki do stand for each member of the core family unit but it is never a whole entity. Perhaps Ngũgĩ is stressing that life on the personal level cannot be functional because issues on the political and cultural scale are amiss. Ultimate truth and justice will result in a functional, fair and aligned social system and personal life.

The one instance where society is working well is depicted in the scene where all the children pay the finder of the radio compensation so that it can become communal property (69). This example of ‘child’s play’ being fair play depicts the best case scenario of how community could work together. Towards the end of the novel all the children who had attacked Matigari are contrite and look for ways to emulate him, with many calling themselves Matigari (145) and declaring: ‘We are the children of Matigari ma Njirũũngi’ (139). This indicates that the future has been restored to its rightful order, the children have aligned with Matigari’s worldview and the reader is left with the hope that truth and justice will indeed prevail.

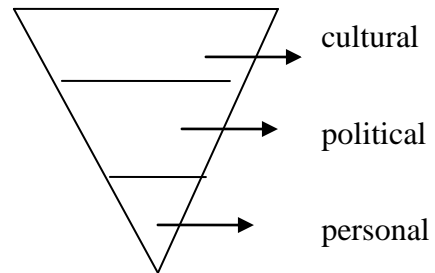
Likewise, for Ngũgĩ hope lies in embracing cultural identity and political self-determination, and he has emphasised these aspects over and above his personal needs. When the larger issues are in sync then all rungs of society will work cohesively. His voice ensures that such an alignment is possible, and indeed, necessary.

Thus, Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ seem to be like inverted pyramids of each other: the widest section at the top of Breytenbach’s pyramid represents his personal identity including mindful, individual experiences. The next segment down represents political identity, connection to land and continent, and finally the inverted apex represents cultural identity and affinity to ethnic and speech communities. On the other hand, the widest section at the top of Ngũgĩ’s pyramid represents cultural group, his mother tongue and community values, followed by political identity and national consciousness, and the final segment is the inverted apex of individual identity.

Identity: Breytenbach



Identity: Ngũgĩ



In Breytenbach's case, he has struggled to disconnect from the Afrikaner group and its associated cultural connotations while Ngũgĩ has endeavoured to reinforce his connection with Gĩkũyũ or indigenous community and its values. Breytenbach has shifted periodically between these different strata of identity throughout his career, while Ngũgĩ has had an almost unwavering approach focusing on cultural-political identity. It will be interesting to see whether their views on language parallel these paradigms in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO MOTHER TONGUE AFFILIATION AND IDENTITY

As the previous chapter pointed out, identity is a powerful and influential shaper of our worldviews, allegiances, as well as a definer of our relationships with others, ourselves and our land. What happens then when another language is introduced into the mix?

This chapter explores how affiliations with speech communities, cultural groups, and language, both a mother tongue and other languages, impact on identity and the creative process, with particular focus first on Breytenbach and then on Ngũgĩ and their respective works. By following the authors' views on their mother tongues, their use of language, and by considering their publishing decisions, I hope to clarify their cultural-linguistic choices. The use of codeswitching and where markers of their mother tongue identities are evident in the two primary texts are also closely examined.

The role of languages in the colonial and Apartheid experiences, as well as bilingualism, biculturalism, and language loss are briefly discussed to foster further understanding of the cultural-linguistic framework in which the writers lived and worked.

Language offers a medium for us to communicate our thoughts, needs and experiences to others and to understand theirs. Whether an innate or learned skill,<sup>18</sup> our mother tongues bind us to a place, ethnic group, district, nation and era, and affect identity. Language is an important strand in the identity mix and often overlaps with the cultural strand.

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<sup>18</sup> There are numerous theories regarding the language learning process. Some theorists regard language as an intuitive ability (Lacan) while others see it as a learned, nurtured skill. Chomsky's Nativist approach outlines how language is innate, driven by a Language Acquisition Device embedded in our brains. The acquisition of a language is a result of these inherent tendencies being triggered by the external environment (David, 2004). Further, differences exist between Behaviourists who see imitation, nurturing and repetition as integral to language acquisition, Cognitive Constructivists who maintain that language reflects a child's cognitive thought process, Social Constructivists who link social language and its impact on thoughts, and Intentionality theorists who view language development as part of a child's holistic development (Ibid.).

Breytenbach's personal values and political views have caused tension between him, his ethnic group and speech community. The Afrikaner community has been antagonistic towards the writer while still acknowledging his technical writing skills. Conversely, Ngũgĩ has attempted to foster close and binding links with his speech community through the conscious use of Gĩkũyũ, and his conflict has been more with Kenyan political parties and figures.

Both writers acquired a second language through a school education system, which relates to what Scheu calls compound bilingualism (2000:136-137).<sup>19</sup> Breytenbach has switched between his mother tongue, Afrikaans, and other languages throughout his prose career, much like he has fluctuated between his personal, political and cultural identities. Ngũgĩ, on the other hand, started writing creatively in English from a young school age and then purposefully aligned with his mother tongue, as he did with his cultural identity. He has promoted, advocated and practised this language path through most of his adult writing career.

Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ often write directly in European languages, while at other times they write in their mother tongues initially and then auto-translate the works or are translated by others. In the case of the two primary texts, *Dog Heart* is written in English, Breytenbach's acquired language, while *Matigari* is written in Gĩkũyũ, Ngũgĩ's first language, although a translated English version is used for the purposes of this dissertation.

Both Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ have been forced to spend most of their lives outside their home countries among populations that do not speak their respective mother tongues. The impact of this dislocation and muting is looked at more closely in Chapter Four.

As mentioned earlier, Breytenbach was educated in an Afrikaans-medium school and went on to study at the English-medium University of Cape Town. His poetry first

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<sup>19</sup> Scheu divides bilingualism into two categories: coordinate bilingualism refers to individuals who develop dual linguistic systems from early childhood, and compound bilingualism where speakers already have a mother tongue and then learn a second language. The latter learn the second language in the context of the first language (2000:136-137).

appeared in Afrikaans in *Die Ysterkoei Moet Sweet* and *Katastrofes* published in 1964. The Afrikaner community and literary establishment embraced Breytenbach and lauded him for his talent and innovative use of Afrikaans.<sup>20</sup> In fact, four of his early works received literary prizes in short succession. Breytenbach was considered an integral part of the then avant-garde Afrikaner *Sestigers* movement.

In an interview in 1997, Breytenbach refers to first language literally as ‘the language of the mother’ and says that it is possibly the only language that one can have access to in its entirety. He explains this intuitive connection between mother and child where ‘a very essential, imitative, suckling-type of teaching process’ takes place and ties in with the ‘irrational’ or ‘pre-rational’ nature of one’s mother tongue (Dimitriu, 1997:70-71). He goes on to say that the tone and rhythm of the language, its melody, are also passed on instinctively (70). Thus, for Breytenbach, language is linked subliminally to the associated behaviours of the mother and the circumstances in which the language is learned, like ‘the smacking of his mother’s lips, the crunching of her molars, and...the taste of his youth’ (Breytenbach, 1990:61).

With the acquisition of language, cultural nuances are transferred to the child from a young age through a ‘process of cultural transmission’ (Anglin, 1995:162-163). Anglin maintains that children learn ‘category labels’ of objects that are functionally relevant to them and that have a cultural value to their society as relayed to them by their caregivers.<sup>21</sup> When an object holds greater significance to their culture, children learn a larger vocabulary or more specific terminology to refer to it. Anglin maintains the acquisition of the vocabulary of a mother tongue (‘natural language’) is thus ‘anthropocentric, fashioned in terms of human purposes, values and experiences’ (1995:176).

Likewise, the linguistic rules and anomalies of a tongue are also passed on to a young language learner. The repercussion for second-language learners, we can assume, is that they miss out on this crucial developmental stage where cultural nuances and

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<sup>20</sup> According to Van Wyk, Breytenbach was the first Afrikaans writer to use profane vocabulary and his own name in his poems, and not adhere to capital letters and punctuation marks (2000:n.p.).

<sup>21</sup> Anglin distinguishes between horizontal development (similar levels of generality) and vertical development (different levels of generality). These mirror the distinction relayed to the child by the adult: if an object has little significance in children’s lives they are named in general terms, and if they have a high significance, more specific terms are used (1995:164, 167).

social implications are linked to word selection; instead they acquire a language where these cultural inferences are already present within the speech patterns and words, albeit indiscernible.

Names can, therefore, show traces of social or cultural significance, and in *Dog Heart*, there are numerous insertions of family names, marriage names, adopted names, nicknames, as well as names of places, mountains, gravestones, ships, and towns with their revisions over several governments. Breytenbach is named after a young cousin of his who died, and this naming influences his identity; he constantly mentions and refers to this deceased cousin throughout his works. Naming traditions often create links to history, family stories and genealogy, and a continuation of a first or family name keeps the memory of predecessors alive and current. Repetition of Breytenbach's first and family names, 'which sounds so much like an echo' (Breytenbach, 1999:170) is reminiscent of some cultures where first names are often taken from the father or the paternal family name and therefore seem doubled. This doubling again ties in with Breytenbach's view of identity, where one is a part of others and an amalgamation of many.

Breytenbach suggests the very naming process, assigning something a name in one's language, traditionally presumes a sense of ownership: 'A place once named is not afterwards supposed to move again. Naming is taming' (Breytenbach, 1984b:84). In *Dog Heart*, while visiting the Retief family farm, Van Loveren, Breytenbach is shown trees named after significant people or events in South Africa: Verwoerd, Republic, King George, D.F. Malan, and Mandela. By this naming of objects and places, the landscape becomes linked to the country, or at least this family's identity and its experience of history (Breytenbach, 1999:2). Explorers and colonisers to South Africa 'tamed' places too by giving them names (185). At the Landdrost's Mansion, Breytenbach studies the maps on the walls: a French map of the Khoi ethnic groups and their areas, farms with names of the colonial owners, and maps in Portuguese and French marking the coastline's bays and inlets (184-185). He supposes these names have disappeared or have been anglicised by now, thus proving erroneous the premise that naming something in one's language concretises rights over it.

Breytenbach uses irony when exploring the political aspect of language in the National Party member's speech: 'This is Afrikanerland' (160) the politician says, and suggests the answer to the current socio-economic situation lies in national-linguistic unity: 'What we need is a new Afrikaans name for the western Cape, a new flag, a new language monument...' (161). This superficial solution comes across as humorous especially taking into account Afrikaans already has two language monuments and a name is no guarantee of prosperity or longevity.

A common language can form a powerful bond between the individual and others. For Breytenbach, the words are only one part of the formula: 'The real *language* of the writer consists of two components: the sounds that disturb him from within, that push from inside – and the *people* who speak his language. Language is *people*' (original emphasis, Breytenbach 1986:74). This intrinsic tie to a speech community creates a 'spiritual' connection, as Breytenbach explains in *Dog Heart*: 'language is not just a tool, it is perhaps the closest we can come to a communal "soul"' (Breytenbach, 1999:176), it taps into the 'the pre-rational' or 'the "deeper" sense of being' (177). By inference, the very language, words and associations writers choose reveal a lot about their links to culture and speech community.<sup>22</sup> Breytenbach does question whether this language connection equates to one's total identity. In an interview with Victor Dlamini in 2008, Breytenbach says that language 'brings with it particular experience and world view and particular texture of interacting – but is that identity?' and he adds, 'I'm not sure. I know that it is not true for me' (Dlamini, 2008b).

In fact, in *Dog Heart*, Breytenbach uses a sense of irony when he associates language as a cultural marker particularly with regards to the Afrikaner: 'It is only Afrikaans which makes of the Afrikaner an Afrikaner; without Afrikaans he'll look a lot like a Russian or a Jew. The language makes the mouth' (Breytenbach, 1999:160).

Later in the interview with Adam towards the end of the memoir, Breytenbach again parodies the idea of a typical Afrikaans-speaker: 'After all, I should know that it is

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<sup>22</sup> People can often identify cultural group membership from linguistic and phonetic features, as well as responsive and initiative language styles which link or distance people from the reference group (Bell, 1999:524-5). Bell analysed various advertisements and how the choice and pronunciation of a language immediately identified to the audience the person's relation to an ethnic group and their position in or out of that group.



language which makes me. I'm the Afrikaner, possessed with ideas, stubborn, unsure parochial' (175) he says, and goes on to outline a caricature of the 'typical' Afrikaner.

Stereotypes are dangerous as they confine people to a cultural, social or language-specific group – an 'other'. While Breytenbach's identity is fluid and changes over time as discussed in the previous chapter, he fears that others view language more statically and use it and culture as a guise for racial discrimination. He warns that culture is replacing race as far as differences are concerned and that the criteria are simply being transferred from one to the other. He maintains that this is occurring as people 'still have the same urge to exclude the foreigners' (Breytenbach, 1990:74) and the emphasis is not on physical factors but language: 'In other words, not really the shape of the nose or the blotch of the skin, but the beat of the music, the accent, the other words' (Ibid.).

Moreover, Breytenbach warns against becoming emotionally biased towards a language: 'We mustn't become attached to words, for it is like hanging on to a robe stitched in pain' (Breytenbach, 1990:208), and questions whether a language has only one political dimension, saying that for him '[a] language is what you want to make of it' (Breytenbach, 1984:354).

With regards to second language speakers, Kramsch observes that access to a group is not reliant on proficiency or grammatical correctness in the second language; the speaker gains acceptance by recognition 'as a native speaker by the relevant speech community' (2003:255). Under Apartheid language became extremely politicised and cultural segregation and linguistic hierarchy were enforced, and this in turn affected whether first language speakers were recognised as native speakers or accepted by their ethnic group and speech community. This was particularly relevant with regards to the mother tongue Afrikaans-speakers.

Afrikaans played a dominant role in the Apartheid era despite a small number of Afrikaans home speakers.<sup>23</sup> This prominence was due largely to its privileged speech

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<sup>23</sup> The South African 2001 Census records indicate only 13.3% of the population, about six million people, belong to this group. Further, Afrikaans first home language speakers are grouped as follows:

community status and political influence. Within the Afrikaans-speaking group, language alone was not enough to ensure membership in the Afrikaner ethnic group. Sckalkwyk refers to Coetzee's (1992) view that the label Afrikaner was 'not just a linguistic/cultural label' but an ideological term (1994:43-44 note 7) and that it became 'an *exclusive* classification' (original emphasis, *Ibid.*). Those who had Afrikaans as their mother tongue 'but did not meet further racial, cultural and political criteria were not accepted as Afrikaners' (*Ibid.*; Kenelly 2005:4). If only white Afrikaans-speakers could belong to the Afrikaner group, could a white Afrikaans-speaker in turn be a non-Afrikaner? This is the very dilemma Breytenbach grappled with: distancing himself from the politics of his ethnic group while maintaining a linguistic association.

The created Bantustans in South Africa encouraged development of each area's pseudo-political, educational and commercial systems and, in particular, its indigenous language. In some instances, the same language group, such as Xhosa, was divided into two different homelands, namely, Transkei and Ciskei (Maluleke, 2005:27).<sup>24</sup> This Apartheid policy of promoting indigenous languages aimed to limit access to uncensored English material, according to Ngũgĩ, control the indigenous-language publishing houses and the content of what people could read (1981:57).

Clearly, this divide and rule policy, strict censorship and control of printed material seriously skewed South African literature and education. Afrikaans became synonymous with Apartheid and there was a swing to English usage, particularly after the events of 1976 where Breytenbach's personal conflict with his mother tongue was played out on a large scale on the South African political scene. In that year, the South African government invoked a previous Afrikaans Medium decree which stated that Afrikaans would be the main medium of instruction in black schools and not English – neither the mother tongue of the majority of students. On 16 June 1976, thousands of students took part in a peaceful rally in Soweto to protest against this decree.

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Black Africans 253 282, Coloured 3 173 972, Indian or Asian 19 266, and White 2 536 906 (Statistics South Africa, 2004:8-11).

<sup>24</sup> During the Apartheid era other languages developed around the edges of English and Afrikaans, such as *Fanakalo*, a pidgin mixture of English and Zulu, and *Tsotsitaal*, a township urban slang with a mixture of Afrikaans, English and black languages. (Maluleke, 2005: 31; Kennelly, 2005:8). More recently, Soweto youths have developed a new urban slang or argot called *s'camto* (Rossouw, 2003).

Police opened fire and the estimated number of deaths that day are in the hundreds. The Soweto Riots, as they became known, epitomised a situation where a second or third language was forced onto a group of people without consideration for their cultural needs or freedom of expression.

As mentioned above, Breytenbach was reluctant to categorise himself in the same group as Apartheid perpetrators and voiced opposition against his political-cultural group as discussed in the chapter on identity. In 1973, Breytenbach specifically appealed for separation of the language from Apartheid, coining it ‘Apartaans’ – an apparent mix of the words ‘Apartheid’ and ‘Afrikaans’ – so that the language could then be free and connect with Africa rather than the white regime of segregation (Coullie and Jacobs, 2004:xvi; Breytenbach, 1985b:160).

While the Afrikaners made Afrikaans and other tongues mutually exclusive from each other, Breytenbach instead viewed language as the ‘live topography of a history of specificity’ (Breytenbach, 1999:17), a constantly changing atlas of where people come from and where they are today, and for him Africa was integral to that.

Language for Breytenbach is an incorporation of other voices and a mixing of ethnic worlds. Afrikaans, being a relatively new language formed from a combination of European and local languages, is part Boer, Khoi and Oriental (112) and continues to change, as Breytenbach writes: ‘People are the products and protagonists of mixing. As with people, so the tongue...’ (63). He explains that people migrate, mix and assimilate over time, and in the process ‘[t]heir language is phased out imperceptibly, to be replaced by a vigorous bastard tongue’ (96).

This new morphed language holds traces of the old, like when a tree is cut down and concentric evidence records the environment’s story over the centuries. The following excerpt from *Dog Heart* demonstrates this accrual of cultures and languages:

My language speaks of the loss of purity, I mix Europe and the East and Africa in my veins, my cousin is a Malagasy; my tongue speaks about moving away from the known, about overflowing into the unknown, about *making*; of dispossessing, plundering, enslavement, mixing; of the transmission under guise of a ‘new’ language of that which refuses to be forgotten, of discovery

but of agreement also (because comparison is as well a compromise), of the land and of light, of the art of surviving. (Original emphasis, 175-176)

Obviously, Breytenbach's viewpoint on language was diametrically opposed to that espoused by the Afrikaners, who elevated Afrikaans and its status and origins.

The Afrikaner establishment was divided when it came to Breytenbach. There were those who wanted to keep him within their inner literary circle and saw him as one of their best creative talents, 'the most famous Afrikaner poet, cherished for his revitalisation of the language...' (Wood, 1994:A6), and one they could not afford to lose: 'Ons kan nie bekostig om jou te verloor nie' (*Rapport* newspaper 7.1.1973 cited in Galloway, 2004:11). Breytenbach's ability and skill as a poet and writer were well recognised and, despite his political views, he received numerous awards including the Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel Literary Prize (1965), the South African Central News Agency Literary Prize for his book *Die Huis van die Dowe, Kouevuur* (1969) and *Lotus* (1970), and the Perskor Prize in 1976.<sup>25</sup> As Wood notes, 'Breytenbach honours Afrikaanedom [sic] even as he murders it' (original emphasis, Wood, 1994:A6). Breytenbach did not accept all his awards, and when he did, his often outspoken acceptance speeches caused even more controversy within the Afrikaner establishment.

On the other hand, there were those Afrikaners who saw Breytenbach as betraying the 'volk' or ethnic group due to his liberal outlooks, 'mixed-race' marriage, and criticism of the establishment (for more on Afrikaner reaction to Breytenbach, see Galloway, 2004). The Afrikaner ethnic group expected the Poet to be 'an exponent of its tribal values, not a dissenter' (Breytenbach, 1976:26), but this was not a role with which Breytenbach could comply.

This painful conflict with his speech community, ethnic group and his mother tongue has resulted in Breytenbach swinging between the pendulum of the inner Afrikaans literary clique and the stark outback of Afrikaner isolation. His increasingly robust anti-Apartheid stance led to censorship of some of his *Kouevuur* poems (1969), and his poetry collection, *Skryt: Om 'n sinkende skip blou te verf* (1972) was banned from

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<sup>25</sup> He later went on to receive the Rapport Prize for Literature, Hertzog Prize, CNA Prize (1990), the Alan Paton Prize for Non Fiction (1994), and the Helgaard Steyn Prize in 1996.

1975 until 1985 (Van Wyk, 2000). Besides a short hiatus when he visited with his wife in 1973 and was briefly embraced by the Afrikaans speech community and press, there was strong reaction against Breytenbach, particularly after his arrest for treason, with many feeling he deserved his sentencing (Galloway, 2004:14).

With his imprisonment, it was as if Breytenbach stepped out of the laager and it closed in behind him. During his nine year term of which he served seven, it was not the Afrikaans press that predominantly called for his release but rather international journalists, writers and human rights activists. It was Afrikaans-speaking prison wardens who stringently controlled his writing conditions (Breytenbach was allowed to write under severe restrictions and each day his writing was taken away), read his drafts and manipulated publication of his works such as *Voetskrif*,<sup>26</sup> and Afrikaans-speaking officials who censored his works and banned his publications. While imprisoned his work could not be published in South Africa so, in these interim years a few collections or anthologies of previously published poems were collated. In the late 1980s, Galloway remarks, the Afrikaner establishment tried to use the carrot and stick approach with Breytenbach (2004:20), valuing his writing while hoping he would hold his tongue in the public realm (19).

After his release from jail, Breytenbach published five volumes of prison poetry in Afrikaans but with his increased disenchantment with the Afrikaner establishment and his experiences in prison, he tried to distance himself from his mother tongue. He said at the time that it was of little importance to him ‘whether the language dies of shame or is preserved and strengthened by its potentially revolutionary impact’, although it would be a loss if the language died as ‘a language is a living organism, not just a reflection of life, but also a precursor and a crucible thereof’ (Breytenbach, 1984:354). Tellingly, *Mouir: Notes-Miroir pour un roman*, translated from the Afrikaans prose by Jean Guiloineau, was first published in French in 1983, and *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* was first published in English in 1984, neither in Afrikaans in the first instance.

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<sup>26</sup> In *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, Breytenbach’s character refers to how the officer manipulated this work, coerced Breytenbach into dedicating it to him, and acted like a literary agent (1984:156-157). Van Wyk (2000) also discusses this. It won the Perskor Prize in 1976.

It was as if he was thumbing his nose at the Afrikaans community. To add insult to injury, the latter work was not released in Afrikaans but rather a Dutch translation from the English.

In 1986, Breytenbach wrote that he did not see himself as an Afrikaner even though he has 'from time to time a whitish skin' and his 'heart-language is Afrikaans' (Breytenbach, 1986:94). However, separating cultural identity from a speech community and mother tongue is not that simple. As previously noted, access into the Afrikaner group was not based solely on language criteria, and despite or perhaps because of Breytenbach's 'qualification' for membership, he tried deliberately to extract himself from the ethnic group while still hoping to retain his mother tongue.

What complicates the matter is that all of the Afrikaner group share his mother tongue and so it is not as if Breytenbach can find a totally divorced linguistic audience. Further, working in a language other than his mother tongue, and thereby for a different audience, has limitations for Breytenbach. Despite proficiency in the acquired language, he sees it as ultimately 'a different skill than the skill of instinctive communication, not only between people, or among people, but also between the person and the environment, which I think happens at its most profound level in your own mother tongue' (Dimitriu, 1997:71). In other words, second language skill is a more conscious and laboured practice. Breytenbach recognises the deficiencies of this other language and laments in *Dog Heart*: 'Why could one not be as easy in a borrowed tongue, a second or third one which one learns later?' (Breytenbach, 1999:176).

Second language learners are not merely 'a blank slate on which the [other] language is inscribed' (Kramsch, 2003:255) and, as Scheu maintains, 'it seems impossible to develop a second language (L2) without being affected culturally in some way' (2000:133). Different factors affect the level of bilingualism and biculturalism, particularly the age at which the languages are learned. A recent study conducted by Weikum et al. in 2007 suggests that the code reading and processing of languages, one or more, begins on a subliminal level at an extremely young age. They found that four month olds can ascertain different languages being spoken by observing the facial movements of the speakers. This ability is lost if the babies remain in a

monolingual home but maintained if they live in a bilingual homes. In other words, the environment is instrumental in fostering bilingualism at that young age. What is more, Scheu asserts that a bilingual child amalgamates both cultural identities to create one bicultural identity instead of developing two separate ones (2000:135).

Surely, this must have serious implications for those, such as Breytenbach, acquiring a second language at a later stage of development as the subliminal learning and integration is forfeited or bypassed.

The link between bilingualism and biculturalism is explored in *Dog Heart* where Breytenbach observes that his friend Marthinus Versfeld was an 'Afrikaner working in English' (Breytenbach, 1999:46). He later says of François Krige's paintings and his selection of themes and methods, that he 'worked in Afrikaans' (112). This blurring of cultural-linguistic lines and overlapping of different genres or mediums reflects Breytenbach's own approach to language and ethnicity in his life, writings and artwork.

One scene in *Dog Heart* illustrates the confusion that can prevail in a multilingual situation when deciding which language to use and which speech community to address. At the school reunion Breytenbach attends, the Happy Valley School principal's behaviour reflects this linguistic uncertainty: when he talks to Breytenbach in Afrikaans he removes his dark glasses but when he speaks in English the principal puts the glasses back on. Finally, someone says: 'Take off that bloody thing, man. This guy speaks Afrikaans just like you and I do' (7). At the same reunion, when introduced to Breytenbach, a young man calls Breytenbach *meneer* but then codeswitches and refers to him as 'comrade' when talking to someone else (Ibid.). Breytenbach does not even write the forms of address in the same style or language: one is in italics and Afrikaans, the other in quotation marks and English. This exemplifies Breytenbach's view of languages and the mixed nature of narrative and speech.

The challenge for bilingual or multilingual speakers is to decide when to use which language and with whom. In *Dog Heart*, Breytenbach says that 'the sound of the bird's song is formed by the shape of its beak – but it was certainly also a choice'

(Breytenbach, 1999, 112). In other words, while a mother tongue is innate and part of identity for him, one can still decide which language or ‘birdsong’ to use and when.

Scheu maintains that bilingualism contributes to ‘cross-cultural understanding’ (2000:149), and speakers must understand the socio-cultural context and the ‘cultural associations’ of the phrase chosen (136). When assuming that ‘language use is culture-based’ two main types of codeswitching can occur: language-motivated and culture-motivated switches (139). These are evident in the changes that can occur in language usage, such as: ‘situational switching’ reflected in channel cues like sentence speed, rhythm, pauses, or in socio-cultural situation; ‘metaphorical switching’ where a change in topic, emphasis or context occurs; ‘emblematic switching’ where phrases, nouns or sentences from the other language are used; ‘intrasentential switching’ where the switched sections conform to the syntactic rules of both languages, and ‘intersentential switching’ where whole sentences are inserted on the base of the other language (140-141).<sup>27</sup>

There are many examples of codeswitching throughout *Dog Heart*. Some are situational, for example, Breytenbach refers to ‘Little Granny Keet’ (Breytenbach, 1999:42), possibly directing this conversation to the English reader but when he and his brother Kwaaiman are discussing her they refer to her as ‘Oumaitjie Keet’ (154). In another scene, Breytenbach chats to an English neighbour when in mid-sentence the man says, ‘...suddenly switching to Afrikaans: *Net arm mense bly daar. Hulle is almal bywoners!* (Only poor people live there. They’re all sub-farmers, or squatters)’ (original italics, 74). This indicates metaphorical switching, an emphasis or topic related change. Breytenbach calls his relatives ‘Aunt Tina’ and ‘Uncle Willy’ (78) not *Oom* or *Tannie*. This could suggest situational switching but may have more to do with speech community membership as his uncle was probably an English speaker and, therefore, not part of Breytenbach’s mother tongue group.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> A sample group of 48 German and Spanish speakers’ speech patterns were analysed in Scheu’s study to see where and why codeswitching took place. The students’ cultural perceptions of the actual languages also influenced their choices.

<sup>28</sup> He travelled from Australia by boat but it is not clear if he was an Australian; if so he would be English speaking.



Breytenbach employs numerous methods when dealing with emblematic switches between languages, or the use of Khoi, Latin, Dutch, French, English and Afrikaans names, phrases and idioms. Bearing in mind Afrikaans is Breytenbach's mother tongue but the memoir is written in English, Afrikaans words are often differentiated to indicate they are 'second language' insertions. In some instances Breytenbach explains or interprets the foreign word or phrase to keep the readers engaged, and in other instances he does not. Ashcroft et al. use the term 'glossing' for these inserted explanations of mother tongue words, and the gap that exists between the original word and the English translation. They maintain that it is within this gap that identity can be expressed and that the omission of translations enables cultural distinctions (1989:62). Whereas they assert a 'polydialectal writer' uses various dialects, glossing, codeswitching, and untranslated words to install 'cultural distinctiveness' (72), Breytenbach does the opposite: he uses these methods specifically to try create a cultural non-distinctiveness so to speak, or an equi-cultural blended narrative.

When first analysing the memoir I thought I would find a consistent, straightforward pattern Breytenbach uses to denote words in other languages, but after much checking I found that Breytenbach indeed uses a plethora of styles to indicate another language or its explanation without obvious reasons as to when and why one method is employed in a situation and not another.<sup>29</sup> For instance, Breytenbach uses italics and/or quotation marks on the L2 or L3 word and provides an English explanation in brackets or quotation marks, such as: *Boom-Boere* (tree Afrikaners) (Breytenbach, 1999:12); '*baas*' (master) (43); *masakhane*, 'building one another' (120). At other times he omits the italics on the L2 or L3 word such as: 'Almôrensfontein' (Every Morning Fountain) (37), Kalkoenkrans (Turkey Rock) (33), or drops the explanation completely: *stoep* (14), *Paradys* (53). Sometimes he uses an English word or phrase to explain an Afrikaans word, for instance: malachite sunbirds (the evocative Afrikaans name is *Jangroentjie*, Johnny Green) (141); or, a braggart, *wind-maker*, as we say in Afrikaans (137).

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<sup>29</sup> So as not to cause confusion in this section on codeswitching, and to exemplify the methods and styles originally employed by Breytenbach, I have omitted quotation marks on direct quotations unless they appear with them in the original text and have inserted Breytenbach's words and punctuation as is.

Then, interestingly, in other places Breytenbach swaps things around translating seemingly everyday English words into Afrikaans, like headcloths (*kopdoeke*) (5), or he blends the languages as in this example: the great transformation, the *groot andersmaak* (63). [Note the definite article here has not been changed to the Afrikaans word *die*.] He also uses italics to indicate an assumed translation from Afrikaans, for example *Uncle* and *Aunt* (56). Further, for no apparent reason, he italicises English words like *bushy-tailed* (101), perhaps to indicate that English idioms, proverbs and sayings are just as foreign as any other language in South Africa.

Intersentential switching, where complete sentences are inserted into the other language, occurs quite frequently in *Dog Heart*. The national anthem, ‘Nkosi sikelele’, is an example of a mix of languages and verses (23). Breytenbach usually includes an Afrikaans sentence with an English translation to keep the reader engaged, for example: ‘*Ek kan sien baas is nie ‘n onbeskofte baas nie ...* (I can see you are not an uncouth master.)’ (159); ‘*Sy’s onse bruid, ons dra haar op die hande!* (She’s our bride, we carry her on our hands)’ (174); (literally – *steek hom in die pad*, sticks him in the road) (131); *Opsaal, Breyten!* (On your horse!) (47). He also uses an English paraphrase of the Afrikaans idiom to do the same: They are cautious (watching the cat from the tree, as Afrikaans would have it) (16);<sup>30</sup> he courted her (the Afrikaans expression: to whirr one’s wing in the dust) (127); Here lies poor old Joe with hands folded; never built a single house. (It rhymes in Afrikaans.) (161).<sup>31</sup>

When Breytenbach includes sayings or words that are directly translated from Afrikaans to English without an explanation, it creates an awkwardness in the narrative, for instance: ‘Dear father, please shoot me now’ (38);<sup>32</sup> [t]he fishes find comfort in his pockets (146)<sup>33</sup>; and also, Koos ‘makes himself out of the feet’ – in other words, he takes to his heels (132). Further, there are words or phrases that seem peculiar in English but do not appear to be direct translations from another language: out-at-arse (59); I chase up a rabbit (188); ... Mr Rigg died at sea, was slipped under

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<sup>30</sup> The exact Afrikaans saying is ‘*die kat uit die boom kyk*’ and suggests caution before you go ahead and do something (Kromhout, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> The words would be ‘*gevou*’ and ‘*gebou*’ in Afrikaans.

<sup>32</sup> A possible translation from the Afrikaans ‘*Liewe vade*’.

<sup>33</sup> The plural of fish in Afrikaans is ‘*visse*’.

the waves (193); and, [s]ome men when they are very sad, frown their foreheads (152). Breytenbach also creates in-jokes in Afrikaans where only speakers familiar with this language would be privy to the humour. For example, he explains that Maître Pierre de Moncul is actually a charlatan called Piet Poephol (183), or the brown politician's wife is just like a white *tannie* (160).

Intrasentential switches, where the syntactical rules of both languages apply to the switched sections, are also used by Breytenbach. Here, I could not assign grammar structure to another specific language but have instead highlighted what the regular structure would be in English and how it differs from the one Breytenbach has inserted. For instance he writes: 'I would use the hooked staff as a *gancho* to bring down closer the branches for picking the figs when they ripened in autumn' (original emphasis, 46). The Standard English sentence structure would read: 'In autumn, when the figs ripened, I would pick them by using the hooked staff as a *gancho* to bring the branches down closer'.

Another example is: 'Wellington's Huguenot High School, where I matriculated years ago, asks by mouth of its headmaster whether my wife, Lotus, and I would consent to being received ceremoniously by the old students' union' (12-13). The Standard English sentence would read: 'On behalf of the Wellington's Huguenot High School, where I matriculated, the headmaster invites me and my wife Lotus to a formal reception organised by the old students' union'.<sup>34</sup> The sentence structure Breytenbach uses here does not seem to reflect an Afrikaans or French style, although it is possible that he is using humour to play on the Huguenots' story of origin (15), demonstrating that they were not as upper-class as their descendents like to think. This highfalutin language and complicated sentence structure may be just as put on as their social ranking.

Jacobs examines how Breytenbach combines the tense formations of both English and Afrikaans by writing past events in the present tense, and incorporating 'the simpler grammatical tense structure of the Afrikaans language in his English narrative'

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<sup>34</sup> The grammatical structure of this sentence was discussed with Gordon, F. (July 2009).

(See Jacobs, 2003:102 for several examples of this). Regarding the language conformity in *Dog Heart*, Jacobs notes several peculiarities:

The English narrative is marked by a number of solecisms, such as mistakes in concord, vocabulary, spelling, and agreement between pronoun and their antecedents. Afrikaans formulations and idiomatic expressions are frequently transliterated into English, sometimes without any explanation. (2003:102)

Schalkwyk comments on similar anomalies in Breytenbach's style in *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* saying that 'the very language of the *Confessions* proclaims his alienation, not simply because he has chosen to write in English rather than in Afrikaans, but because his strangeness to the language is *inscribed* in his many solecisms and lapses in idioms.' (original emphasis, 1994:43 note 6).

However, it seems that in *Dog Heart* it is indeed Breytenbach's intention to deliberately create such a strangeness. In fact, the whole memoir exemplifies the point that there is always something that we, in a multilingual environment and as speakers of a language comprised of many other tongues, will not understand; that will slip through the net of conscious language comprehension. After all, he comments, even the geckos make Khoi sounds (Breytenbach, 1999:28). There does not appear to be a set, regulated pattern that Breytenbach has adopted to define the codeswitching or language changes. Instead, numerous methods are used to insert, switch, or alter a phrase, idiom, sentence or word from one language to another, with or without explanations or translation. This range of styles creates confusion, discomfort and disorientation. Further, some of the L2 interjections are for emphasis, point of view, or inclusion, and yet others are not. It is part of his remarkable talent that Breytenbach is able to take a language and create a sense of exclusion, doubt or awkwardness, even for first language readers. Sometimes you are in the in-group and understand, and at other times, like Lotus, you say '*ja, ja* – without understanding a word' (159).

Usually Breytenbach supplies explanations in order to keep the reader in the loop, but often he withholds, forcing the reader to experience and understand the exclusion that second or third language speakers often feel. There is frequently a moment of doubt where the reader wonders if he or she has really understood what is being said or what, if anything, has been omitted. It is as if Breytenbach is saying, you think you

know this language but you do not. There is no time for complacency, the narrative is constantly moving, switching and shifting, and these irregularities ensure the reader, even a mother tongue speaker, never feels at ease. This approach is best summed up in *A Veil of Footsteps*, where Breytenbach describes the language of dreams, where numerous languages interact or replace each other, and words slot in effortlessly with ‘scant regard for syntactic structure’ (Breytenbach, 2008:196). He queries why a word should have more weight than its equivalent in another language. This dream state, which encapsulates apparent linguistic ease, proficiency and dexterity, is epitomised in the following ‘bastardised’ sentence Breytenbach inserts: ‘The word bird dreams: *Hier en daar is still the ideal endroit to be*’ (Ibid.).

The ability to comprehend one’s mother tongue innately yet interplay with other languages, and the need to belong to a speech community are central to Breytenbach’s life and works. While he says in *Dog Heart* that he finds Afrikaans ‘perfectly apt’ to pursue what he sees is the writer’s role (Breytenbach, 1999:177), his publishing records demonstrate that he has not relied solely on his mother tongue and has, in fact, used other languages particularly for his prose works. His poetry is still more suited to his mother tongue due to its instinctive, stream of consciousness style.

These language choices appear to relate to his relationship with his mother tongue, speech community and cultural affiliations at the time. During his post prison years and the early years of the New South Africa, Breytenbach published four prose works in English: *Mouir: Mirrornotes of a Novel* (1984); *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984); *Memory of Snow and of Dust* (1989); *Return to Paradise* (1993), two collection of essays: *End Papers: Essays, Letters, Articles of Faith, Workbook Notes* (1986) and *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution* (1996), and *Notes of Bird* (1984), a combination of poetry, prose and sketches. He mainly produced poetry in Afrikaans within the same span, namely: four prison poetry series; *Boek: Dryfpunt deel I* (1987); *Soos die so: Toktokkie se Nagregister* (1990); and *Nege landskappe van ons tye bemaak aan 'n beminde* (1993). (*Hart-lam* had Afrikaans and English selections).

Breytenbach did not see the need to ‘wage a struggle for the survival or the imposition of Afrikaans’ (Breytenbach, 1984:355) and in fact, was personally pleased his mother

tongue had ‘...lost its tutelage, its dependency, its privileged link with the state’ (Dimitriu, 1997:87). But with the end of Apartheid and the subsequent loss of Afrikaans’s political standing and clout, Breytenbach’s stance on his mother tongue began to shift from one of detachment and criticism to one of concern. As outspoken as he had been against using the language of an oppressive government, in recent years he has been most vocal about preserving Afrikaans and minority language rights.

In *Dog Heart*, it is Bruinman, the protagonist’s brother who is closely tied to his mother tongue and identity. He is desperate to save his language and fight for Afrikaans (Breytenbach, 1999:182). Loss of language, culture and history is evident in the scene where Breytenbach comes across old books in a dusty museum storeroom. People’s stories have become ‘like dead mosquitoes’ (86) and he wonders: ‘Who will ever read them again?’ (83). Keeping a language alive and vital<sup>35</sup> is the responsibility of the speech community as well as the government. Otherwise the language can land up like the carved names of the British soldiers on the church, which ‘have long since been rubbed from living memory’ (33) and their stories lost.

Breytenbach’s fears for the future of Afrikaans relate in part to the new constitution of South Africa, which officially recognises 11 national languages including English and Afrikaans,<sup>36</sup> and the dominance English enjoys in the country. Breytenbach has openly called this language policy a farce and predicts that what will happen ‘...by decoy or decay, is that South Africa will be an English-speaking nation, where you will have various pockets of different other languages expressing themselves’ (Dimitriu, 1997:86). He explains how this language hierarchy contributes to a lot of the problems in Africa because people are not able to use their own language in their

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<sup>35</sup> According to a 2003 UNESCO taskforce paper titled ‘Language Vitality and Endangerment’, there are nine main factors that contribute to the health and vitality of a language including: intergenerational language transmission, speakers’ attitudes to their mother tongue, government attitudes and policies with regards to the language, number of speakers and proportion to the total population, the availability and quality of materials for language literacy and learning, and the language’s response to new media and domain changes. (<http://www.unesco.org>, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Venter notes there are over 23 languages spoken in South Africa that can be subdivided into seven groups namely: Nguni languages (Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Swati), Sotho languages (North and South Sotho, Tswana), Tsonga, Venda, European languages, Asian languages and other languages (1998:23).

political lives, and this results in political apathy and low involvement by people in their government (Linfield, 2000:271).

South Africa is not unique in this regard. English is of course a global language with extensive use in the media, on the Internet, in politics and commerce. Maluleke in his UNISA thesis 'Language as an Instrument of Power' also debates whether English will become the only official language in South Africa. He argues that the co-existence of English and indigenous languages hastens the demise of indigenous languages. He asserts that English mocks the new language policy: '...regardless of all [the policy's] good intentions, [it] is largely a political gesture, and its chance for success is paper slim' (2005:76). Venter goes even further claiming that English has already attained the status again as 'unofficial official language' (Venter, 1998:33).

The continued prolific use of English in South Africa may seem strange considering it was a prevailing 'settler' language during the Apartheid era. However, as Maluleke comments, despite being a colonial language, English does not seem to have the same political connotations in the South African context as Afrikaans, and the majority of blacks actually see it as 'the language of liberation' (2005:43). Due to the purposeful links between language and racial or ethnic groups during Apartheid, it is no surprise that there are still implications with regards to language choices and self-identification today, as Franchi & Swart found in their study (2003:212).<sup>37</sup>

Having said that, the usage of Afrikaans has actually increased in South Africa from 5.8 million home speakers in 1996 to 6 million in 2001 (Statistics South Africa, 2004:8-9). Despite past associations, Afrikaans, the very language of Apartheid, is currently more frequently chosen as a second language in South African schools than indigenous languages.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Their research, based on 542 undergraduate students from varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds, found that the use of one or more of the languages used by the Apartheid government (English or Afrikaans) or other (mostly Eurocentric) immigrant languages influence how the interviewees identify themselves, their plans to stay in South Africa, and their perceived opportunities in the new dispensation (Franchi & Swart 2003:210).

<sup>38</sup> In 2008, 113 902 out of the total 590 000 matric students chose Afrikaans as an additional language and 491 104 chose English. Only 12 723 selected one of the nine African languages (Govender, 2008).

This could be residual from the Apartheid education era: apparently the lack of indigenous language resources, availability and quality of teachers, attitudes, low uptake at primary school levels and funding issues contribute to these current language preferences (Govender, 2008).

This renaissance of Afrikaans is also apparent in the increased number of Breytenbach's works published in his mother tongue, and seems to coincide with his short return to South Africa. Indeed, he has been quite prolific in Afrikaans in the last decade or so, publishing a large volume of poetry: *Plakboek: Moving on: Verjaarde reisverse vir Hoang Lien* (1994); *Die Hand vol Vere* (1995); *Papier blom: 72 gedigte urt 'n swerfjoernaal* (1999); *Lady One: 99 liefdesgedigte* (2001); *Oorblyfsels: 'n Roudig ter herinnering aan Daantjie Saayman* (1997) and *Die Windvanger* (2007), as well as a prose journal *Woordwerk: Die Kantskryfjoernaal van 'n swerwer* (1999). In addition, he wrote three plays in Afrikaans: *Boklied* (1998); *Johnny Cocroach* (1999); and *Die toneelstuk: n belydenis in twee bedrywe* (2001), and compiled three CDs in Afrikaans: *Om te Breyten* (2000); *Lappesait* (2001); and *Mondmusiek* (2001). A collection of poems, essays and drawings, *Uit die eerste hand*, was published in Dutch in 1995. Interestingly, during this time he seems to have only published one prose piece in English, *Dog Heart: A Travel Memoir* (1998).

Still, this output in his mother tongue has not facilitated a reconciliation between Breytenbach and his speech community. After his plays *Boklied* and later *Die toneelstuk: n belydenis in twee bedrywe* were performed, the Afrikaans press and public lambasted him for the content and vulgarity of the play. The public reaction was fierce with many writing to the Afrikaans news media voicing their displeasure with him and his creative work. Breytenbach in turn wrote a response, in English, to the editor of the Afrikaans newspaper, *Die Burger*, declaring that under no circumstances does he see himself as a member of their ethnic group, and nor did he ever want to be, adding that if he was to be welcomed by the group, he would just politely say, thanks but no thanks<sup>39</sup> (my translation, original Afrikaans in Galloway 2004:29). This bitter dispute came to a head when Breytenbach later indicated that he

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<sup>39</sup> 'Onder geen omstandighede is ek 'n lid van u volk, of sou ek dit ooit wou wees nie. [...] Indien die bevinding is dat ek tot die volk verwelkom behoort te word, kan ek net (beleefd) sê: Dankie, maar nee dankie' (*Die Burger*, 20.4.2001 cited in Galloway, 2004:29).



would never again publish in South Africa or present in public,<sup>40</sup> (my translation, original Afrikaans in Galloway 2004:35) and that from then on his poetry would only be disseminated to a select e-group. As he sees it, an unbridgeable or insurmountable communication gap now exists between him and the Afrikaans people<sup>41</sup> (my translation, original Afrikaans in Galloway, 2004:35). Significantly, following on from this dispute his next memoir, *A Veil of Footsteps*, was released in 2008 in English.

Breytenbach reflects on this ‘personality clash’ further, trying to understand and explain this standoff between himself, his mother tongue and the Afrikaner community. His Hertzog Prize acceptance statement offers some insight into this conflict and poses pertinent questions:

And so I arrived at the place where I can say: I rebelled against the ‘volk’ also in the name of the word. In the name of the mongrel nature of the word. I do not want to apportion blame; I just lost the collective frame of reference. The ‘Afrikaner’ collectivity (formerly a nation now not even a tribe) and the historical ‘I’, Breyten Bitterbrak Buiteboer Ruckus-maker, simply work with opposing logic. Of course I am aware of the provocation my thought might create. People do not want to be hacked away from the safety of group formation, and the questioning of an orthodoxy is experienced as anarchical. What does one propose in the place of it? What does it mean to *belong*?  
(Original emphasis, Naude, 2009)

Belonging seems to be elusive; the very thing Breytenbach cannot attain, achieve or accept. Whereas his innate mother tongue is used in his poetry, his other writings reflect the often tumultuous relationship with his cultural group and his desire to be part of, or distant from the Afrikaans-speaking community. Similar to two like-sides of a magnet, Breytenbach and his cultural group seem drawn to each other on a fundamental level yet repel each other when they get too close. Breytenbach’s use of language is influenced by his personal, cultural and political identity, and fluctuates according to his closeness to his ethnic group and affiliation to his speech community. His language choices in turn impact on his identity and his relationship with his ethnic group.

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<sup>40</sup> ‘...nooit weer in Suid-Afrika sal publiseer of in die openbaar gaan optree nie’ (Diedericks-Hugo, 2002 cited in Galloway, 2004:35).

<sup>41</sup> ‘...het daar ’n onoorbrugbare kommunikasiegaping tussen hom en die Afrikaanse mense ingetree’ (Diedericks-Hugo, 2002 cited in Galloway, 2004:35).

When analysing Ngũgĩ's publishing and writing career, it appears that language largely equates to cultural and national identity for him and has been a way for him to remain within the centre of his ethnic group. This clearly juxtaposes Breytenbach's identity and linguistic struggle and positioning with his ethnic group.

Ngũgĩ is a Gĩkũyũ speaker, which is the largest ethnic group in Kenya with approximately seven million Gĩkũyũ speakers (Lewis, 2009). Despite the size of the group's membership and in a country with 69 listed languages (Ibid.), it is Swahili, not Gĩkũyũ, that is the official national indigenous language along with English.

According to Lodhi, the language chart of Africa clearly reflects the bigger picture of colonial influence on the continent: English is the official language in 19 countries, French in 22, Portuguese in five, and Spanish in one (1993:80). For Ngũgĩ, the 'cultural bomb' dropped by the colonial systems destroys the indigenous people's belief in 'their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves' (Ngũgĩ, 1986:3). The colonial governing system superimposes the colonisers' worldviews, culture and way of life, and makes the local population identify with other languages (Ibid.). Required to communicate in a second language, the colonial child is conditioned to see the world and his/her place in it through a foreign culture and the imposed language rather than its own (17). In an interview with Rodrigues in 2004, Ngũgĩ expanded this line of thought saying that when people lose their own language they not only lose 'the most important' means to define and create their own culture but they become forced to define themselves, and be defined, via a European language and memory. Consequently, their own local narrative vanishes or will be relayed 'as a dream or mediated by that other, foreign, memory' (2004:162-3).

One anecdote Ngũgĩ recalls demonstrates this replacement of narrative and voice: he visited a home where the mother was speaking English to her child who attended an English-medium school. The child could not respond to Ngũgĩ's Gĩkũyũ questions or answer him in Gĩkũyũ, and he mourns this loss of proficiency in indigenous language

(Ngũgĩ, 1981:55). For him such a scenario is tantamount to giving up one's culture and assimilating.<sup>42</sup>

In the opening few paragraphs of *Matigari*, Ngũgĩ inverts the colonial tendency to portray indigenous people in violent and savage terms and the colonialists in a noble light, and he turns the colonial diction and imagery around: in the hunting scene, Ngũgĩ portrays the settlers as savage hunters who cut off the fox's tail and smear blood over a woman's face (Ngũgĩ, 1989:3). At the end of the novel, a mirror scene is created when Matigari, Gũthera and Mũriũki are on the run and being hunted like foxes by the authorities (172). This similarity between the colonial settlers and the current establishment where both are seen as savage hunters completes the inversion of the typical colonial literature model.

JanMohamed maintains colonial literature did not control the local people during the dominant stage of colonialism, but rather, in the hegemonic (or neo-colonialism) phase where the indigenous people often accept the coloniser's values, attitudes, ethics, and institutions. He calls this 'the active and direct "consent" of the dominated' and notes it was often backed by military might (1985:62).

In Kenya, English became the major language in government, legislation and commerce, and together with the education, media, printing, and distribution systems, played a major role in ensuring the colonial agenda prevailed. This cultural control was sustained through the English-medium schools and UK-affiliated universities. Ngũgĩ was educated in such a high school and in universities in Makerere and Leeds (see Sicherman 1995 for more details on Ngũgĩ's education). Mother tongue education in Kenya was sidelined to such a degree that, Ngũgĩ says, Swahili was not a compulsory subject and was merely offered as an alternative to French and German in the syllabus (Ngũgĩ, 1981:43). He also describes the trauma and 'psychological violence' (Ngũgĩ, 1986:9) of the colonial education experience and the overwhelming presence of English. Wise proposes that it is the written language that is in

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<sup>42</sup> Bisong views such a scenario differently and supposes that Nigerian parents would send their child to an English-medium international school because they want a multilingual environment for the child and are confident that the mother tongue and its competence are not threatened (Bisong, 1995:124-125). [Perhaps the difficulty lies in knowing when the language speakers are being broadminded or when they are jeopardising the language and cultural group.]

fact the source of trauma here and not the colonial language as such: ‘Ngũgĩ may fail to take into account the implications of the fact that the written language of *any* educational system (insofar as it is written at all) will inevitably cause a rupture within a child’s oral-aural lifeworld [sic], even within a monolingual setting’ (original emphasis, Wise, 1997:136).

Either way, the pervasiveness of English did have a huge impact on indigenous languages and perceptions, as Ngũgĩ remarks: ‘In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language...’ (Ngũgĩ, 1986:11). A scene in *Weep Not, Child* illustrates the classroom system where children learned by rote and the shame and anger the teacher felt when they got the greeting wrong in front of the ‘European’ woman, calling her ‘Sir’ (Ngũgĩ, 1987:46-47). Sicherman notes that ‘this Europeanizing [sic] of the students’ was an objective of educators in East Africa (1995:25). As a consequence of such an English education system Ngũgĩ became what Sicherman calls an ‘anglophone writer’ (19).

English also became ‘*the* main determinant of a child’s progress up the ladder of formal education’ (original emphasis, Ngũgĩ, 1986:12) and was ‘the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom’ (Ibid.). Success through this education system created access, to some extent, to the dominant culture’s language group.

In *Matigari*, a clear depiction of this education system and pressure to conform to European models is portrayed in the diction, binary terms, metaphors, metonymy and irony Ngũgĩ uses. For example, John Boy Junior talks of his father’s vision in sending him abroad to Fort Hare and the London School of Economics to get an education ignoring ‘the idiots who were mumbling nonsense about sharing the last bean’ (Ngũgĩ, 1989:49). Matigari then realises that John Boy Junior is the child the community sent away to get this English education, and says: ‘Are you the boy we sent abroad? The boy the cost of whose education we all contributed to ... The boy for whom we sang: He shall come back and clean up our cities, our country, and deliver us from slavery?’ (48). Not only did John Boy Junior obtain diplomas, certificates, and degrees but he also learned the British way of life, where to eat, what to wear, and what it is to be an individual. This is typical of the covert way colonialism and neo-colonialism went about changing a person’s culture and identity.

From a collective-orientated background, John Boy Junior returns as an individual focused on corporate gains and unmoved by the fate of his community or his role in it. Matigari says: ‘We used to think that you educated ones would stand firmly against the whites-who-reap-where-they-have-not-sown. What did you do in Europe? Where did this friendship between you and the clans of the white parasites come from?’ (50).

What Ngũgĩ later terms ‘corporonialism’ in *Wizard of the Crow* (Olende, 2006:n.p.), an apparent merge of the words ‘corporate’ and ‘colonialism’, is a theme that is prominent throughout *Matigari* and Ngũgĩ demonstrates its violent role in stripping Africa of its resources (Ngũgĩ, 1989:14, 50, 148). He also establishes obvious similarities and parallels between the colonial means of control and the neo-colonial ones. Kenyan readers most probably would have recognised the radio station in *Matigari*, ‘The Voice of Truth’, as their national radio station because it sounds strikingly similar to what Uskalis mentions was the radio station in Kenya, the ‘Voice of Kenya’ (1996:288). These both echo Fanon’s description of the radio programme, ‘This is the Voice of Algeria’, and his view of the radio as ‘spokesman of the colonial world’ (1965:57), even though in the case of *Matigari* it is of the neo-colonial world. Ngũgĩ uses irony verging on farce in the many radio snippets where some of the most bizarre announcements are made, and these broadcasts portray those in power in a ludicrous light.

In the novel, the notion of copying another culture and language group is highlighted with the use of parrot imagery. At the meeting with the Minister of Truth and Justice it is revealed that ‘Johnny Boy’ and the Minister had studied together and shared the same educational institutions and path. Also in attendance is the editor from the *Daily Parrot*, a Professor of the History of Parratology, and a lecturer in the philosophy of Parratology. They sing from *Songs of a Parrot*, a book of hymns (Ngũgĩ, 1989:101, 104, 108, 119), and even the Minister’s tie has the party emblem of a parrot on it (100-101). The Provincial Commissioner reassures the audience that the professors will write a new history omitting this rebellious Matigari incident: ‘Let us with one accord, like loyal parrots, agree that Matigari ma Njirũngi was just a bad dream’ (118). This reference to mimicry – a parrot usually just repeats what someone says – also comes through in the slogans the politicians use by rote, such as: ‘Long live loyalism!’ or ‘*I am an African Anglophile and proud of it!*’ (original italics, 102). This

is contrasted with the teacher's defiance at the public meeting where he shouts: 'I shall never sing like a parrot, never!' (121).

For Ngũgĩ, it becomes a duty for African writers to retain their local memory, to appropriate their own story. He has written quite extensively on the link between language and culture and how '[l]anguage carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world' (Ngũgĩ, 1986:16). Further, Ngũgĩ sees language as inseparable from an ethnic group '...with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world' (Ibid.). In 'Kenyan Culture: the National Struggle for Survival', Ngũgĩ outlines the process of language choice saying that if writers want to be part of their own national narrative and connect with past and present writers, then they should write in their own 'national language'. Alternatively, if they want to connect with a foreign audience and narrative, they should use that foreign language. He reminds Kenyan writers that the language battle is closely tied in with the struggle of 'Kenyan national culture against imperialist domination' (Ngũgĩ, 1981:60-61).

It is this close relationship with cultural-ethnic group and speech community that is critical to Ngũgĩ. In an interview in 1993, Ngũgĩ emphasises the significant role of community above that of language itself saying:

If I had a language as a writer, but that language had no community of speakers anywhere in the world, then I do not think that that language would really be my world. In other words, I am able to possess language as my world precisely because it is the language of the community. (Cantalupo, 1993:219)

This sense of, and need for, community has shaped Ngũgĩ's relationship with language, literature, orature and his ethnic group. In *Matigari*, the jail scene exemplifies how Ngũgĩ views the group and the individual. He uses metonymy to link the peasant, thief, murderer, vagrant, student, pickpocket, worker, teacher, and drunkard to the groups they represent. These people are nameless, not seen as individuals but rather part of a larger group and community, but Gĩcerũ, the informant, is named (Ngũgĩ, 1989:106). Ngũgĩ, thereby, shows there are just a few people who turn their backs on their own communities and stand out as individuals,

often to the detriment of these larger groups: behaviour that he (or the narrator) does not condone.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1962 Ngũgĩ attended the 'Writers of English Expression' conference that took place at Makerere University in Uganda. While he could take part in the conference, he realised that indigenous writers who had published in African languages were not able to participate (Sicherman, 1995:22; Ngũgĩ 1986:6). This consciousness of indigenous versus colonial narrative led him to eventually reject Afro-European writers or those Africans who write in another language and not their indigenous languages. While he had used the novel genre to write *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977) in English, Ngũgĩ was moving towards promotion of indigenous languages where authors wrote a true African story, by Africans in an African voice. It was becoming clearer to him that indigenous groups had to work from within and not 'develop our cultures and literatures through borrowed tongues and imitation' (Ngũgĩ, 1981:65). At that stage, Ngũgĩ helped edit *Zuka*, a journal that promoted submissions in indigenous languages (Lovesay, 2002:163 Note 13), and translations would become a major focus later in his career.

As English is a means of 'spiritual subjugation' (Ngũgĩ, 1986:9) for Ngũgĩ, it is impossible to have a 'balanced equation' between languages if all other languages have to use English as a measuring stick of validity or 'have to come to English to mean something' (Freeman, 2006:n.p.). In an interview in 2006, Ngũgĩ explains the logic of using his mother tongue and not English, putting it very aptly: 'There is something very wrong in saying to a human being, "Let me cut off your legs and I will give you artificial ones, which will be perfect." I'm saying let us walk on our own two feet' (Olende, 2006:n.p.).

Part of establishing his cultural identity with his own speech community involved changing his name from James Ngũgĩ to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o by 1970, and adopting Gĩkũyũ for his creative works. This set him apart from the Eurocentric literary scene that dominated Africa at the time.

‘On the Abolition of the English Department’, which appeared in *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* in 1972, highlighted the need for African literature and language to have a place in curricula.

Following the Makerere conference, other papers and conferences discussed African literature in school and/or university syllabi, such as the Dakar and Freetown conferences of 1963 whose proceedings were published as ‘African Literature and the Universities’ in 1965, and the Nairobi Conference of English and Literature Departments of Universities of East and Central Africa in 1969 (see Ngũgĩ 1986:95 regarding the latter). In 1986 a conference called ‘The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse’ took place at the University of California where twenty papers were delivered that were ‘implicitly, if not explicitly, committed to exploring and articulating different aspects of minority cultures’, the importance of archival work, and diversity (JanMohamed and Lloyd, 1987:6-8). In 2000, almost forty years after Makerere, ‘Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures into the 21st Century’ was held in Asmara, Eritrea where writers and scholars from all over Africa and the world issued a declaration on African languages and literature. They called for dialogue between African languages, democracy, the right to learn in one’s mother tongue and develop these languages, to develop research, science and technology using African languages, and to overcome linguistic gender bias (<http://www.outreach.psu.edu>, 2009). Ngũgĩ was one of the presiding chairs at Asmara, and many of the proposals align with his personal convictions about the use of indigenous language and the need to foster translations and dialogue between languages.

In a recent interview with Rodrigues, Ngũgĩ said writing in his mother tongue has allowed him to demonstrate ‘that an African language can talk about anything in the world’ (2004:167). He sees it as vital that Gĩkũyũ-speaking intellectuals produce academic material in Gĩkũyũ as, he explains: ‘Something is wrong when you have an entire intellectual elite producing knowledge in a foreign language that is not accessible to the ordinary men and women’ (164).

Writing in his mother tongue gives Ngũgĩ the opportunity to appeal to a large indigenous audience that can enjoy his novels. Even for those illiterate in Gĩkũyũ,



extracts of his works such as *Devil on the Cross* were read out in groups, families, or by professional readers and the novel became appropriated ‘into the oral tradition’ (Ngũgĩ, 1986:83).

Oral tradition transcends the limitations of the written form and continues to play an integral part in Kenyan and African society. These oral traditions can include ‘folktales, music, dance, myths, fables, narrative proverbs, and ballads’ and always conclude with a ‘definite message to relay to the readers’ (Cloete and Madadzhe, 2004:34-37). Ngũgĩ based *Matigari* on a Gĩkũyũ oral tale of a man in search of a cure for an illness (Ngũgĩ, 1989:vii), and in the novel, the protagonist looks for a cure for the socio-economic and political malady apparent in his country.

This blend of oral tale and novel genre enables Ngũgĩ to incorporate many aspects of Kenyan culture and traditions familiar to his mother tongue audience such as riddles, fables, songs, the element of the supernatural, biblical motifs, proverbs, and local historical anecdotes. *Matigari*’s quest for Truth and Justice is explored through a series of riddles, questions and fables (80, 97, 112) and the search for their meaning and solutions. Ngũgĩ uses magic to create hyperbole, a sense of myth and drama in the novel. For example, *Matigari* seems to transform from a dwarf to a giant (60), stones thrown at him change into doves (73) and bullets into water (173).

The narrative has several references to songs (92, 101, 119), plays (102) and dance (71). There are intermittent bursts of song throughout the novel as well as numerous radio announcements. These create an auditory feel to the work and insert verse into the storyline like one would find in a play: one imagines a public reading would involve actual singing of these lines and voicing of local rhythm.<sup>43</sup> The songs also have didactic value for the characters and audience and can be divided into four main categories namely: the way things were: ‘We shared even the single bean that fell upon the ground’ (6, 55); the way things are at present: ‘You foreign oppressor / Pack your bags and leave! / For the owner of this house / Is on his way!’ (46); songs of resistance: ‘Show me the way to a man / Whose name is *Matigari* ma Njirũngi / Who

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<sup>43</sup> Balogun maintains that *Matigari* is ‘an oral narrative performance’ (1995:161) and designed for ‘oral reception’ as Ngũgĩ appeals to the reader/listener in his opening notes (130).

stamps his feet to the rhythm of bells / And the bullets jingle / And the bullets jingle’ (71, 77); and songs of hope for the future: ‘Even if you detain us / Victory belongs to the people. / Victory belongs to the people! / Even if you kill us...’ (121-122); and, ‘Victory shall be ours!’ (175). The power of song as a political tool is not lost on the Minister and he reacts by banning ‘subversive songs’ (122) and the Provincial Commissioner declares that ‘[n]o song, no story or play or riddle or proverbs mentioning Matigari ma Njirũngi will be tolerated’ (118).

Ngũgĩ was enthusiastic about interactive theatre and this may have proven to be his ideal medium had he been permitted to pursue it, as it incorporates close interaction with his language group and intense connection with his culture, traditions and people. As mentioned in the previous chapter, collaboration on the play *Ngaahika ndeenda* (1977) (*I Will Marry When I Want*) written with Ngũgĩ wa Mirĩĩ, proved to be a pivotal point for Ngũgĩ. It was produced at the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community and Cultural Centre and there was enormous input from Gĩkũyũ speakers with regards to the script, idioms, rehearsals, historical facts, songs, and the debate over language (Ngũgĩ, 1986:59). In an interview in 2004, Ngũgĩ said that this contact with the community is what convinced him to change to Gĩkũyũ ‘after years of intellectual dithering’ (Poza, 2004:n.p.).

This kind of experiential theatre resembles what Wise describes as the West African griot epic where a play is never performed in the same way twice and is influenced by audience and occasion (Wise, 1997:138, Ngũgĩ, 1993:19). Breytenbach describes something similar, a play called ‘Wasan Kara’, which is put on every year in Niger and lasts the whole day (Breytenbach, 1990:111). Apparently the whole population participates and the play includes historical scenes, imitation and often satire of the real life protagonists: ‘Their masters, for one day, have become puppets. History, for a day, is in their grasp’ (Ibid.).

Perhaps this is what the Kenyan officials feared when, in March 1982, they closed the Centre and banned theatre in the area. Gikandi suggests the Kenyatta government wanted to avoid an allegiance developing between ‘radicalized [sic] intelligentsia and a disgruntled peasantry’, and that the subsequent Arap Moi regime feared

‘a resurgence of Gĩkũyũ nationalism, which had often used culture as its most powerful mode of insurgency’ (Gikandi, 2000:207).

The Kamĩrĩthũ episode impacted heavily on Ngũgĩ’s identity, particularly his language theory and audience choice. He was shocked that for returning to his mother tongue, those within his own language community had detained him in maximum security without trial for a year: ‘I had been imprisoned by an African government for writing in an African language’, he says (Ngũgĩ, 2004:15). He goes on to explain how he made a decision to write his creative works in Gĩkũyũ and not English: ‘I had to find a way of connecting with the language for which I had been incarcerated. It was not a matter of nostalgia. I was not being sentimental. I needed to make that contact in order to survive. It was an act of resistance’ (Ibid.).

So it seems it was not so much an anti-English move but more a pro-Gĩkũyũ one that tipped Ngũgĩ to change the language of his creative expression. This correlates to criteria set out by Chinweizu et al. in 1980 where they proposed legitimate African literature was material written by African writers, in African languages and for an African audience (1980:11-12).

While in jail, Ngũgĩ wrote *Caitani mutharaba-Ini* in Gĩkũyũ. This novel was later translated into *Devil on the Cross* in 1982. During the launch of the English novel in Britain, it became apparent that Ngũgĩ’s life would be in danger if he returned to Kenya. He therefore stayed in Britain, effectively in exile, and immersed himself in academic study and political thought.

Ngũgĩ’s views on language have since been widely documented in his essays, lectures and speeches. He has produced essays in English including: *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya* (1983), *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993), and *Penpoints Gunpoints and Dreams* (1998). His creative works have been in Gĩkũyũ: he has written three children’s books and his last few novels have all been in his mother tongue.

When he started writing creatively in Gĩkũyũ, he found he had difficulties with words, tenses and tonal variations (Kasanga and Kalume, 1996:47, Ngũgĩ, 1986:74). He also found variances in the spelling of Gĩkũyũ words that resulted from the protestant and catholic missionaries' versions of the Gĩkũyũ sound systems (Ngũgĩ, 1986:67). However, he has obviously overcome these limitations: by 1990, his article 'Imperialism of Language: English, a Language of the World?' was published in Gĩkũyũ in the *Yale Journal of Criticism* (McLaren, 1998:393) and his latest novel in Gĩkũyũ is over 700 pages.

Many have commented on Ngũgĩ's staunch linguistic approach saying he found in his mother tongue a 'cultural shelter' from the alienation he felt in English (Guerrero-Strachan, 2005:78), and that writing in English made him lose a 'Gĩkũyũness' which is a more specific identity than an 'Africanness' or 'Kenyaness' (Fox, 121 2003).

Writing in his mother tongue allows this 'Gĩkũyũness' to come through not only in the language obviously, but also in the metaphors, images, codeswitching and humour that are dispersed through *Matigari*. Puns, irony and humour convey Ngũgĩ's disdain for the neo-colonialists, corporate owners and politicians. A sign at the racecourse reads 'CITY JOCKEY CLUB. NOW OPEN FOR ALL RACES' (Ngũgĩ, 1989:147). This play on the word 'race' creates a pun as it means ethnic groups here and not horse races, which one would normally associate with racecourses. Likewise, the guard at the Anglo-American Leather and Plastic Works wears a uniform with the words 'Guard, Company Property' (10). Ngũgĩ is ridiculing the economic situation where corporate multinationals effectively own local resources and people.

Ngũgĩ also creates Gĩkũyũ anagrams and abbreviations that, when read together, form a cryptic joke that Gĩkũyũ readers would understand. For example, he writes: Anglo-American International Conglomerate of Insurance (AICI), Agribusiness Co-ordinating International Organisation (ACIO) and Bankers' International Union (BIU). The footnote explains that the abbreviations make up words in the Gĩkũyũ language: '*Aici*: thieves; *Acio*: those; *Biu*: thorough; hence, "the real thieves"' (original italics, 50). Another example is the party name, Kĩama Kĩrĩa Kĩrathana: Gĩkũyũ for 'The Ruling Party' (119). This forms the abbreviation KKK, which the reader would understand as being synonymous with American white supremacists.

The politicians' speeches and the radio announcements are often tongue-in-cheek and full of irony. One example is when the chairman of the local KKK branch declares that Karl Marx, Lenin and Mao should be denied work permits (Ibid.), illustrating his ignorance and detachment from reality and the people. These scenarios parody Ngũgĩ's view of the Arap Moi regime. In an interview with Cantalupo, Ngũgĩ talks about Arap Moi having been a British appointee during the Mau Mau struggle and then rising to power after independence, and he gives examples of elsewhere in Africa where this type of compliance occurred. Ngũgĩ points out that these leaders rely on the West and weapons for their power and do not feel accountable or loyal to the people (1993:215).

In the novel, Ngũgĩ utilises compounded or hyphenated words to draw attention to the disparity between the current situation and the way things should be. Repeated use of these hyphenated words that denote people's actions, makes the text appear very convoluted, illogical and absurd. For example: 'white-man-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed' (Ngũgĩ, 1989:46) refers to the settlers and 'He-who-sows' (97) refers to the local workers. Numerous repetitions of these type of labels within a few paragraphs force the reader to stop and question what is really going on here – in the paragraph and in the country – and highlight just how 'upside-down' (137, 138, 150) the status quo is.

Proverbs are another means whereby Ngũgĩ exposes dysfunction. According to Gyasi, when writers create characters that use proverbs to express their thoughts, the writers are emphasising their connection to 'African culture and wisdom' as well as an understanding of their 'heritage and linguistic resources' (2003:151). There are numerous examples of these generational truths or sayings in *Matigari* such as: 'One must never scorn a grain of sand or a drop of rain' (Ngũgĩ, 1989:89); 'Mũriũki added salt to his story. Their thoughts grew wings' (69). But there are also what appear to be pseudo-proverbs, sayings that sound like proverbs. Without being a mother tongue speaker it is difficult to verify if the proverbs are genuine, but because of who is speaking and their being so out of touch with the people, the reader can speculate that they would get the saying wrong. Some examples are when the police say: 'Let him who has ears listen. And he who has not got any should borrow his mother's' (107)

or when the politician says: ‘Provoking this company will be exactly the same as sticking a finger in the nose of the ruling party’ (108).

Conversely, some words like *mũgumo* are used to show a genuine connection with the past and the people. Balogun maintains that in *Weep Not, Child*, the word *mũgumo* links in to Gĩkũyũ mythology as it is apparently under this tree their ancestors founded the Gĩkũyũ nation (1995:149). The Gĩkũyũ reader would understand the significance of this word. There are frequent references to *mũgumo*, metonymy for Gĩkũyũ cultural heritage, in *Matigari* (Ngũgĩ, 1989: 3, 62, 139, 144, 153, 157, 163, 171, 172, 173, 175). Ngũgĩ creates momentum by its repeated use towards the end of the novel. The pace parallels that of the galloping horse image which epitomises the empowerment of Mũriũki and his rapid approach to the *mũgumo* tree of true national freedom and cultural heritage. This, with the destruction of the house depicting colonial rule, is what will lead to true liberation and ultimate decolonisation.

The three sections of the novel are linked by other recurring images. Some have already been covered in more detail in the previous chapter, like the car and horse motifs, but there are others, such as fire and biblical images that sustain the themes of restitution and justice. Fire becomes the symbol for communal living (Matigari hopes to go home and light a fire together with his people), cleansing of the past (razing of Mũriũki’s house, the burning of John Boy and Settler Williams effigies, and the house burning down at the end) and hope in the future (fire of liberation).

Biblical references convey ethical perspectives and morality. There are two complete sets of the Ten Commandments written out in full in *Matigari*; one in the beginning of the novel (34) where Gũthera talks about her father and her becoming a born-again Christian, and the other at the public meeting where they are read out by the priest (120). This repetition depicts the disparity between the personal and political adherence to these laws, and the duplicity of the political situation where there appear to be two sets of rules, one for the workers, fighters, and children, and another for the settlers, multinational owners and politicians. Gũthera’s ethical code and values – she decides to sacrifice her father and save her virginity, and adopts an 11<sup>th</sup> commandment of never sleeping with policemen – differ greatly from the politicians’ and settlers’ set of values where they bear false witness, commit adultery, steal, covet

others' things, and murder. These opposing moral codes are linked by the narrator's pertinent question: 'What was to be righted first? The condition which led people to sin, or the souls of the people who sinned?' (86). One can assume Ngũgĩ's preference is the former.

Imagery, proverbs and language used in a text or play can relay cultural affiliations or nuances. The African audience or reader was often multilingual, and culturally diverse or astute. Ngũgĩ comments that African peasantry had the ability to communicate in multiple languages in a region, including their mother tongues, and had no problem belonging to a local, multicultural or regional identity (Ngũgĩ, 1986:23). Lodhi notes that diversity of languages means that most Africans can often speak, read and write their mother tongues plus the national and official languages (indigenous and colonial) in their country, a neighbouring country's language and usually a language used in commerce (1993:80). Although multilingualism is common in Africa, Ngũgĩ would prefer prioritising the languages, placing local African literature ahead of regional or international ones. For him, the ideal order would be Kenya, East Africa, Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the rest (Ngũgĩ, 1981:38).

Bearing in mind *Matigari* was originally written in Gĩkũyũ, this first language effectively became a second language when the novel was translated into English by Wangũi wa Goro. The issue of glossing, codeswitching and untranslated words is difficult to ascertain in the translated version and I was unable to view the Gĩkũyũ version to confirm if a definitive pattern exists in that original publication.<sup>44</sup> The syntactical or linguistic variances in Standard English displayed in some of Ngũgĩ's English novels are, therefore, less relevant to *Matigari*. A few methods are used to denote emblematic codeswitching between Gĩkũyũ, Swahili and English in this translation. Perhaps these L2 words would not have been denoted at all in the original because the audience, being familiar with these other languages, would have understood them in their original language. In which case, these words have only been denoted in the translation for the sake of the English language reader. Sometimes, a footnote explains the meaning of the L2 or L3 word for example: “‘Shauri Yako’”\*

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<sup>44</sup> This was not available from the UNISA Library or locally.

appears in the text and the footnote reads ‘*Shauri Yako* (Kiswahili): “That’s Your Problem”’ (Ngũgĩ, 1989:25). Likewise, ‘lasso\*’ appears in the text and the footnote reads ‘*lasso* (Kiswahili): a wrapper’ (28).

At other times the L2 or L3 word and the English translation are inserted into the text with an explanation but without denoting the original language: *Uvumi* – rumour-mongering (104); a huge *mũgumo*, a fig tree (3), or a broader explanation is offered in the footnote but the origin of the word is again omitted: ‘*Matatu*: originally an unlicensed “pirate” taxi. *Matatus* are now a recognised form of public transport, comprising cars or converted pick-ups, usually crammed with passengers, who often engage in lively debate, exchanging news, stories and gossip’ (84). One assumes the Gĩkũyũ reader would recognise whether these words are in Gĩkũyũ or Swahili and they are only being explained, once again, for the English reader. Finally, there are instances where neither an explanation nor a footnote is provided, such as: ‘At the time, Matigari, Gũthera and Mũriũki were sitting under a *leleshwa* bush...’ (136, 141). The reason for the omission here could be due to the three main characters having a mutual understanding and thus not needing a translation, or another explanation could be that the Gĩkũyũ reader/listener and the three main characters have a mutual understanding and also need no explanation. Either way, the English reader is not privy to the in-group communication.

At other times a footnote informs the reader when English is being spoken, but in the original novel one assumes it would have been obvious as the rest of the text would have been in Gĩkũyũ. For example, John Boy Junior and Settler Williams Junior speak to each other in English: ‘*Bob, come and listen to a bloke who claims that my house belongs to him*’ (44). The footnote reads: ‘Italics here indicate that English, not Gĩkũyũ, is being spoken.’ Some have commented that these italics indicate Settler Williams Junior’s control over John Boy Junior and ‘his alien, English speech in italics’ reflects this (Tobias, 1997:167), or that they show a ‘lack of mastery of English’ (Gerard, 1984 cited in Kasanga and Kalume 1996:44). However, it is probably merely a practical method to indicate codeswitching.

Intersentential switches occur quite often in *Matigari* where a complete sentence in Swahili or English is inserted into the text, as in the above paragraph. The Swahili



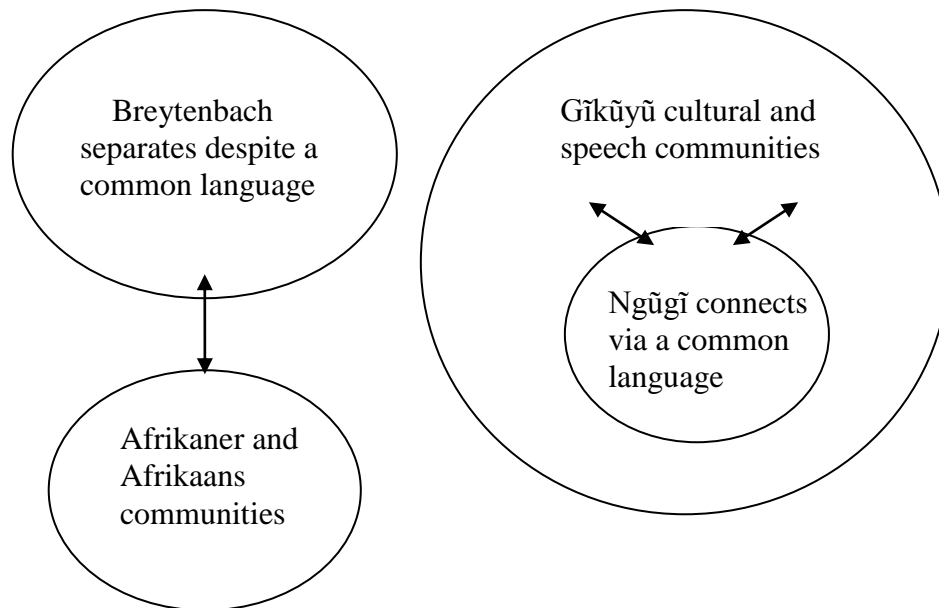
sentences usually have a footnote, like this: ‘*Maendeleo ya muafirika maendeleo ya wanawake* (Kiswahili): “African people’s progress, women’s progress”’ (Ngũgĩ, 1989:153); or ‘*Sisi mbwa kali* (Kiswahili): “we are fierce dogs”’ (174). Most of the Swahili sentences in *Matigari* seem to be attributed to the police or politicians. This could indicate a culture-based codeswitch due to the dynamics of power between Gĩkũyũ and Swahili speakers in Kenya. If so, this would then place the Gĩkũyũ speakers on the side of the masses and the other language speakers on the side of the establishment.

In this translation, English words sometimes appear awkward in that they are very formal. Once again, as it is a translated work we cannot deduce whether Ngũgĩ intended that tone to come through from the Gĩkũyũ or whether he would have preferred a more colloquial one. Examples of this formality are: ‘I shan’t come in’ (23); ‘You will know exactly whom you are dealing with’ (31); ‘I shan’t disappoint you’ (49); and ‘So I bid my lips be silent’ (62).

Ultimately it is his mother tongue and culture that steer Ngũgĩ’s work despite the insertion of L2 words or sayings. This mirrors Ngũgĩ’s writing and academic career where he has continued his commitment to Gĩkũyũ. In 1989, he moved to the United States where he became Visiting Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Yale. He has since lectured in English and Comparative Literature, and is the Director of the International Centre of Writing and Translation, at the University of California which enables him to be at the forefront of language theory, implementation and promotion. His latest novel in Gĩkũyũ, *Murogi wa Kagogo*, translated as *Wizard of the Crow*, was published in 2006.

So from this chapter it can be seen that Breytenbach’s reluctance to associate his mother tongue with his Afrikaner identity, and his cultural group’s criticism of his liberal views and at times provocative creative expression, has caused massive rifts between the two. Breytenbach still predominantly uses Afrikaans in his poetry but his last two memoirs were written and published in English. He has attempted to separate himself from his language group despite their common language, firstly due to the role of Afrikaans in Apartheid, and more recently because of reaction to his creative works and his disappointment in the political dispensation in South Africa.

Whether this impasse changes over time remains to be seen but judging from Breytenbach's past patterns, it most probably will. Breytenbach's thoughts on the nature of language as a bastardised, intermingled and malleable tool echo his inclusive approach to personal identity. These are demonstrated in the actual narrative of *Dog Heart* where various tongues are interwoven, switched and combined.



Ngũgĩ, on the other hand, uses his mother tongue as a barometer of cultural affiliation and a way for him to remain in the centre of his ethnic group despite his physical distance from it. This correlates to his stance on cultural identity and he intentionally connects to his people through or via his mother tongue. Ngũgĩ has purposefully pursued an academic and literary career with Gĩkũyũ at the forefront, and has promoted the use of indigenous language for all, but for those in Africa in particular.

### CHAPTER THREE TRANSLATION AND CREATIVE PROCESS

The authors' mother tongues and other languages play an important part in both writers' creative processes, writings and lives, and as such it seems necessary to briefly discuss the matter of translation. Their views on the necessity, limitations, and relevance of translating works are briefly discussed here with succinct references to *Dog Heart* and *Matigari*.

As mentioned previously, it is difficult to ascertain differences between the original and translated versions of *Matigari* as access to the original was not possible, and Gĩkũyũ is not my mother tongue. Neither am I fluent in Afrikaans. These are limitations that restrict analysis in certain areas of this dissertation.

Translation creates a wider readership or dialogue with people outside of a first language speech community while allowing the authors to write in their mother tongue if they choose. Both Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ have had their works translated, or have themselves translated their writing.

In *Dog Heart*, Breytenbach uses the chameleon metaphor (Breytenbach, 1999:117, 133, 144) to exemplify the process of change or adaptability often needed in a multicultural or multilingual situation. This reptile camouflages with ease, blends into its environment and adapts to shifting circumstances. In *Dog Heart*, the chameleon is depicted as pale, transparent, lacking colour and shrivelled. This dysfunction illustrates the loss of its natural ability to adapt and thus, its vulnerability.

This need to blend into the environment is a priority as Breytenbach describes very accurately in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*:

You see, an actor must fashion his life around that of a character or the ideas or the tradition he's trying to portray. He must make an abstraction of himself, like the chameleon. He is the imitator moving over foreign territory in such a way that his life will not be endangered. The actor as a person must become invisible. Just a situation of view, a transit point, an impersonation – better still, a translation. (Breytenbach, 1990:24)

Breytenbach sees the writer as also having this power, via the creative process, to change things, camouflage names for protection while keeping the rest the 'verbal

truth' (Breytenbach, 1999:167). He describes this creative process in rather violent terms saying: 'Writing is also in its own way a stone making the clear water of memory murky. Or maybe it is a Joseph Rodgers knife separating the head from the body' (Ibid.).

If the writing process is like severing the head from the body, then perhaps translation can be seen as reattaching of the head to the body – or even of another head to the body. It is somewhat clumsy, somewhat inadequate, but the best one can do when performing surgery with a pocket knife and cumbersome thread at one's disposal – certainly not invisible stitching.

In an interview with Dimitriu in 1997, Breytenbach discusses the issue of translation quite extensively. He explains the difficulties involved: that it is almost impossible to accurately translate from one language to another because of the values, associations and emotions imbedded in both (1997:68). He likens the process to that of taking a chick out of a nest and then putting it back again. The bird has an 'instinctive distaste' that the chick has been handled by others and, it is likewise with translation, 'the first intimate link between the person and the work has been broken' (75).

Breytenbach acknowledges the independence of the finished translated work saying that it is effectively a work written by the translator and not the author: 'It is not my poem anymore' (76). Yet he celebrates this new 'strange hybrid product and process' (77) and mentions the time 25 different Italian poets translated his poems into their dialects, and describes the wonderful variations that resulted (70).

His advice to translators is to avoid pandering to the audience's expectations and to maintain the integrity or foreignness of the original. 'Keep at least something of its strangeness intact' (83). It is this very awkwardness that is so prevalent in *Dog Heart*.

Breytenbach frequently translates his own works from Afrikaans to English, collaborates with others to produce a translation, or others translate the works independently. For example: *Mouir: Bespieëlende notas van 'n roman* (1983) was translated by Jean Guiloineau to *Mouir: Notes-Miroir pour un roman* (1983) and by Breytenbach to *Mouir: Mirrornotes of a Novel* (1984).

Occasionally, translated collections have been so well received they have then been translated into yet another language. For example: *Alles een paard: Verhalen en beelden* was translated by Aad Nuis into Dutch (1989) and then republished in English as *All One Horse: Fictions and Images* (1990). *Skryt* was originally a bilingual collection of Breytenbach's Afrikaans poems with Dutch translations by Van Dis. This was translated into *Sinking Ship Blues* by Brink, Leigh-Loohuizen, and Hirson (1977). This process of translating and re-translating creates a dance of languages and interpretations.

Breytenbach comments that in some instances others have translated his works better than he has (Dimitriu, 1997:76) and that the translation process moves between the poles of 'total truth' and the interpretive meaning (77). One can assume that only the original writer can know where exactly the translation sits along that continuum.<sup>45</sup>

For Breytenbach, translation seems to ultimately be about diversity and exploration: 'Not becoming the same, but realising that what we need is [to become] multiple' (89). This again ties in with Breytenbach's view of the multidimensional nature of language in general, and his views on identity, fluidity and change.

Ngũgĩ's stance on the use of his mother tongue is steadfast, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, but he embraces translations and interaction between languages.

In *Matigari*, itself a translation, the scene where the protagonist confronts John Boy Junior and Settler Williams Junior indicates the limitations of monolingualism. Settler Williams, despite living his whole life in Kenya, is unable to even have a conversation with Matigari or understand what is being said. He says: '*Is he all right? [...] I will be the audience and you two the actors*' (original italics, Ngũgĩ, 1989:44). This exemplifies the distance created when access to another's language is limited, and can lead to miscommunication, assumptions or withdrawal.

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<sup>45</sup> Andre Brink, for example, writes simultaneously in English and Afrikaans (Breytenbach, K., 2009). He originally did this because of censorship and the need to rewrite a novel in English, but he now does this out of habit and fascination. By simultaneously translating a work, he says he is able to look at the work through a different cultural window, discover and alter parts of the original mother tongue version that he might not have noticed otherwise.

In his article 'Recovering the Original', Ngũgĩ describes the creative process and what occurs when he writes in a language other than his mother tongue:

I heard their voices in Gĩkũyũ but wrote them down in English sounds. What I was doing, of course, was a mental translation. This means that for every novel that I wrote in English, there was an original text. What happens to this original text, since in fact it exists only in the mind and is not written down? It is lost, and we can only access it through English. In my educated hands, Gĩkũyũ language, culture, and history came out wearing an English-language mask. (Ngũgĩ, 2004:14)

It is imperative for Ngũgĩ that this mask comes down so that he can be true to his culture and identity. His 'primary audience' remains his own mother tongue group (Poza, 2004:n.p.) however via translation other audiences can access the works. The problem is that translation itself can become a question of power, which Ngũgĩ explains arises when decisions are made regarding '...what is translated from English and into English – and in what quantities...' (Wilson, 2008:n.p)

As director of the International Center for Writing and Translation at the University of California, Ngũgĩ hopes to promote dialogue between marginalised languages. As he told Rodrigues in 2004: 'We interpret translation as conversation. And conversation assumes equality' (2004:162), but he explains, there is currently very little translation among marginalised languages themselves, and frequently translation occurs between a marginalised language and a dominant language or the other way around.

It is this dialogue that Ngũgĩ encourages. He edits a Gĩkũyũ journal called *Mutiiri*, which was first published in 1994. This is an influential portal for those wanting to share knowledge in Gĩkũyũ and includes translations from other languages into Gĩkũyũ.

By embracing translation as a tool, both Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ have the opportunity to write in their mother tongues, share their own narratives and find mutuality with others'.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## EXILE AND RETURN

As discussed earlier, identity is closely interwoven with locale, ethnic group and speech community. What happens then when identity axes are transposed to a new environment or when we become separated from these core anchors due to migration, immigration or exile?

This chapter looks at the overall impact of exile on identity, relationships with home and host communities, and the affects of homecoming. These aspects are examined in *Dog Heart* and *Matigari*.

Both Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ were forced to leave their home countries and have lived abroad for nearly 50 and 25 years respectively.

When Breytenbach left South Africa, he did not intend to stay away for that amount of time. His effective exile<sup>46</sup> and subsequent returns and departures from South Africa, have been traumatic experiences for him.

Much of Breytenbach's *oeuvre*, like *Dog Heart*, *A Season in Paradise*, *Return to Paradise* and many of his poems, revolve around a homecoming where the protagonist returns to his birth country, revisits places, people, and events from the past, and has to deal with the memories and emotions that present as a result of this reconnection.

*Dog Heart* is full of references to exile, homecomings, reunions, departures, nostalgia, and exclusions. They include Breytenbach's own experiences, those of the British soldiers in the Anglo-Boer war, settlers in the Cape, and South Africans displaced by the Apartheid government.

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<sup>46</sup> Exile has several categories or classes. Zeleza notes that: '...the exile is usually seen as a victim of banishment while the expatriate and émigré enjoy some choice and emigrant and refugee are legal statuses' (2005:11). But these distinctions are merely theoretical as, 'the causes and consequences of displacement' from a 'physical and psychic homeland' cannot be neatly compartmentalised (Ibid.). Tabori (1972) cited in Guerrero-Strachan (2005:75) states that there are five different classes of exile: 'uprooted refugees, political refugees, those moved by "personal and irrational considerations", emigrants, and expellees'.

Breytenbach uses the image of a suitcase, coffin or casket to evoke this sense of transience, displacement and rootlessness. He describes how his childhood was spent in other places 'living from the many travelling trunks with their false bottoms' (Breytenbach, 1999:60). This alludes to the secret compartment that such a suitcase allows, a life that others cannot see where private thoughts and experiences, memories and hopes can be hidden. Thus, Breytenbach is able to conceal his true cultural identity. In an interview with Brückner, Breytenbach explains how Afrikaans became his secret language, a language for love, poetry, an 'inner language' for him (Brückner, 1994:119). He says, while living in Paris, he would talk to himself in Afrikaans particularly when he felt very annoyed or when he had 'an intense crisis of land sickness' (120).

By living outside of South Africa, Breytenbach became separated from '*die geselsboom* (the talk tree)' (original italics, Breytenbach, 1999:69), the tree described in *Dog Heart* which symbolises cultural life, where his ancestors gathered to exchange news, watch out for danger, observe the surroundings, and look to the future. High up such a tree, there is a heart carved into the bark (Ibid.) and one has the feeling that, despite Breytenbach's compromises, conflicts and cultural disguises he has had to adopt over the years, his heart is indeed still carved into the 'geselsboom' of his mother tongue. Unlike his grandfather who died days after being taken out of his perch in the tree, Breytenbach has managed to survive for 50 years while separated from it.

Separation from this metaphoric tree forces one to lose one's cultural anchor and voice. Without his mother tongue, Breytenbach explains it is like his memory has become amputated: 'The stump of his tongue is bleeding. He is, in some way, living a translation [...] He knows voicelessness' (Breytenbach, 1990:61). What one gets from this description is a deep sense of pain, loss and powerlessness. It is a violent dislocation, an unnatural process, having one's tongue cut out. Deprived of a mother tongue, the ability to connect with people, culture and past is lost, or at least severely hindered.



In *End Papers*, Breytenbach says: ‘...you *do* take your language with you wherever you go – but it is rather like carrying the bones of your ancestors with you in a bag: they are white with silence, they do not talk back’ (Breytenbach, 1986:74). This voiceless, lonely, unresponsive experience conjures up the image of a homeless person carrying around his prized possessions in a plastic bag, except in this case it is the skeletons of his culture and speech community.

Another story in *Dog Heart* reflects this vulnerability: Breytenbach’s relatives shift towns with all their possessions, including their empty coffins. During the trip, the wagon crashes while one of his ancestors is asleep in a coffin and he dies (Breytenbach, 1999:97). This illustrates the temporary nature of life and how one could die at any time and be buried in any place. That is the reality of leaving one’s home. Everything changes: nothing is guaranteed.

It is this sense of dislocation that Breytenbach tries to ameliorate at the end of the memoir. He visits the cemetery in search of his grandmother’s grave. He finds numerous unclaimed, unmarked headstones. ‘Each grave in this purple earth is a place of exile’ (176) he writes, emphasising the nature of displacement, migration, exile, where people leave their homes for a new place but ultimately never really belong. All these images of coffins and caskets take the reader on a cyclical journey from home, to exile, to death – which represents the ultimate experience of return and exile.

This sense of not belonging affects the exile’s identity and ability to fit in and assimilate in the host environment. Breytenbach explains this in *End Papers* thus:

He becomes alienated and detribalized [sic] – his intelligence becomes that of the ‘clever’ immigrant who belongs by adaptation and not by instinct. He never quite fits in anywhere else. It is as if he carries the *absence* within himself as an unspeakable disease – and this disease keeps him separate from others. (Original emphasis, Breytenbach, 1986:75)

The degree of acculturation, according to Berry in ‘Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures’,<sup>47</sup> is influenced by the tendency to retain one’s culture and identity or

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<sup>47</sup> He defines acculturation as the ‘dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members’ (Berry, 2005:698).

a preference to participate in the host culture (2005:704). Berry outlines four acculturation strategies available on an individual level: assimilation where one does not maintain cultural identity and becomes absorbed into the host culture; separation where one places value on keeping the original culture and has little interaction with the host culture; integration where one keeps one's own culture while interacting with the host culture; and marginalisation where little effort is made in retaining home culture, and little contact exists with host culture often due to exclusion (705). These approaches are influenced by the host society's attitudes to immigration and whether they promote multiculturalism, assimilation, or exclusion (703).<sup>48</sup>

Some acculturative strategies necessitate relinquishing aspects of one's culture. Lazear asserts that those emigrating under duress or who were persecuted in their home countries may be less attached to their home cultures and more likely to adopt the host culture (1999:S123). In fact, Van Oudenhoven et al. suggest future research explore which parts of culture can be discarded and which are essential in order for immigrants to retain their cultural identity (2006:647).

Breytenbach was willing to adapt to his new home in Europe and its languages. Bearing in mind his cultural identity make-up, I presume assimilation or integration would have been the two approaches Breytenbach would have preferred. He has found the adaptation process problematic and, in an interview in 1997, he describes the need for acculturation and the difficulties he encountered:

I couldn't live in France as an Afrikaner, for instance, because that would make me permanently handicapped, not only in terms of the language, but also as somebody having to function in that environment. To be able to survive, to be able to move around, one has to adapt, one has to forge the capacity of becoming a Frenchman when it's necessary to be a Frenchman. In political terms, if you were in exile, for instance, and you had to survive as an exile within a foreign ideological environment, you would have to develop the patience of the chameleon. (Dimitriu, 1997:73)

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<sup>48</sup> Berry finds that, depending on which strategy is followed and assuming it is motivated by free choice, the level of acculturative stress varies accordingly. Apparently, assimilation results in the most behavioural changes, whereas marginalisation the most acculturative stress, and integration the least (2005:708). Similarly, Ward and Rana-Deuba find in their study on home and host culture influences on sojourners, that strong identification with home culture is linked to greater psychological wellbeing (2000:301).

This need for a survival strategy is described more ominously in *Dog Heart* where he writes: ‘A glove of snakeskin makes it easy for the hand to catch snakes’ (Breytenbach, 1999:17). We pretend to be like others to ensnare, we become like them superficially, but only for survival.

As discussed in the previous chapters, Breytenbach attempted to give up his Afrikaner identity and its Apartheid implications, and tried to assimilate into French culture. It seems he has been unsuccessful and instead has become marginalised to a large degree, fitting into neither cultural group. Exile became a waiting period for Breytenbach where the life he had become suspended. He uses the term ‘middle world’ to explain this situation where one is unable to return fully to this paused past, where the clock has stopped and there is a freezing of memory, but one is also unable to integrate into the new environment. He explains that ‘pathological conditions of self-pity, hopelessness, [and] impotence’ can develop (Dlamini, 2008).

This no man’s land is a painful place. Where does this space between belonging and un-belonging leave Breytenbach? In *Dog Heart*, the story of the prisoner ‘Kabbo, a Sam Bushman’, explains this sense of suspension, displacement and sadness at being apart from one’s people. Kabbo looks forward to returning to his place and his people:

That I may listen to all the people’s stories when I visit them...Then I shall get hold of a story from them because they – the stories – float from a distance...For, I am here; I do not obtain stories...which float along; while I feel that the people of another place are here; they do not possess my stories. They do not talk my language. (Breytenbach, 1999:36)

When Breytenbach too grasps that his host culture does not possess his stories despite his fluency in French, he understands that he will never totally assimilate into French culture; instead he turns his focus back on his home culture and identity. He tells Brückner that when he understood that there was ‘no possibility ultimately of losing [his Africanness] and becoming absorbed in a Europeanness, or becoming a European or becoming integrated’, his African identity became increasingly affirmed (1994:115). [Interesting to note he does not say Afrikaner or South African identity.]

Over time, Breytenbach came to realise that he will always be attached to the continent and its affairs, saying that '[t]he ship I will go down with will be called the SS Africa' (Ibid.). This sense of nostalgia and loss never leaves him completely.

Even after years away, his culture pulls at his heart strings, as he describes in 'House Poem': 'you listen to the anthem of time / with feathers in the throat' (Breytenbach, 1999:77).

Unlike Breytenbach, some exiles adopt a separation approach, reinforcing or glorifying their own culture, and continue their lives as if they were not outside their home countries. Breytenbach describes these people thus:

Most exiles take pride in their *differentness* and they squat down behind the ramparts of their native sound-castles, sucking and masticating stale bread; they take refuge, they exile themselves there as in a home away from home. Never mind the wash of a foreign sea. (Original emphasis, Breytenbach, 1990:61)

Without the security of home culture or the embrace of host culture, and being very aware of a foreign sea, Breytenbach coped with this displacement by keeping the memory of the home place and culture alive. This 'ghost centre' or presence, he explains, is like having a leg amputated but feeling as if it was still there (Dimitriu, 1997:74). How does one adapt to this amputation? Breytenbach comments that 'transplantation' into a new environment is an opportunity to create a fragmented collage of self, develop 'the other persons in you', embrace multiplicity, and become this new being while still keeping the 'ghost centre' alive (73-74). Once again, this ties in with his approach to personal and cultural identity, and a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional experience.

For Breytenbach, surviving exile and change is no small feat. During the reunion scene in *Dog Heart*, he repeats the words 'survivors' and 'survive' several times to emphasise this aspect (Breytenbach, 1999:16, 17, 19). But he also intimates that sometimes one does not survive, at least in the same form. In *Memory of Snow and of Dust* he writes that exile is 'the living proof that death doesn't kill' (Breytenbach, 1990:25). If one does not actually physically die, then part of one's identity does.

Breytenbach's longing is often for a South Africa that could have been, the ideal, the best-case scenario rather than the reality of the South Africa he grew up in or that currently exists. This is portrayed in *Dog Heart*, when he returns with his family and they renovate a small cottage and call it 'Paradys', a representation of his dreams: 'I have written often of this land as paradise, including in an ironical and bitter way, but this could be the first time that I truly return "home"' (Breytenbach, 1999:53). As he explained earlier to Brückner, once freedom came to South Africa and Apartheid ended, his hope was to return and be part of his 'own linguistic area' again; 'to live functionally fully' and 'build a wonderful paradise' (Brückner, 1994:116). This idealism and his high expectations are dashed when he finds a different country, where he struggles to find his place.<sup>49</sup>

It is almost impossible to slip back into the previous way of life after such a long period away. Breytenbach reiterates this difficulty saying that he realised his 'umbilical cord had dried up' without his being aware of it and that the country, although familiar to a large degree was 'also totally different' (Brückner, 1994:116). He goes on to say how he does not seem to belong: 'You felt yourself invisible' (Ibid.). *Dog Heart* describes the difficulties he encounters on his return to a once-familiar place such as feeling separate, out of touch with local matters, having vague memories, and amnesia: 'I have been away too long. I have to find a way of getting under its skin. One moves forward and backward over the soil, over the page' (Breytenbach, 1999:35). This use of personification (getting under its skin) describes how Breytenbach must re-familiarise himself with the live organism of the country. He describes the relearning process, alluding to the metaphor of a blind person reading Braille (one moves forward and backward over the soil, over the page). By repetitive action, by feel, and over time he hopes to decipher and understand the land and its ways.

The loss of local knowledge and one's place is apparent in the memoir when Breytenbach attends his school reunion and members of the local ANC are having a

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<sup>49</sup> This disillusionment is described in Anatol's article with reference to Kincaid's warning about over-romanticising home: 'If one leaves one's homeland, especially for a long period of time, one cannot expect to return unproblematically. The home for which one pines is not simply a geographical place to which one might return; it is a space and a time' (2002:950).

disagreement on party issues. Breytenbach feels they look to him for arbitration. He writes that he cannot participate as his voice is ‘as mute as that of a Muscovy duck’ (Breytenbach, 1999:7). This lame duck metaphor reflects his ineffectualness and his foreignness in the local context. The word Muscovy also plays on the onomatopoeia similarity of the word Muscovite, which he may have been at one time, and also accentuates the feeling of anachronism that Breytenbach feels being back in his own backyard. Said, after years of living in the USA, wrote that he still felt out of place – which incidentally is the name of his memoir – adding that ‘there are degrees of out of placeness’ (Said and Barsamian, 2003:65).

It is not only what one feels but also what others perceive that contributes to this ‘out of placeness’. People allude to the peculiarity of seeing Breytenbach home, and a scene where Mandela bumps into Breytenbach at a local festival epitomises this social awkwardness. Mandela says: ‘Gee whiz, what are *you* doing here? (But this is home territory, Mr. President. Don’t you know? Welcome!)’ (original emphasis, Breytenbach, 1999:163).

Breytenbach relays a humorous story in the Brückner interview to illustrate how he is viewed as a foreigner in his birth country. He recalls how he checked into a hotel in South Africa and spoke to the porter in Afrikaans. The porter says: ‘But you speak good Afrikaans for a Frenchman. Of course, I can trace the accent. I know you are not an Afrikaner and I congratulate you.’ To which Breytenbach replies: ‘Well, I think it is only polite that if you come into a foreign country you should try and learn the language of the natives’ (1994:117). In *Dog Heart*, Breytenbach describes how the locals are ‘intrigued by this foreigner from abroad who speaks their language’ (Breytenbach, 1999:71). Both accounts are humorous but painful: he is caught betwixt and between, fitting in nowhere and passing as a foreigner everywhere.

Due to Apartheid and its effort to extricate Afrikaner culture from Africa there was no sense of belonging to Africa: ‘We are in Africa and we are not Africans’ (Jacobs, 2004:161; Breytenbach, 1985b:157), neither was there a real tie to Europe, as the following paragraph from *A Season in Paradise* illustrates:

We go to Holland, France, and we realize [sic] suddenly that they've been lying to us. We are not Europeans. We go to England and we discover that we are Boers trying to live like Englishmen here beneath the Southern Cross. Whom can we measure ourselves against? For whom do we write our distorted, pretentious, nouveau riche works...? (Breytenbach, 1985b:157)

Leaving the home country again and re-entering a life of displacement is seen as a kind of death. Breytenbach draws a parallel between Heitsi Eibib, the Khoi god, magician and trickster who shape-shifts, frequently dies and is reborn, and himself. He describes Heitsi Eibib as sitting in the earth, knees drawn up to his chin, with his arrows and skins with him when he dies (Breytenbach, 1999:143). It is this image that Breytenbach replicates at the end of the memoir when he imagines his imminent flight out of South Africa: 'One last swing through Heartland, and then time to go. I think of that flight out, cramped and noisy, sitting with knees drawn up below the chin, as entering darkness – the last stage into death' (183).

Departure is a certain end or death to a specific person, time and experience. Yet with death surely comes a rebirth in Breytenbach's philosophy? Reincarnation seems to have materialised for him in the form of a nomad with a trans-border existence travelling between West Africa, America and Europe. After his last falling out with his cultural group and departure from South Africa, his deep yearning to be part of his birthplace now seems improbable. He has instead turned to Africa for solace, connection and identity. As Director of the Goree Institute he has anchored himself to Senegal, and is able to feel connected to Africa while not dealing with the alienation of living in a country that was once his home. Ironically, Goree – the gateway for Africans exiling into a life of slavery offshore – and what Viljoen calls 'an important symbol of the slave trade' (2001:15), has offered Breytenbach a safe way to return back to the continent and regain a sense of belonging.

Breytenbach's international transience correlates to what Friedman calls 'hybrid cosmopolitans' or elites who 'transcend local and national identities' and experience the world from a bird's-eye view (2003:749). It also echoes Chinua Achebe's criticism of African intellectuals' tendency to escape into abstract universalism to find their place, as quoted in Ngũgĩ's *Decolonising the Mind*: 'Better then to cut all the links with this homeland, this liability, and become in one giant leap the universal man' (Ngũgĩ, 1986:29). This sense of release, and perhaps anticipation, indeed come

across at the end of *A Season in Paradise*, where the Breytenbach's character describes his departure from South Africa: 'I shall take off in this blackened aircraft, / provisionally free / and deprived finally of all genealogy and memory and security / in search of the frontiers of the night.' (Breytenbach, 1985b:268; Reckwitz, 1993:14-15). An article in the latest issue of *The Economist*, somewhat flippantly encapsulates the freedom foreignness can offer one from citizenship: 'You did not vote for the government, its problems were not your problems. You were irresponsible. Irresponsibility might seem to moralists an unsatisfactory condition for an adult, but in practice it can be a huge relief' (2009). This contrasts with the pain of departure for Breytenbach as depicted in *Dog Heart*.

The nomadism that Breytenbach embraces creates perspective, distance and offers him a way to finally stem what he calls the 'bleeding of a distant and ancient wound: Azania' (Breytenbach, 1990:87), which he has struggled with most of his life. It is this non-attachment that enables him to survive *sans* a specific home country. However, does he survive? As his mother tongue was supposedly a spiritual bond to people for him, one wonders how this connection can be sustained considering the isolation his wanderings produce. In *A Veil of Footsteps* there is a scene where he meets a woman on a flight to New York. He suspects she is from Cape Town and 'gently' asks her about her mother tongue (2008:232) but when asked in turn, he says that he is French. He does this despite his longing for connection with someone from his own speech community and jeopardises an opportunity to bond: 'no chance after this of lowering the mask and exchanging a few warm phrases in our shared home language, chuckling conspiratorially, swapping snippets of gossip' (Ibid.). The intimacy of the words used here (warm / shared / home / chuckling / gossip / swapping) point to a commonality, familiarity and affection but these are not realised as he pretends he is from another place, another people. One has to wonder if Breytenbach's Azanian wound has indeed been cauterised or if (perhaps inadvertently) his cultural artery has been cut off in the process.

With regards to Ngũgĩ, he has been out of his home country for over 25 years and has been excluded from the nuances and changes that have taken place in Kenya during that period.



In an interview with Rodrigues, Ngũgĩ remarks on the importance of a writer's relationship with home community and place:

To be truthful, a writer needs to be in contact with the place of his imagination, or with the place that inspires him. Since I write in Gĩkũyũ, the ideal thing for me would be to live and interact with people from the place where that language is being used. To be away from that place has been a big loss. (2004:166)

*Matigari* is based on a fighter who has been in exile in the forests fighting a war of liberation for his people. While exiled he has lost touch and become separated from his people and cultural base. When he returns to the 'heart of the country' (Ngũgĩ, 1989:5) to reunite with his family and return to his house, he finds many changes. He does not recognise the plantation (43), and asks in amazement: 'Does all this land belong to one person?' (41). He also learns how foreign enterprises and international conglomerates control the means of production in the country. He cannot find his family and does not recognise anyone. *Matigari* is also not recognised by any of the people he comes into contact with, and seems invisible even when he is right next to them.

While in jail, *Matigari* is brought up-to-date on the underlying and overt changes that have taken place in his country since he went into the mountains. He learns that people are charged with vagrancy because they have no work, with murder because they kill in anger at not being paid for their hard labour, with theft because they are hungry and steal to feed their families, and that there is a lack of democracy and freedom of speech. This situation fuels *Matigari's* search for real truth and justice – the recurring refrain throughout the novel. He also begins to understand the level of fear people live with and how this paralyses them. His quest to restore sanity, order and fairness to the land is constantly juxtaposed to the craziness, manipulation of law and order, and unequal distribution evidenced in the society. His homecoming eventually leads to resumption of an armed struggle and he says: 'You may well return to places you once left behind. What shall I add to that? You may well return to find an unfinished war. I will retrace my steps to where I went astray and resume my journey from there.' (Ngũgĩ, 1989:139)

This is similar to Ngũgĩ's experience. With the demise of the Arap Moi regime, Ngũgĩ was hopeful he could return to Kenya, believing his exile had now ended (Rodrigues, 2004:161). He longed to be part of the local environment and in touch with Kenyan and Gĩkũyũ activities. Ngũgĩ and his wife did visit Kenya in 2004 and received a hero's welcome from the local people. Within days they were both violently attacked by armed men, his wife was stabbed and raped, and they subsequently abandoned their visit and left Kenya (Olende, 2006:n.p.). Regardless of intention or idealism, some resurrections are not possible. Ngũgĩ has visited Kenya to testify against those responsible for his and his wife's attack, as well as for the launch of his novel *Wizard of the Crow* in 2009, but a permanent or prolonged return seems unlikely at this stage and Kenya still remains elusive to him on a day-to-day level.

A returnee can act as a conduit bringing information back to the locals who may not have access to it. For example, Matigari's return brings word from the mountains that the patriots are still alive (Ngũgĩ, 1989:74) and he holds the key to what really happened to Settler Williams and John Boy Seniors. Ngũgĩ has acted as such a conduit especially during the repressive Arap Moi dictatorship. 'Ngũgĩism' shaped the political thought and action in Kenya in the 1980s. Gikandi explains how Ngũgĩ's Marxist slant influenced many young Kenyans' lives and philosophies, and how disappointed he is with Ngũgĩ's less Marxist and socialist outlook in recent years (Gikandi, 2000:208).

Ngũgĩ's battle with the Kenyan government seems to have abated. This may have to do with the fact that a former Makerere student now runs Kenya, or that Ngũgĩ's desire to return has lessened and he has become more comfortable in his role from outside his country.

Gikandi purports that because 'Ngũgĩ was deprived of the communicative contact that had made his work so central to the transformation of public debates in Kenya', he had to change his approach and shift to a 'language of cosmopolitanism' and universality (2000:199). Global themes are indeed prevalent in Ngũgĩ's latest novel, *Wizard of the Crow* but it seems Ngũgĩ is still consistent in his beliefs on the importance of cultural and language maintenance.

Living in the United Kingdom and the United States for a large portion of his life has meant that these countries have influenced him. This has had repercussions on how local Kenyans view him and how out of touch he can sometimes seem. Lovesay mentions Kenyan media claims that Ngũgĩ's audience is a western one, and Mwangi's questioning of Ngũgĩ's place: 'Africans don't need instruction to use African languages', especially not from exiles who 'preach Kenyan water and drink Western wine' (Lovesay, 2002:142), would surely sting Ngũgĩ as it goes against everything he has worked towards as far as cultural affiliation, language maintenance and belonging. Fitting into a host culture for Ngũgĩ has been secondary to retaining home culture, but he has done so nonetheless. One wonders how different things would have been had Ngũgĩ been allowed back in Kenya in the 1980s. Perhaps his true calling was a political one, the logical culmination of being a political activist, critical thinker and indigenous rights advocate. Had he been allowed to live in Kenya for the past 25 years, he may well have played a prominent political role in the country; been able to pursue a career as a Gĩkũyũ playwright, academic and writer, and been an integral part of the cultural life of his people.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, from this chapter it appears that a state of exile has been painful for both Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ, stripping them of their right to participate in their home country's growth and denying them social contact with fellow citizens on a day-to-day basis. They have had to create new identities, areas of interests or ways of maintaining links with their home culture, while still 'surviving' in their host environment.

Breytenbach tried to adapt to his host culture and hoped for a full reintegration into South Africa once Apartheid fell but has found both unattainable. He has instead attached himself to Africa and embraced a nomadic philosophy to counterbalance this loss of country, people and language.

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<sup>50</sup>Ngũgĩ has received numerous awards and honorary doctorates over the years but most of these are international or foreign; I was unable to clarify if he has received any Kenyan awards in the past 25 years.

Ngũgĩ seems to have forged a way whereby he can retain his cultural identity and his mother tongue connection while remaining outside of his home country, ensconced in academic life in California. He has immersed himself in Gĩkũyũ-oriented material and Africa, and seems to have consolidated his cultural identity, even if it is from a distance.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to examine whether the choice and use of a mother tongue or another language impact on identity in the case of Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ.

The authors' significantly different styles of writing made it difficult to create a unified or parallel comparison. Breytenbach's *Dog Heart* is a memoir, while Ngũgĩ's *Matigari* is a novel with structured setting, narrator, characters, storylines and themes. On the other hand, both works are concerned with similar topics and political issues.

It appears that Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ view identity from different angles. For Breytenbach, personal identity takes priority over cultural and political ones. He embraces the idea of multiple and changing identities rather than static cultural labels or rigid political agendas. Although he advocates against attachment to land and language, it has proven more difficult for him to completely relinquish these over the years. He has swayed between reattaching to, and distancing from, his cultural identity. For Ngũgĩ, national-political identity and attachment to land are crucial, but ultimately, it is his mother tongue and cultural identity at the forefront of his philosophical beliefs.

Use of a second language does affect the creative process. Initially, I wanted to show how the creative process was more innovative or fluid in their mother tongues and more stilted in the writers' L2, but I was limited due to the fact that I am not fluent in Afrikaans or Gĩkũyũ and therefore cannot expertly compare these aspects of the writers' works. Breytenbach's English prose in *Dog Heart* is marvellously poetic and one would assume unhampered in any way by second language criteria. His poetry, however, is written in Afrikaans and would be affected by use of another language. It is difficult to judge Ngũgĩ's translation on a creative level without comparing it to the original Gĩkũyũ version of *Matigari*. However, he has explained that when writing in another language he loses the original narrative, which is often never written, and so this option is detrimental in his view.

With regards to the use of languages, Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ have chosen to write in a particular language depending on their relationship with their speech community and attitude to their mother tongues, or in line with their political views at the time. These choices were not based on their proficiency in the language and can therefore be seen as political statements. Breytenbach sees language as a fluid, dynamic mixture, much like he views identity. Codeswitching and multiple methods representing other languages and styles are intermingled to form a hybrid, mixed narrative in *Dog Heart*. Despite his mother tongue, Breytenbach has tried at times to disconnect from his ethnic group and country. Ngũgĩ, on the other hand, uses his mother tongue as a barometer of cultural affiliation and a way for him to remain in the middle of his ethnic group despite his physical distance from them. This correlates to his stance on identity and he intentionally connects to his people through or via his mother tongue. Ngũgĩ has pursued an academic and literary career with Gĩkũyũ and translation at the forefront.

Cultural identity is affected by the use of a second language but from this dissertation it becomes apparent that Breytenbach's cultural identity, in fact, dictates to a large degree what language he writes in. He has struggled to disconnect from the Afrikaner group and its associated cultural-political connotations throughout his career, and his publishing records reflect the often tumultuous relationship he has had with his speech community. He uses his mother tongue for his poetry but his prose works have changed according to his personal and political circumstances at the time. Ngũgĩ consciously decided to write creatively in his mother tongue because he does see language impacting on cultural identity. He has had an almost unwavering focus on cultural-political identity and Gĩkũyũ. His resolution to pursue this avenue has ensured his cultural identity is not only safeguarded but buttressed, and this has been his way to connect with the Gĩkũyũ community and its values. Ngũgĩ links through language to cultural group and national identity and has had one dominant identity throughout his life.

Distance from home country, culture, and speech community impacts on identity and is relevant when considering both writers. Whether in exile, at home or as a nomad, Breytenbach seems unable to concretise his link to his people or his country, but has, to a degree, connected to Africa instead. Disappointed with developments in South

Africa, he has opted to leave for good and distance himself from it, but not from the continent. Ngũgĩ remains outside his home country as well. Based in California he maintains links via translation and Gĩkũyũ publications, his own creative works in his mother tongue, and his promotion of indigenous languages.

*Dog Heart's* narrative style, themes, and use of languages correspond to Breytenbach's views on amalgamated languages, mixed cultures and multiple identities. *Matigari's* emphasis on political and national consciousness, personal ethical code, close community, and upholding of culture and traditions reflect Ngũgĩ's stance on identity.

Has writing in a mother tongue made Ngũgĩ more Gĩkũyũ, and has writing in another language made Breytenbach less Afrikaner? I presume that it most probably did not in the long run, but at the time it availed them of a stake to prop up their identity, or a glue to hold it together while their personal circumstances were being redrawn. Did their decisions make them a more integral part of their cultural group or less? Again, I believe their choice of language gave them a way to survive in isolation and offered validity to their banishment and ethical stances. Both writers are inextricably linked to their cultural and speech groups no matter what language or genre they have chosen to write in. They are like sundials within their cultural-linguistic groups, and their words and political voices cast a short or long silhouette across these groups from every angle.

Breytenbach and Ngũgĩ have dedicated years to academia, political consciousness and social justice in Africa. Breytenbach has been instrumental in delivering a programme aimed at regional cooperation and peace, while Ngũgĩ has worked enthusiastically to create a translation forum promoting interaction between people in Africa. Exile has forced them to develop new connections with their home cultures and language groups. Returning to their homelands constituted mixed experiences ranging from alienation, assault and detention, but both seem to have found a niche for themselves – outside their home countries but still involved in Africa and African culture and language.

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