



REVOLUTIONARY POSTCOLONIAL DRAMA: NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O AND  
SAADALLAH WANNOUS

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of English  
Of  
The University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By  
Dawlat Sami Yassin  
August 2020

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to mother, Hourieh, who made my education her first priority, to my patient, understanding, and supportive husband who never stopped believing in me, and to my children, the light of my life that gives me hope and propels me forward.

## ABSTRACT

### Revolutionary Postcolonial Drama: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Saadallah Wannous

This dissertation is a comparative project that studies the common aspects of the revolutionary theaters of two important postcolonial dramatists Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (1938) from Kenya and Saadallah Wannous (1941-1997) from Syria. I argue that the adoption of the Brechtian non-cathartic form by the two playwrights has enabled the transculturation of their theaters and rendering them revolutionary. Non-cathartic drama differs from classical Aristotelian drama in the absence of a purifying ending that purges the audience of already charged emotions of pity and fear and brings calmness to the world of the play. Contrary to what happens at the end of an Aristotelian play where calmness prevails in the world of the play, a non-cathartic ending leaves emotions charged and minds alert thinking about solutions to wrong situations. The non-cathartic ending sends the audience home with the knowledge that there is still work to be done. The absence of a catharsis is the main factor that makes the Brechtian form suitable for moving audiences to action. Saadallah Wannous and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, who share with Bertolt Brecht a Marxist outlook of the world, find in Brecht's dramatic form a flexible framework for the exigencies of their postcolonial resistance theaters that aim oppressed classes to question, refuse, and take action to change unjust status quos.

The Brechtian form also plays a big role in the transculturation of the two playwrights' theaters. The narrative, rather than dramatic structure of events and independence incidents of the form, also allow including native theatrical traditions like songs, dance, ritual, and ceremony within the framework of the play. Native theatrical forms are not originally performances of a manuscript or text of a play and they do not enact a story with a masterplot. These aspects belong to Western drama where the playwright produces the text and the theater group rehearses the play behind closed doors to present it to the audience as a piece of perfection. The absence of the catharsis in the Brechtian form allows for integrating native performance elements in a play that is written and rehearsed beforehand like a Western play, and which at the same time resembles native theatrical traditions in including song, dance, ritualistic, and ceremonial elements. This makes the adoption of the European dissenting form a main factor of the transculturation of the genre.

#### KEYWORDS:

Postcolonial drama, revolutionary theater, Brecht, experimental theater, epic theater, native performance forms, transculturation, cultural resistance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Saadallah Wannous

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to my advisor and mentor Dr. Aboul-Ela for all the support he provided. I thank him for encouraging my intellectual growth and for the patience and understanding he showed during the time I was ill and not able to do my research and meet my deadlines. Given what I went through, I could have never completed my dissertation without his continuous support. I also want to thank Dr. Backus for always encouraging me and believing in me and for all the intellectually stimulating conversations. She is the professor and friend who brings intellect and compassion together and makes me think and believe in myself. I also thank all my wonderful professors for the great experience I had at the University of Houston, both UH-Clear Lake and at UH-Main.

I am always indebted to Dr. David Day who had the most impact on teaching me academic writing. A big thank you is also due to Dr. Craig White for his continuous friendship. My deep appreciation goes to Dr. Mahmoud Salami who introduced me to post-colonial literature and inspired me to explore Said's writing twenty-two years ago at the Lebanese University. I cannot thank my friend Bruce Martin enough for his friendship since my first semester at UH, and for his help and support during the last month while finalizing the work on my dissertation prior to defense. It has also been a great opportunity to get to know and work together with the writing group members Rawan Albarqi, Mark Sursavage, Jaedeok Eom and Maurine Ogbaa. I appreciate all the constructive comments and discussions we had over the last two years. I also want to acknowledge my committee members for their support and for helping me graduate this semester on a very short notice.

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## Chapter 1

### Transculturation and Postcolonial Theater

This project studies the different ways adopting the Brechtian non-cathartic form has enabled the revolutionary aspects of the theaters of two important postcolonial dramatists: Saadallah Wannous (1941-1997) from Syria and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (1938-present) from Kenya. Non-cathartic drama differs from classical Aristotelian drama in the absence of a purifying ending that purges the audience of already charged emotions of pity and fear and brings calmness to the world of the play. Saadallah Wannous and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, who share with Bertolt Brecht a Marxist outlook of the world, find in Brecht's dramatic form a flexible framework for the exigencies of their postcolonial resistance theaters that aim oppressed classes to question, refuse, and take action to change unjust status quos. The absence of a catharsis is the main factor that makes the Brechtian form suitable for moving audiences to action. The alienation effect (A-Effect) which is the distancing of the audience from emotional involvement with characters and action in the play, and the lack of a catharsis keep the audience reminded of the artificiality of the theatrical performance. The working of these two aspects of Brechtian drama are clearly interdependent. The absence of the catharsis allows for replacing the traditional well-woven plot in the play with a series of independent, but connected, incidents. The ability of incidents to stand independent, in turn facilitates the use of the A-Effect, which is also necessary for the non-purging end, as it keeps the audience away from emotional involvement and the need for emotional discharge.

Brecht gives the appellation of epic theater to his non-cathartic form based on the distinction between "epic" as narration of a series of incidents and "dramatic" as



revolving around a centralized plot that has “a momentum [to] draw the separate parts into a common relationship” (Brecht 70). To further explain this differentiation, Brecht uses the criterion provided by the German epic novel writer Alfred Döblin. Döblin says that “with an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were taking a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life” (70). This narrative/epic aspect of Brechtian theater is important to the form as it prepares the spectator, both emotionally and intellectually for the different A-Effect strategies that are used. The A-Effect keeps the spectators intellectually involved allowing them to reflect, and critique what they watch, instead of being emotionally hypnotized by the “realism” of characters and action. Adopting the Brechtian form with its central use of the A-Effect and absence of catharsis becomes a cultural revolution against cathartic Aristotelian form and mainstream realist drama. The absence of a catharsis is also a rejection of a long tradition of Western drama that adopts Aristotle’s form while the use of A-Effect is a stark refusal of Western realist’s convention of pretending that the performance is a real-life event which the audience is secretly given access to.

The Brechtian form is still referred to by most recent critics as the “epic theater.” While this term has been originally offered by Brecht himself, it has proven problematic as Brecht has tried to recall and revise it proposing another, no more accurate term of “dialectical poetics” (Boal 93). At first and while putting his new techniques in practice and at the same theorizing the new form, Brecht names his theater the “epic theater.” Brecht bases his choice on the conceived difference between an epic which narrates a story and drama that re-enacts the story insisting that the two are not exclusively contradictory and that they can exist in one work (70). He suggests that there is

“‘dramatic element’ in epic works and the ‘epic element’ in dramatic.” Brecht even explains how nineteenth century novels “developed much that was dramatic” (70). Consequently, Brecht offers a theater that can be turned epic through narrating the action rather than re-enacting it. He also insists that narration of a story and the absence of re-enacting it produces an A-Effect between the spectator, the actor/character, and the action taking place on the stage. Brecht emphasizes the importance of the A-Effect in preventing the spectator from investing uncalled-for emotions, thus his mind remains present to think about and analyze what he sees on the stage.

Decades later, Brazilian dramaturge Augusto Boal disagrees with the choice of names that Brecht made for his theater. Boal refuses the term “epic” as “a word [that is] poorly chosen” (92). To him, the name “epic theater” does not describe Brechtian theater accurately. Boal sees that Brecht’s theater is not epic, but Marxist because of its assertion “that the character is (...) the object of economic or social forces to which he responds and in virtue of which he acts” (92) and that the character’s social relations [is what] creates the dramatic action” (93). He discusses the essence of epic from the point of view of both Aristotle and Hegel and concludes that the character in the epic is a subject while in Brechtian theater they are both a subject and object. In the epic, the character is free to act (subject) while in Brechtian theater they are acted upon by societal forces (object) before he/she acts. Therefore, Brecht’s character is subject-object and consequently the Brechtian theater should not be called epic theater, but Marxist poetics. Boal also refuses the other name that Brecht suggested for his theater at a later stage. Towards the end of his career, Brecht seems to have withdrawn the

name epic theater and replaced it with the appellation of “dialectical poetics” (93). However, Boal explicates that Hegelian poetics of free subject whose actions are expressions of the spirit is also dialectical. He refuses the name of dialectical poetics in order to mark the difference between Hegelian poetics and Brechtian Poetics. Boal settled for the name of Marxist poetics for Brecht’s theater.

Yet, despite the fact that Brecht’s theater is Marxist, there is still a problem with this appellation. By the same logic Boal refuses the name of dialectical poetics, he should have also opted out of the name Marxist poetics to avoid confusing the Brechtian form with socialist realist drama<sup>1</sup> which is also Marxist. The Marxist idea of a subject-object character is not peculiar to Brecht’s theater. In this sense, socialist realism works would also fall under the label of Marxist poetics. Yet Brecht’s theater focuses on narration and a story with parts that can be independent of each other (Brecht 70) while socialist realism insists on a masterplot and dramatization/making the role (Gardiner 628). These differences have alienated Brecht and his works from the Marxist world and its thinkers for decades (Gardiner 629). However, the fact that Brecht’s drama is guided by Marxist principles and the common has enabled the USSR Communist Party to use Brecht’s fame for their publicity purposes. During the 1950s, the USSR Communist Party adopted Brecht as their “own” and invested his international fame as a “publicity tool” (Gardiner 634). To avoid confusing Brecht’s theater with socialist realism theater I would simply refer to the former with terms like Brechtian poetics, Brechtian form or Brechtian drama rather than Marxist poetics or Marxist theater. What postcolonial

<sup>1</sup> Socialist realism was the official style of art and literature in the USSR between 1932-1988. For more information on the Form and how it differs from the Brechtian form, see Jess Gardiner’s “Mother Courage and Political Pragmatism: Sovieting Brecht during the Thaw, and Abram Tertz’s *The Trial Begins and On Socialist Realism*.”

playwrights have adopted and worked with and around is Brechtian poetics and not any other form of Marxist poetics. Obviously, Ngũgĩ's and Wannous's theaters belong to the transcultural genre of revolutionary postcolonial drama that is able to reconcile native themes and traditions with the dissenting Western Brechtian form.

Postcolonial drama in general, and revolutionary theater in particular, should no doubt have an important place in postcolonial literary studies due to the high political involvement of the genre and its entanglement with the process of decolonization. Yet, this importance is often denied or slighted by some critics who study other genres. This most often originates from the conception of the difference between drama and other literary genres, in that drama consists not only of the text of the play, but also of another non-literary element: *performance*. One example of slighting the place of drama is in Jahan Ramazani's introduction to his book on postcolonial poetry that was published in 2001. Protesting the exclusion of poetry from postcolonial studies, he exclaims that "in contrast to the many volumes on fiction and even drama, there are no books on postcolonial poetry" (3). It is interesting that "drama" has to be preceded with "even." Drama has been receiving more critical attention than poetry, but the number of those works show that that attention is not up to par with what works of fiction receive. Imad Khawaldeh explains how postcolonial criticism has neglected rich genres like poetry, the short story and drama making fiction its focal point<sup>2</sup> (9-10). Brent Edwards also correctly notes that "postcolonialism has most exclusively been considered through the novel" (2). Despite the participation of drama in both the colonial mission and the counter

<sup>2</sup> Khawaldeh discusses the lack of attention postcolonial criticism has given to different genres and its focus on the novel. He also discusses some of the works that criticize this practice. For further information see Khawaldeh's *Subversive, Yet Redressive: Recalling the Past in Postcolonial Drama*.

decolonizing endeavors afterwards, drama's place in postcolonial literary studies is not strongly established.

Looking at theaters in the vast regions of postcolonial countries like India, Kenya and other nation states in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and the Arab world, one could say that drama in general is the most politically engaged among the rest of arts, both literary, and performative. A good attestation to the political engagement of drama and its effectiveness as a decolonization tool is the issuance of the August 1876 "Dramatic Performance Bill" by the British Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. The bill is blunt about its goals of suppressing drama that resists British domination of India and native drama (Bhatia 6) and indirectly acknowledges the power of stage in the hands of the colonized. It specifies that it is not directed against "any mere publications of whatever sort, but against representations on the stage [because] such dramatic acting conveys ideas in a manner quite different from that of any sort of publication, and among other things has a much more vivid effect" (Bhatia 1). Hence, to the British Lieutenant Governor, "dramatic representation does require a law peculiar to itself" (Bhatia 1). This is a clear indication that theater was powerful enough to make the colonial government in India worry about its effects and issue the bill.

After achieving the so-called independence, oppressive postcolonial governments have also an interesting position on and use of theater. Nationalists who have realized the effectiveness of theater during the struggle for independence try to use it to promote their domination over the newly born nation states. However, nationalist governments often oppress theater when it questions the legitimacy of their unrestrained and exploitive control of national resources. "Banning orders, censorship,

imprisonment and, in the most extreme cases, murder” have been often the states’ response to theatrical activities that try to engage governments in debates about social and political reform (Plastow 1). Therefore, both colonialists and later nationalist governments have been suppressing theatrical activities that could threaten the power they hold in people’s minds. Theater that dares challenge this power is censored, banned and playwrights have to suffer from state oppression and brutality. It is clear that theater has had a special place as a tool of resistance since the incipience of the colonial enterprise and continued to do so into the neocolonial era.

In addition to the theatrical performance’s intrinsic characteristic of live and direct interaction with the audience, a Brechtian performance also gives voice and agency to the spectator. This makes a Brechtian performance more dangerous to the present social and political systems governments interested in maintaining. Such a performance has the potential to be a ritual of change, an “initiation” of the audience into a more active social and political role, and an abandonment of passivity much desired by the ruling classes. The study of the revolutionary postcolonial dramatic texts and/or performances as well as the history of the theater to which those works belong is an invaluable asset to understanding a postcolonial situation, and the intersection of socio-economic relations and power dynamics in postcolonial societies. In short, criticism engaging theater and its history in a postcolonial state becomes a study of a history of resistance and struggle for freedom and equality at the cultural, economic, and social levels. These political/ politicization aspects of postcolonial drama should give it an uncontested place in postcolonial studies.

This study reviews some of Ngũgĩ's and Wannous's plays focusing mainly on the texts and paying close attention to the playwright's directions since these give a vision of how the playwright imagines the performance. I will also survey information available on performances of the plays under study, which are regrettably very scarce. I am aware of the shortcomings of prioritizing texts over performances since the performance is an important aspect of the life of the play, and, because a play is most of the time written with intention to be performed. The effect revolutionary theater aims at is also mostly achievable through performance. Therefore, to avoid completely eliminating the performance aspect of the play, I am paying attention to stage directions provided by Ngũgĩ and Wannous since these are fixed and always accessible, and at the same time, designed to serve the playwrights' revolutionary purposes. For example, in *An Evening Party for The Fifth of June* Wannous's specific instructions requiring actors to enter the stage and set up the decor in front of the audience are essential instructions to be adhered to in any performance of the play to help achieve the A-Effect, and consequently, the revolutionary purposes of the play.

I focus on the texts of the plays for three main reasons.

- First, the published text is the only fixed element of a play that is produced by the dramatist. Whatever performances follow, they cannot avoid discrepancies that are dictated by different directors' understanding of the text. These discrepancies produce different performances that are not infrequently disappointing to the playwright and often defeat their purposes.

- Second, the lack of access to details on performances and audiences' reactions.
- Third, distinct from information about performances, texts are readily available to access.

Again, focusing my analysis solely on the texts of the plays is not meant to detract from the importance of the different performances of each play or the implications of the effect each produces. Since this study focuses on the playwrights, the development of their dramatic theory and practice, and the strategies they use to render their theaters decolonizing revolutionary mediums, it is appropriate to keep attention fixated on the texts produced by them.

## 1. Transculturation and Resistance

By its very nature, postcolonial drama is a transcultural genre that transcends cultural and political borders to merge foreign and native conventions into new and unique theatrical works. But, before delving into a deeper study of the transcultural aspects of postcolonial drama and how they are complicated with the nuances of the genre's resistance goals, it is vital to explain my usage of terms. First of all, I use "transculturation" and "transcultural" rather than other terms like "multicultural" or "intercultural" because of the term's connotation's ability to transcend limited understanding of cultures as fixed with clear cut borders whose interconnectedness can be flagged as multicultural or intercultural. "Transcultural" blurs cultural lines reflecting the liminality of innovation and invention which results in new aspects that enrich departing cultures (originally invested cultures). However, this fluidity in understanding



culture does not contradict with authenticity as the term is far from meaning cultural purity. By authenticity, I mean infusing the new form with native theatrical traditions reflecting the beauty of those traditions on the basis that they are no less fit for a theatrical and/or stage performance than foreign ones, and that they are malleable enough to build on and innovate as well as synchronize with other imported forms.

The other term that I am using in a wider than its literal dictionary meaning is “postcolonial.” Although this project studies drama that was produced during the independence era of both Kenya and Syria, the concept of “postcolonial” here is in no way meant to be diminished to a temporal meaning where it denotes literature and studies produced in the aftermath of direct colonialism. I use the term as a descriptive of strongly and overly politicized drama that engages in the process of decolonization. Helen Gilbert and Joan Tompkins refuse the temporal meaning of the term and state that “A theory of postcolonialism must, then, respond to more than merely chronological construction of post-independence, and to a more than just the discursive experience of imperialism” (2). They agree with Alan Lawson’s understanding of postcolonialism and his definition as “a politically motivated historical-analytical movement ‘which’ engages with, resists, and seeks to dismantle the effects of colonialism in the material, historical, cultural, political, pedagogical discursive and textual domains” (2). This describes revolutionary postcolonial drama and its engagement with themes of national identity as well as economic and social inequities after independence. Politically motivated drama in the Third World is often revolutionary aiming at dismantling societal power dynamics inherited from the era of colonialism and perpetuated by the ruling class of national elites to oppress the poor and working classes. The transculturation of postcolonial

drama plays an important role in rendering the genre a tool of cultural resistance and decolonization as the playwrights appropriate Western dramatic conventions and choose or refuse among them according to their revolutionary purposes. They are able to do this while successfully preserving the authenticity of their theaters.

Wannous and Ngũgĩ's theaters are cultural rebellions that aim at liberating people's minds from the shackles of cultural oppression. They refuse the artistic tropes of hegemonic imperialist powers and neocolonial control of the cultures and economies of their newly freed nations at the time they write their plays. Viewing cultural decolonization as a prerequisite for social and economic freedom, the two playwrights search an authentic cultural identity a main quest in their theaters which they try to achieve through different strategies like reviving local performance forms, writing in native languages, and other channels depending on each postcolonial experience and the resistance tools it dictates. However, the two playwrights never tried to produce pure pre-colonial theaters or suggest purging postcolonial drama of all influences of the colonizers' theatrical traditions. Ngũgĩ and Wannous adopt Brecht's form—which is also Western—for it serves their revolutionary goals, while they refuse the other mainstream Western traditions of Aristotelian cathartic drama and realist drama. Their strategic use of Western forms undermines the hegemony of Western culture and places both Third World playwrights in a position of control over their cultural production as they appropriate, choose, and refuse theatrical traditions according to their projects' exigencies.

It is interesting that postcolonial drama that came to existence as part of cultural revolution against the hegemony of European cultures draws on traditions originated

and developed in Europe. Writing a play for the stage is a Western tradition that dates back to the Greeks and Romans. Greek tragedy, which was the oldest of the two, emerged from worshipping rituals of the god Dionysus in the mid sixth century B.C.E. and became the source of Roman drama as well as all subsequent Western dramatic forms. This led to the misconception that drama and theatrical performances are exclusively Western. It was not until around the middle of the twentieth century that postcolonial playwrights and theater theoreticians started to doubt this as a misconception showing that their cultures had always had their indigenous performance and dramatic forms. However, they were at the same time right and wrong. While drama as part of theater is unique to the Western world, native theatrical performances are deeply rooted in native cultures and have been long before contact with European colonial world. Drawing on the differences between drama and theater, Brian Crow defined drama as

A type of theatrical performance in which the active participants impersonate (that is pretend to be people, beings or things other than what they really are), and through a usually predetermined sequence of physical actions enact a story for the entertainment of an audience. (Crow, *Studying Drama* 2)

Therefore, theater's broader inclusivity is not foreign to native cultures while drama as a branch of theater where a play is written and rehearsed (usually behind closed doors) in preparation for public performance is a European phenomenon. It is understood from writing a play that there will be a story where action moves through the development of a plot towards a denouement. Consequently, actors would be impersonating characters in the story which sets the performance of the written play apart from native theatrical

forms of ritual, ceremony, song and dance where impersonation—if involved at all, will not be that of characters involved in an unfolding plot. In this sense, a European “manuscripted” play by a specific author is a clearly Western tradition that is different from native performance forms.

Like all aspects of the colonized and newly freed cultures, postcolonial theater carries ineradicable traits of the colonizer’s culture, which has been a natural product of contact between the two. Crow and Banfield see the transculturation of postcolonial theater as a natural historic effect of the meeting of two cultures in a colonial enterprise, when they say that “for the postcolonial playwright theater has meant both traditional indigenous performance—which has often to be rediscovered and reinvented—and the theater that the colonists brought with them from the metropolitan power” (11). In his chapter on national culture, Fanon explicates how the immensity of the struggle involved in colonization and decolonization impacts the colonized culture in a way that leads it to forever losing its pure pre-colonial identity. He succinctly states that the “struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations [struggle for freedom] between men cannot leave intact either the form or content of the people’s culture” (246). This is certainly the case with postcolonial theater for it is not a return to un-meddled pre-colonial indigenous forms. Rather, it is a new form that results from the meeting—though a violent meeting—of the two cultures. Therefore, postcolonial theater inevitably has traits from the two contesting cultures in the case of each dramatist.

Culture and cultural production are mediums of resistance, and like language, they are mediums of power. Speaking of the function of language as that, Ashcroft and Griffiths say that “post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the

center and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place” (37).

Postcolonial drama seems to do with the drama of the center what postcolonial writing does with the latter’s language when postcolonial playwrights amalgamate European drama with indigenous performance traditions for their own decolonizing purposes.

Ashcroft and Griffiths speak of two processes through which the adaptation of the language of the colonizer to the use of the colonized is achieved as abrogation and appropriation where the former is a “denial of the privilege of “English” [which] involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication” and the second is the “process of capturing and remolding of the language to new usages” (37). The same processes of abrogation and appropriation take place when playwrights “adapt” European drama, or elements of it, to allow integrating it into postcolonial cultural texts. To invest European drama that way, postcolonial playwrights like Ngũgĩ and Wannous first—to use Ashcroft and Griffiths’ words—reject metropolitan power over cultural production and second capture and remold European dramatic forms to “new usages” as a means of resistance.

The transculturation of revolutionary postcolonial drama adds richness to the form and bestows on it new dimensions that allow for valuable perspectives and classifications by critics. It is no surprise that this process of rejecting certain dramatic traditions from the colonizing culture while accepting others results in varying degrees of foreign influences. At times, one of the contending native or colonizing traditions dominates over the other, while at other times the two traditions manifest equally. Christopher Balme classifies postcolonial theatrical forms into three categories: syncretic theater, indigenous intercultural theater, and fusion theater. Syncretic theater

occurs when the new form is introduced to cultures that do not have equivalent forms or when the new form eclipses and weakens, though does not completely destroy, the older system whose elements keep appearing within the framework of the new Western realist system (18). Further, Balme describes theaters when the opposite happens as indigenous intercultural theater where the indigenous system remains dominant and some elements of the newly introduced form appear. According to Balme, intercultural theater comes to existence not as a result of colonization and decolonization, but as a result of “internal changes within the cultures themselves” (19). The third category of “fusion” theater appears when indigenous forms absorb “foreign elements to such an extent that formal innovation becomes the dominant characteristic, and old and new elements seem to be in equilibrium.” (19) He gives the example of Asian playwrights who work in folk theater and invests the Brechtian form to politicize their works (20). The importance of these classifications lies in acknowledging the varying levels of influence and cultural borrowing that occur due to the imbalance in the concerned cultures’ powers. Balme acknowledges both the inner-cultural changes that are not connected to colonialism that produce intercultural theater, as well exchanges that take place due to colonization and decolonization resulting in syncretic and fusion theaters. The process of fusing traditions from native and colonizing cultures and adapting them to new political purposes is manifest in Wannous and Ngũgĩ’s theaters. Fusion theater transcends the alleged lines demarcating each culture to accommodate politicizing purposes using both Western and native strategies and forms.

Postcolonial drama becomes a domain for transcultural texts produced in what Mary Louise Pratt calls “space” where the “contact” between the two cultures takes

place. “Contact,” and “space” are key terms and concepts in Pratt’s understanding of the process of transculturation. She specifies that transculturation takes place in social spaces where cultures come to be contiguous with each other. Pratt borrows the term “contact” from linguistics to coin the term “contact zone” that she uses to refer to the social spaces where transcultural texts are produced. In her article “Arts of the Contact Zone,” Pratt defines the contact zone as “the social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” ( 34). She discusses a long letter written by an indigenous Incan noble Guaman Poma to Philip III of Spain as an example of texts produced in the contact zone. Poma wrote the letter in two languages Spanish and Quechua. Most importantly, Poma’s letter was a chronicle of the history of the world with the Andean at its center, which he called “The First New Chronicle and Good Government” (Pratt, Arts of the Contact Zone 34). Poma appropriated the Spanish genre used by them to chronicle Spanish conquest of the Americas to themselves (Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone” 34), and he produced a new history of Christianity and the world from an Andean perspective that challenges European and Christian narrative. As a transcultural text produced in the contact zone, the letter carries aspects of both the colonizer’s culture and the conquered culture.

Similarly, postcolonial theaters were and are still being produced in the sociopolitical spaces of the “contact zone.” Unequal relationships between neo colonial powers and Third World resistance to foreign cultural and economic control result in theatrical texts and performances (as well as other forms of literature) that carry traits

from the grappling and contesting cultures. While a central goal of postcolonial drama has often been resisting the hegemonies of the imperialist culture and reviving an authentic cultural identity, playwrights seem to see no contradictions between achieving these goals and adopting elements from the resisted powers' traditions and artistic forms. For Ngũgĩ and Wannous, and postcolonial playwrights in general, an authentic cultural identity never meant an essentialist going back to a pure pre-colonial form. It always meant replying to the colonizer's narrative often using his cultural forms and traditions and, not infrequently, using his language. For this purpose, pre-colonial forms are adapted to and merged with a vast range of influences by the cultures of the colonizer.

Further, Pratt calls the mode of self-representation "in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms" (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* 7) "autoethnography" or "autoethnographic expressions." She explains that by an autoethnographic text, she means "a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them. According to Pratt, this mode of representation is not "authentic" in the sense of "autochthonous" or pre-colonial which again brings the idea of transculturation of texts that Pratt emphasizes is "a phenomenon of the contact zone" (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* 7). Postcolonial theater can be viewed as an autoethnographic mode of self-representation that "involves selective collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror" (Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone" 35). Whereas autoethnographic expressions are usually addressed to the metropolitan readers and to the literate natives, Ngũgĩ and Wannous's theaters target the oppressed classes in newly independent nations and are not intended to be read by or performed



to a metropolitan audience. Unlike Guaman Poma's letter, which Pratt discusses as an example of earliest autoethnography addressed to the King of Spain whose writer might have hoped it would reach the king, postcolonial plays are written for postcolonial societies, and most often to the marginalized sections of those societies. Performance is a vital part of the life of any dramatic work for it changes, and often extends, the prospects of the work's accessibility to illiterate poor sectors of the native society. Postcolonial plays written and/or performed to postcolonial audiences aim at regaining confidence and pride in local traditions. After decades of imperialist disparaging treatment of native cultures and its artistic traditions as inadequate and inferior by colonists,<sup>3</sup> postcolonial dramatists try to rectify the misconceptions created by this unfair treatment.

Another crucial aim of postcolonial plays is also "historical recuperation" as they "frequently tell the other side of the conquering whites' story in order to contest the official version of history that is preserved in imperialist texts" (Gilbert and Tompkins 12). Crow and Banfield emphasize the importance of the "idea of a cultural return" for the subjugated peoples' recuperation of "their own histories, their own social and cultural traditions, their own narratives and discourses" (10) to the process of decolonization. They cite Edward Said and Fanon to clarify that such a "return" takes place "in the service not of a myth of racial essence," but "as a 'liberation' that is also 'transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness'" (11).

Postcolonial drama is no doubt a form of self-representation, an autoethnographic

<sup>3</sup> For more on cultural oppression of the colonizers and the effect on the colonized subject see Ngũgĩ's *Writers in Politics*. And Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon speaks about Arab culture under colonialism and about Arabism as reaffirmation of pre colonial culture.

expression addressed to a native audience thus participating in the historical recuperation of a postcolonial identity as authentic within its historical context.

As an autoethnographic expression, postcolonial drama also falls under the category that Barbara Harlow calls resistance literature that does “not only demand recognition of its independent status and existence as literary production, but as such also presents a serious challenge to the codes and canons of both the theory and the practice of literature and its criticism as these have been developed in the west” (XVI). The fact that postcolonial plays are written and performed to native audiences does not negate its resistance aspect. Speaking about the importance of cultural resistance, Ngũgĩ points out that “most national liberation movements start by rejecting the culture of the colonizer, by repudiating the religion of the oppressing nation and class and the entire education system of the colonizer” (*Writers in Politics* 26). He further discusses how national liberation movements create their cultural texts of songs poems, dances, and performative arts “which embody a structure of values dialectically opposed to those of the ruling class of the oppressing race and nation” (27) and how they would “take the songs of the colonizers and give them an entirely different meaning, interpretation and emphasis” (27). Clearly, adopting the oppressor songs and building on them to reply with opposing meanings is similar to the practices of postcolonial dramatists’ fusing foreign forms with native traditions for the purpose of cultural resistance both at the formal and thematic levels. Songs and plays target indigenous audiences to unify them in their struggle against oppression and exploitation. Autoethnography is an expression of resistance in the sense of refusing the oppressors

narratives and views and providing an indigenous counter narrative of the colonial and postcolonial experience which to works as a “self-retrieval.”<sup>4</sup>

Pratt is right in suggesting that studying autoethnographic expressions is “important in unraveling histories of subjugation and resistance as seen from the site of their occurrence” (9). The different ways of “collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the conqueror” (7) are pointers to the different forms of subjugation and their subsequent counter resistance. The colonizers’ marginalization and dismissal of native traditions as inadequate necessarily calls for reviving those very traditions by postcolonial playwrights. Abrogation and appropriation of the colonizer’s cultural traditions constitute an act of assuming a position of power, the power a postcolonial playwright can have over the colonizer’s cultural texts, to use, remold and merge them with native theatrical performance traditions based on their ends.

The relationship between European drama and native theatrical performances has never been unidirectional. On the contrary, it presents cultural borrowing at its most active process of exchange. While postcolonial theater has drawn on mainstream European realist drama as well as on ideas and theories provided by the German Marxist dramaturge Brecht, native traditions seem to have influenced European drama long before the rise of postcolonial theater. According to Crow and Banfield, “Brecht seems to have discovered what epic acting could be only after he watched the Chinese actors of Mei Lan Fang’s company in Moscow in 1935” (xi). Brecht could not have come up with his epic theater without his acquaintance with Chinese acting, and postcolonial

<sup>4</sup> Ngũgĩ also discusses this point and cites Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* in *Writers in Politics* 26-7.

playwrights could not have contrived their new revolutionary genre if not for the contact with both mainstream European theater as well as the dissenting Brechtian form.

## 2. The Brechtian form, cultural Authenticity, and Mobilization of The Oppressed

Adopting the dissenting Brechtian form is not only a mode of cultural resistance to hegemonies of a stronger imperialistic culture and the conventions of its mainstream drama, but is also a practical choice of a form that can accommodate reviving an authentic cultural identity through including native performance traditions like songs, rituals and carnivalistic elements in the case of Ngūgĩ's theater and the *hakawatis* (story teller), in the case of Wannous's. Brecht refuses to focus on a unified well-woven plot and introduces performance elements that are looked down upon in Europe at the time like songs, dances and music. These elements that Brecht introduced to the dramatic performance have already been part of native theatrical performances for centuries which makes Brechtian form an exemplary fit for a transcultural revolutionary theater. The Brechtian form works perfectly as a revolution against the hegemony of mainstream dramatic conventions, and as a framework that enables introducing native theatrical elements in the dramatic performance.

Interactive elements of Brechtian form represent going back to the starting point in the development of both Western as well as Third World drama. Despite different experiences and histories, both postcolonial drama and Western drama seem to have a similar history of development. Both start interactive and collective and go through

<sup>5</sup> Hakawati is a professional storyteller who works at a café telling historical and folkloric stories to an audience. The word is derived from the Arabic root "haka" which means talked and the word "hikaya" that means story. The hakawati event is an age-old Arab tradition of café storytelling where the hakawati, storyteller, meets with his audience every evening to tell them stories from Arab history and traditions.

different stages separating and isolating the audience from actors only to go back afterwards to the original. Western drama passed through different stages of development before reaching its current forms among which the Brechtian drama has a legitimate and influential place. The most interesting part about its development is the circular path from the starting point of being an interactive form that was often ritualistic, ceremonial or carnivalistic to going back to the same point of accepting those elements in the works of Brecht, Boal, Piscator and other revolutionary dramatists after passing through different stages that have banished the interactive nature and the collectiveness of the theatrical experience for centuries. The Brazilian revolutionary dramaturge Augusto Boal beautifully summarizes it as:

In the beginning the theater was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast.

Later, the ruling classes took possession of the theater and built their dividing walls. Firstly, they divided the people, separating actors from spectators: people who act and people who watch—the party is over! Secondly, among the actors, they separated the protagonists from the mass. The coercive indoctrination began! Now the oppressed people are liberated themselves and, once more, are making the theater their own. The walls must be torn down (...) the spectator starts acting again. (119)

There has always been a direct correlation between the different stages in the history of drama and politics. Drama has been used either to promote conformity and eradicate any antisocial trends or to provoke resistance against injustices. At different points in Western history, theater was employed to promote the agendas of governments,

powerful social classes or rigid religious authorities, and at other points, it was invested for revolutionary purposes and used as a tool to bring about change. In fact, Aristotelian drama continued to be the prevailing form in the West until Marxist writers started experimenting with doing away with the catharsis in open-ended plays. In Marxist philosophy the dominant ideology is the set of beliefs and values established by the ruling classes to control the working class. Marxist dramatists see cathartic drama as one apparatus of the dominant ideology and therefore set forth to dismantle it in an attempt to turn theater into an empowering rather than an intimidating tool.

It is Brecht who, building on his and Erwin Piscator's experiments, provides both theory and practice for the non-cathartic form. Marxist Brecht breaks with Aristotelian and realist traditions. He specifies that classical Aristotelian drama works as a tool of intimidation and promoting conformity through the emotional identification of the spectator with the hero and action in the play. He refuses the Aristotelian drama and comes up with the non-cathartic form which he first called "epic theater" and later "dialectic theater." Brecht's goal is to mobilize the working classes and make them aware of the exploitation they are subjected to under capitalist systems in order to incite their social and political involvement.

Brecht focusses on a few interconnected elements that he sees can work together to change drama from a classical form of social intimidation to a tool for social change and attaining social justice. He dismantles the fourth wall, making the A-Effect to prioritize narration over plot, and to introduce songs and music in the performance. Contrary to the practices of realist drama that pretends the performance is a real-life event and that the actors are being their characters, a Brechtian performance does not

hide behind these pretenses, but shows awareness of the artificiality of the event throughout the show. Brecht also focuses on narration, rather than dramatization where the story, or part/s of it is told without leaving places for surprises. The story consists of a series of episodes that can stand on their own if each is removed from the play. Instead of a dramatizing a unified central story that unfolds through the progress of a well-woven plot, Brecht uses different strategies of narration like having a narrator tell the story or part of it, a character step out of the role to become a narrator, an actor speak in the third person or narrating through singing. The disconnectedness of incidents also makes the progress of the action more flexible to interspersing it with songs, dances and sometimes mimes. All these effects facilitate avoiding a catharsis at the end of the play. The A-Effect also enabled by dismantling the fourth wall and other strategies also contribute to driving towards a non-purging end of the play since the audience is not emotionally charged by pretended realism. Brecht puts a lot of weight on the alienation effect as a means of turning theater into a place for intellectual rather than empathetic involvement with the performance.

Brecht developed his theater and theatrical theory, and later on, Augusto Boal experiments with it investing compatriot Brazilian Paulo Freire's conscientization pedagogy<sup>6</sup> to allow and facilitate spectators' participation in the theatrical event. conscientization, which is an interactive pedagogical method, adds to the malleability of

<sup>6</sup> Conscientization is a theory of an interactive pedagogical method and social concept developed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. conscientization pedagogy aims at raising critical consciousness in the oppressed about their situation. Freire differentiates between conscientization and "banking education" as opposite methods and concepts. Whereas conscientization equalizes between student and teacher giving agency to the student in the process of learning, the banking education forces the students to be a passive recipient of learning deposited into him by the teacher. Freire explains his theory of conscientization in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* which invested the conscientization method in theater was published in 1974.

the form and allows involving the audience in the performance. In his *Theater of the Oppressed*, Boal elaborates on Brecht's ideas and puts them into practice in his experimental and pedagogical theater. He further analyzes the Aristotelian system of intimidation while keeping his study class—focused and offers a plan for educating and empowering the poor through involving them in the theatrical performance. One main Brechtian idea that Augusto Boal stresses is that establishing calmness is the worst enemy of theater meant for mobilizing the oppressed and that theater aiming at transforming society should do away with catharsis. Both Brecht and Boal agree that the classical tragedy/drama has been used as a means of perpetuating the subjugation of the masses by the ruling classes, preserving the status quo and eliminating transformation trends. They also agree that in classical drama the tragic flaw, which is the antisocial characteristic, is eliminated through the catharsis that purges the audience of any antisocial sentiments and allows the restoration of calmness and the preservation of the status quo with those ruling classes remaining in power and lower classes accepting their lot and fearing even the idea of questioning it. Accepting these tenets of Brechtian drama and experimenting to further its instructional side, Boal uses Freire's conscientization pedagogy to experiment with involving the audience and moving it from the passive role of watching (in realist and Aristotelian drama) into active participating in a new drama allowed by the Brechtian form. Brecht's ideas become the theoretical ground for a Marxist interactive worker, and common man theater.

This same circular path has also been the itinerary for revolutionary postcolonial drama's development which appears clearly in Ngũgĩ and Wannous's experimental theaters. The influence of the stronger Western culture on Third World theatrical forms,



the often violent imposition of Western dramatic forms (Aristotelian and realist), and the suppression of native theatrical traditions by colonial powers has weakened indigenous interactive theatrical traditions of the dithyrambic song and ceremony.<sup>7</sup> Different cultural institutions were used to spread the values, esthetics and taste of the colonizers to create a bourgeoisie class of natives with foreign taste and mentality to serve imperialist interests. Although Western drama was first brought to the different parts of the empire for the entertainment of colonial officers, it was eventually recruited to promote imperialist interests. This has led to the dominance of the foreign tradition that is used for cultural intimidation through the inherent oppressive nature of the form as well as through displaying a proclaimed cultural superiority. The first Western influences on postcolonial drama were those of classical Aristotelian and realist traditions that were imposed on the natives mainly in colonial schools. Colonizers brought with them the classical and realist theaters (Shakespeare, in the case of the British), and imposed them as a sign of power over the colonized. These were the highly esteemed traditions, and the mainstream theatrical forms in Europe. When the English colonizers settled in the different parts of their vast empire, they tried to keep their English culture alive and often to enforce it on colonial subjects. They brought their cultural texts to the colonies in a way to recreate a nationalistic environment and facilitate the practice of their national identity even when they were thousands of miles away from the homeland. European theater with its proscenium stage has been one of the most important cultural markers that colonists have used for both their entertainment, and the cultural

<sup>7</sup> Two examples of the British suppression of native performance traditions can be found in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's chapter on the "Language of African Theater" in his book *Decolonizing The Mind* and Nandi Bhatia's book *Acts of Authority/ Acts of Resistance: Theater and Politics in Colonial and Postcolonial India*.

intimidation of the natives. There is no doubt that the ultimate goal of colonialism was economic exploitation of both human and material resources of the colonies. In his book *Decolonizing the mind*, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o best explains how colonizers have used cultural control and intimidation to achieve their goal of economic control:

The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life. Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important arena of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self definition in relationship to others.

(16)

This strategy of cultural intimidation and scorn of native traditions can be clarified by looking at the crude way that Thomas Macaulay, a nineteenth century British politician, downplays native cultures. In his document, "A Minute on Indian Education," Macaulay asserts the superiority of the English culture and demands modelling other cultures after English traditions:

A single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia (....) Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most

useful to our native subjects(....) We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.”<sup>8</sup>

Despite differences in their colonial approach to native cultures, colonial governments’ ideologies never swerved from believing in, and asserting the superiority of the English language and culture. Macaulay’s crude racism and dismissal of native cultures was in fact typical of all British colonial officials in the different parts of the empire and not exclusive to those who served in India. They viewed native cultures as inappropriate and forced British education and culture on colonial subjects to turn them into “good” servants of the empire.

As a cultural arena, European theater in the empire grew into a tool of intimidation used for cultural control of the colonized affecting both their conception of themselves in relation to the colonizers as well as their self-definition. European colonizers used theater for mental control through both form and content through the way they represented the natives in performances as well as by looking down on native theatrical traditions as backward and inappropriate forms. The native, if appears in an English play at all, he is either a simpleton, lazy, sensuous, drunkard or all of these. A well-known example of negative representation of the colonized in English drama is the

<sup>8</sup> I could not access a source to cite this quote due to the university library closure (Covid-19 impact). Two other instances are on Pages 24 and 80. These missing citations will be resolved once interlibrary loan services resume.

Irish stock character who is a drunkard, unreliable, talkative and cowardly. Similarly, the African, is portrayed as gullible and stupid. He is a simpleton, a “naive peasant who comes to the big town and is completely perplexed by the complexities of modern life, the stupid peasant who goes to speak to telephone wires asking them to send money to his relatives and leaving the bundle of notes under the telephone poles” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing The Mind* 38). This is meant to destroy the native’s belief in himself and his people. Native theatrical performances were also despised and dismissed in colonial education and entertainments while the European proscenium theater was elevated as a cultural form worthy of respect and emulation. When European theater becomes a marker civilization, native theatrical performances turn to markers of lack of civilization.

However, the era of resistance and decolonization claimed back the place of the interactive performance through reviving native theatrical forms, rejecting the traditions of the imposed realist and Aristotelian drama, and adopting Brechtian dissenting form. Indigenous performance traditions are interactive in their very nature where there is no separation between spectators and performers. Decolonizing movements started reviving native traditions in order to restore natives’ confidence, both in themselves as people as well as in their cultures. According to Ngũgĩ, decolonization must be total. For him, national independence is only complete with economic liberation. However, economic freedom from the control of imperialistic powers cannot be achieved without first achieving cultural and mental liberation. Resistance and decolonization movements often invested in theater both during and after direct colonialism. The contact with the revolutionary Brechtian theater happened during the time of resistance when playwrights from the postcolonial world had access to both European languages and

European education. Theater has been used as a cultural revolt in itself as well as a means of mobilizing the masses. Postcolonial theater represents a dissent from the highly held theatrical traditions by the colonizers and the hegemony of their culture. It violates the rules of mainstream classical and realist drama by reviving native theatrical traditions and in the case of Ngũgĩ and Wannous, by adopting Brecht's epic theater, or what Augusto Boal later calls Marxist poetics. Adopting the Brechtian form allows for reviving native traditions to help newly freed people regain confidence in the value of their culture. Through these strategies, the cultural revolt in postcolonial theater rejects the hegemony of the European theater and European culture.

Brechtian stylistic elements are strongly present in the works of Third World playwrights who aim at social transformation as they part ways with Aristotelian and European realist drama in different degrees. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o who is one of the earliest native drama practitioners in Africa, has been influenced by Brecht's dissenting dramatic theory and practice. Ngũgĩ has not only written plays but has also dealt with theory explaining drama written for the purpose of bringing about social, political and economic decolonization. His chapter on the "Language of African Theater" in his universally renowned book *Decolonizing the Mind* is one of the earliest works to tackle themes and ideas related to postcolonial drama. In that chapter, Ngũgĩ explains how he draws on Boal's theater of the oppressed to make theater a collective experience "by a range of factors: a content with which people could identify carried in the form which they could recognize and identify; [and] their participation in its evolution through research stages" (59). Both Ngũgĩ and Wannous began by writing plays with themes of resistance and decolonizing before starting to experiment with employing form for the

purpose. The evolution of their form and audiences' active participation in the theatrical event as a means of change is discussed further in the next chapter. Ngũgĩ and Wannous adopt the Brechtian non-cathartic form and widely employ its A-Effect for the purpose of freeing the minds of their audiences from the hypnotic effect of emotionally identifying with character in a realist performance, as well as for inciting spectators to reflect on the conditions of their lives. While Ngũgĩ's Kamiriithu<sup>9</sup> experiment was cut short at the prime of its success using the form when he was forced to exile in 1982, Wannous's career went through different stages of believing in the ability of theater to empower the oppressed and bring about a revolution to the phase of the disillusionment about the effectiveness of revolutionary theater in a society that is not ready for revolution and change. Drawing on Brecht's inclusion of dance and songs in his drama, and Boal's experiments with the form using Freire's conscientization method to involve the audience in the performance has facilitated adopting the form by postcolonial dramatist for their revolutionary purposes including reviving indigenous performance traditions of songs, dances rituals and/or ceremonies.

### 3. Literature Review

Most criticism written on revolutionary postcolonial theater does not recognize the central role of Brechtian poetics and its major elements of non-cathartic endings and alienation effect in the making and development of the genre. While they emphasize the

<sup>9</sup> Kamirithu is the name of the village and the open-air theater where Ngũgĩ and Mugo's Play *I Will Marry When I Want* was first performed. The village as Ngũgĩ explains in *Decolonizing the Mind*, "is one of several villages in Limuru originally set up in the fifties by the British colonial administration as a way of cutting off the links between the people and the guerillas of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, otherwise known as Mau Mau" (34).

transcultural aspects as well as the attempts at reviving native theatrical forms and forging national cultural identities, critical works often downplay the role of Brecht's theories and later Boal's pedagogical experiments in shaping the genre even when discussing revolutionary playwrights. Another lacking point in that criticism is the absence of works that draw connections between drama from different parts of the postcolonial world. While postcolonial drama has been the subject of many studies within the last two decades, very few critics have stretched the scope of their studies to include works from different cultures or to go beyond the borders of one nation state. From 1996 to 1998, three books treated postcolonial theater as a one and new (relatively compared to other forms) genre and read theatrical works from different regions of the postcolonial world in a comparative vein. Brian Crow's and Chris Banfield's *An Introduction to Postcolonial Theater* (1996), Helen Gilbert's and Joanne Tompkin's *Post-Colonial drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (1996), and *Theater Matters* edited by Richard Boom and Jane Plastow (1998) discuss the revival of indigenous theatrical forms by dramaturges to assert an authentic cultural identity. They offer basic observations and general theory of the common practices in postcolonial drama.

Crow's and Banfield's *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theater* examines the different levels and thematic purposes of integrating rituals and native traditions within the framework of European realist drama. The writers include in their studies theaters developed by First World minorities that are impacted by a history of colonialism and oppression like Australian aboriginal and African American communities. While focusing on the theme of cultural identity, the chapters show how playwrights from different postcolonial nations/communities have used the new form to recover an obliterated

history, expose the oppression of aboriginal communities in Australia, Canada, and the US, and to resist the forces hindering liberation and development especially the corruption of ruling indigenous elites. The book also examines how introducing indigenous rituals and ceremonies in the performances contribute to the development of the themes. As one of the earliest comparative studies on the topic, the book importantly highlights themes of oppression and subjugation. Further, it offers good analysis of the use of different native theatrical traditions as resistance tools in confronting cruel realities of domination and marginalization. The same could be said of the Gilbert's and Tompkin's *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice Politics* which studies the different ways postcolonial theater participates in the process of decolonization as a resistance tool. The writers see in postcolonial drama a process of "writing back" to the center of hegemony thus dismantling tropes of superiority of the west and the binary oppositions between colonial and colonized. The book analyzes how the appropriation and adaptation of European canonical texts (mainly Shakespearean texts), and the use of indigenous rituals, carnivals, storytelling, songs and music, as well as writing in indigenous or "indigenized" languages become tools of resistance to the hegemony of colonialist culture. The third book in this early group of studies, Boom's and Plastow's *Theater Matters*, offers a new approach to the study of "drama that matters." The editors see the significance of drama in its effect on the audience, and they direct their focus on the performances' impact on different communities. Boom's and Plastow's collection includes articles contributed by playwrights and theater practitioners in order to offer first-hand knowledge of the effect



certain performances have had on their audiences. The articles also discuss themes of individual and national identities in terms of geography, race, gender and class.

Critics who wrote about postcolonial theater in wider cross-cultural studies have built on the previous works in their new approaches. In his book *Decolonizing the Stage* (1999), Christopher B. Balme examines theatrical means of cultural decolonization of theater through focusing on the different “formal strategies which involve the combination and amalgamation of indigenous performance forms within the framework of European notion of theater” (1). He uses the term syncretic theater for new postcolonial theater forms “that emerged as a result of colonization and decolonization” (18) where European realist traditions are dominant and only “isolated elements of the older [indigenous] system remain present” (17). Balme classifies postcolonial drama into three categories as mentioned earlier: syncretic theater, intercultural theater and fusion theater. However, he focuses his study only on the first category of syncretic theater and the different ways elements of indigenous forms are integrated within the framework of the Western realist form in “a process of cultural and aesthetic semiotic recoding which ultimately questions the basis of normative Western drama” (4). The influence of mainstream European drama on postcolonial playwrights and the cultures of their nations has been enormous, evident in the different roles it played in the formation of postcolonial drama among which is the emergence of syncretic theater with its decolonizing aspect. By focusing on syncretic theater, Balme study is limited to cases where mainstream Western form is accepted by postcolonial dramatists dismissing the semiotics of the absence of the form and/or certain elements belonging to it as a recording of the functions of formal strategies. Not recognizing the significance

of adopting the Brechtian dissenting drama as a framework for the infusion of foreign forms with indigenous traditions as refusal of mainstream realist dramatic conventions results in missing the significance of the absence of hegemonic form's conventions as a resistance strategy.

Among the early works on postcolonial drama, L. Dale Byam's book *Community in Motion* (1999) stands out as it makes a significant departure from focusing on the realist drama as the most important European influence on Third World drama. Byam scrutinizes different African experiences with "theater for development." She evaluates the ways Freirean pedagogy is integrated in educational programs in different African countries. Byam sees Freirean Pedagogy and native rituals and ceremonies as completing each other in forming the basics of a fruitful theater for development programs. While this is true, the book falls short of giving the contributions of Brecht and Boal their due at the time those contributions provide the ground for interactive theater and enables its use of Freirean conscientization. Byam notes Brecht's injunction about the instructional role of theater and Boal's theatrical experiments using the conscientization method in South America but does not speak of a direct influence of the two dramaturges on African theater for development. Brecht's non-cathartic form of drama has offered the real solid ground for different revolutionary theaters for liberation and development. His refusal of catharsis and a well-woven plot provides an essential framework for the use of Freire's pedagogy of conscientization in theater. Also, Boal's experiments with Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed within the framework of the Brechtian form to involve the audience as active participants in making this theater has

an immense influence on similar endeavors around the world as his book was translated to 25 languages (Sierz).

#### 4. Methodology and Purpose

This dissertation works differently from previous criticism of postcolonial drama in its focus on the role of adopting the Brechtian form not only as an acceptance of the form but as a rejection of other dominant mainstream traditions. In fact, adopting the dissenting form and adapting it to indigenous forms and themes have had the biggest role in shaping postcolonial theater in many areas around the world. Building on the views of critics who study the different aspects of postcolonial theater and reading plays by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and Saadallah Wannous, I show how the Brechtian form accommodates the two playwrights' resistance agenda of recovering an authentic cultural identity in the face of a foreign one through integrating indigenous theatrical traditions in their plays, and how opting for the form also represents a rejection of Western realist tradition, thus undermining its hegemony and questioning its normativity. I will comparatively analyze the use of the Brechtian drama's elements in the works of Ngũgĩ and Wannous and how the two writers adopt, comply with or mold the form as a ground for their own innovations. I suggest that studying and evaluating the strategies through which postcolonial playwrights accept, refuse, or appropriate and remold the different European forms, both mainstream and dissenting forms, is necessary to understanding postcolonial theater and its role as a cultural product. This study also highlights the ways Ngũgĩ and Wannous work with and against European realist drama both in adopting the dissenting Brechtian form as well as in using indigenous elements

within the framework of the foreign form. Through reviewing different plays by the two dramatists I show how the two playwrights invest the Brechtian tradition in their revolutionary theaters for their resistance purposes while at the same time keeping an authentic cultural identity of their drama. I also intend to pay attention to the ways their use of the form evolves over the course of their dramatic careers.

A main purpose here is to study postcolonial theater as a product of the contact zone where transcultural and hybrid texts are produced with certain characteristics depending on the purposes of their creators as well as the environments that produce them. This comparative study examines the different ways acculturation of the texts occurs, whether it is the use and adaptation of the Brechtian techniques or the appropriation and selective use of European realist form. The methodology of the study can be specified as comparing texts from two far regions of the postcolonial world and how they go about their participation in the process of theatrical decolonization while heavily drawing on the different European dramatic forms. Viewing postcolonial plays as autoethnographic expressions facilitates understanding how these cultural texts become modes of self-representation while at the same time engaging foreign forms. Reading these texts, I argue that the Brechtian form has had a very important and “in-dismissible” role in shaping postcolonial drama.

However, studying these common aspects between the two playwrights’ theaters should not blur the differences and peculiarities of each as the product of a unique history before, during and after European colonialism. The choice of which foreign theatrical traditions to use or refuse in postcolonial drama is always contingent on each region’s experience with colonialism that requires certain forms of resistance. The same

can also be said about the strategies used to reclaim an authentic cultural identity in the face of foreign imposed traditions. Gilbert and Tompkins point out that “it is the particular attention to ‘difference’ that marks post-colonialism’s agency” (4). They quote Alan Lawson and Chris Tiffin to emphasize the importance of recognizing the difference between each nation and culture’s experience to avoid recreating hierarchies, misreadings, silences, and historicism that are part of the imperial enterprise:

‘Difference,’ which in colonialist discourse connotes a remove from normative European practice, and hence functions as a marker of subordination, is for post-colonial analysis the correspondent marker of identity, voice, and hence empowerment. Difference is not the measure by which the European episteme fails to comprehend the actual self-naming and articulate subject. Moreover, difference demands deference and self-location(...): not all differences are the same. (4)

Riveting the attention on the differences between regions’ experiences with colonialism is vital to understanding the different approaches to cultural decolonization by each playwright. In newly born nation states like Kenya lying under an inheritance of long oppression of native theatrical performances and languages, Ngũgĩ wrote his plays in his native tongue and had them performed in the open air not in a proscenium stage. Ngũgĩ also includes native theatrical traditions like songs, rituals and carnivalistic elements as means of defining and emphasizing a Kenyan cultural identity. The use of these native traditions represents both, a revolt against suppression of native cultural forms by the colonizers during direct colonialism and by postcolonial governments after independence, and at the same time a means of cultural representation and forging an

authentic local identity. Introducing indigenous elements validates the worth of native traditions and proves them fit for stage performances. Ngũgĩ's plays were based on both native and foreign traditions which the playwright takes over, appropriates, and remolds.

Similarly, Wannous appropriates and adapts different native and foreign traditions according to the postcolonial situation he responds to. In Syria, where neither native performance traditions nor language were under direct threat at the time of writing his plays, Wannous accepted the proscenium theater, but mostly adopted the Brechtian techniques against the strong influence of mainstream European realistic traditions as the former served his purpose of empowering his audience. This dissertation project deals with postcolonial drama as a new genre while at the same time acknowledging that this genre is non-uniformed and versatile. I consider postcolonial theater a genre on its own because postcolonial theaters across the far-stretched regions of the postcolonial world have many characteristics and elements in common while at the same time, are distinctly different from previous theatrical forms both European and indigenous. Ngũgĩ and Wannous's revolutionary theaters offer an example of similarities in dramatic works that come from far areas and use different languages. Ngũgĩ and Wannous who did not speak a common language, and most likely have no knowledge of each other's experiments, choose the Brechtian dissenting form for their revolutionary purposes. However, this "one" genre is non-uniformed for the particularities of each region's experience with colonialism and neocolonialism dictate different forms of resistance and different means to achieve cultural authenticity. Focusing on the Brechtian aspects of Ngũgĩ and Wannous's theaters is far from

downplaying the differences between the struggles of each playwrights' society or being meant as an exhaustive representation of the different trends/schools in postcolonial drama in general, or drama in either dramaturge's country.

The importance of this project lies in three points. Firstly, it is meant as a contribution to the study of postcolonial drama which is underrepresented in postcolonial studies compared to the novel. No doubt about the central place of the novel to the emergence and maintenance of the empire, and later, as a form of resistance and nation building/narrating to the postcolonial nation state. Similarly, theater has also been used as a tool for promoting the colonial enterprise by colonizer and mobilizing resistance by the colonized. Moreover, the fact that a performance is a real-time makes its influence stronger and more direct on the spectator than fiction can have on the reader. This explains why oppressors including colonizers who have always tried to monopolize its use to their advantage have also feared its opposite effect when used for liberation purposes.

Secondly, this project includes Arabic drama for the sake of its importance in reflecting Arab society's struggles as well as to add an important dimension to the understanding of Arabic literature and art different from the currently prevailing one that limits everything Arabic with "Islamism"<sup>10</sup> in its religious, cultural and political aspects. During the decades following WWI and the achievement of so-called national independence, newly born Arab nation states had vibrant secular theatrical movements that dealt with the predicament of their newly forged identities, economic challenges and

<sup>10</sup> Islamism is the ideology which advocates that both private and public (including political) life be guided by Islamic teachings as well as the implementation of sharia law. The term is often used interchangeably with other terms like political Islam and Islamic fundamentalism.

oppression of nationalist governments. Theater has prospered in countries like Lebanon, Syria and Egypt at different periods of time since flag independences have been achieved. I am choosing to include works by the Syrian playwright, Sa'dallah Wannous not because his work is representative of theatrical experiments and trends in the larger Arab world, but because of the importance of his theatrical movement in the history of Arab theater and his achievement as a playwright. Another reason for choosing Wannous is that he shares common themes and techniques with playwrights from different regions of the world. This contributes to explaining my second point that Arabic drama, literature and arts do not have to be Islamist per se. Wannous himself was an atheist. Robert Myers and Nada Saab explain this point in the context of Russian influence on Arabic literature and arts on Wannous (and his generation of artists) reminding readers that Wannous as “a committed Marxist, (...) a cosmopolitan, postcolonial writer who read and studied a wide range of literary, theatrical and philosophical traditions and repeatedly compared his country’s predicament and struggle—and that of the Palestinians against the United States’ only ally in the region—Israel—to that of the Vietcong in Vietnam, who were fighting the American military directly” (xviii).

The comparison between the theater of Wannous and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o who is also a Marxist and cosmopolitan postcolonial writer solidifies the idea of a progressive and revolutionary postcolonial theater that came to existence as a tool for cultural decolonization and an ordinary citizen empowerment in postcolonial nation states. Like Ngũgĩ, Wannous adopts Brechtian theater and strives to politicize his audience by involving them in the theatrical creation, and like others, he often resorts to history and



allegory in order to avoid direct confrontation with an oppressive nationalist government. Along with experimenting with techniques of Brechtian theater, Wannous often resorts to the framework of European traditional realist drama by focusing on dialogue and psychological aspects of characters which many other Third World playwrights of international repute have done.

And thirdly, in studying the different ways Brechtian tradition is employed and invested for decolonization by Ngũgĩ and Wannous, this work shows how postcolonial theater has been a fertile soil for both innovation as well as building channels of cultural exchange. As a genre contrived for cultural resistance and forging an authentic cultural identity for newly independent nation states, revolutionary postcolonial theater shows a complicated relationship with Western theater. Although Ngũgĩ and Wannous meant their drama as a tool for resistance, they have been able to avoid slipping into a nativist discourse by not shunning European influences and remaining open to using forms that serve their revolutionary ends. Along with the stress on introducing indigenous forms of rituals, ceremonies and carnivalistic elements, the two dramatists invest in both mainstream realist drama as well as the European dissenting Brechtian tradition. Cultural resistance in theater is mainly based on refusing imposed traditions and imposed identities and assuming a position of power where the postcolonial playwright has the freedom to accept or reject different elements of the foreign theatrical traditions. Postcolonial theater's relationship to European theater, especially mainstream hegemonic dramatic traditions of the proscenium theater is characterized by ambivalence. It is both acceptance of the form as a medium to write back to, and disavowal of foreign traditions as a discourse of power. While its digging for and reviving

of native performance traditions represent cultural resistance to foreign imposed identities, postcolonial theater's amalgamation of foreign and native dramatic forms presents a set of complicated attitudes towards the influences of the colonizers' culture. Postcolonial playwrights employ elements from European dramatic forms to serve their own purposes of resistance and complete decolonization. They appropriate, choose and refuse European dramatic traditions according to the exigencies of their projects. The European and the postcolonial dramatic forms become interrelated. Difficulties arise when one tries to identify each as completely autonomous for neither has a life independent from the other after the first contact. However, the best fit for Ngũgĩ and Wannous's revolutionary agenda remains the Brechtian non-cathartic form, both for its ability to empower the audience as well as in the fact that accepting it is also a rejection of mainstream Western realist drama.

## 5. Structure of this Project

Chapter 2 studies the process of transculturation of postcolonial theaters in Kenya and Syria and the interconnectedness between these two theaters and European drama. While making the theaters of Ngũgĩ and Wannous its main focus, the chapter presents a contextual history of theaters in Syria and Kenya showing how each of them comes to exist and continues to develop as a transcultural form. Similarities between Ngũgĩ and Wannous's theatrical experiments as well as their struggle for producing "national theater" focusing and preserving dramatic cultural authenticity are also highlighted. Most importantly, the chapter traces each dramatist's experiments with the

Brechtian non-cathartic form for the purpose of moving audiences into political involvement and revolting against oppressive neo-colonial governments.

Chapter 3 then explains the vital role of the Alienation effect in bringing about the non-purging ending. It studies the creative strategies which Ngũgĩ and Wannous use in *I Will Marry When I Want*<sup>11</sup> and *Mamlouk Jabir's Head* to produce an A-Effect, and how the absence of the catharsis in the Brechtian form facilitates including elements of native traditions like ceremony, rituals, song and dance. The absence of a cathartic ending—to which the A-Effect is pivotal—also allows utilizing Paulo Freire's method of conscientization to achieve realistic drama that faithfully depicts the power relationships of society and its oppressive socioeconomic dynamics.

Chapter 4 tackles the apparent contradiction between the two playwrights' use of the A-Effect and the proclaimed realism of their drama. A distinction is made between their version of realism which is Brechtian and mainstream Western realism of the nineteenth century. Ngũgĩ and Wannous adopt Brechtian realism, a concept that can be narrowed down to presenting reality from a Marxist point of view. In Brechtian realism, reality is viewed through a materialist lens and the functioning of society is pinned down to its socioeconomic relations between the different classes of society. To unravel the truth about socioeconomic causes and forces that determine the way society functions, Ngũgĩ and Wannous utilize the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's conscientization method. They use the method to explore and expose materialist forces that control social relations.

<sup>11</sup> *I Will Marry When I Want* is coauthored by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩ Wa Mĩrĩĩ. However, the play will be studied in this project as part of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's dramatic career and consequently the second author's name will be dropped in the discussion and analysis of the play.

Chapter 5 reverts to the main characteristic of the Brechtian drama, which is not only the absence of a purging ending, but rather a charging one that calls for action rather than establishing calmness. The chapter looks at two plays that end with the death of their protagonists. Whereas in Aristotelian drama, tragedies end by the death of the tragic hero, Ngũgĩ and Mugo's play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*<sup>12</sup> and Wannous's play *Historical Miniatures* present nontraditional heroes who fall as martyrs due to tragic merits rather than tragic flaws and who find the best framework for their new traits as well as the action that leads to their martyrdom in the Brechtian non-cathartic form. Martyrdom fits as an end in Brechtian drama as it is not a cathartic end since it motivates for more action rather than bring calmness to the world of the play.

<sup>12</sup> *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is coauthored by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo. Like *I Will Marry, The Trial* is studied as part of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's dramatic career and consequently the second author's name will be dropped in the discussion and analysis of the play.

## Chapter 2

### Transcultural Theaters in Kenya and Syria

As discussed in Chapter 1, transculturation is an effect of the acquaintance with foreign cultural forms and themes that takes place in the contact zone where spaces of convergence vary depending on the nature of the relationships between the cultures involved and the peculiarities of each culture. It is in the different spaces of the contact zone where postcolonial playwrights have the chance to learn about different European dramatic forms and consequently produce their transcultural genre. Spaces of the contact zone that are most reoccurring in colonial and postcolonial situations are reading books either in the language of the colonizer or in translations to native languages, and/or travelling to the mother country often most influentially for education. These spaces constitute important channels that enable native playwrights to learn about foreign dramatic forms and make use of them. Colonial institutions of the church and the missionary school are among the arenas where these sociopolitical spaces are created and promoted.

The Third World's acquaintance with the different forms of Western drama took place at different stages during and after direct colonialism but, in some situations, the contact took place long before direct colonialism. The first contact between Arab drama and Western classical and realist drama for example was peaceful cultural borrowing when an Arab merchant named Maroun Al Naqqash watched performances in Italy and came back to produce plays in his hometown of Beirut. However, this bright picture of the Arab dramatist's acquaintance with Western drama was an exception to its counterparts in other places where contacts mostly took place through imposition of

Western drama by colonial authorities on the natives as a tool of cultural intimidation and a sign of Western cultural superiority. In Kenya, the imposition of Western drama was part of the violent war that the colonial authorities and missionaries waged against native languages and native cultures. Western drama was promoted by the colonizers by presenting it to Kenyans as superior to their traditional performative forms while at the same time showing disdain to native performance traditions and taking measures to weaken them (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 37-8).

While the postcolonial world's acquaintance with mainstream Western drama took place very early, before or during colonialism, learning about and adopting the Brechtian form did not happen until after independence. Colonial authorities were not interested in presenting the dissenting form to the natives. It was not until postcolonial playwrights learned the languages of the colonizers and travelled to the mother countries for education that they became acquainted and started to experiment with Brecht's ideas and techniques. As independences failed to achieve the purposes fought for by the poor classes, the need for change became a persisting priority. The postcolonial era has become an era of resistance to the corrupted ruling class of national elites that serves its own interest at the expense of the welfare of the nation. Moreover, independence has never been complete since the economies of newly born nation states remain controlled by ex-colonial and neo-colonial powers. Therefore, to achieve social justice and complete independence, the lower classes needed to unite in resistance to both, foreign imperialist powers and the comprador class of national elites.

Revolutionary postcolonial drama actively participated in this class struggle and drew on every form available whether native or foreign to achieve its purposes of

educating audiences about their realities of oppression and the need to bring about change. Dramaturges found Bertolt Brecht's dissenting drama a good tool for resistance and invoking the oppressed to think, analyze and reconsider the conditions of their lives as historic conditions that can be changed. A common and main purpose of Brechtian drama and postcolonial drama is moving common people into action and becoming the masters of their own destinies. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and Saadallah Wannous, adopt the Brechtian form as a tool of resistance to the new oppressive systems and a means of educating the masses about the injustices inflicted on them by postcolonial governments. The use of Brecht's revolutionary theater came as an answer to an existing need for forms that can help educate the poor classes about the oppression they are subjected to and ways to resist it. However, while postcolonial plays in general and these two playwrights' work differ in many aspects that are contingent on the different colonial experiences, they still share characteristics that unify them as one genre—mainly the strife for an authentic cultural identity and adopting the Brechtian revolutionary form. This chapter's focuses on the background to embracing the revolutionary non-cathartic form by Ngũgĩ and Wannous through tracking the development of each playwright's thinking and presenting a contextual history of the dramatic career of each dramaturge rather than a comprehensive history of drama in each country. The trajectories of the dramatists' careers showcase the importance of the form to postcolonial drama and how adopting it came as an answer to the revolutionary exigencies of a specific moment in the history of each of the two postcolonial nation states. While focusing mainly on the theaters of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o in Kenya and Saadallah Wannous in Syria, this chapter presents a precise history of

theaters in Kenya and Syria and shows how postcolonial drama in each of these countries came to exist and continues to develop as a transcultural form.

### 1. Ngũgĩ's contribution to Kenyan Drama and The Kamiriithu Experiment

Ngũgĩ's dramatic revolt is part of a wider cultural rebellion directed against the Westernization of his country and the neglect and scorn of native languages and cultures which was started by the colonial authorities during direct colonialism and perpetuated by the Kenyan nationalist government after flag independence. The use of his native language Gikuyu in the theatrical production of *I Will Marry When I Want* marks the beginning of a life-long journey of championing the use of African languages in African literary production. The play was written, rehearsed, and produced at the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Center in the language of the peasant audience and with its collaborative participation. While the use of an indigenous language was meant as a form of resistance to colonial and neo-colonial practices of marginalizing and weakening of native languages, the audience also had a decisive role in determining the language of the play. Theodore Pelton points out that the discussion of language in Ngũgĩ's case cannot neglect the issue of class (17). Marxist Ngũgĩ meant his plays and fiction to speak to the peasant and workers proletariat that was largely illiterate in English, "and, it is precisely these people from whom the [Kenyan postcolonial] government wishes to keep Ngũgĩ's writings" (Pelton 17). For Ngũgĩ, national culture belongs with the broad majority of Kenyan peasantry and is best expressed in their language. However, this does not sit well with a government that protects cultural and economic interests of a minority of Westernized elites and



bourgeoisie. Insisting on the importance of using African languages by Ngũgĩ is part of Africanizing attempts made by Ngũgĩ and other African intellectuals. Patrick Williams cites two earlier examples for Africanizing proposals where the Senegalese poet David Diop in 1956 and the Nigerian critic Obi Wali emphasized that the use of native languages is the only way for “African culture to advance” (12).

In addition to the goals of promoting and preserving African native languages and producing theater that was relevant to the lives and struggles of his audience, Ngũgĩ also aimed at Africanizing Kenyan theater by reviving native theatrical performance forms to which the Brechtian framework proved to be essential. While Africanizing theater might sound like a nativist call, adopting the Brechtian form shows the dramatist’s openness to foreign influences as Ngũgĩ never tries to go back to a pure pre-colonial theater. In an interview in 2003, Ngũgĩ explains that he believes cultures should not live in isolation and that “every culture should borrow whatever is best and progressive in other cultures, including European ones” (Rodrigues 163). In resistance to cultural impositions, Ngũgĩ assumes a position of control over what to choose and what to refuse from foreign dramatic elements where he precisely made his choices based on what serves his purposes. He adopts the Brechtian non-cathartic form which has the ability to accommodate different elements from Kenyan theatrical performance heritage like song, dance, and ceremony that Ngũgĩ aims to revive. In many cases, colonial authorities did not only weaken, but completely destroyed native theatrical traditions and ceremonies like the *Ituika* (the ceremony of handing power from one generation to the next) that they banned in 1925 (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 37).

Banning people's gatherings in 1952 also made native theatrical performances and ceremonies impossible.

Theater in Kenya went through several stages of revolt against the shackles of imperialism before it returned to the people in Ngũgĩ's experimental plays. The cultural revolt in Kenyan theater began in urban areas and was "confined to the four walls of the school, the social hall, the university premises," and also to the boundaries of the English language" (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 39). The earliest manifest of the revolt was in the nationalistic subject matters of the plays, and with theater groups that took theater to areas of broad classes of workers and peasants. Ngũgĩ extended this revolt to the language and form of drama when he wrote *I Will Marry* in his native language Gikuyu and introduced native performance traditions to stage. Adopting the Brechtian form facilitated including traditional dance and singing, making it apt for Ngũgĩ's drama for Kenyan peasants and workers. The history of Kenyan drama is very rich where theater occupied an important place in the lives of the people. Ngũgĩ explains how drama which was "part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community" permeating all aspects of life in pre-colonial Kenya was destroyed by British colonialism (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 37). This in turn explains why colonial authorities used it in the colonial school and church as a tool to intimidate the people by undermining their faith in themselves and their cultures. Both the missionaries and the colonial government participated in suppressing native performance forms. The missionaries thought of native rituals and other performance traditions as "works of the devil" which they set on to fight "before the bible could hold sway in the hearts of the natives" (37). The colonial administration also cooperated and "rituals were deemed

hedonistic and consequently outlawed, leaving European cultural forms as the only legitimate alternative sources of religion and entertainment” (Byam 2). While weakening indigenous drama, the school and the church promoted Western drama. They “produced religious theaters with the story of the prodigal son and the Nativity among the most popular themes,” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 38) as well as plays by Shakespeare and other well-known British playwrights.

Official Kenyan theater sponsored by the colonial authorities and later by the nationalist government did not try to hide its agenda, and, as Nicholas Brown puts it “must be considered somewhat of a special case in that its ideological underpinnings did not need to be discovered by dramatic theory; colonial theater was already explicitly ideological” (68). The colonizers’ “intention was not only to entertain the European community in the colony, but also to inculcate European values and attitudes among the colonized as part of cultural domination crucial to the colonization process” (Mlama 57). European drama was widely “introduced in the schools as ‘Little Theaters’ were established in urban centers all over Africa” (57). During the decades of direct British rule, colonial authorities used the prisons, social halls, and schools to degrade Kenyan national character and to show the “superiority” of Western culture through different kinds of plays. The prison, social halls, and schools became the arenas where Western forms of drama were promoted and made to replace declining native theatrical traditions. In prisons, “political detainees were encouraged to produce slavishly pro-colonial and anti-Mau Mau<sup>13</sup> propaganda plays,” and social halls encouraged the

<sup>13</sup> Mau Mau, also known as Kenya Land and Freedom Army, was an armed resistance movement that waged a war of independence against British in Kenya between 1952-1960. The role of this rebellion in achieving independence is still a matter of debate.

concert, a kind of playlet that depicted the native in a negative pejorative manner (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 38). In these plays, the native becomes a stock character recognized for his stupidity and gullibility at which the audience is made to laugh while internalizing a new image of their own stupidity and gullibility. While prisons and social halls portrayed native cultures as deficient and inadequate, schools presented European drama as superior. Schools and colleges promoted and imposed mainstream European and British forms of classical and realist drama where the plays of Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw were often performed.

British Colonial authorities even founded a Kenya National Theater while the country was a colony under state of emergency in 1952. It was the same year they also abolished social institutions that were run by Africans like schools and churches, arrested nationalist leaders, outlawed Kenya's Mau Mau and hauled Kenyans into concentration camps inside their own country. The purpose of the so-called National Theater was clearly cultural intimidation of the natives to defeat their morals as well as to produce a class of Kenyans with English taste and mentality. European drama performed at the National Theater and elsewhere in the capital's schools and college to bring the different races in the country together to create a national bourgeoisie class with British cultural taste, ways of thinking and loyalty (Brown 68). Ironically, Kenya National Theater was not built where Africans lived, but in the middle of "well to do Nairobi," inhabited exclusively by Europeans at the time, but hoped to be open to rich Westernized Africans in the future and become an area "where people of culture and position could meet" (Frost 73). Frost explained the intentions of the founders of the theater that through it, "the goodwill of the European community could be gained,

European cultural standards could be helped, and, later on, members of the different races could be brought together by participation in a common pursuit which they all enjoyed” (196). This goal was certainly achieved as the theater gathered the people of culture and positions from different races around British and European performances rather than Kenyan or African drama. Over the decades of direct colonialism, the British were successful at creating Kenyan English-educated elite and bourgeois classes that were alien to their native cultures. These classes were to become watchdogs for the interests of the British and other neocolonial powers after independence.

More than a decade into independence, Kenya National Theater was still performing European plays in English and excluding Kenyan and African drama. National elites and middle-class Kenyans who held power after independence were all products of British education. They belonged to the class of Kenyans raised and educated in English ways to create a class of Kenyans with “English mindset to offset the nationalist mindset” (Ngũgĩ, *The Politics of National Theater* 5). National Theater was at the time under the control of members of national elites who continued to promote and maintain British drama. Theater became an arena of cultural struggle against the perpetuation of neo-colonial relationships with the West and a medium for promoting decolonization ideas. Unable to claim the grounds of Kenya National Theater, different theater groups challenged the status quo of deliberate official dismissal of Kenyan culture, and the distortion of the history of Kenyan struggle, by producing plays with different levels of nationalistic fervor. These groups were only concerned with the contents of the plays. According to Ngũgĩ, the revolt was gradual, and it remained within the “walls of the schools, the social hall, the university premises and also within the

boundaries of the English language” (39). A good example of plays of that stage of cultural revolt in theater are Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’O’s earlier plays *The Rebel* (1961), *The wound in the Heart* (1962), *The Black Hermit* (1962), and *This Time Tomorrow* (1967), in addition to the later play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1974) which Ngũgĩ co-authored with Micere Githae-Mugo.<sup>14</sup> The dissent in the first four playlets is partial both in form and themes. Despite their nationalistic subjects, they were written and performed in English on a proscenium stage. Up to the writing of *The Trial*, the dissent in the form of Ngũgĩ’s plays was limited to just a preliminary deviation from the standards of the well-made play. They fell short of adopting popular theater’s ideals of treating content that is of specific concern to popular classes via mediums that belong to those very classes like dance, ritual, and ceremony.

Cook and Okenimkpe point out that Ngũgĩ’s plays, like his novels, “reflect the progression in his thinking from his humanist-moralist concerns with ethical issues to his later advocacy for a radical transformation of society” (153). However, this should be accepted with the awareness that Ngũgĩ’s theater writing reflects his thinking and positions on sociopolitical and cultural issues up until the point when he was forced to exile in 1982 as exile put an ending to his dramaturgy. Away from his homeland and people, Ngũgĩ continued addressing similar themes of domination and decolonization and advancing the politics of language afterwards in his fiction, memoirs, and other

<sup>14</sup> Ngũgĩ wrote his first three plays while a student at Makerere University in Uganda. He wrote *The Rebel* and *Wound in The Heart* were written for his residential hall competition and won in 1961 and 1962 respectively. *The Black Hermit* was written to Mark Ugandan independence and *This Time Tomorrow* was written for The British Broadcasting Corporation while Ngũgĩ was at the University of Leeds in England. It is also important here to note that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* which was written in 1977 remains controversial in its representation of Kenyan history as it deals with the contested topic of the role of Mau Mau armed rebellion in achieving independence. For more on these plays, see Ndgigiri’s *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Drama and the Kamiriithu Popular Theater Experiment*.

nonfiction works. Ngũgĩ's dramatic experience and experiment remain very important in the history of Kenyan and African theater. Josphat Gichingiri Ndigiriji concurs that the importance of the first three plays before *The Trial* lies in their place in the trajectory of the development of Ngũgĩ's dramaturgy (43). She declares the three playlets as lacking critical significance (43) and cites an interview with Ngũgĩ by Sander and Munro as an example on the shortcomings of these plays where Ngũgĩ agrees *The Black Hermit* "is very confused" and that if he was to write it at a later time he would probably have done it differently (55). These playlets belong to the earliest stage of the development of Ngũgĩ's ideas and positions on the then-current state in Kenya during the time when he still trusted that the nationalist government was on the side of the people, and that tribalism was the problem.

The change is clear in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* where Ngũgĩ adopts a "crusading socialist nationalism" (Cook and Okenimkpe 160) that is manifested in the revolutionary non-cathartic ending of the play as well as its other aspects of popular theater. A very important aspect of *The Trial* is its adoption of the Brechtian form. It is Ngũgĩ's first play where the effect of mobilizing the audience to resist oppression relies heavily on its non-cathartic ending as the martyr hero's death at the end charges emotions with the need for action rather than purging them into calmness. The play marks the point of the maturation of its writer's understanding of the neocolonial situation in Kenya and his gaining of a clearer vision of the kind of change needed for real and total decolonization as well as a better understanding of how to connect with a popular audience. It makes one important step in its author's experiments with making a theater of the common people. While sharing the same heroic mode with the previous

plays, *The Trial* represents an important step in the development of Ngũgĩ's theater towards popular theater (Ndigiriri 40). Unlike the heroes of the previous three plays who conceive of themselves and are conceived of in the world of the plays as saviors of their communities, "Kimathi sees the struggle for Kenya's eventual liberation as something greater than his finite self. After his sentencing, he calls for the struggle for justice to continue.... Even as he is led away to his death, Kimathi is firm in his belief that the Kenyan masses shall be free" (116). In terms of the development of the hero, the play marks, as Ndigirigi notes, the beginning of adopting ideals of popular theater that addresses itself to ordinary people, presenting a hero who is one of them and opening up the possibility of elevating them to heroes of their causes. Moreover, the hero's martyrdom, in the case of *The Trial*, plays a role in gathering momentum for the struggle and sharpening determination to achieve any goals. His behavior sets the example for community members to follow suit, which is clearly a strong invitation and motivation to action. This very important aspect will be discussed in more details in the last chapter of this dissertation. I am here concerned with providing a quick contextual history of writing and/or performing the plays rather than closely analyzing any of them.

During the time Ngũgĩ wrote his plays, Kenya National Theater in Nairobi was still controlled by British directors who were the remnants of the colonial era. The crucial issue that surfaced was about the national theater and what exactly constituted it. Subsequent questions like whether it was the location, the management, the kind of plays performed or the language of theatrical expression, or whether all of these constituents together make a national theater developed into a real debate. The development that ensued was that theater groups reconsidered the location of the



national theater and decided to take it to the people, to their hometowns and countryside. Theater groups started making tours to different parts of the country.<sup>15</sup> This necessitated abandoning English and using Kiswahili in plays meant to be watched by the peasants and workers. Thus, for the first time, theater moved outside an official theater building and started using a local language for theatrical expression. However, all these plays were written from the standpoint of petty bourgeoisie class that developed under colonial rule. This class could not see theater as part of the African culture which explains the adherence to the European forms and the proscenium stage.

Ngũgĩ's intervention at this point represents an exceptionally successful experience—though a short-lived one—in theater of development,<sup>16</sup> attempted in different parts of Africa around that time. Byam defines theater for development in the African context as “true African theater in pursuit of development; and true development must engage the subject community” (197). Ngũgĩ's next play after *The Trial* was his *I Will Marry When I Want* which was conceived of and saw light in an open-air theater in

<sup>15</sup> Under the directorship of the first Kenyan officer Mr. Wasambo Were, Schools Drama Festival started touring Kenyan provinces with the winning finalist plays. The University of Nairobi also started its own Free Travelling Theater that toured urban and rural communities. Other travelling mini-theater groups were also formed. For more about these developments in Kenyan drama see Ngũgĩ's Chapter on the language of African theater in his book *Decolonizing The Mind*.

<sup>16</sup> Theater of development is a version of popular theater that was used for educational purposes in newly born African nation states soon after independences were received. There were different styles of theater for development practiced in different countries on the continent with results that vary from absolute failure to relative success as well as exceptional success and effectiveness. The most successful were the styles that involved spectators in the process of learning about and analyzing social and political environment through dialogue. On the other side of the spectrum were the official programs sponsored by governments or other world organizations. These were usually managed by foreigners and were doomed to failure because they did not involve the subject communities. Theater for development projects in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zambia failed because of the lack of community involvement whereas experiences in Kenya (Kamiriithu) and Zimbabwe that adopted a true application of Paulo Freire's interactive pedagogy were the most successful. It is worth noting here that after the destruction of Kamiriithu center in Kenya and the forced exile of its founders, coauthor of *I Will Marry When I Want* Ngũgĩ Wa Mirii ended up in Zimbabwe and was involved in the theater of development first as Community-based theater, and then the national project known as The Zimbabwe Association of Community Theater (ZACT). For more information on Theater for development in Africa, see Byam's book *Community in Motion: Theater for Development in Africa*.

a peasant area where ordinary people participated in its making and critiqued its rehearsals for historical accuracy. The play represents the maturation of Ngũgĩ's idea of a national theater as a popular theater made about the people, by the people, in their local languages. Carlos and Garciella Nuñez describe popular theater as a political theater that "preserves, rescues and incorporates elements whose content is genuinely popular—i.e., serves the interest of the popular classes. [and]...that culture which strengthens ethnic consciousness and class consciousness" (qtd. in Byam 11). It is clear that in this sense, "popular" takes a functional meaning of active commitment to performance elements that belong to the common people who constitute the popular classes. Further, South American theater artist Raul Alberto Leis who places social responsibility on popular theater as an agent of transformation, which is also a functional role while these definitions or descriptions are in line with Brecht's notion of "popular" (qtd. in Byam 11). Citing Brecht's explanation of "popular," Byam cautions against mistaking all popular theater in Africa as progressive for it is possible to employ elements of popular theater like dance and song to discourage liberation and development. To Brecht, "popular" art is "intelligible to the broad masses, taking over their forms of expression... / linking with tradition and carrying it further/handing on the achievements of the section now leading to the section of the people that is struggling for the lead" (Brecht 108). Unsurprisingly, Ngũgĩ's popular theater does coincide with Brecht's idea of the transformational role of popular theater through giving agency to the oppressed to take the lead towards progressive transformation which makes his theater a real theater of development.

Ngũgĩ co-authored and directed *I Will Marry When I Want* with Ngũgĩ Wa Mirii in Gikiyu at the Kamiriithu Community Education and Culture Center where the two playwrights succeeded in producing a popular national theater located among the people and above all, made by the people. Hence, theater returned to the poor peasant and worker classes who are not only the majority of citizens in number and the producers of wealth, but also the preservers of its national cultures and heritage. The play incorporated their traditions and gave them back their active role in making theater. The location and the audience were the determinants for these drastic changes in form. A theater for the peasants and workers would only relate to them when it incorporated their traditions and spoke their everyday language. In addition to this, native performance traditions were inherently interactive which made the audience readily participate. Audience members participated in judging and commenting during the revising of the script as well as the rehearsal of the performance of *I Will Marry When I Want*.

While the participation of the audience in the theatrical performance has always been a characteristic of oral native performance traditions that are most often ceremonial and ritualistic, Brechtian drama provides the theoretical bases of the new form which, like a Western play is written to be performed, but like native theatrical traditions, it allows audience involvement in all its stages. It is at this point that Ngũgĩ and his partner Ngũgĩ Wa Mirii adopt the Brechtian non-cathartic form and amalgamated native performance traditions within its framework. They included dance and rituals in their plays and performed them in the open air. The two playwrights moved performance out of the official theater building and the University to the

outdoors. This was also facilitated by applying Augusto Boal's techniques who elaborated and experimented with the Brechtian theories. In his book *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ briefly speaks about the influence of the Brazilian dramaturge Augusto Boal on making the play (59), and, of course, that Augusto Boal's theater is Brechtian to the core. The dramatic revolt went through different stages before reaching its final destination of bringing theater to the empty space where native traditions can be revived, and spectators can be involved as active participants rather than passive recipients in the theatrical experience. Adopting the Brechtian form allows for writing a play that revolves more around dance and music than a strongly weaved central plot which develops towards a denouement, and Boal's experiments paved the way for an audience participation in rehearsals as well as final performance. Giving this active role to ordinary people and what it implicated regarding having an active role in a future aimed at decolonizing socialist revolution proved too much for the nationalist government to tolerate. On 16 November 1977, the government cut short the performances of the play by banning any public gathering at the Kamirithu Center. Later that year, Ngũgĩ was arrested and detained for a year.

This play reclaimed a long-lost confidence in native theatrical forms as well as the worthiness of native languages for theatrical expression. It is noteworthy here to mention that after *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977), Ngũgĩ abandoned English as the language of his theater and fiction and turned to solely writing in his ethnic language Gikuyu for a few years. However, living in the West through his extended forced exile seems to have eventually brought him back to writing in English. Ngũgĩ's contribution to African theater in general and to Kenyan theater in particular is not limited to proving the

possibility of writing and performing in native languages, but also investing the Brechtian revolutionary form to raise awareness among the poor peasants and workers about the unfair sociopolitical dynamics of their oppression and marginalization. While writing and performing in native languages makes theater intelligible to a larger audience instead of limiting it to a small group of educated Kenyans and national elites that understand English, it also becomes a way of resisting the hegemony of Western languages and cultures. Adopting the European dissenting Brechtian form is also an act of cultural resistance to the artistic hegemonies of Western cultures.

In 1981, an even bolder project of performance was planned at the Kenya National Theater of Ngũgĩ's musical drama *Mother Sing for Me*. While this play/musical was planned to be performed in a proscenium theater, it was more ambitious than *I Will Marry When I Want* in terms of both dramatic form and language. In his attempt at preserving native theatrical forms and asserting the suitability of native languages for theatrical expression, Ngũgĩ gathered songs, dances, mimes, proverbs and ceremonies from all Kenyan ethnic groups and languages to present in one musical drama for all Kenyans. The play was to be performed by Kamiriithu group, at Kenya National theater. But again, the nationalist anti-populist government did not allow the performance of any all-Kenyan authentic theater to materialize. Kenya National Theater closed its doors on the performance in February 1982 and the Kamiriithu Center was leveled to the ground by the police on 12 March 1982 (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 59). However, the rehearsals were watched by thousands of Kenyans from all national ethnicities (59) who spoke different languages, but to whom the play had also spoken in their own languages and gestures that they were familiar with. The universal enthusiasm for the

play was aborted by banning the performance and forcing the author into exile since then. Kamiriithu Center was closed and all theatrical activities in its area were outlawed. The anti-populist government did not allow a performance that could make the people feel united and could incite them to think and act. Such drama that could free people rather than intimidate and control them was never what the nationalist government wanted. The play that was meant to make people proud of who they were, of their languages and their heritage was not allowed to officially see light. Exile, first in Europe before settling in the US until this day, put an end to Ngũgĩ's dramatic career, but it did not end his commitment to writing in his native language and advances the politics of language in his fiction, essays, memoirs and other non-fiction works.

## 2. Saadallah Wannous and Arab Drama

While the language of African drama took a central place in Ngũgĩ's revolutionary theater, the case is completely different in Syria with Saadallah Wannous's experiments. Although language of literature in general, including the language of theater, has often been a debated issue within the larger Arab literary community, the subjection to colonial rule and later postcolonial governments have had no direct relation to the issue of language at the time Wannous wrote his plays. The question that was being debated, and obviously continues to be, is whether to write in classical, or in everyday spoken provincial dialects of Arabic. This question pertains to the development of the Arabic language, which, at least during the last four decades of last century, was independent of the Arab world's experience with twentieth century European colonialism and its aftermath of neo-colonial and imperialist control.

While this study focuses on Saadallah Wannous who was born, raised, and continued to live until he died in the present-day nation state of Syria, the history of Syrian drama cannot be studied without including theatrical movements in what used to be Syria<sup>17</sup> before Britain and France divided the Arab World into today's nation states. Historical and geographical Greater Syria included today's Lebanon, historical Palestine, Jordan, in addition to parts of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Sinai and Turkey. Cypress is also often counted as part of Greater Syria. Therefore, the study of Syrian Theater before 1919 would naturally include theatrical activities in Arabic speaking region of Greater Syria mainly current day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and historical Palestine. Theatrical movements in the rest of the Arab World were by no means disconnected from theatrical experiments and activities that took place in Syria with a special relationship between cultural movements in Egypt and Syria both before and during colonialism as well as after independence. The common language is no doubt the main connecting factor making all experiments parts of a developing Arab Theater searching for an authentic identity through proper forms and subjects, which explains why Saadallah Wannous always uses the term Arabic Theater rather than Syrian Theater in his writing about drama and theater. His and other playwrights' search for an authentic

<sup>17</sup> To differentiate between pre-mandate Syria which is the larger region and present-day nation-state of Syria, I am using the term Greater Syria to refer to the first and Syria to refer to today's Arab Republic of Syria. The term Greater Syria has been historically used to refer to the region and has been also adopted by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) that was founded in 1932. SSNP called for the creation of a nation-state of Greater Syria based on claims that the region is one geographic environment with natural boundaries that separate it from other countries. Syria can still be used to refer to the bigger region depending on the context.

Another name that refers to the whole region is also "Bilad El-Sham" (countries of Sham) where "Sham" is another name of the important historical city of Damascus which served as the capital for Umayyad Caliphates and is the capital of the present-day republic of Syria. Damascus is one of the oldest inhabited cities in history. This name of the important city "Sham" is also often colloquially used to refer to the whole region of Greater Syria as the name of the part can be used to refer to the whole in Arabic.

identity for an Arab Theater, which revolved variably around form and subject, took place after the independence of different modern-day Arab nation states. The most prominent among playwrights who discussed and experimented with producing authentic Arab theater are Wannous, Ali O'qla Orsan, and Kalid Al-Barad'i in Syria, and Tawfik Alhakim, Yusuf Idris, and Salah Abdul Sabour in Egypt (Hamo 5).

While the language of drama is not a major issue in Wannous's theater, it is clear from his plays as well as his writings about drama that form has always been a major concern. The adoption of the Brechtian tradition did not take place until two decades into independence for reasons related to the development of the form itself, Arab and Islamic culture, the colonial situation in the region, and Syria's relation to the USSR and other countries of the Eastern Bloc. During the years between the two wars, Brechtian theater was new and still developing while the Arab World was coming face to face with the ugly reality of the allied forces' treachery. Instead of gaining independence in a unified Arab national state as promised in Hussein-McMahon correspondences,<sup>18</sup> Arabs found themselves colonized subjects of France and Britain. The people, writers, and thinkers were occupied with armed and other forms of resistance where theater did not have place in the struggle due to different reasons. Arab culture and Islamic traditions were probably major factors hindering the prosperity of theatrical and performance traditions. Arabs have historically held poetry as their main literary heritage from the

<sup>18</sup> A series of letters exchanged between Shareef Hussein, the emir of Mecca and Sir Henry Mc-Mahon the British high commissioner in Egypt between 1915-1916. In these letters, Britain promised to recognize an independent state including all Arabic-speaking people in return for their support in the war against the Ottoman Empire. However, while Arabs revolted against the Ottoman Empire and supported Britain in the war, the latter did not keep its promises. Instead of recognizing a unified Arab State under Shareef Hussein, Britain divided the Arab world previously ruled by the Ottoman empire to be colonized by Britain and France according to Sykes-Picot agreement. Britain also promised to support the founding of a Jewish state in Palestine (in the Balfour Declaration, 1917) disregarding the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people.



pre-Islamic era till this present day. While different performance traditions have always existed, they tended to be more of popular entertainment traditions enjoyed by people, but not cherished or honored to any position near that of poetry. The popular saying “Al Shi’r Diwan Al Arab” which means “poetry is the legacy of Arabs” summarizes the story.

Islamic teachings<sup>19</sup> that restrict the mingling of the sexes in public places as a way to moral decay have certainly been also a hindrance to the development of drama. In addition to Islamic teachings, Arab culture in general (among both Muslims and Christians) kept women from the public sphere. The socializing of strangers from the two sexes was not approved of either by religious authorities, or by society as a whole, and consequently did not exist in respectable circles. This conservative environment had, no doubt, its negative effect on the place and development of theater where not only the audience is expected to be both men and women, but also made acting a taboo job for a woman in Greater Syria and the larger Arab World.

Moreover, people in Greater Syria might have not felt the need for cultural resistance during direct colonialism or immediately after independence as the colonial powers did not meddle much with Arab and Islamic culture and religion. The arrangement for French control over Syria was not a traditional colonial enterprise, but a mandate published by the League of the Nations in the aftermath of the First World War and the Partitioning of the Ottoman Empire’s dominions. Even though the mandate gave enough control to the French over present-day Syria and Lebanon, especially of foreign policy and judicial system, the officially announced purpose of the mandate was to help the people of the region through the transition period of moving to self-rule after the

<sup>19</sup> There are other opinions suggesting that Islamic teachings have weakened theater in Muslim world in more than one way. For more on this see Brockett and Hildy; Karam; and Bell.

defeat of the Ottoman empire that had ruled them for centuries. The articles of the Mandatory guaranteed freedom of worship, did not interfere with the Arabic language, and rejected racism:

The mandatory shall ensure to all complete freedom of conscience and the free exercise of all forms of worship which are consonant with public order and morality. No discrimination of any kind shall be made between the inhabitants of Syria and the Lebanon on the ground of differences in race, religion, or language. (Smuin 48)

Even though the French did not interfere directly with religious practices, daily life and customs, they still used their power to further archeological activities and excavations, control museums and make French an official language along with Arabic and to impose teaching it in schools.<sup>20</sup> The French's abstinence from flagrant interference with religion and culture did not spring out of their goodness, but from a long experience and knowledge of Muslim society. They were well aware that "Islam as a religion was little affected... by the 350 years of Cristian missionary endeavor. [And] as a polity, it was little affected by the 150 years of colonial conquest and imperial rule"<sup>21</sup> (Jansen 68).

Since changing and even influencing the culture was not an easy task, the French opted not to meddle with the Syrian society also to avoid stirring trouble and resistance of the Mandate. As W. Watt explains, for a ruling institution to be able to govern a Muslim society, it has to respect its religious practices and teachings: "This

<sup>20</sup> For more on the background of French orientalism and interference in the region see Idir Ouathes's *Syria And Lebanon under The French Mandate*.

<sup>21</sup> French involvement with Egypt started with the Napoleonic occupation 1798-1801. Then France occupied Algeria in 1830, Tunisia in 1881 and Morocco in 1907 concentrating its Islamic empire in North Africa before being granted the Mandate over Syria and Lebanon by the League of Nations after WWI.

respect, ... [takes] the form of an understanding between the rulers and the jurists, according to which the rulers [do] not meddle with the social structure or associated mores" (Watt 175). He notes that there is a sense that "it does not matter who rules a community of Muslims provided he respects their social and religious observances, and provided that he is not an advocate of an alternative ideational system" (Watt 175). However, the mandate lasted for twenty-six years that were fraught with armed resistance.<sup>22</sup> The inhabitants of Greater Syria were resistant to transferring authority from the Ottomans to the French after World War I and demanded self-rule.<sup>23</sup> The French army entering Syria in 1919 was faced with armed resistance from different local factions. This might have also made it more urgent for the French to crack down on rebellion than to use its power to gain more cultural domination. One could say that Syria gained its independence with Syrians gaining knowledge of the French language and consequently French literature, with no harm done to the place of the Arabic language and the Islamic traditions in their lives. In short, there was no direct cultural oppression or attempts at destroying native culture comparable to that which the British practiced in Kenya or the French in Algeria, for example.

To be more specific, no form of European theater was imposed on Syrians to call for a dissenting revolutionary theater of resistance, or even to dig into Arab traditions for any. In fact, the contact with the classical and realist traditions seems to have taken place through trade more than half a century before modern European

<sup>22</sup> The Great Syrian revolt which started in Druz area in 1925 also spread to the rest of Syria and Lebanon and lasted for twelve months before the French were able to crush it. For more about antagonism between the French mandate rule and Syrian nationalists as well as armed resistance see Peter A. Shambrook's book *French imperialism in Syria, 1927-1936*.

<sup>23</sup> The inhabitants of Greater Syria were resistant to French rule and splitting Lebanon and Syria except for the Maronite minority in Mount Lebanon that had strong ties with France.

colonialism in the region. Because of the geographical proximity of parts of the Arab world to Europe, older cultural rivalry between the Muslim empire and Europe, as well as trade relationships, many Arabs learned and spoke European languages. Greater Syria and its port cities were among those places where contact through trade materialized often in trips taken by Arab merchants to European countries and coming back acquainted with different foreign cultural traditions.

Marun Al-Naqqash travelled to Italy where he encountered Western-style theater and came back fascinated with it. According to sources, Al-Naqqash possessed “an adequate reading knowledge of French and Italian (besides Arabic and Turkish)” (Nima 8). He adapted Mulier’s *L’avare* making it the first Western style play in Arabic. This comedy was presented in Al Naqqash’s house in Beirut in 1848 and marked the introduction of European dramatic form to an Arab audience. Although Al-Naqqash translated the play into Arabic verse, Arabicized the names of the actors and changed the locale, he kept the plot intact. Al-Naqqash continued adapting European plays as well as investing traditional Arabic stories like *A Thousand Night and One Night* for his theater that he built next to his house after the great success of his first play. However, the resistance of several religious and social authorities and personages to an Arab theater forced Al Naqqash to turn his theater into a church shortly before his death.

After Al-Naqqash, an artist named Ahmad abu Khaleel Al-Qabbani established the first professional theater in Damascus. While supported by government officials in Syria who were bent on modernization, Al-Qabbani’s theater was strongly opposed by religious officials. Al-Qabbani moved his theater to Cairo where he achieved tremendous success (Nima 11). Unfortunately, a fire destroying his Cairo theater cut his

successful journey short. The incident also destroyed him financially and caused him to return to Damascus where he lived on a government stipend until his death in 1902. During this period, there was a mass emigration of actors from Syria to Egypt (10). This emigration was caused by the “propaganda of religious orthodox circles coupled with the penury of the artists” and resulted in depriving theater in Damascus of its ablest artists (10). However, plays continued to be written and performed by amateur theater groups during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth.

Upon the independence of newly born Arab nation states, many of them started looking towards Europe and the West for development. Foreign influences were solidified when Arab writers and thinkers travelled to different European countries both Western and communist. Theater was one of the cultural forms that was shaped by this increased contact with foreign cultures. Syrian government founded the National Theater in 1961 when Thought and Art Society<sup>24</sup> whose intellectuals were trained in Europe started presenting amateur productions of European plays and some works by Egyptian writers like Tawfik Al-Hakim. Members of Thought and Art Society, and other actors trained at the Institute of Dramatic Art in Cairo also joined the National Theater troupe. Syrian theater benefited from foreign influences while, at the same time retaining, its connections to Arab dramatic movements that were also influenced by different European dramatic traditions.

<sup>24</sup> Thought and Art Society was founded in 1959 by the cultural critic and screenplay writer Rafiq Al Sabban, who gathered a number of talented intellectuals around him and turned his house into a kind of cultural center.

While mostly foreign cultural influences have come from English and French, other European cultures have also had some considerable influence. Muhammad Azzam lists other European cultures from most to least influential where the Russian culture comes first followed by the German, Spanish and Italian (130). Discussing the influence of Brecht on Arabic theater, Azzam notes that Brecht's and other German works have been made accessible to Arab readers, thinkers and writers through translating them from English and French (131). However, the alliances different Arab countries like Syria, Iraq, and Egypt made with the USSR formed direct channels for influence. These countries signed formal agreements for cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union. Syrian government was the first Arab country to sign such an agreement on 20 August 1956, followed by Iraq and Egypt (Dawisha 426). In addition to cooperation in press, television and radio programs, there was a flow of books, films and publication into these countries. According to Dawisha, "in the field of the performing arts, between 1955 and 1970 the Middle East as a whole, and Egypt in particular, was host to a tremendous number of outstanding Soviet troupes, orchestras and ensembles" (426).

These cultural imports must have helped transmit the ideas of Brecht to the Arabic speaking intellectuals and playwrights at the time of Brecht's prime popularity in the Soviet Union. During the 1950s, the USSR Communist Party adopted Brecht as their "own" and invested his international fame as a "publicity tool" (Gardiner 634). In fact, Bertolt Brecht and his work gained more coverage in Soviet media since he moved to settle in East Germany in 1949 (634). This new interest in the Marxist dramatist culminated in awarding him the International Stalin Prize in 1954. Brecht's popularity in

the USSR must have facilitated learning about him and adopting his techniques by Arab dramatists. Starting from the sixties of the last century, Arab dramaturges have been showing big interest in Brechtian theater and started experimenting with the new techniques (Azzam 133). This has been clearly facilitated by openness of the Arab states in the Soviet Union and East European countries at the levels of education, tourism and receiving technical training and support.

However, this does not mean that Arab states closed their doors in the face of Western influences. In the field of education, which is one of the most effective ways of transculturation, Arab students have by large preferred to study in the West. Despite the fact that study in the USSR was always funded either by the Soviet government or Arab governments while studying in the West was mostly self-paid, more Arab students chose to study in Western universities (Dawisha 436). Dawisha, who provides and analyzes the number of Egyptian, Syrian and Iraqi students graduating abroad from the USA, UK, and USSR, inferred that pro-Western cultural orientations strongly continued among Arab elites (436). Arab students from financially able classes who preferred to stay in their home countries also chose Western institutions like American University of Beirut, the American University of Cairo, St. Joseph's University in Beirut, and others. Dawisha gives the interesting example of Nasser's daughter who attended The American University of Cairo (436). Nasser was the founder of Arab Socialist Union in Egypt and the icon of socialist nationalist ideology who is loved by Arabs for his nationalism and astute anti-imperialistic positions. Regardless of Nasser's socialist ideology, his daughter, like most of the children of her class, chose a Western educational institution.

Upon this unprecedented contact with both the West and the Eastern Bloc that started influencing the different aspects of Arab life following independence, many writers resisted cultural subservience and turned to Arabic traditions and history for forms and subject matters. Playwrights also started debating what an authentic Arab Theater would be. Ideas about “Ta’sseel al masrah Al Arabi,” which means making Arabic theater authentic,<sup>25</sup> started in 1964 with Yusuf Idris’s articles<sup>26</sup> that called for an authentic Egyptian and Arabic Theater. To playwrights who took on the task of Ta’sseel, Arab repertoire of traditional performance forms constituted the source of authenticity for an Arabic theater. However, Wannous did not completely agree with this opinion. He suggests that folklore and Arab performance traditions can provide good material to experiment with in this respect, but not solely sufficient to achieving theatrical authenticity without dealing with current problems and challenges of the lives of spectators. For him, authentic Arab theater can be achieved through continuous experimentation with different techniques and themes in order to relate to the audience. Addressing current life conditions and social and political problems of a specific audience in a specific time and geography are what make a theater an authentic cultural aspect of its locality. By this, Wannous maintains that the adaptation of foreign texts or forms to local environments do not negate the authentic identity of theater so long as

<sup>25</sup> “Ta’sseel” means making “Asseel” which is the adjective form of the term meaning authentic, or original, or genuine. I am opting for the “authenticity” and “authentic” to translate the Arabic term and its derivatives simply because the issue is connected to two ideas: 1-the original identity which means the theater reflects Arab culture and heritage and is the product of Arab playwrights’ creativity. 2-the idea of autonomy of the theater which means it is free to innovate and free from the mar of being imitative of other, specifically Western drama.

<sup>26</sup> The series of articles were published in the January, February, and March 1964 issues of the journal al-Kätib.



texts and performances are adapted to local environments. It is clear that to him, like Ngũgĩ, authenticity is achieved through relevance.

Wannous experimented with different approaches to foreign forms adopting traditions that serve his purposes and/or modifying others for an Arab audience. While *The Rape* (1990) is based on the 1964 Spanish play *The Double life of Doctor Valmy* by Antonio Buero Vallegro which Wannous adapts to deal with Arab-Israeli struggle, a subject that highly concerns not only Syrian but Arab society by large, *Mamlouk Jabir's Head* presents a story from Arab and Islamic history using a foreign form. In the *Rape*, Wannous accepted the realist form and wrote a literary play with a subject that was of concern to all Arabs at the time. It is important to note that this play was written in a later stage in Wannous's career where he tended to use traditions of mainstream Western literary theater more than he ever did before. However, in the latter play, *Mamlouk Jabir*, which was written earlier, Wannous adapts Western Brechtian elements to resonate with an Arab and Syrian audience while presenting a story from Arab history. To suit Arab taste, Wannous wrote the play to be performed in a café with a Hakawati, traditional storyteller, which the audience was familiar with. Like Brecht, Wannous here moves the play outside the official theater building. The setting that Wannous chooses for his performance produces the familiarity to the place and atmosphere enabling the audience to relax while at the same time creating an alienation effect for there is no pretense that the event is a real one, but a performance put on by professional actors. Hence, there are no contradictions between adopting foreign techniques and creating an authentic theater.

Like Ngũgĩ, Wannous also deals with the problem of national theater which is tightly related to the question of authenticity. He too deals with it at both the theoretical level as well as experimenting with different forms and themes. The problem of the national theater in Syria was similar to that of the national theater in Kenya. Both national theaters of those independent countries were under the hegemony of foreign cultures, presenting mainly European plays and rarely presenting any plays from local cultures and environments. According to Wannous, the scarcity of plays by Arab writers staged at the Syria National Theater was so bizarre that for thirty international plays scheduled consecutively, only two Arab plays were offered (Wannous, *Bayanat* 50). Wannous participated in the ongoing discussion about the crisis of the national theater suggesting that cultural subordination to the West was underlain by the structure of class power within postcolonial societies. As a cultural edifice, the Syria National Theater was controlled by traditional bourgeoisie class that had cultural and economic connections to foreign bourgeoisie class within the capitalist world system. Wannous explains that this class that has failed to develop a local culture of its own—the same way it failed at building an independent local economy—“found its only way out in turning cultural institutions into bridges that connect it with the mother class and its cultural productions” (50-1). He elaborates that the appearance of the petty bourgeoisie and change in the structure of class power have resulted in the necessity of changing audiences and accommodating them.

The ascendance of the petty bourgeoisie to more sociopolitical power in Syria, and the bringing of the peasant question to the front by the agrarian movement<sup>27</sup> made recognizing these classes as the backbone of the nation an urgent historic need at every level, including the cultural. While the Syrian Communist Party was not able to sustain much influence or popularity, and had to go underground at different stages,<sup>28</sup> the other two parties and especially the Ba'ath Party, would be the main political power deciding the future of the nation. The Arab Socialist Party under the leadership of Akram Hurani<sup>29</sup> was mainly a peasant party that championed peasant rights against big proprietors and landlords. Its slogan was "Fetch the basket and the shovel for the burying of the agha and the bey."<sup>30</sup> The Arab Socialist Party merged with Ba'ath Party<sup>31</sup> in November 1952 to become Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party which would rule Syria from 1963 to the present. Pre-merged old Ba'ath Party was made up mainly of urban petty bourgeoisie, but the Arab Socialist Party brought its peasant base to the support of the

<sup>27</sup> Even though only the Arab socialist Party could be accurately described as agrarian, the other two parties, Syria Communist Party and Ba'th Party, got involved with the peasants at different stages, and helped bring them to the range of the nation's political vision.

<sup>28</sup> After gaining popularity in Syria and Lebanon during the early and mid 1940s, the Communist Party lost most of its members and supporters after its endorsement of the Kermlin's acceptance of 1947 plan for the partition of Palestine. Again, the negative position the party leader, Khalid Bakdash took towards the Egypt-Syria Union made whatever support the party had salvaged after 1947 loss instantly evaporate. The party was outlawed and forced to go underground in 1948, and again in 1958. A temporary ban was also put on the party between 1981-1986. For more on the history of the Communist Party, see Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry: The Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables And Their Politics*, and Paul Salem's *Bitter Legacy*.

<sup>29</sup> The Arab Socialist Party had emerged in 1939 as Hizb-is-Shabab (Youth Party) and took the name of Arab Socialist Party on March 1, 1950. For more about the history of the party see Batatu.

<sup>30</sup> Ottoman honorary titles. Agha could be a civilian, or a military officer, and the bey was usually a district governor.

<sup>31</sup> Ba'th Party grew out of students and teachers circles that were formed as early as 1939 and had its founding congress in 1947. It was dissolved with the union between Syria and Egypt in 1958, only to be revived by a secret military committee in 1959 before coming to power following the coup of 1963. A sequence of intra-party coups followed, the last of which was the calm and bloodless coup of 1970 that brought Hafiz Asad to power as the head of the Ba'th Party and president of the Arab Republic of Syria. For more about the history of the Ba'th Party with its three major political and ideological phases, see Batatu and "Neo Ba'th Party of Syria" by Avraham Ben-Tzur.

newly formed Party. However, unlike Hurani, who was the man of the people, Michel Aflaq, the leader of the Ba'ath Party, had an urban outlook and "the peasants never constituted an object of his concern" (Batatu 136). His observations about them were only general like when he expresses that the "national struggle... can only be based on the generality of the Arabs and these will not take part in it if they are exploited" (136). However, even though the party was dominated by urban cadres, members of the old Ba'ath Party of the 1940s and 1950s took initiatives to alleviate the misery of exploited peasants and educate them without any prompting from their leaders. Clearly, the Ba'ath Socialist Party has had agrarian elements in its ideology even before the merger with the Arab Socialist Party. This history of relative empowerment of the urban petty bourgeoisie, and lending attention to the peasant question presented a need to change culture which Syrian theater failed to meet resulting in the crisis which Wannous dealt with.

To Wannous, the national theater's crisis started when it tried to change its old audience without living up to the task of connecting with the new audience. The official slogans in a country like Syria that proclaimed socialism<sup>32</sup> and equality contradicted with the status quo where petty bourgeois, peasant, and worker classes were excluded from the national culture. Analyzing the problem of the national theater, Wannous criticizes the choice of the elitist area of Abi Romanah to be its home. He elaborates that despite all the changes, this "lonesome cultural center is still determined to continue choosing Abi Romanah over all other areas inhabited by popular classes" (Wannous, *Bayanat*

<sup>32</sup>One example of such slogans is that of the ruling Ba'th party which was "unity, liberty and socialism."

50). Like its Kenyan counterpart, the Syria National Theater isolated itself from common people who are the majority and preservers of national culture. According to Wannous, the aloofness of the Syria National Theater from popular classes is the origin of its crisis. Its failure to accommodate the new audience puts it face to face with the question of authenticity raised by many writers, critics and playwrights including Wannous.

However, while Wannous did participate in the ongoing discussions about the authentic identity of an Arab theater, identity and authenticity were not his main concern throughout the different stages of his career as he never wrote for the purpose of merely creating and devising an authentic Arab theater. Rather, he responded to the then-current circumstances in the Arab world that always affected him very deeply. Wars and defeats always affected his outlook of the world and theater caused him to reconsider his previous positions on different social and political issues as well as his ideas about the nature and role of theater. Sakhsūkh describes the change in Wannous's thinking and its impact on his theater as "several stages in which Wannous rebels against theatrical stable traditions, only to come again and rebel against what he has previously reached as he passes it into something new" (39).

Critics divide Wannous's theatrical career into three stages.<sup>33</sup> The first stage which extends from 1961 to 1966 started with Wannous's disappointment at the dissolution of the union between Syria and Egypt. The plays of this period are preoccupied with existential questions that are manifested in elements of the absurd like alienation, meaninglessness of life and futility of man's activities. During this period,

<sup>33</sup> Ali Al-Anezi in *An Analytical Study of the Theater of The Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous with Particular emphasis on The Plays Written After 1967 War*. Ahmad Sakhsoukh in *Ughniyāt al-raḥīl al-Wannūsīyah: dirāsah fī masrah Sa'd Allāh Wannūs*, Rida Bin Salih in *al-Masrah al Arabi Byna al-tajrib wa al-taghib: qirā'ah fī masrah Sa'd Allah Wannous* and others.

Wannous wrote *Life Forever* (1961), *A corpse on the Street* (1964), *Tragedy of the Molasses Seller* (1964), *The Unknown Messenger* (1965), and a few more, each of which reflects different existential concerns and followed the traditions of the absurd theater in one way or another. According to Ahmad Sakhsūkh, Wannous's play *Al-Jarad* (the Locust), where he tries to portray the working of the subconscious mind of his main character Yūsuf, is archetypal of the works of the first stage of Wannous's dramatic career when he was under the influence of existential philosophy and the styles of the absurd dramatists like Samuel Becket, Eugene Ionesco and Arthur Adamov (42).

This stage came to an end when Wannous turned to socialism as he rejected the idealist philosophy in favor of a materialist outlook of the world. Residing in Paris for two years (1966-1968) to study theater, Wannous was influenced by Marxist thinking. Two important historical events that took place during his two years in Paris solidified his new way of thinking. The defeat of Arab armies against Israel in 1967 shocked Wannous to the core and caused him to return home for a few months. The 1968 student Marxist revolution in Sorbonne University, in which he participated championing Palestine Liberation Organization's struggle to liberate the homeland from Zionist colonizers, gave him hope and confidence in revolutionary actions. These two events shaped Wannous's new approach to theater which he started using as a revolutionary tool. On one hand, the Arab defeat made him realize the need to address its sociopolitical causes in Syrian and Arab society that suffered from marginalization of ordinary people as regimes' dictatorial apparatus of oppression had turned them into submissive apolitical beings. On the other hand, the Sorbonne revolution showed him the possibility of a socialist revolution that could shift the balance in favor of the

oppressed. Wannous started using theater to educate his audience about the socio-economic roots of their oppression and the power relationships that work against their interests. During that period, he was convinced that theater was able to incite a revolution and change the status quo. Wannous believed in the possibility of a revolution that could change history and saw theatrical action as praxis of change. Making the audience his starting point, Wannous addressed his themes using stories, forms, and mediums of communication that his audience is familiar with to facilitate connecting with it and moving it to action. (Citation: see Note 8, above)

However, no revolution took place on the ground outside the walls of the theater building. At the end of each performance, “people leave as they usually leave at the end of any other performance, laughing, whispering to each other, and spreading admiration comments about the play. But then what? ... Nothing else... Never anything else...” (Wannous, *Bayanat* 286). This phase continued until 1977 when, realizing the inability of theater to bring about a revolution, Wannous entered a long period of silence as he abstained from writing for 13 years.

It seems that during this time, Wannous fully reconsidered his previous conceptions of revolution, change, and history as he came out of the period of silence with completely different convictions. He realized the depth of the backwardness of his society which makes moving it to an instant revolution closer to impossible. Since immediate revolution and change are not feasible in a society that is stuck in the past ruminating on old legacy, in the third and last stage of his theatrical career, Wannous took on the task of using theater as an aesthetic means to enrich individual spectator's sense of appreciation for good art, add to their knowledge, and help opening the scope

of their thinking to new ideas and values. Wannous lost his faith in the ability of popular theater to affect change by relating to a popular audience and switched alliance to literary theater that “continuously invents new aesthetics and new possibilities of expression which are not available in other mediums of communication... ‘a theater that steadily gains courage in exploring the individual and society’” (Sakhsūkh 69). He no longer aimed at changing government or resisting ruling classes but aimed at affecting change in society and individuals themselves. Unlike his previous works that sacrificed understanding the individual in favor of representing the interests of groups (which in his Marxist thinking were always social classes), plays of the third stage concerned themselves with the individual, the psychology of his/her behavior, and the motives for their actions. He finally broke his silence in 1990 with his play *Al Ightisab (The Rape)* and wrote a total of eight plays before he died in 1997. In these plays of his final stage, history occupies a central place. Some of the plays’ stories are drawn from Arab history for the purpose of comparison and exposing the contradictions of the present, and others deal with current troubles of their time. Like his previous stage of revolutionary theater, Wannous aimed in his last plays for change, but it is not the quick and drastic change that a revolution brings, but a slow and steady one that starts from the individual. While change to him was preconceived as happening from the top down, it changed direction to become from the bottom up. Wannous lived his last years with the conviction that no positive change could happen without taking place in society, first starting at the level of the individual.



### 3. Common Aspects of The Transcultural Postcolonial Theaters of Ngũgĩ And Wannous

Whether focusing on changing the individual or changing the government, Wannous, like Ngũgĩ, is always concerned with the question of relevance. To him, relevance does not mean just giving a cultural identity to the cultural text, but means engaging in ideas, themes, and issues that are of concern to the spectators via a medium they are familiar with. Achieving cultural authenticity is an issue that both Ngũgĩ and Wannous discuss and write about at the time the new genre of postcolonial drama is searching for identity both at the levels of form and content. On the surface, the two playwrights take different positions on the role of native performance traditions as well as on influences of mainstream European drama. Yet, a deeper look at each dramaturge's theory and practice shows surprising agreements between the two. While Wannous declares that Arab folklore provides good material for drama, but not enough to achieving theatrical authenticity (Wannous, *Bayanat* 96), Ngũgĩ highlights his use of native performance forms of ceremony, song, dance, mime as important elements of authenticity in African and Kenyan theaters (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 45-54). However, the subject matter of Ngũgĩ's plays show how he does not rely solely on form but uses content that is deeply grounded in the reality of his spectators' lives which Wannous declares time and again to be the most important element of authenticity. Even though Wannous doesn't see folklore as enough to make theater authentic, like Ngũgĩ, he still makes the history of his people (Arab history, in his case) and their performance traditions, a source of inspiration for his theater. In *Historical Miniatures* for example, the play revolves around a historical event from old Arab history. The use of Arab performance traditions is also prominent in Wannous's plays especially the

hakawati in *Mamlouk Jabir*. To him, “a theater that does not make Arab performance traditions and the struggles of the spectator as a citizen and a member of a crushed social class its starting point is destined to be a dead and identity lacking theater” (Wannous, *Bayanat* 97). Like Wannous, Ngũgĩ also sees that people’s life “is the very stuff of drama” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 42). The *Trial of Dedan Kimathi* presents the story of a patriotic leader to revive history of the struggle of Kenyan people and teach it to their young generations. In *I Will Marry When I Want*, Ngũgĩ also presents the history of his people’s struggle in mime and makes the play a revival of native performance forms of song, dance and ceremonies. In addition to the fact that the switch from English to Gikuyu in *I Will Marry* forms the basis of its authenticity for Ngũgĩ wants to present a play to the audience in its own language. He explains the role of language as both a means of communication and a cultural carrier of the traditions and ways of thinking of the people who speak it. Clearly, relating to the audience is what creates the authenticity of his drama.

Both Ngũgĩ and Wannous also have interesting positions on mainstream European drama, especially realist drama that is housed in an Italian proscenium theater. Both seem to oppose confining drama in a proscenium theater building and thought that that would undermine the revolutionary role of their theaters. Wannous who has no problem in borrowing and adapting foreign texts to relate to Arab environment (Wannous, *Bayanat* 84) still sees in the Italian proscenium theater building “an obstacle in the way of developing an authentic Arab theater” (95). This position mostly belonged to the early stages of his dramatic career before he mitigated his revolutionary tone and returned to the proscenium stage during the last phase of the development of his drama

which spanned the last years of his life. Ngũgĩ also aims at moving theater back to the open space and recuperating Kenyan drama after the damage colonial authorities have inflicted on it through their violent attempts at “destroy[ing] the concept of the empty space among the people by trying to capture and confine it in a government-supervised urban community halls, school halls, church buildings and in actual theater buildings with the proscenium stage” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 38). Both Ngũgĩ and Wannous see moving theater out of the limits of the theater building and the Italian proscenium stage as a factor that enables experimenting with different forms and contents to which their audiences would relate.

However, it is clear that neither Ngũgĩ nor Wannous sought a precolonial native theater to which their adoption of the European Brechtian form strongly attests. They experimented with the form which has the flexibility to accommodate themes, subjects, stories, and different performative elements from the very lives and history of their audiences. Marxist Brechtian drama which has been originally developed to move the poor European working classes against the injustices of capitalist systems best served the revolutionary purposes of postcolonial drama like inciting critical thinking and inspiring confidence in the marginalized classes about their ability to bring about change. Despite the differences in histories as well as experiences with colonialism and economic systems between Kenya and Syria, Brechtian drama is adopted by Wannous and Ngũgĩ to move the oppressed classes against social, cultural and political injustices they were subjected to at the hands of nationalist governments.

A main tool of the Brechtian drama that Ngũgĩ and Wannous use to incite spectators to think critically about the root causes of the unfavorable conditions of their

lives and to consider searching for solutions is the A-Effect. The A-Effect is a stable tool in Brechtian drama that does away with the illusion of realism of the performance which in turn is blamable for spectators' emotional over-involvement with action and character in the play. Ngũgĩ and Wannous use the tool to block spectators from losing themselves in the action and allowing overwhelming emotions to disable their faculty of thinking and judgment. The A-Effect is achieved through different strategies that keep the audience reminded that they are watching an artificial event being performed by actors who are personifying the characters of the play. Ngũgĩ and Wannous experiment with the Brechtian form and its A-Effect. Each author creatively draws on the performance traditions which are native to his culture. To do away with the illusion of realism, Ngũgĩ invests in song, dance, mime, and ceremonial and ritualistic elements while Wannous employs traditions like hakawati and uses stories from Arab and Islamic history which his audience is familiar with.

### Chapter 3: Alienation Effect in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's and Saadallah Wannous's Theaters

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 show how Ngũgĩ and Wannous's theaters are cultural rebellions that benefit from adopting the Brechtian form in their attempts at moving their audiences to reflect critically about their unfavorable life conditions, search for the root of injustices and resist oppression. In their most revolutionary plays, both Ngũgĩ and Wannous strongly and creatively employ the Alienation Effect (A-Effect): the one stable and indispensable technique of Brechtian drama. In fact, Brecht's theatrical revolution against classical Aristotelian and realist Western drama lies mainly in his *Verfremdungseffekt* which is often translated into English as Alienation Effect, estrangement effect or distancing effect. Critics who opt for one translation over another always offer legitimate claims for their choice by showing the nuances of each translation. However, none of the English translations is the exact equivalent of the German word *Verfremdung*. The main concept of the *Verfremdung* effect is presenting what is familiar and usually taken for granted to the audience as strange and surprising and consequently needs to be examined and rethought. This study uses the Marxist term, Alienation Effect (A-Effect) because Brecht's ideas originate from his Marxist interpretation of life and dynamics of society. In Marx's alienation theory, the workers' loss of control over the product of their labor in a capitalist system alienates them from intrinsic human traits. They lose the ability to determine for themselves and end up accepting unjust social conditions as unchangeable realities due to their submersion in those conditions. Brecht's theatrical alienation is meant to awaken the oppressed to this social, economic and political alienation. Ronnie Bai expresses the connection between Marx's social theory and Brecht's dramatic theory precisely and succinctly when he

describes the A-Effect and its function as “a technical device... [which] bring[s] audiences to recognize the strangeness of social conditions that they take for granted, [and] arouse[s] their will to alienate alienation” (411). Clearly, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o and Saadallah Wannous also aim at alienating social injustices in their postcolonial nation-states to better understand them.<sup>34</sup> Their Marxist thinking, which they share with Brecht and experiment with applying to their theaters, is also another reason for choosing the term of “Alienation Effect.”

The A-Effect is therefore the theatrical technique of alienating the incidents portrayed from the spectators. This precisely means showing what is usually familiar as unfamiliar and strange. To achieve this estrangement of “the familiar,” the spectators need to be prevented from unconsciously losing themselves in the action by keeping them reminded of the artificiality of the event. Acknowledging the artificiality of the event means the illusion of the assumed reality of the event is abolished and that the fourth wall is dismantled. “The fourth wall” is the imagined wall that separates the stage from the auditorium through which the audience can see the action while the actors pretend that they are not aware of being watched and that their event is a real-life incident.<sup>35</sup> Removing the fourth wall is achieved through different techniques most common among which is the direct address of the audience by an actor/actors and/or conversation between the stage and the auditorium. Also, any signal from the stage denoting the

<sup>34</sup> In his article “Alienation and Revolutionary Vision in East African Postcolonial Dramatic Literature,” Nelson O Fashina deals with the theme of social and psychological alienation in Ngũgĩ’s plays *I Will Marry When I Want* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Fashina explains how the writers approach the theme of Alienation from a Marxist economic perspective in the two plays.

<sup>35</sup> Addressing the audience during the performance existed in western drama long before Brecht. However, the modernist deliberate removal of the fourth wall only appeared after the standardization of realist and naturalist drama, and only then started to produce a shock effect on the audience. See Nathaniel Davis’s ““Not a soul in sight!”: Beckett’s Fourth Wall.”

acknowledgement of the fact that this is a play and not a real-life incident and that the actors are being watched is a removal of the fourth wall. The awareness of the artificiality of the theatrical event restrains the audience from excessive emotional involvement and identification with action and character on stage. Therefore, removing the fourth wall is essential to creating an A-Effect as it prevents the spectators from being carried away in an emotional orgy that disables their critical judgment. Brecht states that “the aim of [the Alienation Effect] technique...[is] to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident” (136) and specifies that the main object of alienation is the social gest underlying the incidents, where the social gest acts as “the mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationships prevailing between people of a given era” (136). Therefore, by alienating the theatrical action, Brecht historicizes the incidents, the social gestures underlying them as well as social relationships. Through the Alienation Effect that incites viewing incidents critically, Brechtian drama presents the world as “manageable” (140).

This comes in stark contrast with orthodox Aristotelian and realist drama that normalizes social structures and portrays them as fixed and inevitable. While Aristotelian drama presents dramatic conflict as between Man and unchallengeable divine forces which consequently makes destiny unchangeable, Marxist Brecht brings dramatic conflict to its “real” scientific nature as societal class struggle between human beings. Brecht sees the main function of classical Aristotelian and realist drama as normalizing the alienation of the poor classes and perpetuating their submersion in the situation of oppression through intimidation and promoting conformity. His Alienation

Effect's most important function is impeding conformity through presenting social structures as historical that can be critiqued and ultimately changed.

What promotes conformity in Aristotelian idealist drama is the cathartic ending of the play. The catharsis purges the spectator of any tendency towards dissent or opposing the system. Through empathy which the spectator develops towards the character, he/she vicariously suffers the latter's full experience. According to Augusto Boal, "the only indispensable element of empathy is that the spectator assumes a 'passive' attitude delegating his ability to act" (102), which turns the spectator into an "object in relation to the character: whatever happens to the latter, happens vicariously to the spectator" (102). The spectator vicariously suffers the tragic hero's peripeteia (radical change of fortune) and experiences his anagnorisis (recognition) and acceptance of hamartia (flaw) as bad. The tragic end of the play has a cathartic effect on the audience which is the most important element of the Aristotelian dramatic system. The sequence of these experiences and their subsequent emotions numb the spectators' minds, prevent them from critically analyzing their situation, and purge them of any antisocial tendencies. What is described by antisocial here are the tendencies of resistance to the system, challenging the ethos of society and aiming at destabilizing the status quo.

It is clear that to Brecht, the culprit of turning the spectator into an object in spectator-character relationship in idealist works is empathy which is the precondition for spectator's identification with character. Therefore, empathy is indispensable for making the spectator experience the character's peripeteia and anagnorisis, and for him to be purged of his "social sin" (103). While Brecht in his earlier works sounds like



demanding the elimination of empathy, he seems to have become clearer about it in his later works as he notes that the actor “needs not renounce all means of empathy entirely” (136). He also does not reject emotions in his emphasis on “the rational.” On the contrary, Brecht accepts emotions and a level of empathy that “looks for the interests corresponding to the emotional effects of works of art” (145). Augusto Boal explains the kind of good empathy that Brecht allows as the “empathy that does not prevent understanding but, on the contrary, needs understanding precisely in order to prevent the spectacle’s turning into an emotional orgy” (103). He argues, then, that Brecht’s position is “entirely favorable to that emotion which is born of pure knowledge [and] opposed to the emotion which is born out of ignorance” (Boal 103). While good empathy and good emotions are born of knowledge, bad empathy results from blurring that knowledge. Bad empathy is achieved, according to Brecht, through the hypnotic illusion of the reality of the dramatic event is realist drama’s covert weapon for manipulating the audience into complacency with the status quo. Hence comes his turning against realist drama and its pretense that the dramatic event takes place in real life and that the audience is the secret observer of the action.

It was during the time when realist drama was already solidified as the mainstream European and Western drama that Brecht started thinking about new forms that function to liberate the audience, rather than perpetuate its subjugation. Brecht challenged the traditions and practices of realist drama that established blinding empathy with characters and made the A-Effect central to his theory. Keeping the spectator reminded of the artificiality of the event does away with the chances of excessive and non-knowledgeable empathy that leads to identification with character

and the subsequent catharsis at the end of the play. Subordinating emotions to rationality to show the world transformable is the position of Marxist Brecht on theater. When emotional involvement is kept under control and tempered towards social liberating purposes through the A-Effect, the need for a cathartic ending is eliminated and drama can be invested as a tool for liberation rather than a means of subjugation. This works perfectly for revolutionary postcolonial dramatists. Wannous and Ngũgĩ accept Brecht's dramatic ideas and practices while rejecting forms that Brecht also rebels against. They transfer the A-Effect into their drama and achieve it creatively by investing both Brechtian and native traditions to effectively enable its revolutionary aspects.

Transcultural revolutionary postcolonial theater's adoption of the Brechtian A-Effect for the conscious purpose of moving the spectators into thinking, resisting, and bringing about change comes in line with dramatists' purpose of reviving an authentic cultural identity as the techniques that bring about the Alienation Effect has never been foreign to native theatrical forms. These techniques were not used to create an A-Effect as there has never been an effort to hide the artificiality of theatrical events to start with. Long before Brecht came up with the concept and coined his term, elements that reminded the spectators that what they were watching was a performance rather than a real event were naturally part of native performances in many parts of the world including Africa and the Arab world. John Conteh-Morgan's article "African traditional Drama and Issues in Theater and Performance criticism" explains how native African performance forms never pretended to be reality peeked on secretly by the audience. Conteh-Morgan classifies African drama into the two categories of ritual and drama in

terms of role playing. To him, the ritual is a distinct form, though sharing some characteristics with the other forms of theater and drama. Ritual mostly does not involve impersonation while theater and drama do. And since ritual does not involve impersonation, then there is no need to create an A-Effect for the spectator to detach themselves emotionally from character. Moreover, there is no separation between audience and performers in ritual and the spectator is at the same time a performer. Therefore, whatever takes place during ritual is in fact a reality and not an imitation of reality. On the other hand, impersonation is the core of drama that is enacted for the sole end of entertainment. Conteh-Morgan shows that “drama as a secular staged activity-involving play-acting ...has always existed in traditional societies” (11) and notes that actors are not only humans but could also be puppets. In other words, the fourth wall does not exist in African performance forms. An event enacted by puppets for example, cannot pretend to be a real-life event.

Like native African theatrical forms, traditional Arabic performance forms are also explicit about the artificiality of the event. Most Arab performance traditions like dabkeh (folkloric performative dance) and dahiyeh (circle or line dances with a leader) do not involve impersonation and consequently are real events that cannot be considered drama. Native Arabic performance forms that involve impersonation like khayal el thil (karakuz wa iwaz) and al-aragoze can be labelled as drama since they are performed solely for the sake of entertainment. Characters in both traditions Khayal el thil are puppets that clearly do not involve the spectator with strong emotional identification. Spectators only see puppets that represent different characters (usually types) during different performances.

However, postcolonial drama is not simply a continuation or development of native performance forms. Experiences with colonialism have resulted in the birth of a new revolutionary theater which aims at reviving the native and local identity of drama which has been suppressed under colonial rule and/or neocolonial cultural hegemony. It also resists foreign cultural impositions by choosing and refusing from among foreign dramatic forms according to its own revolutionary agenda. The absence of the fourth wall in native African and Arabic traditions has made using Brechtian drama as a framework for a revolutionary theater which refuses mainstream European forms and revives an authentic cultural identity a viable task. Ngũgĩ writes that “theater is not a building. People make theater” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 42). And Wannous declares involvement of the audience as an essential element in theater:

A [dramatic] work should remain continuous and harmonious dialogue taking place in two directions. One dialogue occurs within the group [of playwright, actors, director and others...] to explain and deeply explore ideas as well as design and build the work. And another dialogue between this group on one side and the spectators on the other. The two dialogues should go on at the same time and reflect on each other in a dialectic relationship that will lead to a successful theater.” (Wannous, *Bayanat* 37)

These assertions necessarily negate the existence of the fourth wall in Ngũgĩ and Wannous’s theaters. Although neither Ngũgĩ nor Wannous elaborate much about the use of the A-Effect at the theoretical level, reading their respective plays *I Will Marry When I Want* and *Mamlouk Jabir’s Head* show how central the technique is in these non-cathartic revolutionary plays, and how innovative the two playwrights are in

employing it. By amalgamating native and foreign conventions, they bestow a strong sense of authenticity on their transcultural drama and enhance its revolutionary aspects through relating to their audiences' lives, environments, and struggles.

### 1. A-Effect in *I Will Marry When I Want*: "People make theater" and the Revival of Native Performance Forms

In *I Will Marry when I Want*, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and his collaborator Ngũgĩ Wa Mirri invite their audience to think about their life conditions through alienating the dramatic action by involving their audience in the creative process of producing theater as well as contrasting different themes and forms. Contrasting themes and forms is provided through elements of form like songs, mime and conversations in the play. *I Will Marry When I Want* is a play that deals mainly with class struggle in a postcolonial context of newly independent Kenya. In addition to class struggle and neo-colonial relationships with imperialist powers and ex-colonizers, the play also deals with themes of marriage and family, gender, culture and political struggle. It presents the story of a poor working-class couple, Kigũnda and Wangeci, who lease their labor in the fields and factories and on their small lot of land to sustain themselves and pay for their son's education. Having very little to no money for the education of their children, Wangeci and Kigũnda opt to pay for their son's education and deprive their daughter Gathoni of the chance of getting an education. Poverty and deprivation of even the most essential needs make the girl vulnerable to the rich young man, John Mũhũni, who lures her out of her parent's house with gifts and nice clothes. John Mũhũni's father is Kigũnda's employer, who also tricks the latter to borrow money from a bank that he manages and

pawn the lot of land, to eventually dismiss Kigūūnda from his job and strip him of the only property and source of livelihood, his small lot of land. By this time, Gathoni is pregnant and jilted by her rich lover who dumps her on the road once they arrive in their town calling her a prostitute. Class relationships are discussed in long conversations and necessarily with showing the appropriate class attitudes between classes in both speech and body language which Brecht calls the “social gest.” In fact, the relationships between classes is the play’s main concern, it is necessarily heavily built on Brecht’s idea of social gest. Alienation Effect and inciting critical thinking are tightly related to viewing social relationships and social gest critically.

The first and most important element contributing to alienating the dramatic action and allowing a space for intellectual involvement with the stage event is the direct and active involvement of the audience in all the stages of making the play. When “people make theater,” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 42) they are involved in the creative process and are aware of its progress. Rejecting realistic drama that pretends the theatrical event happens for the first and only time and was never rehearsed before, the writers involve their audience in all the stages from writing the script, to revising it and rehearsing for performance. The didactic nature of the play does not mean the authors assume the position of teachers imparting knowledge to the audience, but rather the flow of knowledge and learning goes both ways where the authors learn from the audience and vice versa. Discussing the role of the radio as a new technological invention and how to “put its instruction into artistic form... link[ing] it up with the efforts of modern artist to give art an instructive character” (52), Brecht emphasizes the objective of “turning the audience not only into pupils but into teachers” (52). Ngũgĩ Wa

Mirri and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o benefit from Brecht's view of how to integrate art and education, and from Freire's theory of conscientization. The writing and revising of *I Will Marry* took the form of dialogical thematic investigation sessions as the authors adopt Freirean pedagogy by "reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (Freire 53). Limuru<sup>36</sup> villagers participated in critiquing the performance during rehearsal as well as in revising the script. They participated in discussing both form and content of the play. The peasants were "particular about the accuracy of detail...about language [and] most particular about the representation of history, their history" and "the discussion would go on" (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 54).

Keeping the audience aware of the process of preparation for the play also involves setting up the stage for performance in front of them. In his discussion of the A-Effect in Chinese theater, Brecht notes that "articles of furniture are carried in [to the stage] during the action" (*Brecht on Theater* 91). However, while the authors of *I Will Marry* do not include stage directions for the characters to carry stage furniture in front of the audience like we will see Wannous in *Mamlouk Jair's Head* (1971), the fact that the villagers who were the prospective audience built the stage and prepare it for performing the play does away with the illusion of the realism of the event. They designed the changing rooms as well as the stage and the auditorium. Kamiriithu theater had no roof and no division between the stage and the auditorium where "the flow of people between the auditorium and the stage was uninhibited" (Ngũgĩ,

<sup>36</sup> Limuru is a town in central Kenya with rich agricultural land where the British and other Europeans established coffee and tea plantations from 1903 onward. Kamiriithu where Ngũgĩ had his open air theater is a village in the area of Limurult. Limuru is also his birthplace.

*Decolonizing the Mind* 42). The actors are also chosen from among the same people that are to be the audience at the time of the performance. Moreover, the rehearsal is done in the open and not hidden from the audience in order to present the performance as if born a piece of perfection.

In addition to the audience's active involvement in the different stages of "making" the play, elements of form are also employed to stimulate critical thinking and keep the audience from excessively empathizing with characters and story. Mime is one important element of form that the authors of *I Will Marry* invest to stimulate critical thinking through contrasting native ceremonies to foreign imposed ones, while also bringing "good emotions." Brecht notes that even today Asiatic theater uses musical and pantomimic A-Effects "that are "certainly a barrier to empathy" (192). Re-enacting Njooki's and Gĩcaamba's traditional Ngurario (native wedding) and Kigũũnda's and Wangeci's intended church wedding detach the audience from the other story of Gathoni's relationship with John Mũhũũni and even from the Kigũũnda's and Wangeci's naïve belief that the Kioi's wants their son to marry Gathoni. Consequently, the audience keeps their involvement with the characters and action in check and focus on the two mimed events. Although the two events are not mime in the full sense of suggesting action, character and emotion without words, they remain enactments that mimic a past or a future event. In addition to the fact that these two episodes don't take place as original action, but are copies and mimesis of certain events, they do not contribute to the development of the story. The main task of these two enacted episodes as Wa Thiong'o points out is the contrast between the two ceremonies (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 53). In fact, contrast, as a stimulus for critical thinking is widely



used in the play and will be discussed, below. The two mimed weddings are one important instance of employing the strategy. While the church ceremony is “emptied of its grandeur and dignity” (53), the Ngurario revive the dignity of a national ceremony through the Gitiro opera (54). This invokes reconsidering native ceremonies that are deemed invalid by colonial and neocolonial authorities and questioning foreign culture’s impositions in the context of neocolonial and capitalist control of the newly born nation state by foreign investors and their local agents. Miming these two ceremonies involves the audience intellect and allows establishing good emotions regarding the two kinds of wedding ceremonies, rather than being engulfed in overwhelming empathy with the character and action of a developing story.

In addition to mimesis, another primary element of form employed by the authors that also serves the cause of A-Effect and the audience’s intellectual involvement is song and dance. Brecht sees in the use of songs and “the introduction of music ... a certain break with the dramatic conventions of the time” (84) which is presented in the use of music and singing in *I Will Marry When I Want*. The play breaks with imposed realistic and naturalistic drama that looks down on including singing, music, and dance. Brecht scholar John Willet notes that “songs... are presented as a deliberate means of interrupting the play: of taking the wind out of the actor’s sails and showing the actual mechanics of the work” (172). This is certainly solidified with often combining songs with dance. According to Brecht, “a theater where everything depends on the gest cannot do without choreography. Elegant movement and graceful grouping, for a start, can alienate” (Brecht 204). Kigūnda’s two long songs in the first half of Act One contribute to the creation of the A-Effect and set the tone for the songs in the play. These forms

are not simply incorporated for their own aesthetic sake as a break from the then approved conventions but are also used as cultural texts for certain political reasons. Cook and Okenimkpe go as far as suggesting that “the primary strengths of the play [*I Will Marry When I Want*] remain the vigour of its song and dance patterns, and its forceful, detailed assertion of social injustice as part of an unambiguous, class-based protest” (182).

The authors adapt those familiar songs and dances to “become a continuation of the conversation and of the action [as they arise] from what has gone before and... lead to what follows” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 45). According to Ngũgĩ, “daily speech among the peasants is interspersed with song” and that “song and dance ... are an integral part of that conversation” (45). This might give a false impression that including singing in conversations creates a sense of realism to the performance, however, the authors use certain Brechtian strategies that convert singing, dancing and music into elements that remove the fourth wall by reminding the audience that this is a performance and not a real-life event. Discussing the production of the *Three Penny Opera* (1928), Brecht considers that “the strict separation of music from all elements of entertainment” was “the most successful demonstration of the epic theater in that production. He also adds that “the small orchestra [that] was installed visibly on the stage,” as well as the use of “duets, trios, solos and final choruses” attest to that separation. Similarly, elements like duets, trios, solos and choruses are also characteristic of *I Will Marry When I Want*. While the fact that the songs are continuations of conversations might give a realistic feeling, the abrupt appearance of singers and dancers on stage marks the separation. In the conversation preceding his

first song, Kigūūnda reminds Wangeci how beautifully he used to sing and dance when he was young before the state of emergency that started in 1952 (10). He then sings to show her that he still can sing and dance the way he used to and is joined by dancers who also sing along with him. The second song that is also a continuation of the preceding conversation follows Kigūūnda and Wangeci's remembering of the good-old time when they used to sing and dance. The couple start dancing to music that they are assumed to be hearing from memory, and then are joined by actual "guitar players and players of other instruments" (23). All actors on stage join the dance including Wangeci and Kigūūnda. This participation of dancers who are not part of the story, and only show up on the stage to sing and dance with Kigūūnda, dissipates any feelings of the realism of the event and marks it as a performance that is conducted for entertainment. The use of these strategies of having actors go on the stage only to participate in singing or to play music to songs without having to be there for any reason connected with the story, and the presence of choruses continue throughout the play. The awareness of the artificiality of the event annihilates the "narcotic effects" of empathy with characters and action.

Kigūūnda's songs help dissipating "bad empathy" that is born out of ignorance and bring about "good empathy." The fact that these two songs are based on folkloric songs contribute to the creation of good empathy through what Brecht calls gestic music. "Gestic music is the music which allows the actor to exhibit certain basic gestic on the stage" (Brecht 87). What Brecht means by "basic gestic" is the social and class attitudes that are expressed through speech, movements and gestures. Social attitudes are necessarily invoked through music and songs that are grounded in the traditions of

Kenyan peasantry. Ngũgĩ explains to what extent those songs are rooted in the traditions of Kenyan peasantry: “the Gitiro opera sequence [is] written word for word at the dictation of an illiterate peasant woman from Kamiriithu village and performed step by step according to her choreography” (190). In addition to invoking an authentic cultural identity, incorporating these traditional folkloric songs and dances as integral parts of the play also produce the kind of desirable empathy in a revolutionary play. Instead of empathizing with characters, the audience becomes invested in emotions that serve the authors’ goals. Folkloric songs heighten the workers’ and peasants’ sense of unity, belonging to, and pride in their national and class heritage. Confidence and pride in the value of one’s native traditions correlates with negative feelings towards foreign imposed cultural forms that colonial authorities—and later neocolonial government—foster while weakening and attempting to annihilate native cultures.

The same songs also keep the audience from losing themselves in the action and incite their intellectual response through juxtaposing traditional themes of love with those of patriotism. This juxtaposition insinuates a nuanced contrast between the themes themselves and their contexts. Although the two themes are not necessarily opposites, each has a completely different context from the other. Situations that call for a love song are not the same as those that call for a patriotic song. Bringing the two themes together in one song would at least make the listener stop and think. The two songs start as celebration of love and courtship only to end with the idea of resistance to oppression and glorifying resistance leaders. Kigũũnda’s two songs speak mostly about love, but abruptly ends with the theme of patriotism. One of the songs ends stating a position on the current situation of the nation and refusing neocolonialism:

Wangepi our mother, we now refuse

Wangepi our mother we now refuse

To be slaves in our country

To be slaves in our country. (Ngũgĩ, *I Will Marry* 24)

The abrupt shifting to the subject of patriotism and resistance surprises the audience and prompts it to think about the reason for the shift as well as about the new idea that is introduced at the end of the traditional folkloric song.

A similar shift of topic also occurs at the end of Kigũũnda's other song where Kigũũnda ends a traditional song of love with the promise of victory:

Mother ululate for me,

For if I don't die young I'll one day sing songs of victory.

Oh, yes, come what come may

If I don't die young I'll one day sing songs of victory. (12)

After this stanza is repeated by the dancers Kigũũnda sings:

The crown of victory should be taken away from traitors

And be handed back to patriots

Like Kimathi's patriotic heroes. (12-13)

The shift in discussion invites the audience to think about the reason that calls for the shift as well as highlight the new subject. Locating the subject at the end of the song also emphasizes it and leaves the audience to critically consider what they've heard last. However, Kigũũnda does not stop singing, and as he sits down, he repeats the last stanza changing the last line to suggest his eligibility for recognition as a patriotic freedom fighter:

The crown of victory should be taken away from traitors

And be handed back to patriots

Like Kigūūnda wa Gathoni. (13)

This final suggestion of his own eligibility for recognition is symbolic of the worthiness of so many freedom fighters like him who remain unseen and unrewarded for their patriotism and sacrifices in the struggle for independence. It also probes at the idea of hijacking the victory of the peasants' resistance by a national elite class that has replaced the foreign masters in exploiting the working poor masses. This way, the two songs serve to alienate the status quo and make the peasants see that their destiny or station in life, contrary to what the capitalists want them to think, is not a divine will; but it is a Man-made situation. And, since destiny is of Man-made, it is changeable. The theme of patriotism and the right of patriots to reap the benefits of their role in the victory over colonizers persists throughout all the songs.

Contrasting the themes of love and patriotism in these songs also intertwines with contrasting life before and after independence. Before independence, fighting for freedom was a source of hope for a better tomorrow which left a margin for love and courtship. This explains Kigūūnda's love-song that ends with looking forward to an inevitable victory:

Mother ululate for me,

For if I don't die young I'll one day sing songs of victory

Oh, yes, comes what it may

If I don't die young I'll one day sing songs of victory. (12)

It was a time when the enemy was known, the goal of freedom was clear and the way to achieve it was obvious to all. Despite its challenges and sacrifices the time of armed struggle was characterized with hope. The songs move back in time to speak about Wangeci's and Kigũnda's youth. It was a time when life afforded them happiness, dancing and singing. The sense of regret and nostalgia towards the time when hope for freedom made them happy is heightened as it is set against the couple's, as well as the audience's, frustration and despondence about their current lives.

These songs aim at the audience's understanding of their situation of being exploited by a handful of rich capitalists from their country, and that that situation should be changed. The songs engage the audience in thinking about ideas deeper than passed youth, nostalgia and love. This move in time and subject keeps the audience focused on the comparisons and contrast drawn by the songs to the point where they may temporarily forget about the main plot developing in the background. The songs make the audience critical of their life conditions and remind them that a small group of national elites who are basically traitors monopolize the benefits of the victory achieved through the sacrifices of the poor. While these songs do celebrate native folkloric tradition (singing, in this case), and its aesthetic value, they are at the same time engaged in analyzing the life conditions of the audience and call for the audience's intellectual involvement. The songs bring up deeper issues for the audience's critical consideration and prevent their emotional submersion in the story.

Drawing contrasts is not the only way songs serve to create an A-Effect as many songs or parts of songs contain irony and sarcasm that also invite intellectual consideration of meanings. These songs are sung in sarcasm by either one of the four

workers in the play, or by the rich showing the irony in the discrepancy between reality and how they try to paint it. While in fact the rich are robbers who steal the wealth that the workers produce and should be entitled to it, they view themselves as the chosen and saved people by God. After telling Kigūūnda that he lives with his wife “in sin,” the Kiois and Ndugires ironically call themselves as “the amazing ones”:

When Jesus comes back  
 To take home his amazing ones,  
 The amazing ones being the people  
 Saved by the lord  
 They will shine bright as the star  
 And the beauty of his amazing ones  
 Will shine like the stars  
 And you the children, and you the children.... (49)

The irony lies in the fact that the rich who unlawfully and immorally exploit the poor and expropriate the fruits of their labor think of themselves as superior to the poor in the eyes of a God whom they claim to be fair. They are not content with the way they see things, but they try to impose their view on the poor through intimidation. The rationale that these elitists are put in charge of the nation, favored and rewarded with riches by God is a popular one that the irony in this song along Kigūūnda's response refutes. Kigūūnda refuses the Kioi's and Ndugiris claim that his marriage is not valid, mimics the two rich couples and chases them out of his house with a sword.

A similar irony is also employed in the use of the biblical reference “I will make you fishers of men” (46). Relating the story of his conversion to Christianity, Ndugire



tells the Kigūundas that God has told him “the only good freedom is that of the soul” (46) and asked him to leave his “fishing net behind” and follow Him. Then the Kioi’s group breaks into singing:

I shall make you fishers of men  
 Fishers of men, fishers of men,  
 I shall make you fishers of men,  
 If you follow me  
     If you follow me  
     If you follow me  
 I shall make you fishers of men  
 If you follow me. (46)

The irony lies in the Kiois group’s use of the biblical phrase while in reality they are different kinds of “fishers of men.” The group portray themselves as chosen by God to put out the good word of “Truth,” and the word for the love of the Lord as food. Instead of catching fish in a net, they catch people to join them in their journey of love and worship of God. However, the reality shows that they are fishers of wealth who exploit the workers and prosper at the expense of the suffering of the poor. As the end of the play shows, they are fishers of men who entrap and cheat men like Kigūūnda in order to dispossess them of whatever small wealth they have. However, the irony becomes easily discernible long before the end of the play as Ndugire’s story that he tells immediately after the song speaks about the earthly riches he has gained since his conversion. Instead of spreading love, Ndugire has been accumulating wealth. He tells

about the shops, lands and tea farms that he now owns, for in reality, this is what he fishes for.

While irony is employed in the Kiois group's songs to highlight their lies and treacheries, sarcasm is mostly found in the songs by Gīcaamba and his wife who are aware of the rich's attempts to make people "drunk with religion" in order to make exploiting them easier. Gīcaamba mimics the rich's song and indirectly exposes their lies to the audience:

Goats and cows and money  
Are not important.  
What is important  
Is the splendid face of Jesus. (57)

The rich try to delude the poor into thinking that earthly riches are not important while all their endeavors are directed at accumulating them.

Conversations that follow the songs continue to expand the contrasts that are started in the songs and carry on confronting the audience with ideas to consider rather than with emotions to indulge. Songs are parts of conversations; they are continuations of the discussions that precede them and are also followed by extended debates of their themes and ideas. The endings of songs initiate prolonged conversations. They prepare for speeches that also invite the audience to analyze the conditions of their lives. The frequent comparisons between the past and the present is promoted by discussing the changes that have befallen Wangeci's and Kigūūnda's health and physical attractiveness. Remembering his youth, Kigūūnda is suddenly seized by a lighthearted mood and remonstrates:

This voice that belongs to Kigūūnda wa Gathoni

Don't you remember before the Emergency?

How I used to sing and dance the Mucung wa'dance?

Was it not then that you fell in love with those shapely legs? (10)

However, Wangeci insists on the present and reminds Kigūūnda of his declining looks under years of poverty: "An aging hero has no admirers" (13). Both Wangeci and Kigūūnda are aware that their bodies are not worn out from age, but from hard labor and living in poverty. Kigūūnda describes to Wangeci the change in her physique and what the years in poverty has done to her shape:

Look at you.

See what the years of freedom in poverty

Have done to you!

Poverty has hauled down your former splendor,

Poverty has dug trenches on your face,

Your heels are now so many cracks,

Your breasts have fallen,

They have nowhere to hold.

Now you look like an old basket

That has no shape. (29)

What makes the couples life miserable is the unfair distribution of resources and national wealth. The couple work hard and barely earn enough to feed their bellies. Clearly, each and every audience member identifies with the experience of Kigūūnda and Wangeci. All of them suffer from the exploitation of foreign and local capitalist

investors and lead hard lives that destroy their bodies before their time. Commenting on a song, Kigūūnda also tells about his poverty:

How the times run!

How many years have gone

Since we got independence?

Ten and over

Quite a good number of years!

And now look at me! (28)

...

(Kigūūnda looks at himself, points to the title-deed and goes near it)

One and a half acres of land in dry plains

Our family land was given to homeguards.

Today I am just a labourer

On farms owned by Ahab wa Kanoru

My trousers are pure tatter. (29)

The poor have become poorer after independence, while the traitors and collaborators with foreign imperialists have become richer. This probing at themes of poverty, patriotism, independence and the betrayal of the masses by the few rich capitalists invokes the required good empathy on the side of the audience while at the same time, presenting their life conditions to them, not as a divine will, but as a human-contrived situation that they need to analyze and understand the roots of in order to change.

Sarcasm also aids in comparing and contrasting life circumstances under colonial rule to those under nationalist government. After Gīcaamba's long speech

detailing exploitation and listing the injustices inflicted on the poor peasants and workers, Wangeci sarcastically and despondently exclaims “Oh, well. Independence did come!” (Ngũgĩ, *I Will Marry* 38). Elsewhere, she gives the answer to the comparison between the two times.

The difference between then and now is this!

We now have our independence! (19)

Wangeci sees that nothing has improved or changed in the lives of the oppressed. Before independence, they were exploited by foreign colonizers; and after independence, they are exploited by a class of local capitalists.

It is no surprise that many poor workers become cynical about their life conditions and the so-called freedom. To complicate the contrast between the time before and after independence; and to make it speak to audience members of all possible attitudes toward national independence, Wangeci is made a cynic who doubts the righteousness of remaining faithful to the cause of revolution and freedom. She blames Kigũnda for not betraying his cause in return of material wealth like others did:

Who prevented you from selling out?

Today we would be seeing you

In different models of Mercedes Benzes,

With huge plantations,

With servants to look after your massive properties.

Yes, like all other men around!

They are now the ones employing you,

Jobs without wages! (Ngũgĩ, *I Will Marry* 13)

The last song in the play is also an explicit call for “holding dialogue” (105) to find ways and means of resisting oppression and exploitation. At first, Gĩcaamba sings:

Come my friend

Come my friend

Let's reason together.

Our hearts are heavy over the future of our children.

Let's drive away darkness

From the land. (105)

Gĩcaamba who sounds the most revolutionary and knowledgeable person about the neocolonial situation and the unjust and cruel capitalist system that needs to be overthrown calls for the poor workers and peasants to come together and think about their conditions; to dialogue and find ways to bring about most needed social and political changes. Dialogue among the oppressed is important to building common understanding and unity in their struggle for their just cause against marginalization and exploitation. In the following pages, the call for dialogue is repeated three times either by one of the four workers or by them all singing together. The importance of dialogue is emphasized through repetition. The same song is repeated once more by both Gĩcaamba and his wife Njooki (106), and then a third time by the four poor workers after Kigũũnda reconciles to Wangeci (114). Placing this message towards the end of the play highlights it as a central message in the play which the authors want to leave with their audience to carry outside theater into real life. Rational conversation about who the real enemy of the poor is and where they should direct their anger leads to the couple's reconciliation. This reconciliation which takes place in the midst of financial adversity

and family crisis is very significant; it is an invitation to the masses to put aside their small and petty issues between each other, get involved in meaningful discussions about their life circumstances, and focus on fighting the enemy. Completing decolonization and achieving freedom need unity which the scene of the four workers singing together and specifying the way out of oppression symbolizes. There is also a small but keen change to the last line of the song when it is sung by the four workers together as a message directed to the audience; and through them the Kenyan poor masses. While the end of the song goes twice as “Let’s drive away the darkness/ from the land” (105, 106), the last line becomes “from all our land” (114). The four characters invite the people to drive oppression from all Kenya and to make it a better place for future generations. By also saying “all our land,” the characters emphasize that the land and its resources belong to them, the people who produce wealth, not to a handful capitalists and their foreign masters.

Clearly, all this political discourse in songs and conversations pushes the story to the background and helps create the A-Effect. Making the plot subservient to conversation allows for intellectual reflection on ideas discussed in conversations, brought up by songs as well as those raised through the development of the plot. The plot of the play is very simple: a girl is exploited by a rich young man and then deserted while pregnant which results in her being kicked out from home by her father. Even with more details surrounding the plot, the action that counts towards developing the plot occupies very little space compared to political discussions. In fact, details that contribute to the development of the plot are shed light on during larger political discussions between the four poor workers. Plot-related information occupies a small

space and becomes a way to initiate or expand already started discussions of the miseries of the poor workers' class and their children. In fact, the Kigūūnda's family tragedy serves as an example of the ordeal of all poor Kenyans under a cruel and exploitative capitalist system. Gathoni's story becomes the story of every poor young girl who is either a field worker, bartender, or a housemaid. Suggesting that a housemaid job will keep Gathoni out of the way of exploitation, especially sexual exploitation, Njooki replies to Wangeci:

A housemaid?

To be collecting all the shit in somebody else's house?

And when the memsahib is out of sight,

The husband wants the maid to act the wife!

Thus the maid doing all the work for the memsahib! (106)

Gĩcaamba and Njooki: (Sing as if continuing the song Gĩcaamba just sung)

Yes we find out why

It's the children of the poor

Who look after rich people's homes,

Who serve them beer in beer-halls,

Who sell them their flesh

Come my friend

Come my friend

Let's reason together.

Our hearts are heavy over the future of our children.

Let's drive away darkness



From the land. (106)

Similarly, Kigūnda's and Wangeci's decision of converting to Christianity that is crucial to moving the plot forward is used to extendedly discuss how religion is used to drug people into accepting their lot in life and not to think of what is in the rich people's hands. Upon learning of the Kiois's attempts at converting the Kigūndas to Christianity, Gīcaamba gives a very long speech interspersed with songs and followed by discussions of the subject of religion and its use by the oppressors to subjugate the masses. Gīcaamba's speech and the ensued discussion extend over nine pages (56-64) without any mention of, or reference to, the developing plot. Gīcaamba questions how religion has come into a plan of marrying young people who are already dating:

All the religions that now sit on us

Were brought here by the whites

...

And which tell us we should give them a tenth of all that we

Produce.

Where does the ten percent go?

To America

Then they send back to us ten shillings

Taken from the tenth portion we sent them,

And they tell us:

This is American aid to your local churches.

And we give them a standing ovation.

When the British imperialists came here in 1895,

All the missionaries of all the churches  
 Held the bible in the left hand,  
 And the gun in the right hand.  
 The white man wanted us  
 To be drunk with religion  
 While he,  
 In the meantime,  
 Was mapping and grabbing our land  
 And starting factories  
 On our sweat. (56-7)

Evidently, despite building it on a move in the plot, removing this speech does not harm the main story of the play. Every piece of action is invested to initiate dialogue about the unjust system that manipulates the poor and perpetuates their subjugation by an exploitive rich class. There are also dialogues that are not related to any development of the story but are there to directly serve the author's intention of evoking the audience into critical thinking. A good example of this kind of conversation is that of Kigūūnda and Gīcaamba where they speak about the realities of work in the factories. This conversation extends over some ten pages (33-42) without having a role in developing the plot, or the slightest connection to the main story.

In addition to these conversations and speeches, several episodes can also be removed from the play without harming the story. Episodes like the mime of Gīcaamba's and Njooki's native wedding, the mime of the church wedding, and the drunk man who shows up at Kigunda's house are used to alienate the action and invoke thinking about

deeper themes and ideas rather than developing the story of a girl jilted by her lover, or the loss of one and a half acre of land by her father. This makes the story an example of the unfair and exploitative relationship the rich have with the poor. The play's story becomes symbolic as it becomes the story of every dehumanized and exploited working class member and their family.

As a transcultural offshoot of native theatrical performances tradition, the play, *I will Marry When I Want*, benefits from traditions that do not pretend the performance is a real-life event to remove the fourth wall and create an A-Effect. It strives to channel audience members' empathy and incites them to intellectually engage in the theatrical event. The fact that native theatrical performance forms acknowledge the artificiality of the theatrical event, or never tries to hide it, makes it easier for the writers of *I will Marry* to give the play a new revolutionary form. The play does not belong exclusively to native traditions, nor does it resist all foreign influences. On the contrary, while it revives many traditional cultural activities like Ngurario marriage ceremony and inserts songs in everyday speeches to forge an authentic cultural identity, it refuses mainstream Western realist drama and allies itself with the revolutionary Brechtian form.

## 2. The A-Effect in Wannous's "Theater for Politicization"

Similarly, Saadallah Wannous utilizes native theatrical traditions to create an A-Effect. Wannous sees in native performance forms and Arab history and traditions good material to experiment with (Wannous, *Bayanat* 96). He often dramatizes Arabic history to draw parallels with the present and deduce lessons from past experiences, which again requires intellectual, rather than emotional involvement with the action of the play

which the A-Effect certainly facilitates. Like Ngũgĩ, Wannous also adopts the Brechtian form to involve his spectators as active and intellectual participants in the dramatic event in *Mamlouk Jabir's Head* and to make his theater a call for a much-needed political involvement. *Mamlouk Jabir's Head* demonstrates adopting Arabic history, engaging Arab performance traditions and using the Brechtian form as a framework for Arabic drama that deals with the reality of the audience's life. As an integral aspect of Brechtian drama, the A-Effect persists to keep the spectators alerted to the facts that they are watching a play, and that there is a lesson to understand and relate to their lives.

The play presents the story of Mamlouk Jabir, a bright young and ambitious, but self-centered slave who tries to make use of the political turmoil and conflict between the Khaliphah and his minister to his own advantage. The Khaliphah and the minister are consumed in plotting against each other instead of uniting in the face of the foreign threat of the Mongol conqueror Timur Lang's mighty army that is getting closer to the walls of the city of Baghdad. During all this, the people of Baghdad remained passive and stood watching the crisis develop without them lifting a finger. Jabir sees the conflict between the Khaliphah and the minister seizes the opportunity. When the situation reaches a deadlock and the minister becomes desperate to transmit a message to the enemy about his willingness to collaborate with them against his Khaliphah, Jabir offers to have the letter tattooed on his scalp and waiting for his hair to grow and hide it before carrying across the city's checkpoints. In return, Jabir asks to be married to his sweetheart who is also a slave of the minister, and for the elevation of his social and economic status. The minister readily promises all that and Jabir leaves the city with the

letter tattooed on his head. Upon receiving the letter, Timour Lank gives orders to execute Jabir as the letter instructs. The play ends with the destruction of the city of Baghdad and with Jabir losing his life. The message of the play is that people should not be selfish and disregard the interests of their community. Being passive and apolitical are also social sins that the play punishes both Jabir and the people of the city of Baghdad for. Wannous wants his audience to think about their own passivity when it comes to contemporary political circumstances.

The play, *Mamlouk Jabir's Head*, is one of Wannous's experiments with what he calls "theater of politicization" in which the A-Effect plays a central role. This theater tries to use performance events as rehearsals for political involvement not only through dismantling the fourth wall, but also by blurring the physical barrier between stage and auditorium. The play is performed in a café, but Wannous suggests that it can be performed in other places. With no stage erected, the actors just line in front of the spectators and perform their parts after the hakawati<sup>37</sup> reads sections of the story of the play from his book. In this play, Wannous experiments with encouraging and training spectators to be part of the theatrical event by having trained actors sit among the audience and perform their roles of participating in the performance and directly talking to the stage while pretending they were real spectators. Wannous declares that he does

<sup>37</sup> The hakawati is usually talented in telling his stories as he did not simply narrate them but enacted some of his characters too. For generations, the hakawati evenings of storytelling continued to be the main entertainment tradition for communities and neighborhoods in Arabia and Greater Syria. The cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Sidon were the most famous of their hakawtis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the appearance of the television and cinema captivated people and pushed the hakawati tradition to the edge, and eventually to extinction. There are some current attempts at reviving the hakawati evenings especially in the United Arab Emirates (Chaudhary) and Lebanon (Hamadi) after the publication of the Lebanese painter Rabih Alameddine's novel *The Hakawati* in 2008. However, those attempts remain isolated efforts and the tradition does not exist in people's everyday lives. The hakawati evenings were by large extinct when Wannous wrote his play in 1970.

not expect his audience to believe those actors are real spectators; but he wants them to see an example of audience participation. He uses this technique to break the ice and initiate a more spontaneous dialogue between stage and auditorium, which no doubt creates a great sense of A-Effect reminding the spectators that the event on stage is a play performed by actors.

The role of the A-Effect is keenly enhanced in *Mamlouk Jabir* by building a fake sense of realism only to undermine it, exposing and highlighting the artificiality of the event. The part of the play where the hakawati Uncle Mounis meets with his audience for a storytelling evening assumes a sense of realism and functions as if it is a real-life event of hakawati evening that has never been rehearsed and happens only once. However, this sense of realism is immediately exposed and undermined as the play is designed to carry elements that bring about an A-Effect and keep the audience alert that they are watching a play. In fact, the building of the sense of realism is simultaneous with the play's ongoing destruction of it. *Mamlouk Jabir's Head* is a play within a play, which is a continuous reminder of the idea that the event involves acting and that it is not a real incident. The bigger play is the performance carried on by the hakawati and his listeners. This hakawati relates the story of an adventure by a young mamlouk (slave) named Jabir. As the hakawati relates his story, actors appear on stage and perform parts of the story of the mamlouk's adventure. The enacted parts together become the play inside the bigger play. Wannous elaborates Brecht's techniques of creating an A-Effect and merges them with practices of his own invention using the traditional Arab performance form of the hakawati as the principle that both moves the events of the play on, and aids in achieving the A-Effect.

In *Mamlouk Jabir's Head*, Wannous's main tool of creating an A-Effect is narration, a Brechtian element which Wannous enriches with the use of the original Arab folkloric tradition of the hakawati. In addition to making his play overwhelmingly narrative rather than dramatic, Wannous makes the hakawati form a framework for his play. Hence, as soon as *Mamlouk Jabir's Head* starts, it announces its difference from the realist play, acknowledging that it is telling a story rather than pretending that the action takes place in real life. While the realist Aristotelian play relies in transmitting its story on a plot that progresses through rising tension into a climax before reaching a denouement (catharsis), the Brechtian play depends on narration and conversation where actors perform their characters, not by being them, but by imitating and quoting them. To create the A-Effect, Brecht requires the actor not to fully impersonate the character and become him/her, but to look as imitating and sound as if quoting them. To facilitate this, he suggests "three aids that help alienate the actions and remarks of the character being portrayed [as] 1-Transposition into the third person 2-Transposition into the past 3-Speaking the stage directions out loud" (*Brecht on Theater* 138). To produce these same effects, Wannous does not limit himself to this style of acting but goes the extra mile by making the plot move only through the hakawati's narration. Brecht adds that "speaking the stage directions out loud in the third person, results in a clash between two tones of voice, alienating the second of them, the text proper" (138). However, while Wannous does not have the stage directions spoken out loud, he has the events of the enacted scenes related in the third person, using a neutral tone that is different from the tone of the actors of the scenes. This necessarily ends in alienating the enacted scenes that constitute the smaller play. The hakawati also tells about the

characters in the story of mamlouk Jabir where his narration covers part of the characterization instead of leaving it wholly to the characters to represent themselves through acting. His narration is the spine of the play; and it could be read as a summary of the story. Although the audience members know they are watching a play, they cannot be absorbed into thinking the action is real since they are directly presented with the idea of being told a story.

The same technique of effectuating an A-Effect through narration continues even in the play within the play which is basically an enactment of Jabir's story. Despite the fact that play within the play does not pretend to be real as it is narrated by the hakawati, it still contains elements that resists realist acting. The parts of the story read by the hakawati usher the enactment of the episodes in front of supposedly real café customers. However, even those acting parts consist mostly of narration rather than action. In fact, the audience is presented with a double narration as the acted parts are simply episodes played by actors to explain in more details what the hakawati has just related, and the episodes themselves consist mainly of conversations and descriptions more than real action. The first acting scene is performed by five Baghdadis who talk about their life conditions, utter submissiveness to rulers and their political disenfranchisement. This conversation by the Baghdadi citizens comes as an interpretation, elaboration, and expansion of the hakawati's narrative that precedes it where the hakawati tells about the passive attitude adopted by the Baghdadis towards all political changes around them as a safety strategy, and a route to best protect themselves and their families. This first scene sets the tone for the rest of the play. Each



time the hakawati narrates part of the story, actors appear on the stage to present the scene with additional and livelier details.

Narration also accompanies the mimed scene at the end of the play. Like Ngūgĩ, Wannous also invests mime in a new and creative manner. While mime is a technique that Brecht prescribes for creating an A-Effect, Wannous enhances the A-Effect of the technique by accompanying it with the hakawati's narration. While the scene of executing Jabir is carried on in mime, the hakawati also narrates what is happening. The voice from the stage disappears and is replaced by the voice of the hakawati:

(Voice disappears, but we still see Jabir's protruding eyes.. his mouth as he screams and cries for mercy... struggles to disentangle himself... but, he was tied.. the scene continues in mime)

Hakawati: And Jabir did not know that the man called Lahab is the swordsman of the king. And swordsmen are always characterized by precision and thoroughness. They don't neglect any details and they don't like chattering. The moment his tools become ready, Lahab grabs Jabir's head, places it on a baseboard that is soiled with old dry blood...and with one strike from his sharpened ax, he separates Jabir's head from his body. (Wannous, *Mamlouk Jabir* 161)

It is noticeable that Wannous only uses mime at the end of the play, and only for violent action. Again, mime is clearly employed to break the empathy between character and action on one side and spectators on the other. Seeing a violent scene performed by skillful actors who can become, or get very close to becoming, the character would lead to overwhelming empathy with the suffering characters, while watching the violent

scene mimed would transmit the message about what happens and relieves spectators from overwhelming emotions. Because it is less likely to foster empathy, mime keeps space for considering the situation with reason. The hakawati's reading from his book about the incidents that are performed in mime emphasizes and maintains the story telling aspect of the performance. For the closing episode of the play another violent incident that is performed mimetically while the hakawati is reading about it, Wannous instructs that

(The hakawati narrates the episode with the noise of horse trotting and sword clashing interrupted by screams every now and then in the background. Some of the characters we have known who have performed the roles of Baghdadi public and others rush to the stage, Man 1,2,3, 4, Woman 1 and 2, Yasir, one guard... all of them enter while screaming and miming being stabbed...and raped.. the second woman mimes rape by falling down with torn clothes and opened legs... Actors pile on top of each other in front of the café's customers... corpses and.. ripped bodies. As he narrates the events, the hakawati leaves his chair and walks among the piling corpses). (165)

In this last episode, Wannous brings three techniques together in perfect harmony to seal the performance with the A-Effect. Narration, mime, and merging the stage with the auditorium are condensed in a few minutes of performance. Whether drawn from Arab folklore or inspired by the tools Brecht uses in his plays or adopted from his theoretical writings, all these A-Effect techniques are merged together in perfect harmony. However, the ruling principle of all this remains strikingly the act of narration by the hakawati.

The hakawati's narration persists to accompany every aspect of the play, even the act of setting up the stage. Wannous either has the hakawati read a briefing of the episode before setting up the scene's furniture in front of the audience, or the arrangement takes place while the hakawati is reading from his book. A few times in the play, the setting is prepared simultaneously while the hakawati is telling his briefing of it so that the audience can listen to the hakawati and watch the stage being set up at the same time, a strong and consistent reminder to the audience that what they are seeing is artificial rather than real. It is also a conspicuous rejection of mainstream Western realist drama that hides all its preparations from the audience in order to present the plays as pieces of perfection. A realist performance pretends that the action is a real-life event that takes place now for the first and only time. Unlike realist drama, Brechtian theater adopts storytelling acting to emphasize the artificiality of the theatrical event. In fact, this form of acting which is an essential component of narration constitutes the mainstay of Brechtian drama.

With storytelling acting necessarily goes the coldness of the character while performing his/her part. The hakawati tradition does not only alienate the action through Uncle Mounis's narrative; but Wannous makes his hakawati a Brechtian actor who remains emotionally detached from both his story and his audience throughout his whole narration. Whereas real hakawatis in the past used many techniques like "playing around with accent, tone, ...pitch," (Hamadi) facial expressions and mimicking characters to captivate audience and infect them with certain emotions and excessive empathy (Hamadi; Chaudhary), Uncle Mounis's, face remains expressionless and his voice continues flat throughout the play.

Wannous describes him as:

A man of over fifty. His movement is slow. His face looks like a page in his old book which he carries under his arm. His face is expressionless as if it is made of dusty wax. The look in his eyes is hard and emotionless; and despite their mixed and confused color, they give the impression of cold neutrality. In fact, the most apparent expression of Uncle Mounis's face is cold neutrality, which he keeps throughout the evening. (51)

The hakawati keeps his coldness and detachment even while conversing with his listeners who try to move him into narrating a happy story. He simply states that his stories need to go in order because the stories about the times of chaos and defeats will lead to those about times of victory and happiness, hence, his listeners need to be patient and wait. The hakawati's position engenders a comparison between the old times of defeats in the stories and the present which the audience lives in. The comparison is voiced by one spectator who exclaims: "That [defeat] time is what we live now" (54). This is reaffirmed by another customer saying that they taste the bitterness of defeat every moment. A third customer then unabashedly asks the hakawati for a happy story as an escape from reality, a request that is declined by the hakawati (54).

However, the coldness of Uncle Mounis does not prevent him from expanding his role beyond reading the story of Mamlouk Jabir from his book. His interactive role contributes to removing the fourth wall which is the maintainer of the illusion in realist plays. The hakawati's role smoothens that removal and brings it about in a most natural way. He does not only narrate stories, but also announces intermissions, converses with the audience during time outside the reading from his book, and at the end of the

play, he leaves his chair to read walking among corpses that pile on the stage. The hakawati announces the intermission in the play in a very polite, easy, and familiar—though always emotionless—manner: “And now, let’s have a short break for a cup of tea. Of course, whoever chooses to leave for a little while they can, and whoever chooses to stay, they are welcome to” (117). This familiarity is also reflected on the side of the audience when they suggest not to break but to continue listening to the hakawati while drinking their tea. His audience feels comfortable enough around him to request certain stories and protest against his choice of gloomy ones while he on his part defends his choices and explains the reasons for making them. However, this familiarity does not conflict with the A-Effect aimed at by Wannous as the hakawati keeps a straight emotionless face even during these conversations. His audience is also aware the hakawati who is conversing with them is not a real hakawati, but a character summoned from a few decades earlier and is played by an actor in a theatrical performance that allows them to have an active role. In the world of the play, as in real life, the hakawati is not only the entertainer of the evening, but also a neighbor and a friend who replies to audience questions and comments. They try hard and logically argue to convince him to read happy stories which again works as a reminder about the artificiality of the two events, the one on stage since it is dramatic rendering of the story; and the bigger one since the hakawati is not a real hakawati, but an actor and his audience is a modern audience who has come to see the play of *Mamlouk Jabir*. The hakawati’s role facilitates audience participation in the performance through the familiarity they feel towards Uncle Mounis that allows for conversing with him and commenting on the episodes being enacted on the stage.

Acting episodes include some action that is necessary for the development of the simple plot of the play; but that action is continuously alienated by spectators' comments which in turn prevent empathy and identification with character and action. These comments by the audience are an important mode of presenting the material of the play where audience's input becomes a vital part of the final effect of the play. This part is conducted by trained actors sitting among the spectators to encourage real and improvised audience participation. Wannous has used the same device before in *An Evening Party* (1967) to also break the ice for real audience involvement in making theater. Both plays are part of the same project of theater for politicization, the device helps creating Alienating Effect in both and facilitate critical valuation of incidents and ideas by the audience. In *Mamlouk Jabir's Head*, Wannous have the audience continuously commenting on the actions and often relating what they see and hear to their current life under totalitarian regime. Nonetheless, the play can be presented without spectators' comments and still be coherent and complete, yet it would lose its character as a didactic play with a message to which the A-Effect is very essential. The most important effect of spectators' comments is enhancing and strengthening the A-Effect. When spectators-actors who belong to the present time comment on historical episodes and compare current times with the time when the story of Mamlouk Jabir takes place, audience members are kept in check against losing themselves into action or characters. Commenting on the action and comparing the past with the present encourage the spectators to think critically and learn lessons from history to better understand the present. Moreover, repetitively commenting on how the social, political, and economic circumstances during the time of the story are very similar to those of the

audience's own time keeps the audience in the present while allowing them to critically think about both history and present.

While comparing history with the present is an ongoing motif in audience comments and conversations throughout the play, Wannous reserves drawing a lesson from history till the end of the play when he shocks the audience with Jabir's fate. In both commenting on enacted episodes and in conversing with the hakawati, the spectators express tiredness of hard life conditions, defeat in the face of a strong enemy and wish for victory. They also agree with Baghdadi citizens that passivity and not interfering in politics are the routes to safety. In fact, they reflect the opinions and views of the masses that have internalized class divisions and convinced themselves that the affairs of the government are not their business. The spectators see Jabir as the type of the good citizen, the smart one who gives no heed to public affairs and focuses only on his personal matters:

Customer: (to his neighbor) What do you say...By God, he is a son of his time.

Customer 2: Nothing bothers him.

Customer 1: Neither a Khaliphah, nor a minister.

Customer 2: Headaches and heartaches that lead to no good. (108)

These comments reflect the audience's endorsement of the passivity of the Baghdadis and Mamalouk Jabir towards the politics of their nation. They even agree with the narrow opportunism of Mamlouk Jabir because they think he is right not worrying about politics and focusing on improving his life and social status. For a while, Wannous let this trend continue among the spectators by having the hakawati give a favorable description of mamlouk Jabir's character as brilliant, vibrant, and determinate. Wannous

uses this tactic of allowing the spectators to formulate and be comfortable with wrong opinions in order to shock them when he proves them wrong at the end of the play. The non-cathartic ending is what awakens the audience to their delusions confusing discretion with passivity.

The hakawati's role of facilitating spectators' participation and expressing of opinions aids bringing about the non-cathartic ending of the play that is both a means and a goal of the A-Effect. After Wannous lets the Baghdadis express their opinion about Mamlouk Jabir, he seems as if he endorses it and continues as such for a while in order to revert against that position and shock them into rethinking it. At first, he seems to consent that the Baghdadi's passivity represented by the blind self-centeredness of Jabir is the right choice to keep oneself safe during times of turmoil. He even sounds as if endorsing Jabir's opportunism making the hakawati's narration come closer to reassuring the audience of the righteousness of their position:

Hakawati: And Mamlouk Jabir is very brilliant and sharp. As soon as he got a glimpse of an opportunity, he jumped on it. Jabir believes that an opportunity does not come twice and that if his imagination helps him, wishes become easy to secure. Why would he care about what is happening in Baghdad if he can be the winner at the end? He went to the gates of the city several times... and exerted his mind to contrive a trick. Jabir is very brilliant and sharp; and if he exerts his mind, he will no doubt achieve his goals... He kept thinking until he figured out a way. He beamed and quickly asked to meet with the minister. (95-96)



Throughout the play, and just before the ending, Wannous seems to agree with the passivity of the Baghdadis (and consequently his audience) only to turn against them and punish the Baghdadi's for their lack of involvement, and Jabir for his selfish and opportunistic behavior.

However, even while temporarily going along with the audience's desire and sounding as if he endorses the passiveness of the Baghdadis, Wannous spreads seeds of doubt in the minds of the spectators to alienate them from the situation and prevent them from whole-heartedly identifying with Jabir. By planting these seeds of doubts, Wannous prepares for his coup at the end of the play when he proves both the Baghdadis and the audience wrong. He has one character, Man 4 arguing that passivity and abandoning involvement in politics does not guarantee remaining safe. Although Baghdadis on the stage and audience in the cafe remain resistant to these doubts and reject Man 4's position, this does not mean that they never entertain the possibility of being wrong after they listen to Man 4's remonstrations. Wannous has Man 4 repeat this and even argues for it, but he does not push towards convincing the audience of Man 4's opinion. He remains content with preventing them from being fully comfortable with their passiveness by having Man 4 object to it and Customer 4 (a spectator) express inclination to accept Man 4's position. Man 4 explains to the Baghdadi citizens that passivity and not doing one's part will certainly backfire, and Customer 4 goes as far as betting that Jabir will be a loser at the end.

Man 4's conversations with other Baghdadi citizens also serve as intellectual stimulation that works hand in hand with the A-Effect to keep the audience in a mode that allows for critical thinking. This is achieved by presenting opposing opinions

combined with Brechtian social gest. When Man 4 speaks, he shows awareness of the relationships and attitudes between different classes of Baghdadi society. Similarly, all Baghdadi citizens are aware, but are not facing reality like Man 4. The opposing opinion is voiced and stressed through Man 4 who tries to make the audience see that their passiveness is not really the route to safety, and that the ruling classes' decisions and divisions affect the poors' lives directly. Speaking of the Khaliphah and the minister Man 4 reminds the people who are waiting to buy bread at the bakery that the "battle between the two [Khaliphah and minister] takes place over [the people's] heads" (82). Man 4 indirectly invites his fellow citizens to reconsider their position on political involvement. He sees that they should, resist and refuse the marginalization and silencing practiced on them by the government in order to have an influence on the direction of events that impact their lives. Man 4 does this while trying to tell the people that he is one of them and that he knows the horrors of government's prosecution as he has been imprisoned before. This social gest of identifying with the other Baghdadis and showing understanding of their position, yet differing from them in his opinion, serves as an invitation to thinking critically about the different opinions which are voiced; while at the same time identifying with one's class and its interests. Speaking about the guards, Man 4 tells other customers that he fears the guards like the rest of the Baghdadis do; and that he feels his heart stalled at seeing them strolling the streets of Baghdad. However, he goes on to assert the need for political involvement: "But, do you think it is right to continue drifting blindly not knowing where these circumstances are pushing us?" (80).

Intellectually stimulating conversations and the A-Effect prepare for Wannous's coup that comes at the end in the form of a pseudo or anti-catharsis. Wannous allows the audience to identify and express their identification with Jabir as well as with the rest of the passive characters on the stage, only to turn back against them and show them their mistake at the end of the play. Spectators' temporary emotional involvement and identification with the passive Baghdadi populace and the protagonist Mamlouk Jabir allows for a non-purging, though a catastrophic ending. It is an ending similar to a catharsis in the sense that Jabir dies for his own mistakes, and the Baghdadis suffer for their passivity. However, the audience does not go home relieved and purged of anti-social and dissenting tendencies. Instead of leaving relieved after the catharsis settles everything and brings calmness to the world of the play, the audience leaves feeling and understanding that something needs to be done. The disaster of Jabir's execution, and the mass punishment of the Baghdadi ordinary people leave the audience in shock as conformity and passiveness prove to lead to disasters that can only be avoided by being actively and responsibly involved in the public affairs of one's nation. Even though wrong behavior is punished, the ending remains non-cathartic and non-purging. An Aristotelian cathartic ending purges tendencies towards action, but what the ending of this play rejects is not action, but passivity. Moreover, the disaster is not asked or wished for by anybody in the play or among the audience. Therefore, it is a pseudo catharsis that, though it punishes the faulty individuals, it is still unwanted, not seen as bringing justice to the world of the play, and above all, it does not drive away dissenting tendencies, but invites them.

The folkloric form of the hakawati evening does not only serve producing an A-Effect through its story-telling nature, but also in the fact that it is an extinct form invoked from local history, and in the nostalgic feelings it engenders. The hakawati tradition is imported from recent Arab history, just a few decades before the tradition was pushed out of practice by the cinema and television. The fact that the spectators have come to watch a modern play rather than to listen to a hakawati narration keeps them conscious of the artificiality of the event. If the play was written and performed during the time the hakawati tradition was still in practice, this element of narration would lose its effect as a distancing strategy. An audience from the age of cinema and television who is most likely aware of recent history and how the new mass media have replaced hakawati tradition is not likely to be carried away into forgetting that that is not a real evening of hakawati story-telling, but a play within a play. However, the nostalgic feelings to the old days of the hakawati belongs to the kind of empathy that Brecht sees beneficial. Nostalgia is a feeling that makes the audience identify with each other, not with the character, or action on stage. It makes them think as a group with the same background, history and interests, thus comes the comparison between their times and the times of the stories they are listening to and learning lessons from. Thinking about their own life circumstances and, comparing and contrasting their present with the time of play is a byproduct of the A-Effect; and a goal that Wannous means to achieve.

Producing the A-Effect does not only occur at the level of narration, neither is it only restricted to areas where the hakawati role can help producing or enhancing it. Stage preparation is also a big contributor to creating the A-Effect as stage décor and furniture for the non-realist *Mamlouk Jabir's Head* is a big asset in keeping the audience

conscious of the artificiality of the event throughout. Wannous clearly adopts Brechtian techniques of using stage décor to create the A-Effect but is also very creative in enhancing the effect. His stark rejection of all traditions of realist drama and realist acting certainly takes his audience by surprise, which again is a strong element of A-Effect. He uses stage setup for creating a strong A-Effect through the simplicity of stage furniture, the timing and manner of preparing the stage for the scenes, and the fact that décor and furniture for each scene are brought and set up by the same actors who are going to perform the scene. However, all these aspects are built on Brecht's ideal of the simplicity of the stage setting. In his article "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect" Brecht instructs that both "stage and auditorium must be purged of everything 'magical' and that no 'hypnotic tensions' should be set up..." and "[t]his rule[s] out any attempts to make the stage convey the flavor of a particular place (a room at evening, a road in the autumn), or create atmosphere by relaxing the tempo of the conversation" (136). Wannous purges the stage of any pretense that the theatrical event is a real one by using the simplest stage set up. For example, in the second episode, Wannous requests two actors to come to the stage carrying "very simple décor pieces to represent what looks like a hallway in a Baghdadi palace" (Wannous, *Mamlouk Jabir* 59). Another example is also the use of "only a bakery window and a few more pieces to represent a street" (69) for the scene where five Baghdadi people are waiting for bread at a bakery. Wannous also notes the possibility of substituting furniture pieces with paintings to represent the place where events take place for all episodes and scenes. No effort is put into making the stage close to reality. Décor pieces are also put together for each scene in front of the

audience as there is no curtain to be drawn for changing settings. This allows the spectator to witness all the details of changing and setting up the décor for each scene. Wannous also takes this one step further by having the same actors bring the décor pieces that are appropriate for their scene, set them up before acting and then take them back when they finish.

The same way Wannous creatively puts Brecht's suggestions on stage set up to use, he also adopts Brechtian characterization to create characters that are types in order to prevent the audience's empathy with them. Wannous's characters are Brechtian types that represent their social classes. Presenting characters as types to symbolize their class and social status rather than individuals with full character dimensions prevents the spectator's empathy and identification with them. This is achieved through avoiding digging deep into their psychological processes and by populating the play with many nameless characters. Wannous limits his characters to their societal roles which explains the superficiality of characterization and not naming most of them. More than half of the characters in the play are not given names and are marked by numbers. Customers in the café are identified as Customer 1, 2, 3, etc. and Baghdadi citizens are referred to with either "Man" or "Woman" with a number attached to it like Man 1, Woman 1, Man 2, etc. The poor couple are also referred to with "Husband" and "Wife," while the professions of each of the baker and the guard are used instead of their names. These nameless characters have no effect on the direction of the plot because of their passivity and inaction. They come to the stage to give a livelier picture of the history that is already told by the hakawati. The Baghdadi citizens express their passive opinions, except for Man 4; and the customers of the café

comment on those opinions, and always agree with the Baghdadis' refusal to interfere with public affairs. These groups of nameless characters are not meant to be memorable as individuals, but as representatives of their classes in a specific place at a specific moment in history. The Baghdadis represent the poor Baghdadis under Khaliphaht Al Moqtadir's totalitarian rule; and the customers of the café are Damascene middle and lower classes under Assad's dictatorship. Their lack of names is certainly related to their lack of action and might also be meant to signify their lack of self-esteem.

However, even though Man 4 differs from the rest of the nameless in his opinions and seems to have had a history of resisting the tyranny of the state since he has been imprisoned for political reasons, Wannous also denies him a name. Man 4 has the insight to realize that passivity is not the route to safety and that people should actively guard their and their families' safety and interests by being involved in politics and having a say in what happens surrounding their lives; however, he still seems not to qualify for a name in Wannous's view. His failure to initiate any dissent and revolution might be the reason for grouping him with the nameless populace of the play. Clandestinely expressing his opinions, talking to ordinary people and explaining to them that their passivity does not guarantee their safety, seems to fall short of what a revolutionary leader needs to do. Wannous knows that without courage and sacrifices, revolutions do not happen, and change cannot be brought about. Therefore, Wannous treats Man 4 as the rest of Baghdadi citizens and denies him a name. The nameless groups are types representing their classes, and their behavior is typical of the behavior of any member of the same class.

Even characters whom Wannous chooses to give names to are still types who never develop and are presented without any psychological depth. This again leaves a gap in understanding those characters that is to be bridged by critical thinking about their actions rather than sympathizing with them once the audience has access to their psyches and inner thoughts. Wannous only grants names to major characters who contribute to the action in the play like the minister Mohammad al Alqami, the Khaliphah Al Moqtadir and Mamlouk Jabir, or to those whose opinions shed a much-needed light, though very limited, on the character of the protagonist like Mansour and Yasir. However, granting these characters names does not change the fact that they are also types as Wannous still limits them to the typical behavior of their classes. These characters' behaviors are characteristic of what people in their positions would think and do. A weak Khaliphah who only cares about keeping his throne, is manipulated by unscrupulous advisors like Abdullah, and an excessively ambitious and again unscrupulous minister won't refrain from betraying his people and collaborating with a foreign enemy for his selfish political gains. Wannous seems to be saying that class conflicts and class interests are the determinants of the treatment common people receive from their superiors. Regardless of their conflicts, both the Khaliphah and the minister are oppressors who cannot be on the side of the common people and their behavior is characteristic of the ruling class. Similarly, the protagonist is also typical of his class of slaves and servants in his nonchalance and passivity about politics that directly impacts his life. However, what makes him different from the rest of his class is his boldness and vibrancy of character. Wannous's description of Jabir lets the audience into more information about his charming personality than he gives away



about any other character in the play. However, that kind of characterization is dictated by necessity. Wannous wants the audience to develop some level of empathy with Jabir in order to make the catastrophic ending more effective in terms of transmitting its lesson. Despite his intelligence, indiscreet ambition combined with boldness brings his fall. Jabir's attitude towards politics and public affairs is typical of his class, and what differentiates him is only his intelligence and boldness of character. Only Mansour and Man 4 are different from the rest of their classes, but their voices remain unheard by their associates.

Another strategy that Wannous uses to create an A-Effect while at the same time emphasizing the fact that his characters are types who represent their social classes, is assigning different roles to the same actors. Performing different roles by one character hinders empathy from developing between the audience and any of the characters impersonated by that actor. This strategy keeps the spectators conscious of the fact that what they are seeing is acting which in turn facilitates perceiving the characters as representatives of their classes. Class representation seems to be the motto for Wannous's assignments of the specific roles when they are to be performed by the same actor. The actor who performs more than one role is usually assigned to impersonate characters who belong to the same social class. Even accuracy of social status and hierarchy within the same class is also taken into consideration when assigning the roles. The actor who performs the Khaliphah also performs the Minister and King Monkatim, and the actor who performs the Khaliphah's brother and adviser, Abdullah, also performs the Minister's confidant Abdul Latif, and King Monkatim's son Halawoon. The same applies to characters who represent ordinary people of Baghdad

as, for example, the actress who plays Woman 2 also plays the nameless young mother who is referred to in the play as “The Wife” and her husband is played by Man 1.

Investing different strategies to prevent spectators’ empathy and identification with characters, using simple stage furniture and preparing the settings in front of the audience, and having the hakawati narration accompany the movement of the dramatic action unmistakably contribute to the continuity of the A-Effect and the demolishing the fourth wall between stage and auditorium throughout the performance. However, Wannous is not content with achieving and using the A-Effect as a fixed element of form but makes it a medium of transculturation where traditions of foreign and native cultures meet and integrate to develop new and innovative ways of producing and using the technique. Wannous obviously strives to relate the audience’s life and culture through a content that deals with their historical past and present struggle with oppression and marginalization, and to present this content in forms that are deeply rooted in their culture. This productive amalgamation of different traditions also helps produce an unconventional ending that shocks the audience into thinking and reconsidering their pre-conception of political involvement as unnecessary evil. However, the magnitude of the catastrophe in the last two scenes risks producing emotions that might mitigate the effect of estrangement strategies jeopardizing the lesson which Wannous wants his audience to infer by the end of the play. To seal the end of the play with a strong A-Effect and prevent “wrong empathy” from engulfing the audience at the horrific sight of death and destruction in the last two scenes, Wannous merges the two plays, the big play and the play within the play together. In the last scene, the auditorium (the play of the hakawati and his listeners) and the assumed stage (the inner play of the action of

Jabir's story) interlope through the hakawati's involvement with the inner play and its actors. This way the hakawati asserts the absence of the fourth wall between himself as belonging to the auditorium, the seemingly real part of the play, and the inner where the openly artificial parts are performed. He actively bridged the gap between the two spaces when he receives Jabir's head from Lahab, reads the message tattooed on the head, walks among the corpses and finally, when he hands Jabir's head to Zomorrud. Thus, leaving the audience to contemplate an alternative course of action since passivity has proven to lead to disaster.

The disastrous end of Wannous's play is avoidable and so is the end of Ngũgĩ's play. The question of how to avoid these fates have obvious answers, but no easy application in real life as the struggle against oppression and marginalization requires sacrifices. The two playwrights send their audiences home charged with, rather than purged of rebellious emotions. The use of the Brechtian A-Effect helps the playwrights achieve these non-cathartic endings. However, Ngũgĩ and Wannous do not merely transfer the Brechtian A-Effect to their theater as they found it in Brecht's writings and plays but adapt it to the environment of their audiences. Each playwright employs the A effect differently and creatively in ways that relate to his audience. Ngũgĩ, whose audience knows theater as part of the "rhythm of the daily and seasonal life of the community" (37) and made by community, involves his audience in all the phases of making his play, and Wannous, whose audience knows about the receding tradition of the hakawati evenings invests the tradition to both, highlight the artificiality of events and relate to his audience. This creatively contrived A-Effect in each playwrights' case

paves the way to reaching a non-cathartic ending and enabling the revolutionary aspects of the plays.

## Chapter 4

### Realism in Postcolonial Theater: Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's play *I Will Marry When I Want* and Saadallah Wannous's *An Evening Party for the Fifth of June*

This chapter uses Brecht's concept of realism in drama and literature to understand Ngũgĩ and Wannous's emphasis on the realistic aspect of their theaters in the context of the postcolonial situation they respond to, the influences of Western modernist drama that is often understood as anti-realist,<sup>38</sup> as well as the native theatrical forms they try to revive and utilize. In an era of oppression, the two revolutionary playwrights have in common the conviction that resisting injustices and bringing about change start with clear recognition and understanding of the very reality of oppression. They use their theaters as investigations into the realities of their audiences' lives in order to better understand the origins of injustices and the means of resistance. Ngũgĩ and Wannous, who agree that drama is inevitably political and resolve to use it as an instructional tool, see realism in drama as an obligation that they have towards their audiences. Their dramatic strife to uncover blurred aspects of the realities of their audiences' lives reflects their commitment to telling the truth, and their respect for their audiences. For example, in his book *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o emphasizes that a Kenyan theater in English cannot be realistic. Reflecting on his earlier plays *The Black Hermit* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* which are written in English, he suggests that the realism in theater "collides with the historical reality it is trying to reflect" (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 43). Ngũgĩ explains that when Africans speak English in a play and are understood to be speaking their own languages, their

<sup>38</sup> See Dina Amin's *Alfred Farag And the Egyptian Theater* (29). Amin considers modernist art as a countermovement to realism and its offshoot, naturalism, of the nineteenth century. She also lists Brecht's epic theater as one of the dramatic movements of modernism.

reality becomes marred with the foreign language's inability to reflect African culture and ways of life and thinking. He also adds that contradictions become worse when these very characters/actors who use English switch to sing in their African languages (43). These assertions testify to the centrality of the idea of achieving realism to Ngũgĩ in his plays.

Similarly, the topic of realism and reflecting a "historical reality" are central in Wannous's theater. In the introduction to his experimental play *Mamalouk Jabir's Head*, Wannous advises that the writer and the crew, who are involved in all the stages of making the theatrical work, "should not limit [their] efforts to aesthetic concerns, but rather, should pass them into the realms of political and social troubles of the time" (45). He requires conducting active research into the social, political and economic realities of the life of the audience in order to choose subjects and modes of treatment to which it can relate. This clear position on the importance of representing reality faithfully in the introduction to the play in 1971 had been preceded three years earlier by his play *An Evening Party for the Fifth of June* that is dedicated to the theme of realism and truthful representation of reality. In *An Evening Party for the Fifth of June*, realism in literature in general and drama particularly becomes the central quest of the play and a motto that inhabits the play inside out as it digs for truth, as well as explicitly discusses the importance of reflecting reality in literature. The two main characters in the play, the playwright Abdul Ghani and the Director, lay down their contradicting positions on realism in theater, and the refugees Abu Farraj and Abdul Rahman's inputs help the audience take a position supporting realism in theater as it renders theatrical works truthful and honest. This chapter studies what "realism" in literature and drama means

to Ngũgĩ and Wannous and how they conceive of social realities. It also discusses the different, and common means the two dramaturges employ to achieve realism in their two plays, *I Will Marry When I Want* by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and *An Evening Party for the Fifth of June* by Saadallah Wannous.

The two playwrights' concern with realism becomes problematic since they adopt the Brechtian dramatic form interspersing their plays with the alienation-effect (A-Effect) as the second chapter of this work clarifies. The A-Effect is their indispensable tool to keeping their audiences intellectually engaged and to eliminate the hypnotic influences of traditional mimetic realism. A main concern in this chapter is to draw the distinction between traditional Western dramatic realism of nineteenth century<sup>39</sup> and Ngũgĩ and Wannous's Brechtian realism. I use the term traditional Western realism because the movement continued to be the standard for dramaturgy for almost a century before modernist avant garde drama started to reject and defy tenets of realism in drama across Europe. Robert D. Boyer compiles a bibliography of the realistic school of dramaturgy during the "formative and experimental years of the movement" from 1870 to 1920 in Europe and sums up the definition of dramatic realism as:

the set of artistic strategies designed to achieve verisimilitude on stage to create the appearance of the life that is, with no discernable artifice, no self-justifying poesy, no pretty illusions, and most importantly, no lies. The subject matter is hard material fact which is crafted into a unique form, carefully disguised. (xvi)

<sup>39</sup> Realistic drama started around 1870 as a challenge and rejection of melodrama which was the manifestation of romanticism in theater. For more see "Forms of Modern Drama" by John Gassner.

The Western realism which Boyer describes is focused on verisimilitude on stage and making the events and characters life-like so that the audience willingly suspends its disbelief and approaches what it sees on stage as a real-life event. This realism is constituted of two elements: suspending the disbelief in the action as an artificial event and remaining faithful to the reality of the life depicted on stage. The first element clearly contradicts with the most important aspect of Brechtian drama. Whereas mainstream Western realistic drama requires the audience to suspend their disbelief in the dramatic action and temporarily accept it as a real-life event, the very goal of the Brechtian form is to keep the audience alerted to the artificiality of the theatrical action and to facilitate approaching it critically. Ngũgĩ and Wannous are far from wanting their audiences to suspend disbelief in the theatrical event. Rather than creating an emotional hypnotic illusion of realism, the two playwrights strive to keep their audiences intellectually engaged to analyze and critique what they see on stage and question the causes and social factors that engender unfair realities. Their Brechtian drama employs the alienation effect to do away with the illusion of realism and invoke an intellectual rather than an emotional reaction to the dramatic action. The very use of the A-Effect negates an important element of mainstream European dramatic realism.

The second element of realism that Ngũgĩ and Wannous agree is giving a true picture of reality. They concur that dramatic realism, necessitates presenting reality as it is, excluding lies, and sticking to hard material facts. Both playwrights strive to show the truth about the lives of the poor and the exploited in their theaters and express their opinions about the need to portray that reality with the utmost fidelity. However, while they agree that representing life truthfully is the decisive element of realism, they reject



mainstream Western realist concepts of “reality” and opt for its Brechtian counterpart. Ngūgĩ and Wannous dissent from mainstream Western realists’ tradition of depicting outside or surface reality and opt for its Brechtian version of digging into the socio-economic causes that bring social reality into being. Whereas the pioneers of mainstream Western realism are content with portraying outside reality and abstaining from polishing over it, Brecht digs deeper into the causes behind those realities. To Henrik Ibsen and Emile Zola, realism is achieved by telling society the truth about itself and unmasking social and moral ills. Ibsen who is known as the father of realism conducts close examination and bold exposition of realities that lay behind social veneers. He challenges the approved social decorum and moralities of his time and exposes realities that have never been represented before. Other dramatists of the realist era also insist on the importance of delving into the “psychological complexity motivating ... dramatic persona” (Strindberg 89). Naturalist Zola<sup>40</sup> takes a step further and insists on studying the biological and environmental forces that determine and direct individual’s behavior.

Brecht refuses all these traditions as insufficient clarifying that he rejects the psychological realism of Leo Tolstoy as well as the minute details of Honoré de Balzac as determinate and exhaustive markers of realism in fiction and drama:

We shall care not to ascribe realism to a historical form of novel belonging to a historical period, Balzac’s or Tolstoy’s, for instance, so as to set up purely formal and literary criteria of realism. We shall not restrict ourselves to speaking of

<sup>40</sup> Both naturalism and realism aim at presenting an exact image of life to create an illusion of real life, but naturalism is realism carried to the extreme (Boyer xvi). For more about realism and naturalism, see Gassner.

realism in cases where one can (e.g.) smell, look, feel whatever is depicted, where “atmosphere” is created and stories develop in such a way that the characters are psychologically stripped down. Our conception of realism needs to be broad and political. (109)

Brecht revolts against inherited traditions of realism and insists on looking for new ways that suit the historical moment. He is against setting up rigid measures and protests that such measures would become mere empty traditions of form as they lose their ability to correspond with the real-time circumstances. He clearly declares that “new problems loom up and demand new techniques” (110). Brecht promotes using the scientific methods of observation and analysis to understand the reality of the social classes, their materialist interests and interrelations. To him, presenting this “objective” and “temporal” reality is what achieves realism in drama and literature: “Reality alters; to represent it the means of representation must alter too...The oppressors do not always appear in the same mask. The masks cannot always be stripped off in the same way” (110). Brecht’s objective reality is a historic reality that is grounded in Marxist thinking and which is to be unmasked using the scientific methods.

Emphasizing on the Marxist logic of Brechtian drama—as opposed to idealist Hegelian logic where “the spirit creates the dramatic action” (93)—which views “the characters’ social relations [as the source of] dramatic action” (93), Augusto Boal offers the appellation of “Marxist poetics” as better describing Brecht’s theater than the name “epic theater” provided by Brecht. By the same token, Brechtian realism is also best described as Marxist realism since Brecht sees that social and economic circumstances determine thoughts and consciousness of reality. In Brecht’s poetics, realism in art is

achieved by subjecting reality to critical thinking through exploring and uncovering economic and social forces. To him, giving a truthful representation of life in literature is of interest and use to the broad working classes (107). Brecht condenses his definition of what realistic art means as

Laying bare society's causal network/showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators/writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/emphasizing the dynamics of development/concrete and so as to encourage abstraction. (109)

Brecht's version of realism is different from all literary and theatrical "realisms" that view social conditions as reflections of the spiritual and mental conceptions of life which prevailed throughout the ages until Marx reversed that formula. His politically involved drama makes class relationships and economic interests its starting point to explain societal problems and find their solutions. To Brecht realism is achieved through truthful presentation of injustices and their roots in socioeconomic relationships between social classes. Brecht's concept of dramatic realism is new and revolutionary where realism means exposing the truth about socioeconomic relations that underlies injustices and approaching those relations as changeable without pretending that the theatrical event is real and not a performance.

Ngũgĩ and Wannous adopt that Brechtian realism, a concept that can be narrowed down to presenting social reality from a Marxist standpoint where social conditions are viewed through a materialist lens and the functioning of society is pinned down to the socioeconomic relations between its classes. In an era of oppression, the

two revolutionary playwrights seem to share the conviction that resisting injustices and bringing about change start with clearly understanding and recognizing the very reality of oppression. They use their theaters as investigations into the realities of their audiences' lives in order to better understand the origins of injustices and the proper means of resistance. Ngũgĩ and Wannous independently agree that drama is inevitably political and resolve to use it as an instructional tool and see realism in drama as an obligation that they have towards their audiences. Their dramatic strife to uncover blurred aspects of the realities of their audiences' lives reflects their commitment to telling the truth, and their respect for their audiences.

To unravel the truth about socioeconomic causes and forces that determine the way society functions, Ngũgĩ and Wannous utilize the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's conscientization praxis. They use the method to explore and expose materialist forces that control social relations. Paulo Freire's theory of conscientization teaches by digging up the kind of causal realism that is socially engaged from a Marxist viewpoint. It is a theory of interactive pedagogy that involves the learners in a dialogical process of gaining knowledge. The two dramaturses adopt the conscientization method to educate their audiences about the causes behind the unjust conditions of their lives and to mobilize them to revolt against those conditions. According to Freire, liberating education does not only help recognizing reality as oppressive, but realizing the possibilities of changing it:

In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. (31)

This is exactly what Ngūgĩ and Wannous try to transmit to their audiences through the medium of theater. Realizing the domesticating effect of oppression, the two revolutionary playwrights try to bring their audiences to approach the realities of their lives critically; to view oppressive relationships between the ruling rich classes and the poor working classes as an “objective reality” that they can study, think about critically, and act upon and change. I use Freire’s term of “objective reality” (31) to refer to the social reality of oppression of the poor working classes as that reality is uncovered by making it an object of observation and analysis. Freire clearly states that conscientization “makes oppression and its causes objects of observation and reflection” (30). To him liberation comes as the praxis of that reflection when the revolutionaries “confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality” (34). It is the objective reality of oppression that Brecht, Ngūgĩ and Wannous agree needs to be unraveled and changed. Acting on reality to these Marxist thinkers, Brecht, Freire, Ngūgĩ and Wannous means revolting against oppressive social and economic dynamics of society and bringing justice to the life of the poor and marginalized classes. In short, the reality that Ngūgĩ and Wannous are concerned about representing and ultimately changing is an objective reality viewed from a Marxist point of view. Ngūgĩ’s play *I Will Marry When I Want*, and Wannous’s *An Evening Party for the Fifth of June* probe into the socioeconomic relations between oppressors and oppressed to present objective realities on stage, and to train their audiences to think critically about those realities. The aim at a non-cathartic ending, and the other two pivotal aspects of the Brechtian form which are the A-effect and the episodic story, gives the playwrights flexibility of using lengthy dialogues to explore reality. Both Ngūgĩ

and Wannous employ Freirean pedagogy of conscientization to explore causal forces of oppression and present a Brechtian version of dramatic realism which is both a revolution against mainstream Western realism and an exploration of the lives of the poor and oppressed classes for the purpose of inciting revolution and bringing about change.

## 1. *An Evening Party for the Fifth of June*

### 1.1 Objective Reality Explored Through Dialogue

Wannous builds *An Evening Party for the Fifth of June* around dialogue involving the audience in the theatrical event that focuses on exploring the causes for the unfavorable realities they live in. He presents a play that tells the story of another allegedly cancelled play: a play within a play. The play that is advertised, and which people have bought tickets to see, is *An Evening Party for the Fifth of June*. It presents the story of the writing, rehearsal and the withdrawal of an “unrealistic” play *Whispers of Souls*. *Evening Party for the Fifth of June* was written in the aftermath of the Arab defeat in 1967 and the loss of big parts of Arab lands to Israel. The war left hundreds of thousands of refugees from Palestine and Golan Heights. However, while the play allegorically refers to the general refugee situations in different Arab countries since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, it explicitly focuses on the grievances and marginalization of refugees from Golan Heights as well as the average Syrian citizens are subjected to by the Syrian nationalist government.

The incidents of *An Evening Party for the Fifth of June* revolve around Abdul Ghani’s withdrawal of his play because of his scruples about presenting a non-realistic

work, a work that does not truthfully depict “reality.” After a thirty-minute delay, the audience grows impatient, and the director appears on stage. Acting embarrassed and disappointed, he apologizes and tells the audience that the problem is out of his control. He blames the playwright for stopping the performance by withdrawing his play at the last minute. However, the playwright appears from among the audience and climbs the stage. Both the playwright and the director try to explain their opposing positions on the play *Whispers of Souls* and along the way express their opposing opinions on realism and aesthetics in art. While the two men reenact a previous meeting that has taken place between them before, professional actors perform sketches that have been suggested during that meeting as parts of *Whispers of Souls*. The different parts of the cancelled play are presented, discussed and commented on from different perspectives by the audience, the playwright and the director. Realism in art becomes the contested theme between the Director who advocates sacrificing truth in favor of aesthetics, and the writer Abdul Ghani who considers obliterating truth a treacherous act that he does not condone or take part in. This way, Wannous presents the two narratives or two types of plays: the play that conforms to authorities’ narrative and presents fake reality, and the encompassing play, which is critical of untruthful theater.

*An Evening Party* presents objective reality and invites those who have accepted it as unquestionable and unchangeable to think critically and dialogue about it. Through exploring the reality that has led to the defeat and created the refugee problem, the play addresses the lies of the government and its deluding propaganda which portrays the defeat as victory. After the playwright and the Director tell the story of writing *Whispers of Souls* and the actors enact the parts of the play that were suggested by the Director,

trained actors who sit in the auditorium disguised as spectators criticize the enacted play as unrealistic. The spectators-actors initiate dialogue by suggesting that neither the war presented looks like the war they lived through, nor do the characters behave like the villagers of the Golan Heights. They continue to take an active role in dialogue and critically think about the conditions in their nation. The dialoguers question their own identity and place in the nation and investigate the reasons behind the Arab defeat in the Six Day War of 1967.

Through dialogue, the play probes into the “limit situation” of oppression to unmask truth and achieve critical consciousness (conscientization) in the oppressed. In Freirean pedagogy, the limit situation is the situation that limits people and annul their subjectivity “reduc[ing] [them] to things” (Freire 50). Here comes the role of conscientization pedagogy as a re-humanizing education to “deepen ... the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence” (90) from limit situations. The process necessarily involves uncovering truths that are not clearly grasped before and bringing the audience to see their “submersion in the reality of oppression,” how it impairs their perception of themselves as oppressed (27) and bars them from seeing through the government’s lies. These lies become myths instilled in the oppressed as truths. Repetition perpetuates the lies and misleads the oppressed internalize them as truths. Freire explains the effect of oppression on the oppressed and advises that in order to break its effect, people have to objectify and study it:

One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’



consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. (33)

*An Evening Party* shows the domesticating effect of oppression as well as the possibility of “emerg[ing] from it and turn[ing] upon it.” Through dialogue, the spectators understand their submersion in the situation of oppression and the systemic dehumanization they are subjected to by the government. To explain the extent of oppression, marginalization and dehumanization of the Syrian peasants, a contrast is drawn between them and Vietnamese peasants.

Spectator 1: Those people are also poor peasants. They also fear the bombs that burn their rice fields.

A Spectator (from the auditorium): The Vietnamese!

Spectators (Together from the auditorium): Where are we from the Vietnamese?

Spectator 2: But they are not strangers in their homeland. They do not live in exiled islands. They are not scattered names in old records. (107)

According to the dialoguers, the Vietnamese peasants are treated as an integral part of their nation's existence and identity, and consequently identify as such and act accordingly. The contrast is carried further to point out the dehumanization of the Syrian peasants before the war.

Spectator 3 (from the auditorium): Also, they are not insects on the ground like ants or earthworms....

Spectator 4: And they are not animals that feed on grass and despondent wishes. (107-8)

The contrast between poor Vietnamese peasants and poor—but dehumanized—Syrian peasants explains why the Vietnamese have remained stuck to their land and defended it while Syrian villagers have left at the first sign of war. The responsibility for the failure of the inhabitants of the borderline villages to hold their ground and resist falls on the government and the whole nation. Miserable life conditions, neglect, and ignorance are manifestations of the limit situation of oppression and result in defeat. While the dehumanization of Syrian peasants is depicted in its crudest form when they are compared to the insects and animals, contrasting them with the Vietnamese peasants brings up what Freire calls the “untested feasibility” (83) that lies beyond the limit situation of oppression as a viable possibility.

Wannous’s use of conscientization continues to further unravel the limit situation of oppression through codification of certain existential situations for the dialoguers to decode. To set out an analysis of the dehumanization of Syrian peasants and the obliteration of their human and national identity, Wannous reaches out to Lacanian psychoanalysis and its idea of the mirror stage. Wannous uses a real/physical mirror as a code to bring his spectators to think about their selfhood and their place as human beings and citizens in the postcolonial nation-state of Syria. At a moment of reflection and self-blaming for the responsibility of the defeat by one spectator (Spectator 1), mentioning of the mirror inspires another spectator (Spectator 2) to question individual and collective identities as prerequisites for responsibility. His idea is that to be responsible, one needs to exist, and to realize their existence as a full human being first. Spectator 2 becomes enthusiastic about the idea, sets up a mirror and invites the

dialoguers to look inside it, try to recognize their images and decode the situation of their denied authentic existence:

Spectators 3, 4 and 5: (together) For real...Who are we?

A spectator: (from the auditorium): We are a defeated nation.

Spectator 2: Before the defeat, the question has always been there. The defeat does nothing other than removing the dust from it and making it visible. (The spectator goes back to the game of staring in the mirror) We stare in the mirror and persist in asking its polished surface: "who we are?" deep in the mirror...in the corners. There.. we gaze and gaze (after a few moments, he leaves the game and shouts the group away from it) Do not strain your eyes for you are not going to see anything. There is nothing in the mirror. No face.. No picture.

Spectators 3, 4, and 5: (like an echo) There is nothing in the mirror.

Spectator 2: Nothing at all.. But do you know why?

Spectators 3, 5 and other spectators from the auditorium (together)-Why?

Spectator 2: Because we are erased images.

Spectators (from the auditorium) Erased images

-Erased images

Spectator 2: Images that the national interest has erased before they take form or features.... (114)

The mirror is the concrete code and the "fact" that people have no images appearing in the mirror is the concrete existential coded situation that the spectators analyze. The coding of an abstract concept (identity/existence as full human beings) into a concrete

situation of image reflection in a mirror analyzes and decodes the whole of the limit situation of oppression.

When dialogue about the limit situation is complicated with different generative themes such as poverty, ignorance, marginalization, and responsibility for the defeat, and the dialogue reaches an overwhelming point, coding of the parts becomes necessary to disentangling the whole of the situation.

Spectators 4,5 and 6: And how did that happen?

Spectator (from the auditorium): What are you saying? Be careful.

Spectator (from the auditorium): Speaking costs more than silence.

Spectator 2 (unheedingly continues): Year after year that happened. This is how it happened (a new game, he acts. He speaks in a commanding manner) Do not speak. The tongue can be tempting. The word is a bait. For the sake of the national interest, cut your tongues.

Spectator (from auditorium): Cutting the tongue is the safest route.

Spectator 6: And we cut our tongues.

Spectator 1: Why did we cut our tongues?

Spectator 2: If we do not cut our tongues, the national interest has prisons that the sun cannot reach even if it's only once a year.

Spectator 4: Then, we are millions of tongues that are cut and dumped behind closed doors, in closed mouths, in closed toilets.

....

Spectator 2: The question is a trap.. The look is a trap. The smell is a trap. What remains then from a picture where the tongue, the nose, the eyes and the thinking faculties are erased.

Spectator 4: Nothing remains but a faint shadow of which you cannot make a shape or a detail. (114-17)

After realizing the erasure of images in the mirror, the next movement of the decoding becomes necessarily the return from the whole (limit situation) to the part which is the negated existence of the people and stripping them of their human and national identity. The different generative themes of suppressing free speech and governmental terrorizing of dissent, responsibility for defeat, poverty and marginalization of citizens are discussed as constituting the limit situation of oppression. The dialogue brings the government's oppressive practices into light until the speakers reach the realization of how they have come to be dumb, deaf and ignorant. Dialoging on the failure of citizens to have their images reflected in the mirror allows disentangling different generative themes that constitute the limit situation to better understand it.

Wannous's use of the mirror and looking for one's image, Lacan calls the "imago" is significant as marking the moment a human baby recognizes him/herself as a unified and complete human being. This stage is important to the development of the human subject as the baby does not perceive his/her "unified complete self" without perceiving their "imago" in the mirror. However, the mirror does not have to be literal and can be human gaze. In the case of the baby, the mirror which can be the mother's gaze, would be the government's in the case of the villagers and common people in Syria in *An Evening Party*. While the mother's gaze gives the baby a sense of wholeness, the

government's gaze strips adult citizens of theirs as it forces them to quit thinking and speaking so that it thinks, speaks and decides for them. Thus, the government deprives the citizens of their sense of unity and wholeness and turns them into fragmented "selves." Whereas the mother's gaze helps develop the ego, the subject "I," the government hinders its development and cancels the possibility of formulating one in the oppressed. The very lack of an image reflection is significant for two reasons. First, the people looking into the mirror are adults who are infantilized by the ruling class and deprived of their subjectivity. And second, the metaphorical cutting of people's tongues deprives them of language; the medium through which they realize an identity. Thus, people become erased images that cannot be reflected in a mirror.

*An Evening Party* itself also becomes Freirean dialogical investigation into a denied truth when Wannous uses drama itself as a code. The play *Whispers of Souls* is the first and main code in *An Evening Party*, and it is used to pose falsification as a problem to dialogue on. In fact, all discussions and dialogues are parts of decoding *Whispers of Souls*. *An Evening Party* forms a thematic investigation circle on stage where participants dialogue about the reasons of defeat. Truth about the war is explained through a lively conversation between two refugees Abdul Rahman and Abou Faraj. After listening to the discussions and negotiations between Abdul Ghani and the Director and watching parts of the play *Whispers of Souls*, refugees from among the audience (again, trained actors playing the refugees) voice their opinions. They assert that while the village in the play resembles theirs, the villagers behave completely different from the real peasants in the border villages. The peasants in the play are organized and politically conscious of the war that is waged against their country, its

implications and their own unpreparedness. Moreover, their decision to leave is part of a plan to prepare and come back stronger to fight the enemy. This positive picture of the peasants' political awareness is a myth that the ruling class rely on to show the government as efficient, democratic, fair and caring. Freire explains how such myths that make the dominant elites appear as if "recognizing their duties' [and] promot[ing] the advancement of the people" (121), are used to promote gratitude and docility in the oppressed and facilitate their exploitation. However, the reality which the two refugees speak of is completely different:

Abdul Rahman: ...(sigh) ...But so big is the difference between (people in border villages) us and them [villagers in *Whispers of Souls*]! Did you see their organization Abou Faraj?

Abou Faraj (now near the stage): Yes, I wish we were like them.

Abdul Rahman: I always say people in our villages will never have any order in their lives. Didn't we waste our breaths trying to organize them, even if a little.

...

(The conversation continues between Abdul Rahman and Abou Faraj as telling a story by the two voices. It is more of a monologue than a dialogue).

Abou Faraj: And the women.

Abdul Rahman: Lack of comprehension. One woman wanted to return because she forgot to bring her son's shirt, and another one does not remember whether she closed a window or not. After three hours of walking, Zainab Amna wanted to go back and check if the window is closed. And nobody could convince her to keep quiet and walk.

Abou Faraj (now on the stage. He continues unhesitatingly): And Um Mohammad Ghazaleh... An old grey-headed woman who has left a hen with chicks at home...She was nagging about and wailing the possible loss of her hen all the way. If I did not beat her and force her to walk, she would have returned to the village. (76)

The conversation uncovers a new reality, one of defeat that goes against the official narrative of heroism. The villagers are in reality, poor, confused and unorganized. They are consumed in small mundane concerns and trivialities at the time their country is being attacked by a mighty enemy. This conversation de-mythicizes reality presented in *Whispers of Soul* as a communique to be deposited in a passive audience.

The play here achieves Brechtian objective realism while rejecting, appropriating, and remolding Western realist traditions. The rejection happens when the details are not simply used to portray realities of ignorance and poverty, but to provoke thinking about the causes behind those realities. The representations of the reality of oppression and its detrimental effects on people are sharpened through a parody of older traditions of realism and naturalism. The play parodies naturalism by focusing on petty daily concerns instead of graver and darker sides of reality like alcoholism or crime. The villagers' obsession with these petty daily concerns become uncanny in the midst of grave and massive events like wars. The parody is characterized by bitter sarcasm as it shows the limitations of villagers who are consumed in petty concerns about the food they left in their pantries or a child's shirt that they left behind at the time their very existence is in jeopardy. In the face of the possibility of losing one's home, land and even life, these villagers are consumed in their concerns about insignificant matters.



Some even want to go back to close a window they have forgotten to close. Part of the parody is also showing nonconventional causes as the determinant forces of personality and behavior. Here, it is not heredity or biology, but socioeconomic forces and the dynamics of power in society that determine behavior and dehumanizes people. The determinant for the villagers' pitiful and absurd behavior is ignorance which in turn is perpetuated by the government-imposed limit situation of oppression. Abou Faraj and Abdul Rahman tell stories about the ignorance, naivety and poverty of the villagers.

Even the manner of the conversation between Abdul Rahman and Abou Faraj reflects the isolation they have been living. Surprisingly, the conversation between Abou Faraj and Abdul Rahman takes the form of monologue divided between two voices, which essentially contradicts with Freirean dialogical method of unraveling truth.

Wannous seems to aim at benefiting from this conversation at both levels, dialogue and monologue. The two characters are involved in a dialogue since they converse about one idea where each of them contributes to his and his partner's (and the audience's) understanding of it. This clearly serves the author's goal of unraveling an objective truth through actively involving spectators in dialogue that generates new knowledge from thinking critically about old knowledge. However, the two characters' manner of speech simulates a monologue. The two refugees converse with each other as if each of them speaks to himself rather than addressing a partner which reflects the sense of isolation of borderline villages and their inhabitants before and after the war. The villagers have been excluded from the nationalist discourse as second- or third-class citizens for a long time. They are left isolated in their faraway border villages and nobody has tried to communicate with them, the less to educate them. These peasants are not used to

communicating or exchanging knowledge. They are only used to receive “communiques” from the government through official news on the national radio which only tells them lies about the heroism of their army and the greatness of their nation. The two men’s voices sound isolated even while dialoguing on, and correcting misinformation about the story of their existence. The best they can do is deliver their story in the form of monologue as if each one is speaking to himself rather than communicating with another.

Wannous might also have instructed for this conversation to take the form of a monologue in order to present the Abdul Rahman-Abou Faraj story as a concrete coded situation for the audience to participate in decoding. After Abdul Rahman and Abou Faraj finish relating the story of the war and how they ended up leaving their homes and farms, discussions and dialoguing start. The two refugees bring a new version of the story of both the beginning and the outcome of the war. This new story helps turn the audience from passive recipients of communiques into active dialoguers exploring the reality of defeat. Freire explains that

When the individual is presented with a coded existential situation, his tendency is to “split” that coded situation. In the process of decoding, this separation corresponds to the stage we call “description of situation” and facilitates the discovery of the interaction among the parts of the disjointed whole. This whole (the coded situation), which previously had been only diffusedly apprehended, begins to acquire meaning as thought flows back to it from the various dimensions. (86)

The coded existential situation that the audience/dialoguers are faced with is the story of the war that is related by Abdul Ghani and Abou Faraj. A thematic investigation circle develops to dialogue about the implied isolation of the borderline villagers—latter as refugees—and the story they present as other spectators join Abdul Rahman-Abou Faraj conversation. The dialogue becomes lively only when audience members participate and start digging into the reason behind the defeat in the war through asking about the reason for the villagers to abandon their homes and lands at the first sign of war. The circle moves from the theme of defeat in the war to the reason for the defeat and then to the alienation not only of the borderline villagers, but of the large Arab and Syrian masses. When the refugees express their alienation and lack of connection with the rest of the nation, another spectator replies that all the Syrians are similarly alienated:

Abou Faraj: Nobody guides us what to do.

Abdul Rahman: We listen to the radio...And we don't understand what it says.

Spectator: (from the auditorium): If what it says is understandable.

Spectator: (from the auditorium): We are all like you. (93-4)

Abdul Rahman and Abou Faraj become one voice, the voice of the refugees who have witnessed the war, who know the truth firsthand and their task becomes to lay it down to the audience for debate. They present part of the limit situation, the alienation of the peasants in the borderline villages which enables moving to the whole, the limit situation of the poor and oppressed classes in so-called independent Syria. The play shows its rootedness in Brechtian realism by subjecting class reality and its direct causal relation to oppression through Freirean dialogue and critical thinking.

Wannous does not achieve Brechtian realism using Freirean conscientization method simply as an exposition of a fixed truth, but rather as a training session for his audience on how to subject reality to critical thinking and how to dialogue about it. He experiments with different techniques to move his audience to participate in the theatrical action discussing oppressive realities of their life hoping that this will lead to political involvement outside the walls of the theater. Of course, Abdul Rahman, Abou Faraj and other spectators who participate in the dialogues are all actors trained for their roles. While this is not explicitly announced before or during the play, the audience tacitly understand this reality as no effort is done to elude it. Wannous also warns that not motivating dialogue through realistic representations of the spectator's life and his conditions as well as a mode of treatment to which he can relate and dialogue about, will certainly turn the techniques of implanting actors among the spectators into mere elements of form (*Mamlouk Jabir* 42). Probing into the limit situation of oppression of spectators lives through dialogue shows them the possibility of digging into reality, exploring and discovering hidden dynamics of society.

In Freirean conscientization pedagogy, the fact that the participants are actors trained to conduct the dialogue, and that both the process of investigation through dialogue and the discovery are written in the manuscript of the play condemns the investigation to failure as it sets a hierarchy between teacher and student (teacher here are the actors and students are the spectators). However, this is not the case of the play nor is it how Wannous wants drama to be. Wannous aims at an educational drama where the spectator is an active participant in an improvised dialogue between stage and auditorium. *An Evening Party* is one of Wannous's experiments with what he calls

“politicizing theater” (Wannous, *The King’s Elephant and Mamlouk Jabir’s Head* 43) that aims at moving the audience from being apolitical to becoming politically involved. Politicizing the audience through theater cannot be conducted in a traditional form of drama with passive audience or through delivering communiques disguised as dialogues. Wannous states his definition of politicizing theater in the introduction to *Mamlouk Jabir’s Head* as “a dialogue between two spaces where the first is the performance carried on by a group of actors who want to communicate with the audience. The second is the auditorium where the audience carries and reflects all the problems and unfavorable symptoms of its reality” (43). Seating actors among the spectators and having them participate in the discussion as if they were audience members is used to encourage the real audience to be involved in the discussion. In fact, even during this play where spectators/actors are trained for their roles, the play has space for improvisation and real audience participation. *An Evening Party*, and other plays by Wannous like *Mamlouk’s Jabir’s Head* where actors participate as if they were audience members are meant to break the ice for a real spectator involvement in the theatrical action. Wannous hopes that enacting a conversation between the stage and the auditorium and having individuals climb the stage and take part in the performance would encourage real audience participation. Therefore, drama with an example of spectator participation is an entrance into a pedagogy of the oppressed where truth is unveiled through real improvised dialogue. Wannous makes his politicizing drama part of conscientization pedagogy that enable the spectators to become conscious of the limit situation of oppression they live in, the possibility of transformation (untested feasibility) and the need to enter praxis and achieve that

transformation. *An Evening Party* is a major experimental play in Wannous's project of using theater as a tool for politicizing the audience. He explains that the aim of his politicizing theater is to get real spectators to participate in an original and improvised discussion (44). Therefore, while the play does unravel a predetermined truth, it still leaves a space for an improvised dialogue and gives the audience an example of an active audience participation with the hope to lead to an authentic dialogue in and outside the theater.

### 1.2 *The play's Engagement with the Question of Realism in Art*

The truths uncovered through dialogue work to condemn non-realistic drama as presenting a fake image of the nation for the purpose of perpetuating the subjugation and exploitation of citizens by the ruling classes. Using Freire's dialogical method to dig into the truth of oppression and its sociopolitical roots in class relationships, *An Evening Party* discredits the inner play *Whispers of Souls* as pernicious "communiques" of banking education that serve to preserve the status quo of the limit situation of oppression and domination. Banking education is the oppressive form of instruction that Freire rejects as dehumanizing where the teacher is the authority figure who owns knowledge and deposits it into passive recipient-students (53, 55). The teacher's knowledge in this case is a static predetermined reality that students accept with no vision of it ever changing. To Wannous, drama that eludes reality serves as banking education that dehumanizes the audience and perpetuates their subjugation to their oppressors. By presenting the two sides of the controversy represented by Abdul Ghani and the Director, Wannous succeeds in achieving the task of exposing the deceitfulness

of the government-approved art to which the Director is committed. The government and its agents use art and media to control people by hiding knowledge that can empower them and continuously keeping them in the dark regarding important events and circumstances in their nation and the world. When the refugees are asked why they have left their border villages, they fail to give an answer. They reply with the question: “What else can you do when the war breaks?” (94) These villagers do not have any clue about what is happening or how to react. The government’s strategy of keeping its citizens in the dark to facilitate ruling and controlling them has become backlashes in the face of a foreign assault. Prior to, and during the Six Day War, the citizens did not have access to the truth about their country’s affairs and were closed off from the news about the rest of the world. Perpetuating the submersion of the masses in their limit situation weakens them and results in their inability, not only to revolt against their corrupted government, but also to defend their country. Nonetheless, the government does not learn the lesson, and continues oppressing its citizens to keep them weak, ignorant and poor, thus, putting the nation at the risk of more future defeats.

*An Evening Party* emphasizes the importance of realism in art while condemning art that evades representing societal dynamics and relationship between classes under the pretext of being neutral and apolitical.

Abdul Ghani: My words! (he shakes his head and raises his voice) But, I smelt the stench from the lines that I wrote... The stench was very bad and very strong.

Writing those words felt like throwing garbage in the face of people. (68)

Abdul Ghani describes his words in *Whispers of Souls* that subscribe to the Director’s values of prioritizing aesthetics over reality as emitting stench. While the Director sees

*Whispers of Souls* as good art, Abdul Ghani sees it as lying to the people and stupefying them. *An Evening Party* aims at making the audience aware of the propaganda in what pretends to be innocent art by contrasting two opposing points of view about realism in art. The Director and the playwright Abdul Ghani hold different views on the relationship between realism and art. Abdul Ghani advocates realistic art and encourages the people to discuss and present the realities of their lives because they know it best. The Director on the other hand has a different opinion. He dismisses reality as irrelevant in creating good art. He presents a made-up and polished-over realities. In other words, he lies in the name of aesthetics.

The Director and Abdul Ghani represent the two opposing pedagogical schools of banking education and dialogical education respectively. Freire borrows Erich Fromm's appellations of the "necrophilous" (58) for the banking education teacher as their pedagogy of banking education cannot promote "biophily, but instead produces its opposite necrophily" (58). The necrophilous person in *An Evening Party* is the Director, who "approaches life mechanically, as if ... living persons were things" (58) ready to receive ideas deposited into them, thus curbing all possibilities of growth. In banking education, learners are objectified in a process that makes them see a predetermined reality by, and from the perspective of the necrophilous educator. On the other hand, Abdul Ghani's biophilia connects him to the organic and alive world of growth and development. Abdul Ghani (and Wannous) see the audience as the subject of exploring and eventually changing reality. While the reality of the necrophilous educator is fixed and polished upon, that of the biophilous truthful and changeable.



The Director's version of "reality" is the myth which the oppressor elites want to indoctrinate the oppressed masses into because it "is indispensable to the preservation of the status quo" (Freire 120). Once the oppressed are made to internalize the myths of the heroism of the Syrian soldier and the freedom and equality Syrian people enjoy, there won't be any reason to criticize the failing oppressive government, or rebel against it. The Director presents the myths about the heroism and efficacy of the Syrian government as a reality. He carries on this task on behalf of the ruling classes. Freire explains that

In their political activity, the dominant elites utilize the banking concept to encourage passivity in the oppressed, corresponding with the latter's "submerged" state of consciousness, and take advantage of that passivity to "fill" that consciousness with slogans which create even more fear of freedom. (76)

When the Director says that his theater should not stop offering new performances and should not be missing on being artistically involved in the historic events that are taking place (Wannous 18), he does not mean to offer realistic representations of those events or the circumstances surrounding them. For him, reality can only provide material for the artist who uses his imagination to draw a different world, a "better" one than the reality on the ground, in other words, a mythical world.

*An Evening Party* denounces non-realist drama by also exposing its advocate's dishonesty. The Director's theory of "art for art's sake" is not innocent, nor does it really idealize art for its own sake. He holds this maxim as a higher standard than Abdul Ghani's commitment to realism in art. When spectators object to the picture of the beginning of the war that *Whispers of Souls* presents, the Director explains that that is a

“dramatic picture of the beginning of the war” (27). His excuse that in being a theater director, he is there “to create art” is only a justification for dismissing reality. The Director’s commitment to the creation of art for art’s sake is not innocent. He hides behind this theory to achieve his, and his government’s political goals of diverting the public from searching into the “real” reasons behind the defeat by presenting the defeat as victory, or a promise of victory. The Director promotes the government’s lies and dresses false news in a garment of innocence. He is one of the governments tools of faking reality and deluding people about the state of their nation. While the nation suffers a big defeat and loss of souls and land, the Director prepares to produce a play about heroism completely and blatantly dismissing the reality on the ground.

The play warns against malicious art that evades reality also through exposing its agents who are complicit with the government oppression and who employ their art to further its propagandist lies. The Director and the class of intellectuals he belongs to are discredited very early in the play, and along with them their drama which, relying on “banking education,” presents predetermined, static and “fake realities.” When the Director is exposed as insincere and dishonest, the whole class is exposed so too. In the notes to the play, Wannous’s remarks that his characters have no “depth as individuals but are voices and manifestations of a certain historic situation” (4). In other words, they are types representing their classes. When the Director first appears on the stage to apologize for the delay, he promises to tell the truth and to give a full explanation of the situation. He also assures the audience that it is their right to know the truth adding the rhetorical question: “Where does trust come from if not from always telling the truth” (8). Yet, in a private conversation with Abdul Ghani, during the earliest

stages of their cooperation to produce the play *Whispers of Souls*, the Director dismisses realities that matter to the people as causing unnecessary hindrance to producing good art. One might justify the director's contradictory statements as separating between telling truth in real life and telling truth in literature. However, this exoneration of the man's character falls to the ground when he lies in a real-life situation. Immediately after promising the audience to tell them the truth, and while re-enacting his conversation with Abdul Ghani for the purpose of presenting the full truth to the audience, the Director skips the sentence where he declares that what matters to "to the people should not affect or perplex us [artists]. Theater is important and should always be" (18). It is Abdul Ghani who objects to skipping the sentence and brings it to the audience's attention. The Director does not own what he has said earlier and gives a fluctuating answer between acknowledgment and denial, first with a question, and then with agreeing to assume that what Abdul Ghani says is true: "Really?" "Even though the memory is different from printers and recording instruments" (19). The Director fails to stand by his words in front of the audience whose opinion he has dismissed earlier as insignificant. His comment that what matters to the people shouldn't be a main concern in producing art stands in complete opposite to what Brecht declares as realist art and what Wannous adopts as his own version of realism in *An Evening Party* as well as his theater in general. The Director loses integrity when he is shown as a contradictory hypocrite, and so does unrealistic art which he upholds.

### 1.3 Dramatization of Reality of Oppression

*An Evening Party* does not only explore the reality of oppression while condemning unrealistic art, but also presents a minimized picture of the oppression in the nation outside the theater's walls. The reality of people's lives in Syria and their possible politicization through dialogue is dramatized through the action in the play which involves both the stage and the auditorium. The unfolding of the action vouches for the truths uncovered through Freirean conscientization method. The whole experience from entering theater until leaving which includes the time before the play officially starts and after it ends becomes a minimized image of Syrian society and a miniature reflection of its reality. Before the play starts, the theater management does not bother to explain the reasons for the delay for a good thirty minutes. It is only when the audience grows restless and starts complaining that the Director appears on stage. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that the Director apologizes only because there are "important" persons who are members of the ruling class among the audience. The few minutes before the director appears mirror the life of the people, the disrespectful treatment they receive from the authorities, and cynically foreshadow the ending of the play as a predictable outcome each time a citizen decides to question the practices of those in power. The prevailing atmosphere of frustration with the theater management during the wait symbolizes people's frustration at the disrespectful treatment by their government. Audience members start voicing their indignation in comments coming from different sides of the auditorium like:

-What is this? We are not their fathers' slaves.

-What a farce! It is a theater or a hotel!

(A whistle blows... and another hoarse one)

-Yes.. We did not come to sleep.

...

-technical error.

-Like a typo, an easy justification for all follies.

...

-Or an imperialistic plotting. (6)

Spectators' cynical comments do not only reflect frustration at the ill treatment, but also shows awareness of the lack of respect on the side of the theater management towards them and despondence at being ever respected and told the truth. These comments draw an implicit comparison between the treatment citizens receive from their government and the way they are treated at the theater. People are oppressed and dehumanized each time they get in close proximity with the ruling classes or their agents. The disrespectful treatment by the theater management recalls the feeling they have at the government treatment. However, in the face of the theater management, spectators are able to object and speak out without suffering consequences. They protest that leaving them to wait in the auditorium without any communication or explanation for the delay is unacceptable. They also express their refusal of being treated as "slaves." However, protesting the government's oppression is not as easy as those who object is dealt with heavily and often accused of treason.

Shrewder and more cynical comments are also voiced suggesting possible reasons for the delay. One spectator sarcastically says it is a "technical error" and another agrees comparing it to "a typo" in being an easy excuse. These comments

which imply that the management is inefficient in its work and untruthful in telling the real reasons for the delay also reflect a similar attitude towards the government. There is a sense of mistrust in all figures of power among the spectators and a common understanding that those figures do not feel obliged to tell the truth to “common people.” Another spectator hits the nail on the head when he sarcastically suggests that the theater authorities are dealing with an imperialistic plotting against the nation. The audience is used to hearing the phrase of “an imperialist plotting” or “imperialistic conspiracy” each time citizens try to question the government’s unfair policies or its failures. The government uses the excuse and accusation of “imperialist plotting” as a “ghoul” to scare the people and presents itself as their protector. This way, the government falsely appears to be on the same side with its people against imperialistic threats. The accusation of imperialistic plotting achieves two goals for the oppressor classes. First, it serves as an easy accusation to punish dissent, and second, it creates the myth of the heroism and efficacy of the oppressor classes to awe the dominated and promote conformity among them. The idea of an “imperialistic conspiracy” as a ready accusation also foreshadows the ending of the play as the individuals who participate in the dialogue and investigate the realities of their lives are arrested for treason and conspiring with “imperialistic foreign enemies.” The audience is very familiar with the idea of imperialist conspiracy, but the play indirectly poses it as a problem of blurring reality and expects the audience to scrutinize it. Although no dialogue follows to mythicize the idea of an imperialistic foreign conspiracy, the sarcasm in bringing it up serves as a means of inviting people to critically rethink the way they receive it. The fact that the issue is left unresolved and that it is re-emphasized at the end of the play

contributes to the non-cathartic nature of the play's ending as the audience goes home knowing that something still needs to be said and done.

The play's dramatization of reality shows the hierarchy of Syrian society and how that hierarchy determines each class's access to resources as well as to knowledge and education. On the top of the hierarchy sits the rich ruling classes that monopolizes resources, fakes reality and creates myths to feed to the masses. This class is represented in the play by the Director and the Government Official who remains quiet and watches things develop probably to let more people expose their dissenting ideas. He only interferes at the end to make arrests and to assure the "docile" faithful people that the government is there to protect them against traitors and imperialistic conspiracies. For the oppressor classes, the people and the nation exist for the sake of the regime that guarantees the privileges of the elites. The oppressors are ready to sacrifice not only people's rights, economic welfare and freedom, but also people's lives to guard the continuity of the regime. The Government Official orders the arrests of spectators who participate in the discussion, accuses them of collaborating with foreign imperialists against their own nation, and threatens to punish them accordingly.

## 2. *I Will Marry When I Want*

### 2.1 Exploring Socioeconomic Reality of the Lives of Poor Peasants and Workers

While the arrests that end Wannous's *An Evening Party* are fictional retributions inflicted on those who try to use theater to empower the Syrian proletariat through raising critical consciousness of reality in the world of the play, the performance of Ngũgĩ's *I Will Marry When I Want* results in the real destruction of the Kamiriithu theater

by the Kenyan nationalist government for the same reason. The oppressed who try to objectify their reality and approach it critically in order act upon it are always confronted with different forms of persecution. The typical reaction of the oppressors is always further suppression of the freedom of the oppressed because to them the change (untested feasibility) is a “threatening limit situation which must not be allowed to materialize”, so, they “act to maintain the status quo” (Freire 83). The oppressors consequently use ruthless means to abort the latter’s attempts at critically intervening with reality. Freire explicates that

The oppressor knows full well that this [the intervention by the oppressed with reality] would not be to his interest. What is to his interest is for the people to continue in a state of submersion, impotent in the face of oppressive reality. (34)

Like *An Evening Party*, Ngũgĩ’s *I Will Marry When I Want* adopts Brechtian dramatic realism. While Wannous writes the play as a blueprint for a hoped-for improvised dialogue, Ngũgĩ involves his prospective audience in all the stages of making theater from writing, to revising and rehearsing. Drawing on their first-hand experiences, peasants whose lives are represented in the play contribute expert suggestions to the manuscript. Ngũgĩ turns the stage of preparation for the play into Freirean thematic investigation circles that explore reality to be represented in a realistic performance. Participation in the different stages of preparation for the play trains the spectators to analyze their life conditions and approach learning about the proletarianization of the Kenyan peasantry and their limit situation of oppression as a dialogical process where all sides of the dialogue are there to learn from each other. While Wannous lets his audience come up with their version of reality during performance by leaving space for



improvised dialogue, Ngũgĩ makes his audience participate in the making of the play before the performance. The two methods used by Wannous and Ngũgĩ serve the same end of relating the spectators to their reality critically by presenting the truth about their lives and objectifying it for scrutiny. This attests to the fact that the two playwrights have faith in people's ability to transform the world and to realize their full humanity by being subjects of their thinking and decisions, to "make and remake, to create and recreate" (Freire 71) the world. Even though each dramatist times his audience's participation differently, both Wannous and Ngũgĩ make their audiences the judges of the play, specifically of the play's truthfulness to reality which they know best.

*I Will Marry When I Want* does not only teach dialogically through involving the audience in exploring the reality of their limit situation during the preparation for the play, but also in presenting long conversations and songs that dialogue on the different themes of the limit situation on stage. This direct involvement in discussing current issues is a very important aspect of objective realism that is meant to touch the lives of the spectators in order to teach them about their limit situation of oppression, domination, and impoverishment. Despite the fact that there is a plot developing, very little action takes place and most of the play consists of conversations. The plot develops in the background of the play giving space for prolonged dialogues among members of the oppressed classes. Those dialogues serve as thematic investigation circles probing into the limit situation of oppression. The discussions are enlightening to the audience as they explain the truth about the lives of the proletariat, and the exploitive relationship the capitalists have with them. The dialogues between Kĩgũnda and Wangeci dig up the limit situation by commenting on the terrible conditions the

masses live under especially after independence. They describe the ugly realities of their, and their class's everyday lives where prices of the most essential necessities are very high that they, the Kīgūūndas, cannot afford to buy even salt for their food:

Kīgūūnda: Today I am expected to cut myself to pieces

Or to increase my salary by force

To enable me to keep abreast with the daily increase in prices?

Didn't they increase the price of flour only yesterday?

...

Wangezi: But even if prices rise

Without the wages rising

Or even if there are no jobs,

Are we expected to eat saltless food?

Or do they want us to use ashes? (19)

Wangezi cynically also laments that there is no difference in their life before and after independence: "The difference between now and then is this! We now have our independence" to which Kīgūūnda answers: "I ran from coldland only to find myself in frostland" (19). The comparison even tells that life has become more difficult after independence for wages are not increasing at the same rate prices are. Moreover, jobs are scarcer under the new nationalist government. The conversation also presents a strong stand on the issue by calling the Kīois, their friends and all their class "...the real bedbugs/Local watchmen for foreign robbers" (31). This is a clear Marxist discourse stretched to fit a postcolonial situation. Wangezi realizes that the middle-class capitalists in her country are typical bourgeoisies, and worse, they are in collaboration with

members of an international class of capitalists to exploit the poor Kenyan working class and steal their resources: "...these foreigners/whom they invited back into the country to desecrate the land" (31). In collaboration with the ex-colonial and imperialist powers, Kenyan capitalists control the country's economy and steal its resources. The play makes it clear that the neocolonial situation is caused by the Kenyan bourgeoisie class's betrayal of the welfare of their country for their own interests. This explains to the audience that decolonization is not complete. Therefore, to complete the country's independence, the national elites' exploitation of the people should be refused and resisted. It is obvious in this conversation that the situation is a class struggle complicated by a postcolonial situation.

A very important Freirean dialogue on the reality of the political and social oppression in postcolonial Kenya also takes place between the Kīgūūndas, the peasant family that works on plantations, and the Gīcaambas who work in factories. This conversation involves persons from the two biggest sections of Kenyan proletariat, the peasants and the factory workers. It becomes an eye-opening conversation, a socialist discourse about who produces wealth and who enjoys and accumulates it. Gīcaamba tells Kīgūūnda in plain simple language that they, the poor workers, are the producers of wealth, yet not the beneficiaries:

We are the people who cultivate and plant

but we are not the people who harvest the fruits. (33)

Gīcaamba explains how the proletariat class is overworked and starved, while the wealth is shared between national capitalists and their partners overseas in Europe, America and Japan. The workers do not only burn their lives away at the machines, but

many of them die or become crippled under hard work and neglect of essential safety measures by employers. With this conversation, the workers are made to see plainly that their independence is not complete and that the colonial control of their country has not come to an end yet. Although the direct colonial presence of England has been ended, other forms of imperialist control have infiltrated back to the country with the help of the national capitalist elites. This class has invited foreign investment for a commission and turned its back on the welfare of the nation.

The conversation with Gĩcaamba also becomes an in-depth study of the psychological means of intimidation the capitalists' practice to perpetuate the submersion of the Kenyan proletariat in their limit situation of oppression. Kĩgũũnda sees that religion is used in post-independence era by national bourgeoisie for the same purposes it was used by Europeans during direct colonialism:

When the British imperialists came here in 1895,

All the missionaries for all the churches

Held the bible in the left hand

And the gun in the right hand.

The white man wanted us

To be drunk with religion

While he,

In the meantime,

Was mapping and grabbing our land,

And starting factories and businesses

...

The Whiteman had arranged it all  
 To completely cripple our minds with religion!  
 And they have the audacity to tell us  
 That earthly things were useless. (56-7)

Gĩcaamba emphasizes that the capitalists use religion to convince the poor that people's status in life are ordained by God and should never be questioned:

The same colonial church  
 Survives even today  
 Did the leopard ever change its spots?  
 A kid steals like its mother.  
 The chameleon family  
 Has never changed its backridge. (59)

Gĩcaamba warns both Kĩgũũnda and the audience against falling prey to the capitalists' schemes, especially the propaganda for conversion to Christianity. Gĩcaamba is aware of the political and social situation in his country and how religion is used only to promote conformity on the side of the workers. He tries his best to explain to Kĩgũũnda that the capitalists want an ambitionless working class that serves them without complaints and that conversion to Christianity is used only to allow the capitalists to carry on their exploitive project. Religion becomes the alcohol with which the rich drug the workers to guarantee their submissiveness and acceptance of all the injustices done to them. This view is reiterated by the rich Kioi when he explains to Ndugire, the other capitalist, that converting Kĩgũũnda "would lead the other workers into the church" (81) and consequently guarantee their "good behavior." The idea of using religion to cheat

workers into accepting the exploitation they are subjected to is proven true by the outcome of the play.

The songs in the play are also part of the conscientization method of education and contribute to its realistic presentation of the materialist forces controlling the lives of the Kenyan proletariat. Songs often present a coded situation to dialogue on.

Kīgūūnda's first three songs that culminate in the freedom song narrate the story of the struggle for independence and the consequent control of the means of production and national wealth by the bourgeoisie. Like the conversations, songs also incite critical thinking through drawing contrasts. Kīgūūnda and Wangeci's song contrasts the life of the Kenyan masses before and after independence and reflects the people's feelings of betrayal by the nationalist government and nationalist elites. Presenting generative themes through song resonates with the audience and teaches them to think about the roots and causes of their poor life conditions, and the possibility of changing them. Kīgūūnda's song calls for revolution and correcting the wrongs inflicted on the proletariat:

Where did the whites come from?

Where did the whites come from?

They came through Mūrang'a

And they spent a night at Waiyaki's home,

If you want to know that these foreigners were no good

Ask yourself:

Where Waiyaki's grave today?

We must protect our patriots

So they don't meet Waiyaki's fate. (28)

Kĩgũũnda contrasts the role of the poor Kenyans to that of the rich during the struggle for independence and clarifies that those who have sacrificed for independence are rewarded by poverty while the national elites have gotten hold of land and resources. Commenting on the song, Kĩgũũnda laments that all he has gained after struggle is a very small lot of land that is not the best for agricultural use:

One and a half acre

Our family land was given to homeguards.

Today, I am just a laborer. (28)

The nationalist bourgeoisie have undeservedly reaped the material and economic gains of independence and named themselves the heroes of the struggle, a struggle that was fought by Kenyan workers and peasants. Kĩgũũnda calls for reclaiming both the economic and honorary gains of independence to the masses that have sacrificed for it. The song demands giving back the honor of the victory to those who have fought for it like the patriotic Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi:

The crown of victory should be taken away from traitors

And be handed back to patriots

Like Kĩmathi's patriotic heroes. (13)

Next, Kĩgũũnda tells about his own deserving role in the victory of independence and demands that honor should..."be handed back to patriots/ Like Kĩgũũnda wa Gathoni..." (13). By telling about his personal contribution to the victory, he incites each member of the audience to think about their deserving role and how they should reclaim their rights to the honor of a victory they have suffered to achieve. Here the contrast is

personalized, allowing each member of the audience to compare and contrast his/her own role in the struggle for independence with that of members of the national elites. This might probably provoke thinking and analyzing more than anything else in the play. The spectators are reminded that they have fought and sacrificed, but other people have benefited from their victory. Through dialogue among members of the oppressed class, the play makes it clear that the national elite class is a group of traitors who have “sold out” their cause and betrayed their country and their people, but ends up benefiting from an independence they contributed no sacrifices to achieve. Kīgūnda insistence on the need to return material and honorary gains to those who have fought and sacrificed for them speaks of the extent of iniquity of their reality.

## 2.2 Western Realist Traditions in the Service of Brechtian Realism

*I Will Marry When I Want* does not only achieve Brechtian realism through dialoguing on the limit situation of oppression and unravelling the reality of hidden dynamics of domination in society, but also puts nineteenth century mainstream realist traditions in the service of its version of realism. These traditions help give a faithful depiction of life of the poor peasants and workers, thus, backing up reality uncovered through dialogue. Older European realist conventions are invested to present a performance to which the audience would relate, and which facilitates for them objectifying their reality for study. Watching the play becomes an example on how to approach the struggles of their lives critically. The minute details of the setting are not only invested to give the play a sense of realism, but also to create a “showcase” of the limit situation of oppression and domination to be probed into, and to sharpen the sense



of injustice of the status quo. While Wannous parodies old traditions of realism and naturalism with bitter sarcasm by focusing on petty concerns of everyday life in the midst of huge historical events, Ngũgĩ takes over the old concepts of realism, remolds, and makes a “lively use” of them bringing them the closest possible to his Marxist version of realism. Focusing on the details of everyday life, Ngũgĩ does not refrain from close and detailed descriptions where one can smell, feel and see what the writer closely depicts. The minute details of mainstream European realism help reflect the truth about societal functioning and class mechanisms from a Marxist point of view. When Ngũgĩ shows the hard conditions of the workers’ lives, it is always for the purpose of pointing out the roots of oppression and injustices. Older realist traditions help him present these surface realities, make them more intelligible to the masses, and invoke questioning the causes behind them. The minute details of the setting in the Kĩgũũnda’s house as well as the activities conducted by family members create, through small details, a realistic scene for opening the play:

Kĩgũũnda’s home. A square, mud-walled, white-ochred, one-roomed house. The white ochre is fading. In one corner can be seen Kĩgũũnda and Wangeci’s bed. In another can be seen a pile of rags on the floor. The floor is Gathoni’s bed and the rags, her bedding. In the same room can be seen a pot on three stones. On one of the walls there hangs a framed title-deed for one and a half acres of land. Near one side of the wall there hangs Kĩgũũnda’s coat. The coats are torn and patched. A pair of tyre sandals and a basin can be seen on the floor.

As the play opens, Wangeci is just about to finish peeling potatoes. She then starts sorting out rice...

Kīgūūnda is mending the broken leg of a folding chair... As Kīgūūnda mends the chair, he accidentally causes the title-deed to fall on the floor.... (3)

The details of the setting and the activities carried out by the characters cater perfectly to the targeted audience. If anything, that the working-class share, it is poverty and difficult life conditions. Like the Kīgūūndas, most, if not all, audience members live in mud houses with poor and scarce furniture. One bed, a stone stove and rags for bedding on the floor are what they are used to seeing and can identify with. Besides, the land deed of an acre and a half on the wall also represents the little wealth they have acquired as the fruits of the independence of their country. Hanging the deed on the wall symbolizes their pride as citizens of an independent nation that have expelled foreign colonizers and regained sovereignty over its land. The activities and chores performed by the family also contribute to the realism of the scene. Wangeci prepares her family's food herself using ingredients that are cheap enough to be part of the poor family's diet. She peels potatoes and sorts out rice on a tray like all the working-class women do. The picture is completed by the man of the house mending an old broken chair and a bed that needs "a nail or two." These activities are typically part of the everyday lives of the poor Kenyan proletariat. All this put the audience at home both in the physical appearance of the house as well as the frustrated pride they all share about the incomplete independence of their country, which in turn allows them to relate to an oppressive reality that is completely theirs and which will be objectified and dialogued in the play. This realistic setting of the opening scene is recalled again to contrast with the setting of the second scene of Act II at the Kiois house:

Kioi's house, in the evening. A big well-furnished house. Sofa seats, TV, radiogram, plastic flowers on the table, and so on. Electric lights. On the wall are several photographs. On the wall can be seen a board with the words 'CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THIS HOUSE, THE UNSEEN GUEST AT EVERY MEAL, THE LISTENER TO EVERY CONVERSATION' There is also a picture of a hairy Nebuchadnezzar turned into an animal. Jezebel, Ndujire and Helen are at table. All sorts of dishes. There is also water on the table in a huge glass container. A waiter stands by. ... (75)

These contrasting small details between rich people and poor people's houses sharpen the sense of Brechtian realism of the play and facilitates objectifying reality for questioning and scrutiny. The setting of the opening scene at Kĩgũnda's house and that of Kioi's house draw stark contrasts that make thinking about the difference between the life conditions of the two groups inevitable.

In addition to the realistic representation of everyday details and activities, Ngũgĩ also recruits elements from Émile Zola's naturalism to contrast the lives of the poor and that of the rich capitalists and make the spectators critical observers of the reality they are submerged in. The appearance of the drunkard Kamande wa Mũnyui who gives in to drinking after losing his job contributes to the truthful representation of the hardships faced by workers. Mũnyui's alcoholism is a direct effect of the social injustices and oppression Kenyan working class is subjected to. Again, the portrayal of poverty and alcoholism links the play's objective realism to other related literary traditions of the past, specifically the naturalism of Zola. In objective realism approach, Zola's naturalism which portrays the darker aspects of life especially poverty, drinking, and sex are

insufficient to make art and specifically drama realistic. For Brecht these darker sides are not dictated by emotions, heredity, biology or environment, but by economic and social injustices. Ngũgĩ also adopts this materialist form of realism. He employs this older literary tradition in the service of his objective realism by connecting alcoholism and poverty to social injustice and to class struggle in a capitalist society. Kĩgũũnda, refuses to blame Mũnyui for his degeneration into alcoholism and reminds Wangechi that Mũnyui is a “good man” and that he has taken to drinking since he has lost his job. In other words, capitalism and employers are to blame for the degeneration of the “Mũnyuis” of the poor working classes and not any biological, hereditary or environmental dictates. It is the unjust social and economic dynamics of society that lead Kĩgũũnda and Mũnyui to alcoholism, while enabling Ikuua who has a tendency to excess in food and sexual pleasure to indulge in those pleasures without destroying his and his family’s lives.

Drawing on naturalist traditions, the characters of Kĩgũũnda and Mũnyui are tacitly contrasted to that of Ikuua to show how these characters are symptoms of the hidden realities of social and economic relations between the different classes of society. Mũnyui is described by Kĩgũũnda as a good worker. Kĩgũũnda is also praised by Kioi as a good worker who

... should be saved

He would lead the other workers into church.

Some of those workers who waste their energy in beer-halls

Would give up the habit of altogether

Besides, Kĩgũũnda is a good worker. (80)

Kīgūūnda, by the testimony of his employer and class enemy, is not only described as a good worker, but a potential “good” influence on other workers. Kioi wants Kīgūūnda to embrace Christianity not out of any concern for Kīgūūnda’s interests and spiritual welfare, nor to improve his behavior for Kīgūūnda is already well behaved. Kioi wants Kīgūūnda to be Christian in order to lead the rest of the workers to a church that preaches contentment with one’s life. What pushes Kīgūūnda and Munyui to the self-destructive habit is desperation, poverty and oppression. On the other hand, Ikuua is described as “a man with a belly as huge as that of a woman about to deliver” (75). He is inclined to excesses in bodily pleasures of food, drink, sex and showing off his wealth. Ikuua declares that he has two wives and is contemplating a third one. While good hardworking people like Mūnyui and Kīgūūnda lose hope and give in to alcoholism under financial stress, Ikuua’s economic resources allow him to indulge his excesses, to be content with his reality, and enjoy his privileges.

To further develop the realistic image of the relationship between the rich and the poor in Kenya, the play again employs another technique from older realist traditions. Psychological details are drawn in a keen way to serve the goals of objectifying reality without individualizing emotions and feelings, or psychologically stripping character as individuals. On the contrary, the psychological insights which to Brecht are not sufficient to turn a work realistic, is invested through allegory to serve objective realism. The play strips the psyche of a whole class to show its scorn for another. Like any relationship that involves exploitation, the relationship between rich bourgeoisie and poor proletariat dehumanizes the exploited as unworthy of respect. It can never be an equal relationship as the Kiois pretend in case of the Kīgūūndas conversion to Christianity. Viewing the

poor as unworthy of respect provides the rich with a moral justification for exploiting them. Several examples in the play show the scorn which the rich have towards the poor. The way the Kiois treat the Kīgūūndas while at their house announcing their readiness to convert to Christianity is one of those instances. This scene draws an implicit contrast with a previous scene when Kīgūūndas receive the Kiois as guests in their house. The destitute Kīgūūndas cook for their guests and do their best to please them and make them feel welcomed. However, when the Kīgūūndas show up at the Kiois house, they are shunned, not offered any food or drink at the time the company is eating. The Kiois insult the Kīgūūndas by telling them that they have cooked just enough for themselves and their guests, and by skipping them when the tea is served. Even when Kīgūūnda asks for a glass of water, he was not offered any from the water that was on the Kiois's dining table but was brought a glass of water from the drum that is kept outside for the farm animals. The rich are so powerful to the point that they don't feel the need to hide their contempt of the poor. They shamelessly dehumanize Kīgūūnda and offer him water that is kept for the animals while clean water is at hand on the table in the same room when he asks for it.

The play also provides insights into what the rich think of the poor by having them converse among each other and express their ideas and feelings towards the workers and peasants. Immediately before the Kīgūūndas are mistreated in the Kiois's house, a conversation between the two capitalists Ikuua and Kioi takes place where they dehumanize the poor by considering their lives as of a lesser value than those of the rich. These dehumanizing ideas have already led to practices that have dire consequences on the lives and health of the workers. Ikuua and Kioi don't refrain from

stating clearly that an insecticide factory that produces bad smells and dangerous gases cannot be built in an area where “important people live” (75) and that it should be built in a poor people’s area:

What we need is a place like Kīgūūnda’s

Or any other place similarly situated

The poor are many in Kenya. (76)

These lines show how the businessman Ikuua and his friend Kioi view poor people’s lives as valueless and insignificant. The play makes the audience aware of this utter disrespect the rich have for the poor classes. All this draws a realistic picture of the limit situation of oppression and domination. Needless to say, that this picture is completed by dialoguing about these facts among members of the oppressed and impoverished classes, which in turn, puts European psychological realist tradition in the service of Brechtian objective realism.

### *2.3 Plot Development and the Exploitive Relationships between Rich and the Poor*

In addition to investing mainstream realist conventions to sharpen the sense of injustice of the reality of the poor Kenyan classes, the development of the plot and the end of the play confirm that unjust reality. While the play tackles political and social issues directly and takes an explicit stand on them through dialogue, the plot develops in the background to confirm the reality of oppression. Ideas like ending the oppression which the small, but powerful, bourgeoisie inflict on workers, reclaiming the nation and its resources back to the people and the urgent need for changing the social and political situation which are explored and developed through direct conversations and

comments by the characters are again validated by the outcome of the play. The disintegration of the Kīgūūnda family exemplifies the jeopardy poor Kenyan families are in under a corrupted system that allows exploiting them by the rich.

The end of the play also shows how the rich have no respect for the poor workers' humanity and would never think of them as equal human beings, an idea that Gīcaamba explains and discusses with Kīgūūnda early in the play. Gīcaamba tells how capitalist do not bother to improve bad work conditions that result in deaths and disabilities among workers and how these injuries go without proper treatment or compensations: Speaking of one of those injured workers, Gīcaamba tells:

The chemicals accumulated in is body

He was forced to go to Agha Khan hospital for operation

...

He was summarily retired with twenty five cents as

Compensation

What has life now got to offer for him?

Is he not already in his grave though still breathing? (36)

Giccamba sees clearly how the rich have no regard for the workers as human beings.

The only relations they have with the poor revolves around exploiting them and dispossessing them of everything they own, even when that entails costing the poor their health, dignity, and their families. Kiois' earlier proposal to the Kīgūūndas to convert to Christianity and become brother and sister in Christ is also proven to be a lie by the end of the play. When Kīgūūnda and Wangeci announce their decision to convert to Christianity, Kioi promises:



We shall now become true friends

Your house and mine are one

In the name of the Lord. (83)

However, when the idea of the two houses becoming one comes up as a real possibility, Ahab Kioi shows his real color. The Kiois knew about the relationship their son, John Mūhūūni, has with Kīgūūnda's daughter, Gathoni, and allowed it knowing that a marriage between the two would never take place. When Gathoni gets pregnant and the Kīgūūndas suggest that John Mūhūūni should marry her, Ahab Kioi is infuriated, throws them out of his house and dismisses Kīgūūnda from his job. By firing Kīgūūnda, Ahab Kioi knows that Kiggunda will fail to repay his debt and that his lot of land will go into foreclosure. After destroying Kīgūūnda's family, Kioi buys the latter's land, stripping him of the only property he has. This disastrous end of the Kīgūūndas shows the sinister scheme that Ahab Kioi has been planning to exploit the Kīgūūnda and his family in every possible way. First, he allows his son to sexually exploit Gathoni, then tries to use Kīgūūnda to facilitate exploiting his and the other workers' labor, and finally dispossesses Kīgūūnda of the small lot of land he owns.

This end decodes the visit of the Kiois to the Kīgūūndas' house that takes place very early in the play. In fact, the visit is a coded situation that is decoded through both the dialogical conversations, songs and the development of the plot. Gīcaamba and Njooki speak of the selfishness and treachery of the capitalists and emphasize that they never have good intentions towards the poor. However, the Kīgūūndas do not understand the true intentions behind the visit until the end of the play when they lose both their daughter and their property. Visiting the Kīgūūndas under the pretext of

converting them to Christianity for their own good, the capitalists have two goals in mind: dispossessing Kīgūūnda of his lot of land and securing him as their faithful servant who will never aspire to improve the conditions of his life or questions the disparity between the quality of his life and that of the rich. The capitalists use religion to drug the Kīgūūndas with fake promises about being their brother and sister in Christ if they go to church and convert. They also try to delude them with religious arguments about contentment with one's place in life and not looking at what is in the hands of others. The rich capitalists use religion to justify exploiting the workers and peasants and accumulating wealth while those who produce that very wealth starve. These different generative themes are investigated in long dialogues between the four members of the two poor families in the play as well as in songs. The development of the plot comes to confirm the findings of exploratory dialogues.

The play as a whole is an active investigation into the life conditions of the Kenyan proletariat at the time of its writing. Considered along the conversations that take place earlier in the play, the end shows how the bourgeoisie employers do not have any good intentions towards the poor. Their only aim is to exploit the poor and to dispossess them of the very little they have in the way of property. Despite the Kīgūūndas's conversion to Christianity, their family is destroyed by the greed and wickedness of the Kiois. Even while Christians, the Kīgūūndas are still despised by the Kiois who dispossess them of their lot of land and allow their son John Mūhūūni to sexually exploit Gathoni and then dispose of her as unfit to marry a rich family's son. The Kīgūūndas story and its disastrous end summarize all aspects of the limit situation of oppression their class lives under and its roots in socioeconomic relations. The

disintegration of the Kīgūūnda family constitutes the non-cathartic ending that establishes the lesson of the story and its call to action.

### 3. Conclusion

The ending of the two plays represent realistic outcomes of the passivity of the oppressed where each play's ending becomes a waking up call to its spectators to change their behavior in real life and avoid disastrous fates. The two playwrights transmit their message about the need for action and send their audiences home unfulfilled. Rather than ending the play in praxis with the dialoguers committing to carry on transformation, Wannous provides a realistic end. His dialoguers face the consequences of their daring to question the efficacy of the government and their willingness to hold it accountable. They are accused of treason and arrested. This way, the play shows how the ruling class oppresses the revolutionaries and does all it can to abort their liberation attempts. While Wannous encourages dialogue and the unveiling of truth, he still wants the audience to understand the challenges of the process. What happens in the play mirrors what happens in the nation outside the theater's walls. Jails are filled with political prisoners, simply because they have dared to think and speak- and oftentimes because they are suspected of being able to think and speak the way dialoguers do in the play. However, the arrest of Abdul Ghani and others, is a non-cathartic ending that is not meant to intimidate the audience or to warn them against dissent, but, to make them aware that the process of knowing the truth, uncovering and understanding the reality of their life conditions involves some big sacrifices.

While the end of *An Evening Party* aims at making the audience aware of the challenges they need to be prepared for in their struggle for liberation, *I Will Marry* warns its audience against passivity in the face of the exploitation they are subjected to. The disastrous ending of the play is not presented as inevitable, rather avoidable and changeable. It is a realistic outcome of the docility and passivity of the oppressed. The play shows the workers that the capitalists are their class enemies and not their friend. To save their families, lives, and livelihoods, the poor workers and all the marginalized social strata should unite in the face of exploitation. The play teaches the oppressed how to critically approach their reality and leaves them with charged emotions about the need to turn upon their limit situation and take the task of changing it into their own hands.

## Chapter 5

Martyr Hero or Tragic Hero: Victory in Death in Wannous's *Historical Miniatures* and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

However, the purging aspect, which is an important characteristic of such a disastrous ending, is absent in the non-cathartic Brechtian form. A tragic ending is usually either death or a life to which death is usually preferred as more merciful. Like classical tragedies, Ngũgĩ's and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Wannous's *Historical Miniatures* all end with the death of their protagonists-heroes. However, those deaths neither purge charged emotions, nor do they bring calmness to the worlds of the plays. This chapter analyzes these tragic endings and how they come to be charging emotions, rather than releasing them and investigates the question of tragic fates of the protagonists in the two plays and whether these fates make the fallen protagonists tragic heroes in the classical Aristotelian sense. The chapter also studies the similarities and difference between the two plays and classical tragedy.

In classical tragedy, the demise of the hero comes as a punishment for some transgression that he commits. Tragedies treat human suffering through the heroic actions of a protagonist who meets a disastrous fate. Oedipus, for example, is a classical tragic hero who falls due to one and only one flaw in his character: arrogance. As the mother of all vices, arrogance generates his rashness of temper. However, this very mistake of character aids him to rise to prosperity before bringing about his demise. It is Oedipus's arrogance to cause the rash killing of the old man whose identity is discovered later to be the king of Thebes and Oedipus's real father. This killing is inevitable to both Oedipus's rise as well as his subsequent fall. Oedipus saves Thebes

from the plague by killing the dragon, marries the widowed queen and rules the city efficiently, only to unknowingly become the transgressor who kills his own father and marries his own mother. His transgression is necessarily brought about by his flaw of character. At the end of the play his fall becomes clearly a punishment for his transgression and a purging of his tragic flaw, thus the catharsis of the Aristotelian form is realized. Shakespearean tragedies are also Aristotelian and cathartic.

Shakespearean tragic heroes such as Lear also have their tragic flaws that cause the fall of the heroes. In fact, mainstream Western tragedy is built on the classical paradigm and consequently is cathartic and Aristotelian.

This form has continued unchallenged for a long time before the German dramaturge Bertolt Brecht rejects it as oppression of the masses and comes up with non-cathartic drama which Augusto Boal calls Marxist poetic and which this project simply refers with “the Brechtian form” for reasons explained in the previous chapters. As also explained earlier, Brecht sees the catharsis as a tool of keeping the status quo through intimidation. The catharsis at the end of the play instills fear of being punished like the tragic hero in the spectators, thus purging them of “their anti-social sins.” This perpetuates existing injustices by keeping those in power in their place while curbing any tendencies towards dissent. Brecht came up with his non-Aristotelian (non-cathartic) drama that incites people to think about their life conditions, to question injustices, and to take action and bring about change.

Revolutionary postcolonial dramatists Wannous and Ngũgĩ adopt the Brechtian non-cathartic form to move people into thinking and acting. Their dramas become a tool of liberation rather than oppression and intimidation. However, the deaths of the heroes

in Wannous's *Historical Miniatures* and Ngũgĩ's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* raise the question of the relationship between tragedy in its classical sense and postcolonial non-cathartic plays that end with the deaths of their heroes. While the deaths of the protagonists in these two plays seem to bring them close to the concept of tragedy, the non-cathartic nature of the endings solidifies the difference and sets the two forms apart where death becomes martyrdom rather than tragic demise.

The action that leads to the death of the two heroes does not conform to the Aristotelian tragic action allowing the heroes to die as martyrs of causes to which they are committed. The martyrs choose the path of struggle knowing that it might cost them their lives. The death of the heroes in these two plays is not a punishment for a flaw of character or a crime committed by the hero, but a spiritual victory of his will over that of his enemy. The martyrdom action and the spiritual victory the martyr achieves through death complicate the relationship between these plays, and classical and Shakespearean tragedies. A good example of a classical tragedy to compare with throughout this chapter would be Sophocles's *Oedipus The King* where Oedipus ends up taking out his eyesight and leaving the city of which he has been a king to live as an outcast for killing his father and marrying his mother. Shakespearean tragedies also end with catastrophic ends—which is almost always the death of the tragic hero—as a punishment for transgressions. Reading *Historical Miniatures* and *The Trial* in comparison with Sophocles' play *Oedipus The King* helps clarifying how these two plays relate to tragedy as understood in the west in general, and how the authors by adopting the Brechtian form reject certain aspects of mainstream western drama and adapt others to serve their revolutionary purposes.

Unlike Oedipus—or even Hamlet or Macbeth—Wannous's and Ngũgĩ's martyr heroes do not die because of a tragic flaw, nor do they possess one to purge. On the contrary, their fall comes as result of a tragic merit of which each is characterized. This chapter studies the different aspects of these post-colonial martyr heroes, when they intersect with those of the classical tragic hero and when they depart from them to make the martyr hero a category of its own. Central to this study also is the ways the martyrdom of the heroes constitutes the non-cathartic ending. The protagonists of Ngũgĩ's play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Wannous's *Historical Miniatures* are non-traditional heroes who fall as martyrs due to tragic *merits* rather than tragic flaws and who find the best framework for their new traits as well as the action that leads to their martyrdom in the Brechtian non-cathartic form.

### 1. Martyrdom as a Non-cathartic Ending in the Two Plays

The writers of *The Trial* and *Historical Miniatures* aim at motivating the audience into thinking and acting through employing the Brechtian non-cathartic form that sends spectators home realizing there is something that needs to be done to thwart oppression and injustices inflicted on them. Martyrdom in the two plays serves both playwrights' goals of educating and instructing the audience. In a real-life situation, martyrdom's educational effect involves the community that shares the same values with the martyr, but whose members' commitment to those values might not be up to par with that of the martyr. Even martyrs themselves are aware of the role martyrdom plays in gathering momentum for the struggle and sharpening determination to achieving goals. From here comes the tendency of martyrs to send last messages to



their followers to persevere and not give up until they achieve victory. The writers of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* note in the preface to the play that the historical figure Kimathi had sent a last message which was smuggled from prison asking the people to continue “the struggle for total liberation from foreign domination and oppression until the wealth and land was returned to the people of Kenya” (Ngũgĩ, *The Trial* Preface). While the protagonist does not send such a message during the action of the play, it is clear that reviving his memory through the play is meant to be an emphasis on the purpose he fought for and a reiteration of what he wanted his followers to do after him. When he defies Henderson stating that neither him nor “[his] people will surrender” (58) the message that is transmitted to the audience is clearly about continuing the struggle and not surrendering. This statement, and many other similar statements permeating the play, recall the message that the real Kimathi had sent from his prison. This way the martyr does not only set an example through his behavior, but also asks his fellow countrymen of peasants and workers to follow his example by continuing the struggle.

A similar last word is also delivered by Al Tathili to the people of Damascus right before the beginning of the fighting and the death of Al Tathili. As a scholar and alim,<sup>41</sup> Al Tathili, has the chance to address the people before the fighting starts. Through this address, Al Tathili connects with the people in a way that inspires many, if not the majority of them. His address is important in two respects. First it is a message, a will, a confession and a code of conduct that he leaves with the people before he dies. And

<sup>41</sup> Alim is derived from the word “Ilm” which translates to knowledge or learning. Alim is the one who has the Ilm. It can refer to a scholar or scientist by attaching the alim’s specialization. However, when the word alim is used on its own, it most often refers to the scholar specialized in Sharia, or Islamic law with its different branches from rules of everyday life to more complicated legislations grounded in Islamic teachings.

second, it completes the idea of purification the martyr goes through which Al Tathili needs in order to switch alliance from the upper class to the masses. Al Tathili confesses to the Damascus people that he has been involved in the corruption typical of the elite class. He says that he has bribed his way to become the supreme judge and a legislative authority in Damascus. Al Tathili's confession represents cleansing of those vices, detachment from the corrupted upper class of merchants and ulama,<sup>42</sup> and joining the masses in their fight against the foreign enemy. Each of these messages seem to be a last attempt from the martyr to tell his follower that he remains committed to the cause till the last moment of his life and that the cause is worthy of the sacrifice. Thus, he sets an example for them to follow through both preach and practice. Only practice precedes preaching in the case of martyrs and their last messages.

David Cook argues that the martyr "creates an example, a standard of conduct by which to judge other fellow believers. By demonstrating publicly that there is something in the subordinated or persecuted belief system worth dying for, the value other believers place upon it is augmented and the belief system is highlighted" (2). From here comes the commemoration of martyrdoms rendering them into symbols that unite the community and strengthen the commitment of its members to the faith. Martyrdom and martyrdom narratives leave little choice for community members to stay neutral as seeing somebody die for the faith becomes a tacit admonition for those who choose to remain uninvolved. Martyrdom narratives involve several elements that vary depending on the context of the martyrdom. However, the most important elements that reoccur in every martyrdom narrative can be pinpointed to the oppressiveness and

<sup>42</sup> "Ulama" is the plural of alim.

injustice of the enemy and the steadfastness of the martyr's commitment to his faith/cause. The martyr's defiance of the ruthless and powerful enemy that he knows can physically destroy him at any moment is also an essential element. Against these self-sacrificing narratives of martyrdom, neutrality becomes cowardice. Unlike the tragic hero's death that instructs by intimidation and promoting passivity and conformity, the lesson of martyrdom is usually that of resistance. In other words, it is a lesson of non-conformity with the values of those in power.

Martyrdom has been historically a slippery concept. Its original, oldest and most simple form is that of enduring torture and death meekly, though dignifiedly, for professing one's faith. It can also be the behavior of choosing to endure torture and the path that leads to death passively without necessarily dying at the end. In this case martyrdom becomes the behavior and not the death itself. In both forms whether the death or the behavior, Martyrdom shames the oppressor and draws victory out of the disastrous end through death or suffering. Opting for death rather than subjecting one's will to a stronger oppressor is a spiritual victory achieved by the martyr, and consequently a victory for his faith. The earliest historical defining moments of martyrdom "have been those of the Jewish people, especially those which occurred during the period of Hellenization of the middle east after the conquest of Alexander the Great" (Cook 5), and the first and most important martyrdom in Christianity is that of Christ. These martyrdoms are characterized by focusing on the process of suffering and physical torture the martyr patiently endures.

Early Islamic martyrdoms, especially during the Meccan phase, share this characteristic with both Jewish and Christian martyrdom. However, martyrology in

Islam, except for the earliest Meccan years, is that of a “person—usually a man—who through his active choice [seeks] out a violent situation (battle, siege, guarding, an unstable frontier, etc.) with pure intention and [is] killed as a result of that choice” (Cook 30). Yet, this act of fighting is not limited to defending the religion, as the Islamic tradition provides basis for considering the person who dies for his country as a martyr. The Hadith states that “the one who dies defending his property, people and dignity is a martyr” (*Riyadh Al-Salihin* 375). When risking one’s life in the battlefield for secular purposes, there is always a tendency in Muslim society to connect religion and country and use them in the context of martyrdom as if they are synonymous. Aside from Islam’s connection of martyrdom to causes other than defending the right to profess one’s faith and including death while fighting in its concept of martyrology, the earliest forms of martyrdom have been both religious and passive by large.

However, the age of nationalism has created a secular form of sacrifice that has also been commemorated as martyrdom. Dying for one’s homeland is not a new concept by any means, nor is honoring such death and giving a special status to the hero who dies for the homeland and the group. However, during the last two centuries and with the rise of European nationalism, the concepts of heroism and martyrdom have become easier to reconcile as the nationalist hero who dies in the battle dies for a “sacred cause: the nation” (Rosoux 84). With the secularization of martyrdom, the cause (the nation) replaces the religious ideal for which the martyr dies. In his article “The Politics of Martyrdom,” Valérie Rosoux suggests that “on the political stage, the use of the word ‘martyr’ ceases to be literal”—as the original definition of the term implies dying

for faith— “and becomes metaphorical” (Rosoux 84). where the context starts constituting martyrdom rather than the manner of death and suffering for faith.

However, the term’s application to violent situations is still contested. Rona Fields does not consider soldiers who die in the battlefield as martyrs. She differentiates between martyrdom behavior and heroic behavior emphasizing that “heroism is differentiated from martyrdom because it implies fighting against odds and either winning and staying alive, or death in the process of bringing down the enemy” (xviii). Fields would consider the protagonists of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Historical Miniatures* as heroes rather than martyrs as these protagonists do not walk to death choosing to die, on the contrary, they fight with the hope to win and to live. Fields points the difference between dying while passively enduring torture and dying while actively fighting with the hope to win and to live while being ready to sacrifice one’s life for the cause. However, dying heroically is also a martyrdom, especially that death has the ability to be commemorated and invested in forging identities, uniting communities around a religious or secular cause and constructing national identities. It is true that the histories of heroes can be invested the same ways, but the death of the hero immortalizes him and makes the narrative of his death more effective. Fields’s objection can probably be solved by providing more categories of martyrdom, like heroic martyrdom for those who fight heroically and fall in the battlefield. While passive martyrdom is victory for the cause by showing it worthy of dying for, heroic martyrdom is even a stronger victory as it gives momentum to actively continuing the struggle, often an armed one, as is the case in *The Trial* and *Historical Miniatures*.

Therefore, commemorating martyrdom is an important factor in its making, no less important than the intentions of the martyr and the manner and context of his death. An intrinsic aspect of the martyrdom is how it is invested and transmitted to and by a community, or an audience in the case of the plays. Fields differentiates between the approach to martyrdom that tends to analyze the motive of sacrificing oneself and the political approach that focuses on the representation of the phenomenon by those who commemorate it. She quotes Kassimir's important idea that can serve as a complimentary definition of martyrdom as she suggests that "martyrs are made not simply by their beliefs and actions but by those who witnessed them, remembered them and told their story" (qtd. in Fields 83). This aspect is no doubt applicable to heroic martyrdoms. In the case of the two plays, the protagonists' heroic deaths for the cause of the homeland—whether this cause remains secular or dressed in a religious attire—is the main element in their martyrdom narratives.

## 2. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

In *The trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ngũgĩ and Mugo do not refer to their protagonist as a martyr, though they draw him as one in every respect. They present the story of his trial and execution in a manner that is typical of martyrdom narratives as he suffers at the hands of a tyrannical enemy and dies for a cause he believes in. Ngũgĩ and Mugo write the play to celebrate the life and legacy of the freedom fighter and guerilla leader who was executed by the British colonial government in Kenya in 1957 for his role in the Mau Mau armed resistance. The incidents of the play take place during the trial of Dedan Kimathi by a British colonial court for his participation in the armed resistance

against British exploitation and domination of Kenya and its people. Ngũgĩ and Mugo aim at reviving the story of the heroic resistance and martyrdom of a real historical figure in the minds of Kenyan audience. Through imagination, the writers offer a martyrdom narrative that reconstructs the personality and the manner of resistance of Dedan Kimathi to commemorate the heroic history and death of the guerilla hero.

In the era after independence, constructing a national identity becomes fundamental to nation-building. This necessarily mandates reviving national history and correcting historical narratives written by imperialists who portray Kenyan patriotic figures and martyrs as criminals and outlaws. Martyrdom narratives constitute an important element in imagining and embracing an identity that unite people around a common sacred—religious or secular—memory. Because “national identities are elaborated on basis of memory” (Fields 84), Ngũgĩ and Mugo try to link the past struggle with present by commemorating the death of a martyr hero:

it was crucial that all this be put together as one vision stretching from the pre-colonial wars of resistance against European intrusion and European slavery, through the anti-colonial struggles for independence and democracy, to post-independence struggle against neo colonialism.” (Ngũgĩ, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* IV)

They state that in writing the play they “would try to recreate the same great man of courage, of commitment to the people, as had been described to [them] by the people” (IV) who had known him.

However, some critics suggest that the hero of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is not the historical figure, as much as an ideologue of Ngũgĩ and Mugo’s socialist outlook for

a free, just and fair world, and a martyr of the cause of achieving that world. In this sense, Ngũgĩ and Mugo's Kimathi becomes more of a spokesman for, and a martyr of the writers' socialist ideology more than the real freedom fighter and martyr of independence which the historical Kimathi has been. Those critics have explained in different ways how the hero in the play is made to serve the purposes of the authors rather than to represent the guerilla leader as a historical figure. Jane Chesaina refuses the idea that the play's value lies in its reconstruction of history and argues that Ngũgĩ's and Mugo's Kimathi is their own creation and "not the historical Kimathi" (23). She sees that "the authors have used the historical Kimathi as a raw material" for their hero because he possesses characteristics that are essential in a revolutionary political leader. Chesaina gives enough evidence to support her proposition that the Kimathi of the play is their spokesman and "that what he says indicates their position" (23) by which she means their Marxist position and socialist views.

Gerlad Moore also argues that "historical reconstruction is not what Ngũgĩ and Micere are interested in" (163). He thinks that "their purpose is both more dramatic and more didactic; their technique distinctly Brechtian" and argues that what the authors do is more than just a reconstruction of history. The authors themselves speak about their rendering of the historical event-based narrative more suitable for the dramatic work in the preface where they describe the play as

An imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement.



Moore is right that the authors are more interested in recreating their hero to embody the resilience of poor Kenyans who survive British oppression and are able to continue resisting foreign and local exploitation after independence. However, his suggestion about the dramatic and didactic nature of the play as well as the use of Brechtian techniques falls flat as he fails to note the connection between the didactic aspects of the play and the use of not only Brechtian techniques, but Brechtian form with its main element, the non-cathartic ending. The didactic side of the play is achieved through the use of the Brechtian form. Moore only notes that the naming of characters as "Woman," "Girl," "Boy" follows Brechtian models, but fails to see how the Brechtian form governs all aspects of the play through the absence of the catharsis that enables the martyrdom of the hero and through it, the didactic aspect of the play.

Another critic, Nicholas Brown also sees the way the martyrdom of Ngũgĩ's and Mugo's Kimathi is re-imagined for a future socialist revolution. To Brown, Kimathi is not so much a martyr for independence as a martyr for a peasant revolution which is still to come" (60). The importance of this point to this study lies in suggesting that Kimathi of the play is not the martyr for independence which the real figure is as he has fought under direct colonialism for the purpose of freeing his country from British colonialism, but the martyr of a socialist revolution that should happen in the future and for which the play stirs. To Brown, the martyrdom of the real figure is adapted for the socialist ideology of the authors and the martyr becomes a recurring symbol of sacrifice needed to motivate the exploited poor to revolt against the injustices of the capitalist system that alienates and dehumanizes them. However, the writers speak in the preface to the play about the commitment of historical Kimathi to the cause of returning the national

resources to its real owners, the Kenyan people. They also tell of a last message that was smuggled from prison asking the people to continue “the struggle for total liberation from foreign domination and oppression until the wealth and land was returned to the people of Kenya.” It is clear that the writers share the same philosophy with their hero, but the way they foresee the application of that philosophy is certainly more up-to-date, and more fit for anti-neocolonial oppression and exploitation in a postcolonial state connected to the world through a capitalist system.

Ademola O. Dasyuva suggests that “Dedan Kimathi is more of a legend than an historical fact,” and that Ngũgĩ and Mugo have deliberately put him “on a mythicizing pedestal” (532). There is no doubt that mythicizing the martyr hero contributes both to re-imagining him according to the way the writers’ view the world and want it to be as well as a means that facilitate investing his martyrdom for their purpose of moving the audience to revolt against oppression. Dasyuva correctly notes that including the woman’s suggestion that: “Kimathi will never die,” is a form of “*mors mortis* philosophy that evinces invincibility” (532). Putting the martyr hero on a “mythicizing pedestal” makes the narrative both dramatic and didactic. Yet, this idea does not negate the authors’ purpose of making the play part of a bigger effort to re-write the history of the continent from the point view of its people to counter the narratives of the colonizers who dismembered it, impoverished its people, and distorted its history to serve their imperialistic purposes. In writing the play, Ngũgĩ and Mugo aim at both reconstructing history and at the same time moving people to use that history to understand their presence and respond to the neocolonial situation at the time of writing the play. The idea of re-membering history as well as rewriting it to counter the narrative of the

colonialist reoccurs in Ngũgĩ's work. In his book, *Re-membering Africa*, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o states that "the history of Africa has not simply been one of deprivation, dispossession and exploitation but also one of resistance and struggle. At the center of this struggle has been the quest for re-membering Africa so brutally dis-membered" (Ngũgĩ, *Re-Membering Africa*). And in the preface to the play, the writers regret that "there was no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic resistance of Kenyan people fighting against foreign forces of exploitation," a shortness that the two writers try to make up by writing this play. Reconstructing history does not have to contradict with making the play dramatic and didactic and neither goal has to be exclusive of the other. Ngũgĩ and Mugo succeed in reviving history and recreating the "the same great man of courage [and] of commitment to the people." (Ngũgĩ, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* Preface) Resisting colonialism necessarily means commitment to the nation with its masses of poor classes of peasants and workers. Mythicizing the hero is clearly a way of immortalizing the martyr for the purpose of having his history remembered and his philosophy of armed resistance continue.

The idea of continuing the legacy of acting upon injustice to change it finds the best form in a non-cathartic ending of the martyrdom of the hero. The death of the hero stabilizes his philosophy in the minds and imagination of the people. Kimathi's philosophy "that the world is changeable and that the problem of his people can be overcome through armed resistance" is that of his creators too (Dasyllia 534). Dasyllia compares Kimathi's embodiment of his creators' philosophy to "Caesarism in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar" (534). Dasyllia sees that like "Caesarism" that "equips" Caesar's friends with hope and deprives his enemies of courage, "Kimathism" also

“equips Kimathi’s co-fighters with strong and unwavering optimism” and sends “profound fear down the spine of the enemy of the people, the British imperialists and their local agents” (534). While this is true during the life of Kimathi, the commemoration of his martyrdom keeps his philosophy (and his creators’ through him) alive.

The ideas and insights these different critics offer are valuable to the present discussion as the martyrdom of the play’s hero is invested for education and instruction, which necessarily anticipates some future application of that education. The cause of independence which the historical Kimathi dies for has been already achieved, but in Ngũgĩ and Mugo’s opinion, there is another socialist battle to end exploitation that is still waiting. Kimathi becomes the martyr of the coming revolution. He sacrifices his life for the cause of social justice and his martyrdom becomes a debt to be paid off by the poor and the exploited through continuing the struggle until they get back the control over national resources and the wealth they produce, which is the goal that he dies for in the play.

Kimathi’s martyrdom is made more effective as a non-cathartic ending of the play by drawing the symbolic associations of historical Kimathi with fighting for a just cause to make him a symbolic martyr of a much-needed socialist revolution. Ngũgĩ and Mugo invest in the image held by Kenyan peasants of Kimathi as a symbol of the Mau Mau movement and a hero of independence. E. A. Magel clarifies that “Kimathi as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance has a literary and historical tradition among the Kenyan people” (240). This, according to Magel, is attested to by “non-traditional historical sources like public opinion surveys, oral histories and personal interviews or data” (240). Magel also reinforces the suggestions of anthropologist Donald Barnett and

Karari Njama's in their *Mau Mau from Within*, that that Kimatha's popular image as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance is enhance by the British colonial government's own media that aimed at discrediting him (Magel 240). He quotes the words of Karari Njama, that

... the police circulated advertising leaflets with their (Dedan Kimathi and Stanley Mathenge Mirugi) photos and notice of a large monetary reward to the person or persons who would present any of the heads to the government. The police announcements made the two persons more significant figures to the people.  
(240)

The place historical Kimathi occupies in the people's imagination contributes to making the martyr hero of the play a symbol for the cause of liberation. Ngũgĩ's and Mugo's Kimathi champions the cause of social justice and dies defending poor workers and peasants against oppression and exploitation. Thus, his martyrdom becomes a symbol of a coming socialist revolution.

Even though Kimathi dies for the secular reason of the "nation" and the people's struggle, the idea of religious martyrdom still forcefully persists: not to portray the freedom fighter as a religious martyr, but to raise his commitment to his country to the status of religious martyr's commitment to his faith. The play presents Kimathi as a Christ figure by drawing parallels between him and Christ. The parallel drawn between Kimathi and Christ portrayed through the betrayal of a friend that brings about the execution of the two. Christ is betrayed by one of his disciples and Kimathi is betrayed by some Kenyan freedom fighters who sell out to the British and abandon the struggle. The traitors help the British ambush and arrest Kimathi in return for safety and some

materialistic incentives. Like Christ, Kimathi's martyrdom takes place after being betrayed and as a result of that betrayal. The writers also include an important aspect of martyrdom narrative in the story of Kimathi's imprisonment and execution. Kimathi is tortured and humiliated by both Henderson and Kenyan collaborators, yet he endures that patiently and achieves his spiritual victory when the British fail to subdue his will and make him abandon the struggle and collaborate with them.

The most important aspect of Kimathi's character that makes him a Christ figure is probably his temptations while in prison. Like Christ, Kimathi is tempted with worldly pleasures to give up the cause he is committed to. While fasting in the Judean desert, Christ is tempted by Satan three times, those of hedonism, egoism, and materialism, which Christ refuses. Kimathi is also visited three times by delegates of the imperialistic British power to sway him from his commitment to the liberation of his country and its people. The first tempter is the British Judge Henderson who offers to save Kimathi's life and guarantee his safety. After Henderson leaves, Kimathi is visited by a delegate consisting of a banker and insurance agent. This delegate offers Kimathi money and material gains which he refuses. The third and last delegate that visits Kimathi consists of a business executive, a politician and a priest. These again argue for Kimathi's safety, money, and prestige in return for abandoning the cause of people's struggle.

Christ's temptations take place in the desert away from society and the support of his followers. Kimathi's cell turns into a desert that is cut off from the community of supporters. Like Christ, he resists temptations relying solely on his own inner strength. Kimathi is imprisoned and cut off from news of the struggle, becoming in touch with only the "Satans" of imperialism and exploitation who come to his cell with different offers of

money, prestige, social, and political status, and most importantly, saving his life from an imminent execution. Like Christ, Kimathi refuses the temptations and emerges victorious. While Christ's victory over Satan represents purification and readiness to carry on his ministry, Kimathi's spiritual victory represents purification and readiness to die a martyr's death. The latter's ministry starts after death through his memory as he becomes a national hero in the war for independence and an example to be followed. This is evident in the commemoration of the martyr by Ngũgĩ and Micere Mugo through writing the play, and by the people who refuse to accept the fact of his death. In the introduction to the play, the authors note how people talk about Kimathi:

They talked of his warm personality and his love of people. He was clearly their beloved son, their respected leader and they talked of him as still alive. 'Kimathi will never die', the woman said. 'But of course, if you have killed him, go and show us his grave!' She said this in a strange tone of voice, between defiance and bitterness, and for a minute we all kept quiet. (Ngũgĩ *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* III)

While Kimathi fights the colonialists when alive, his legacy after death continues to guide the people in their struggle against oppression. Out of the disastrous ending, hope emerges as martyrdom becomes spiritual victory for the martyr and a promise of an actual victory for those who are alive and continue the struggle.

### 3. *Historical Miniatures*

Similarly, martyrdom in *Historical Miniatures* (1992) carries positive aspects of spiritual victory that feeds hope for a possible reversing of injustices and an actual

victory. While the terms “martyr” or “martyrdom” are not explicitly mentioned in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and only the narrative presents Kimathi as a martyr of the people’s struggle, Wannous’s play *Historical Miniature* is preoccupied with the idea of martyrdom. The main protagonist, Burhan Al Din Al Tathili, declares his readiness to die a martyr’s death right before engaging in warfare against the forces of the invading enemy. However, the play’s involvement with the theme of martyrdom is not limited to that of the main protagonist. Other characters also triumph over the will of the enemy and other decadent local voices calling for surrender and die martyr deaths.

The non-traditional structure of the play allows for the use of martyrdom for a double-non-cathartic ending. *Historical Miniatures* does not only focus on one protagonist and follows him till his death at the end but presents the audience with several protagonists. It also consists of two parts which the writer names “First” and “Second Miniatures.” Each “miniature” ends with heroic martyrdom of character or characters who die while defending their city and their people. The martyrdom of the main hero, Al Tathili, at the end of the “First Miniature,” inspires fiercer fighting in defense of Damascus in the “Second Miniatures.” A cohort of other secondary martyrs die during, and at the end of the “Second Miniature” to form—together with the martyrdom of Al Tathili—the non-cathartic effect of the play which invites thinking and acting on the side of the audience. In other words, martyrdom’s non-cathartic effect of the play is the sum of the non-cathartic ending of the “First Miniature” and the effect of the rest of Martyrdoms during and at the end of the “Second Miniature.”

The theme of martyrdom in the play is complicated and cannot be taken at face value. In addition to forming an “accumulative” non-cathartic effect through the



martyrdoms of several protagonists, the play seems to be interrogating and dissecting the very concept of martyrdom. *Historical Miniatures* invents fictional narratives to commemorate certain types of commitments and martyrdoms. Wannous reaches to Arab and Islamic history to draw analogies with the contemporary situation in Syria and the rest of the Arab world at the time of writing the play to show that strong commitment to Arab and Muslim causes is needed even if that means risking one's life for the good of the rest. Basing his play on a major historical event in the history of Arab and Islamic World, Wannous invents fictional martyr hero narratives as examples of resistance to celebrate and emulate. The play presents martyrs from different walks of life who sacrifice their lives for different reasons. Al Tathili is an "alim," an Islamic scholar who sees fighting against the foreign invader a religious duty and that dying while defending his city is a religious martyrdom. Azadar is a military leader who sees defending his city as fulfilling a job that is trusted to him. Sharaf's and Souad's participation is an expression of personal integrity and commitment to both their religion and their people. Al Shar'ji's case is a different one where he is deprived by the authorities of the privilege to defend his city and is kept in jail as a heretic only to die at the hands of Timur for sticking to his intellectual convictions. However, religion still exists at the core of those convictions and interferes with the most secular motives of martyrdom in the play.

Like *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, *Historical Miniatures* commemorates martyrdoms for political reasons. However, unlike Kimathi who is a real historical figure, the protagonists in *Historical Miniatures* are fictional characters. These protagonists die for the freedom of the homeland, but their commitments have varying religious and secular underpinnings. While religion colors the martyrdom of Kimathi to emphasize his

commitment to political motives, it forms a motive for self-sacrifice in Wannous's play. Each time the term martyr or martyrdom are explicitly uttered in the play, they have to do with religious martyrdom and are always related to the death of the religious leader Al Tathili. This connection most overtly occurs during the period before his involvement in military activities against Timur's invasion.

Although Al Tathili was not defending his right to confess his faith, but rather defending his city and its people, he sees his martyrdom as a religious one. It is clear that Al Tathili's martyrdom is political rather than religious, but its religious underpinnings are strong enough to conflate the man's political and religious reasons behind self-sacrifice. Conflating secular and religious motives of martyrdom in the play is a bit more common than expected. The religious aspects of martyrdom keep appearing even in relation to the most secularly motivated sacrifice of life due to certain cultural factors that blurs the boundaries between the two. Describing the complex cultural underpinnings of Irish Republican martyrdom, Jeffrey A. Sluka points out that "while in a syncretism of religion and politics, the Judeo-Christian theme of sanctification through sacrifice underlies the basic political dynamic of republican martyrdom, there is also an important Gaelic/Irish cultural tradition of heroic or patriotic sacrifice" (37). A similar syncretism between politics and religion is going on regarding the martyrdoms of Wannous's protagonists but is most clear in the case of Al Tathili. Most, if not all Arabic, especially pre-Islamic, poetry is preoccupied with the idea of heroic sacrifice. Leading a rough life in the desert, continuously competing, and often warring for command and prerogative over water sources, tribes brag of their heroic acts while fighting to protect property and kinsmen. Poets who were the spokesmen of their tribes always express

readiness to sacrifice their lives for the tribe. However, in Islam, the tribe is replaced by the “umma,”<sup>43</sup> the bigger nation that includes all Muslims originally under one government, but even if they are divided into different political entities, they are still connected by the allegiance to the religion. The scale of wars has also become bigger as Arabs and Muslims started warring against forces beyond the Arabian Peninsula. This is how Al Tathili sees himself defending the religion and the ummah through defending the city of Damascus against the Tatar invader. The Quran verses<sup>44</sup> about martyrdom in addition to the Hadith which states that the person who dies while defending his home, people and property is a martyr were certainly in the mind of Al Tathili as he fights.

There are two more immediate reasons why Al Tathili and other characters in the play view dying while defending the homeland a religious martyrdom, and especially in Syrian, Arab, and Muslim audiences. First, at the time the incidents of the play take place, the state that the martyr dies defending is founded on religion where state and religion are not separated. The sovereign (Khaliphah), is both the religious and political leader. The authority of the Islamic Khaliphah (state) in the minds of its citizens was the “guarantor” of professing and practicing their religion. Therefore, dying for a political reason of defending the state becomes at the same time dying for the religion. The second reason is that jihad (holy war championing Islam and/or Muslims), in Islam is

<sup>43</sup> The closest meaning of the word “umma” in English is “nation.” However, this translation remains inaccurate since the nation has territorial and racial resonance as well as linkage to the state which the concept of umma does not. For more on the subject see Tamim Al Barghouti’s *The Umma And the Dawla: The Nation State And The Arab Middle East*.

<sup>44</sup> There are many verses in the Quran speaking about martyrdom while fighting oppressors and sacrificing one’s life to champion the religion as well as defend Muslims and their territories. The most famous and most often cited verse among which is the verse in Al-Imran (3-169-70) which tells that martyrs are “not dead but living with the Lord, well provided for....”

considered a duty.<sup>45</sup> Whereas there are two kinds of duties, “fard ayn” and “fard kifayh” where the first is mandatory of all Muslims and the second stays mandatory until some Muslims fulfils it before it becomes voluntary, jihad falls in the first category. This means, the participation of all Muslims, depending on their geographic proximity to the sight of jihad, must participate in defending the Islamic realms. Responding to and obeying the religious command to fight and defend one’s homeland renders the fight holy and the death that takes place while fighting a religious martyrdom. From here comes the merging of the two concepts of religious and political martyrdoms in Islamic societies into one. However, death is not a goal that the martyr enters the battlefield for, but a celebrated end if it happens while the soldier fights with the intention to defeat his enemies as he will be paying with his life for bringing them down.

Like Al Tathili, Azadar dies for Damascus, its people, and the ummah, but unlike the former’s martyrdom, Azadar’s is clearly more secular than religious. Azadar’s death is not referred to as martyrdom, nor does the man invoke any religious aspects to his commitment to fighting Timur Lang’s army. The absence of any references to martyrdom with respect to his death might be meant as a differentiation between two kinds of martyrdom, the religious one of Al Tathili, where the lines between religion and

<sup>45</sup> A duty in Islam is called a fard or farida. The kind of Jihad in the play is a mandatory fard. Fard is two kinds: fard ayn and fard kifaya. Fard Kifayah is a duty that a Muslim does not have to do as long as others are doing the job performing the duty while fard ayn is a duty that everyone has to do, and, the fact that some are doing the job does not give a pass to others. Jihad is also two kinds: defending Muslims and their territories (jihad dafi), and fighting against any forces opposing Muslims’ attempts at reaching people and telling them the message of Islam (jihad Talab). The first kind which we see in the play is a mandatory kind of jihad (jihad dafi) required of those who are in closest proximity to the place needing protection through fighting against aggression. If the closest armed forces need more support, the fard of jihad widens to include more people according to their geographical proximity until it entails enlisting the whole umma. Ex. Fighting against the colonization of Palestine by European Zionists at this point in the history of Muslims is from a sharia point of view a fard on all umma which means a mandatory duty on all Muslims regardless of race, ethnicity or geographical location.

homeland with its people are blurred, and the other which validates commitment to the land and people through commitment to the system, the government that guarantees order (Wannous, *Historical Miniatures* 154-5). Azadar's dedication to serving the state that has given him his position and entrusted him with defending its realms seems to overwhelm and even exclude any religious obligations or personal convictions. As the military leader, he does his duty of defending the city to the last moment he can. Azadar is appointed by the government and represents the Khaliphah in Damascus as a military leader of Islamic dominions. He remains faithful to the state that employs him as well as to the city and the people he is expected to defend. Again, what defeats Azadar is not the invaders, but the betrayal of his people. While most of the population of Damascus support resistance in the beginning, the elites manage to manipulate the people and turn them against Azadar and his men at the Citadel of Damascus. The elites who oppress the common people of Damascus on behalf of Timur Lang manage to convince them that this oppression is imposed because of Azadar's refusal to surrender, and that if he capitulates their grievances will end. When the common people of Damascus start to side with Timur's forces, Azadar is left no other choice but to give in and surrender the Citadel to Timur. However, Timur avenges his losses in the battle against the fierce and stubborn resistance of Azadar by torturing the heroic leader and killing him. His forces also persecute, torture and abuse the citizens of Damascus. The play does not show or narrate any details of the torture Azadar is made to go through. It only shows Azadar walking in a magnificent attire, head held up with the pride of the military leader who has fulfilled his duty fighting the enemy with every means he has. The details of the torture are left to the imagination of the spectator to preserve the dignity of the brave

man who has fought heroically. The last image the audience sees of Azadar is that of a prince and military leader walking proudly to meet the enemy that he has fought fiercely, but fallen short of defeating only because of the betrayal of his own people rather than any weakness on his side or merit on the side of the enemy. Azadar dies for the sacred duties of both defending his nation and performing the job that is entrusted upon him.

While both Al Tathili and Azadar conform to the ideals of their positions, where Al Tathili dies as an honest citizen and scholar and Azadar dies as a good military leader, Souad and Al Shara'ji represent dissent and are still treated as martyrs. The martyrdom of Souad, Al Tathili's daughter, is an interesting case. She challenges the traditional gender roles of her society and volunteers to be the nurse helping to treat the injured soldiers at the Citadel. Souad hangs on to the hope of victory and dignified life until the last moment when the decision to surrender the Citadel to Timur's rule is taken by Azadar. To avoid a life of servility and humiliation at the hands of the victorious enemies, Souad commits suicide. However, her death and her body receive a very non-traditional treatment in similar situations. In Islamic tradition, high religious authorities are instructed to deny funeral prayer to the person who kills themselves (Ibn Muflih 261-2) as a sign of condemning suicide, and only the public—not lead by a religious authority as usual—perform the prayer. However, Souad's suicide is honored and considered the best and most discreet decision by Azadar and his assistance Shihab Eddin who makes sure that her body receives funeral prayer by the imam of the Citadel. Both men praise her bravery and courage. As a sign of honoring the brave woman, Souad's body is carried by six men who walk side by side with Azadar and his assistant

Shihab Eddin in the magnificent procession leaving the castle in the morning of surrendering it to Timur's forces:

Azadar: ... What did you do with Al Tathili's daughter?

Shihab Eddin: Her body is given the funeral washing, coffined and prayed upon by the imam of the Citadel. Her coffin will be carried by six of our men. (Wannous 188-9)

Without describing her death as martyrdom, Souad is honored like a martyr. Albeit, not exactly like a martyr who dies while fighting where both the funeral washing of the body and the prayer are waived,<sup>46</sup> but as a life laid down for the cause of the country and the umma.

Using Souad's martyrdom, the play also introduces another important element of differentiating between religious martyrdom and secular martyrdom for commitments to the nation as well as personal commitments to preserving one's dignity. Before her death and after she realizes the end is closing in on the people at the Citadel, Souad expresses some rebellious and even blasphemous ideas. She questions the existence of God:

Souad: It is all over.

Sharaf Eddin: (with tears in his eyes) We are defeated by our people and the enemy.

Souad: Where is God, Sharaf Eddin?

Sharaf Eddin: I don't know...

<sup>46</sup> Both the wash of the body, and the funeral prayer are waived for the martyr who dies at the hands of the enemy. However, the prayer can still be done as a sign of honoring the martyr, though not required. For more, see *Al Mughni* by Muwafaq Eddin Bin Qudama (467-78).

Souad: Do you have your doubts like me?

Shara Eddin: I don't Know...

Souad: Doesn't He see us? How can He abandon us when we are fighting for the right against the wrong! How can He leave us alone with no rescue or mercy!

Didn't He promise victory to people like us? Hasn't He promised that he is close to us whenever we pray and... Is it possible that He supports Timur's rule on earth, and defeat the group that fights for the right and just cause?

Sharaf Eddin: I don't know... I don't know...

Souad: Yes... We don't know...and we might never know... (184)

Islam instructs to contentedly accept fate and face hardships armed with faith and patience. But shocked at the defeat, Souad complies with neither. She questions the existence of a fair God who has promised victory to those fighting for the right cause and ends up killing herself to avoid the humiliation of a life of servility under the merciless enemy. Souad also decides that she and Sharaf Eddin consummate their love that night before they leave the Citadel the next morning since they might never meet again. Souad performs a mock marriage between herself and Sharaf and declares that they are married before consummating their love. However, in Islamic tradition, this marriage is not complete as it lacks the witnesses and public announcements. From mere religious perspective, in addition to suicide, Souad commits two sins, adultery and blasphemy. Nonetheless, she is still honored in the world of the play like a martyr.

Wannous seems to be sending a message to his audience that faithfulness to one's country and people, preserving one's dignity in life and death are no less valuable traits than commitments to religious values. To him, one's dignity, freedom and nation are no



less worthy of sacrifice than religion. An honorable martyrdom can extend to include dying for many as a just cause that one is committed to. It becomes clear that Souad's death is no doubt a secular form of martyrdom after she declares her non-conformity with the tenets of her religion.

The second martyr who dissents from what is commonly accepted as the right belief of his society is Al Shara'ji. He is an ex-student of Al Tathili, a scholar and a philosopher who adopts positions on some articles of faith that dissent from the consensus of the Muslim ulama<sup>47</sup> of his time. Al Shara'ji argues logically for his positions, and when he realizes that his views are not welcomed by the scholars of the city, he abandons Al Tathili's lessons and retires to his house to study on his own. A betrayal by one of his students leads to his imprisonment and subsequent execution. Al Shara'ji is betrayed to the state as a heretic before Timur's invasion of the city of Damascus by a student of his who falls in love with Al Shara'ji's wife. The student tells Al Shara'ji to get the husband out of the way and marry the wife. The context and cause of his death associate Al Shara'ji's martyrdom with that of the father of Greek philosophy, Socrates. Like Socrates, Al Shara'ji dies for his dissenting philosophical views and like him too, he is condemned to death after gaining the animosity of the elites of his country. Like Kimathi, Al Shar'ji's martyrdom is also given a Christ's aspect. This betrayal by a friend is an important element of his martyrdom narrative that bestows on Al Shara'ji an aspect of a Christ figure. Again, religion colors another form of secular martyrdom. Al Shar'ji's death is motivated by his commitment to reason over creed. His solid adherence to his views stems from intellectual integrity rather than

<sup>47</sup> Ulama is scholars, the plural of alim

convictions of institutional religion. Yet, Al Shahra'ji is the only one in the play whose death can be directly related to the right to profess one's faith. However, his problem is not the simple professing of the faith, but that of professing it the way he philosophically sees it.

The last example of martyrdom is that which does not end with death but can only be characterized by the behavior of the martyr. Sharaf follows the path of martyrdom but he is lucky to be saved from death by his teacher Ibn Khaldoun.<sup>48</sup> Al Tathili's valor in the battlefield and his heroic death inspires many people among whom Sharaf, the Egyptian student-scholar who is apprenticed<sup>49</sup> to the renowned historian Ibn Khaldoun. Sharaf joins the soldiers at the Citadel knowing that he might die while fighting. In fact, even after surviving the fighting while defending the castle, Sharaf could have been executed like Azadar if not for Ibn Khaldoun's intervention to save his life. Sharaf accompanies Ibn Khaldoun in his sojourn to Damascus to record the historical events of the Tatar invasion of that part of the Islamic Khilaphah<sup>50</sup> (Islamic state led by the Khaliphah). Ibn Khaldoun's philosophy represents a decadent way of thinking and a negative approach to Arab and Muslim culture. He sees no hope of bringing all Arabs or Muslims together in the face of a foreign invader because they lost both "asabiya" (tie to

<sup>48</sup> The character of the historian Ibn Khaldoun in the play is based on the real historical figure of the Arab historian and social scientist Ibn Khaldoun from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The real Ibn Khaldoun was in Damascus when Timur Lang attacked and ransacked it and he did meet with Timur Lang as does the fictional character in Wannous's play.

<sup>49</sup> This tradition is based on learning from a scholar in exchange for serving him which entails living with the scholar as a servant. The earliest record of this tradition goes back to the time of prophet Mohammad. The well-known hadith narrator and prophet companion Anas bin Malik was educated by serving the prophet. The prophet treated Anas like a son throughout the ten years he lived with him. The tradition became more widespread during Abbasid era and continued to be a means of getting an education till roughly the mid of the last century in different parts of the Muslim world.

<sup>50</sup> Khilaphah is the Islamic state following Sharia law (Islamic teachings) and is led by Khaliphah.

the tribe) and the influence of religion to motivate people for jihad.<sup>51</sup> Pessimist as he is regarding the ability of the people of Damascus to defend their city, Ibn Khaldoun sides with the elites of the city who advocate accepting the rule of the invader over Damascus in return for peace. Disappointed and exasperated at the position of his teacher, Sharaf parts ways with him and joins the fighters at the Citadel where he fights and is arrested by Timur's forces. However, Ibn Khaldoun who has built a good relationship with Timur by offering him gifts and later on mapping Morocco for him interfered on behalf of Sharaf and was granted his request. Despite the fact that Sharaf survived the invasion and left Damascus safe, following the path of Al Tathili renders his participation in the fighting a martyr behavior. He shares with Al Tathili the same motives for participation in the war and readiness to die defending the city and the larger Islamic nation. Sharaf's is the story of a heroic martyr behavior that Wannous chooses not to end with death, thus covering an array of martyr stories with different motives and outcomes.

While the martyr heroes in *Historical Miniatures* and *The Trial* do not all die, or fight, for a belief system, David Cook's idea about the educational side of martyrdom is still valid in all their cases. The martyr becomes the example of solid commitment to the cause that should be followed by those who survive to continue the struggle and achieve victory and justice. Moreover, the educational sense of these plays is heightened as the heroes do not set an example of accepting death for professing faith as a passive way of resistance but are actively involved in fighting the enemy. These martyr heroes die defending their countries as they believe in their right to freedom and dignity. The martyr heroes' patriotism and commitment to fight for their intrinsic rights of

<sup>51</sup> This is the philosophy of the historical Ibn Khaldoun as well as that of Ibn Kahaldoun, the character in the play.

living in peace and dignity become the ideology; the belief that their martyrdom endorses. While this ideology is completely secular in the case of Kimathi and Azadar, it keeps a strong religious dimension in the case of Al Tathili and Al Shara'ji. Souad's case remains ambiguous as she fights with strong religious conviction only to lose it after defeat. The two plays offer different paradigms of martyrdom narratives that are used by the writers to educate their audiences about the right way to deal with a foreign invader and/or foreign and local exploiters. The deaths of the protagonists become debts for other revolutionaries to pay off by continuing the struggle. Unlike the death of the tragic hero in a classical tragedy that settles matters in the world of the play—and vicariously in the real world—martyrdom invokes more action. This sets Martyrdom narratives apart from tragedy most importantly in enticing action rather than curbing the tendency to challenge power and bring about change.

## 2. Martyr Hero versus Tragic Hero

However, despite the positive aspect's martyrdom adds to death, from spiritual victory to the promise of an actual victory, the death of the hero remains disastrous which presents the question of the relationship between a martyr play and tragedy. The martyr's death is no doubt tragic, not in the sense of evoking pity and fear in the audience like the tragic hero does, but in the sense of the immensity of the disaster and the loss. The martyr hero does not comply with Aristotle's first, and probably most important aspect of a tragic hero which is evoking the feelings of pity and fear in the audience. The catastrophic fate of the tragic hero evokes pity and fear in the spectator who pities the hero for an undeserved fall and fear a similar fate due to a latent flaw

they share with the hero. Augusto Boal sees that pity and fear are the very tools of intimidation which is achieved through the catharsis:

Perhaps that of which one is purged is not the emotions of pity or fear, but something contained in those emotions, or mixed with them. We must determine the identity of this foreign body which is eliminated by the cathartic process. In this case, pity and fear would only be part of the mechanism of expulsion and not its object. (29)

He explains that it is not pity and fear that are purged of the spectator, but a myriad of other feelings and tendencies that constitute a danger to the established system and socially approved morality. The purged tendency, or combination of tendencies, form the tragic flaw of the classical hero. Boal suggests that empathy “which is based on these two emotions” (28), “[of pity and fear] disables the spectators’ intellect and makes them delegate action to the character and experience events vicariously” (37). The audience would regret Oedipus’s arrogance and rashness and wish he was moderate in his actions to evade the fate he meets. Consequently, the audience who potentially has the tendency to arrogance and rebellion against political and religious authorities fears the fate met by Oedipus and is purged of all its social sins.

The absence of the tragic flaw in the martyr hero does away with the feelings of pity and fear and facilitates reaching a non-cathartic ending. In a postcolonial martyr play, the death of a protagonist is always caused by a merit of character rather than a flaw. Replacing the tragic flaw with a merit raises the martyr above the feeling of pity. Patriotism and solid adherence to an ethical cause (faithfulness to one’s nation) are what lead to the death of the heroes. These merits would evoke respect for the heroes

rather than pitying. While the spectators would pity Oedipus for having a flaw that causes his fall, they cannot but respect the martyrs for having the merits that bring about their deaths. Even though death remains a painful end, it becomes a spiritual victory where the will of the martyr defeats the will of his enemies and becomes a highly held symbol for his or her cause. While the audience will certainly deem the hero's death a social loss, they don't wish the martyr never has had the trait that brings about his/her death. In *The Trial*, Kimathi obviously does not fall because of a tragic flaw. On the contrary, he possesses a merit that makes his death a highly esteemed martyrdom. This trait is more of a tragic merit rather than a tragic flaw. The oxymoron of tragic merit is explainable only through considering the aberrant historical context of the postcolonial situation of the play. While the merit of patriotism should be rewarded in a normal situation, it is punished in the aberrant postcolonial system. However, the audience would not wish Kimathi is any less patriotic to save his life because any less patriotic becomes a betrayal of an ethical and just cause he is committed to. They would covet his merit and even strive to possess it.

The absence of the feeling of pity in regard to the martyr hero does away with the subsequent fear of his fate. The martyr hero is not only raised above the feeling of pity, but their death doesn't evoke the fear of meeting a similar fate in the audience. Despite its catastrophic nature, death as martyrdom becomes less of a bad thing. As Cook puts it, martyrdom becomes "an attempt to rescue some type of meaning and dignity from death" (11). The absence of the cathartic ending correlates with the absence of the emotion of fear. Fearing to meet the fate of the hero in classical tragedy is an important element of achieving the catharsis. To fear the fate of the hero is part cleansing the

audience from the tragic flaw. The cleanse takes place in two steps: first through eliminating the hero, and with him his tragic flaw. This process eliminates the flaw from the audience. Since the audience goes through all the stages of purgation vicariously (Boal 34), they are safe, but they fear such a fate in reality. Fear stays with them to keep such inclination in check. Since the martyr hero does not evoke the traditional feeling of pity, nor does he have a flaw to purge, the fear of meeting the same fate never exists. Instead of fearing the fate of the hero, spectators become ready to fight the injustices which have led the hero to such fate in order to eventually thwart the danger from themselves, their beloved ones and their community or class.

While the martyr hero differs from the tragic hero in not evoking pity and fear in the audience as the function of these emotions contradicts with the role the martyr hero plays in revolutionary theater, he/she still has some characteristics that either conform to those of the tragic hero or come very close to them only to take a new direction of interpretation. Modern scholars' examination of what a tragic action is, and what makes a tragic hero, sheds more light on the character of the protagonists who despite, all his noble characteristics, meets a catastrophic ending due to one tragic flaw of character and consequently evokes pity and fear in the audience. Friedrich Dürrenmatt elaborates on the characteristics of a tragic hero specified by Aristotle:

The qualities he must have are all well known. He must be capable of arousing our pity. His guilt and his innocence, his virtues and his vices must appear to be blended in the most pleasant and exact manner and doled out according to certain rules, in such a way for instance that if I choose a villain as hero I must add to his wickedness an equality large portion of wit, a rule which has had the

effect of at once making the devil the most likeable stage figure in German literature. (50)

This opinion about the tragic hero highlights the difference between him and the martyr hero and shows them as two different categories that are unrelated. While the tragic hero does have a pleasant blend of virtues and vices that makes him a likeable figure, the martyr hero is likeable and respected because of his tragic merit. It is a virtue that makes the martyr hero a likeable figure without making him a candidate for the audience's pity or making his fate feared by it.

The action in martyrdom narrative also has some parallelism with tragic action. Other critics and dramaturges have examined the nature and causes of the tragic action as well as the characteristics of the tragic hero beyond Aristotle's precise definition. According to Ferdinand Brunetière, tragedy happens when the obstacles are "insurmountable, or reputed to be so...like the decrees of fate...of Providence...laws of nature...or passions aroused to frenzy" (408). While this is not the case in either *The Trial* or *Historical Miniatures*, since conflict is between human beings and is at most against oppressive societal systems, the force against which the protagonist strife is still immense. Kimathi fights the British who rule Kenya with an iron fist crushing any rebellion with their organized and highly advanced military forces. The British also use the weapon of intimidating the natives by claiming and acting upon an assumed superiority and invincibility to defeat at the hands of revolutionaries whom they see as primitive and inferior natives. Like the prodigious force of the British, Timur's army is also famed to be unbeatable in the battlefield. News of the Tatar forces sweeping countries, looting, and killing races to Damascus before their arrival. The man who



comes from Aleppo describes the horrors he has seen and how he lost all family members except the boy (a girl, in reality) that accompanies him. Even the historian Ibn Khaldoun who is allegedly an objective thinker assessing the situation disinterestedly agrees that Damascus cannot stand in the face of Timur's army or fight back against it. However, the martyr hero always has the courage to challenge the tremendous power, and the confidence that he could surmount it.

The sense of the massive and unbeatable power of the enemy and the courage the hero has to challenge it, contribute to the prodigious stature of the martyr hero. In fact, the stature, more than any rank or social status, is what makes the death of the hero a major loss to the cause which needs to be made up for by the revolutionaries' strife and sacrifices. The stature of the hero appears in his/her strong personality and solid will regardless of birth. The tragic hero is also of good stature, which according to American dramatist Arthur Miller makes his catastrophic fate tragic. Miller objects to the traditional understanding of the heights from where the tragic hero falls and distinguishes between rank and stature. In his Piece on *Death of a Salesman* where he considers his protagonist salesman, Willy Loman, a tragic hero, Miller disagrees with the common understanding of the heights from where the tragic hero falls: "Aristotle having spoken of a fall from the heights, it goes without saying that somebody of the common mould cannot be a fit tragic hero" (108). Further, he suggests that

... there is a legitimate question of stature [there], but none of rank, which is so often confused with it. So long as the hero may be said to have had alternatives of a magnitude to have materially changed the course of his life, it seemed to me that in this respect at least, he cannot be debarred from the heroic role. (108)

Therefore, Miller would say that Oedipus's fall is tragic not because of being a king and son of a king, but because of being a king of big stature as he rules Thebes efficiently and pursues the search for the criminal in order to end the plague as the oracle instructs. Insisting on serving justice and saving his city builds his stature in the play and entitles him to be a tragic hero more than the rank he occupies.

Accepting Miller's differentiation between rank and stature, and his proposition that it is stature and not rank that makes a tragic hero should not lead us to identify the protagonists of *The Trial* and *Historical Miniatures* as tragic heroes. In his differentiation between rank and stature, Miller does not question the tragic hero's aspect of evoking pity and fear. To him, a man of common birth but whose stature has grown can evoke pity and fear. Stature is a characteristic which is common to both the tragic hero and a martyr hero without rendering the martyr a tragic hero. Unlike Oedipus, the martyr heroes under study are not of royal or noble birth but are of "the common mould" and stature is what makes their loss immense to their people and to their causes. Kimathi's stature shows in his resistance to all materialistic advantages he has offered. He is tempted with money, social and political status and prestige, but remains invincible to these temptations. He becomes a Christ figure in his ascetic behavior and aspiration for a higher cause. While Christ's aspiration is spiritual, Kimathi's aspiration takes a more realistic and materialist/Marxist turn. His ultimate goal is to regain people's control over resources of their country and the wealth produced by their labor. Kimathi resists temptations and adheres to the cause of achieving liberation and social justice for the Kenyan masses. His stature does not only show in resisting and refusing temptations, but also in enduring bodily torture. He is ordered to be tortured by lowly collaborators

and insulted verbally by them to break his spirit. However, he proves solid and resists both temptations and torture. His martyrdom at the end makes him a giant towering over petty collaborators and shames British oppressors.

Similarly, the protagonists of Wannous's play are also made big by their dignified behavior. Al Tathili's stature has nothing to do with his upper-class birth and background. On the contrary, what builds his stature is his renouncement of this belonging. Al Tathili has the courage to talk about the corruption of his class and to denounce its cowardice and hypocrisy in his last address to the Damascus public before his death in the battlefield. He confesses his participation in corrupted activities typical of his class, detaches himself from the elites of the city and announces a new chapter of his life where he sides with the masses. His daughter Souad also shows the courage of her father. Azzadar describes her as taking after her father (189). Rather than seeking safety by hiding, Souad becomes a revolutionary female character. She joins the fighters at the Citadel to nurse soldier's wounds and stands side by side with the men till there is no point in continuing the fight as defeat becomes clearly approaching. Once she realizes that there is no hope of victory and dignified life, and that future is an imminent life of servitude under the ruthless oppressor Timur and his victorious army, she commits suicide preferring a dignified death to life of servility and other forms of humiliation.

Sharaf who survives the battlefield is also a hero of big stature. Despite the fact that he is still a student serving his teacher in return for learning from him, Sharaf shows sound thinking and courage to act on his own convictions. He objects to Ibn Khaldoun's soft position about defending the city. Ibn Khaldoun sides with the elites of Damascus

and even makes a visit to Timur at his camp outside the city, offers him gifts, and upon the latter's request starts mapping Morocco for his next invasion. Sharaf confronts Ibn Khaldoun with his opinion that his cowardly behavior is shameful and that as a scholar, he should lead the people to the right path in hard times and not let them down and side with the selfish few who constitute the upper elitist class of the city. Sharaf is no doubt of good stature no less than Al Tathili and his daughter. Azadar is also of strong convictions and strong will. The four heroes of the play are carefully selected from different sections of society to show that the martyr hero can be anyone of good stature regardless of his birth and his sex. While Azadar seems to be of noble birth as he holds the title of "prince," Al Tathili belongs to the upper class but there is nothing to denote a royal or noble birth. He is certainly a member of the elites but is not of any considerable rank. What is also innovative is Wannous's introducing a female figure who is of no less stature than the male protagonists of the play. Souad is no smaller in stature than either the scholar (Al Tathili) the honorable young man of integrity (Sharaf), the philosopher (Al Shara'ji), or the military leader (Azadar). Unlike Al Tathili and his daughter, Sharaf is a young man and student of common birth who proves that dignity and courage is not a monopoly for any specific class. These heroes share the aspect of good stature with the tragic hero. While Arthur Miller sees that it is stature that makes a tragic hero and not simply rank, Wannous would say the same about his martyr heroes.

Another common aspect between a tragic hero and a martyr hero is personal freedom. Heroes of such big statures are also no doubt free to make decisions that direct their lives. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, the "chief source of great tragedy, is human freedom" where "the most moving thing the theater can show is a character

creating himself, the moment of choice, of the free decision which commits him to a moral code and a whole way of life" (43). In fact, the death of these heroes is the consequence of the practice of will and freedom (42). Freedom also takes another level of meaning in these two plays. The heroes' practice of their freedom is reflected in committing themselves to a cause and making decisions that determine their lives. This very committing of oneself to a cause and acting on that commitment involves fighting for freedom. Practicing their freedom is part of the strife for liberation.

Sartre emphasizes that for the fall of the tragic hero to be significant, it must come as a result of free choice. He elaborates that "the man who is led inevitably to his downfall by a combination of circumstances is not likely to move us. There is greatness in his fall only if he falls through his own fault" (43). This certainly applies to the fall of the martyr heroes with only one difference. The heroes do not fall because of a fault, but because of an ethical commitment and a sound decision. When Kimathi becomes a freedom fighter and leads the guerilla life in the forest, he practices his freedom of choice against the allegedly bigger will of the British oppressors represented by their law, courts, police, and advanced weaponry. His ability to be free is emphasized in presenting him as a Christ figure as he is tried with temptations. Kimathi's decision to stay faithful to the cause of the poor Kenyans' struggle against threats of hanging as well as temptations of wealth is an assertion of his inner freedom. His death represents the victory of his will over the will of the British colonial authorities.

The same applies to Al Tathili, Souad, Sharaf, Azadar, and Al Shara'ji. Al Shara'ji chooses to stand by his opinions against the full power of the city's elites and scholars who try to rob him of his human freedom to think for himself. Al Tathili, Souad, Sharaf,

Azadar, freely commit themselves to the defense of Damascus. Fully aware that surrendering the city to Timur and his army will rob them of their freedom and renders them slaves living under the mercy of the barbaric invader, they resist pressure from the elites of Damascus and commit themselves to fighting for the freedom of their nation and their ummah. Each one of them has different challenges against which to assert his or her freedom. Al Tathili resists pressure from the merchants and scholars of the city and parts ways with them to act on his own personal and religious convictions. Souad resists the gender role stereotype of the soft woman whose arena is the home and not the battlefield. And Sharaf has to bluntly reject his teacher-master's ideology and take a completely different path for his life. Taking on these challenges shows the inner freedom of these characters that resists outside social and gender shackles which makes their fall moving and likely to influence spectators.

However, in spite of all the differences between the character and role of the martyr hero and tragic hero, the two still share some characteristics. These common characteristics make the fall of the two tragic in the sense of the immensity of the loss. Like the tragic hero, the martyr hero's action originates in his free will. Committing to a cause and risking one's life for championing it attests to the freedom of choice the martyr hero has. Martyrdom does not take place in circumstances over which the hero has no control. On the contrary, the martyr hero commits to an ethical cause fully aware of the risks he/she faces including losing one's life at the hands of a ruthless enemy. The enemy is always known for their allegedly unbeatable power which the hero takes upon themselves to challenge and defeat. This certainly speaks of the big stature and inner strength of the hero. Oedipus defies the gods, Kimathi defies the British colonial

regime, and the protagonists in Wannous's play fight against Timur who they know has been razing cities and nations and building towers of skulls of the conquered people. Big stature, human freedom and courage to resist and fight against powerful enemies are the characteristics that make the death of the tragic hero and martyr hero moving and significant. When these characteristics are espoused with the tragic flaw, pity and fear become the natural products and the tragedy instructs by intimidation and cutting off any tendency to actively try to change the balance of power in society. The catharsis at the end of the play purges all tendencies of dissent which are seen in the tragedy as "social sins" to be gotten rid of. However, when the same characteristics of good stature, courage, and freedom occur with a tragic merit rather than a tragic flaw, the Brechtian non-cathartic form accommodates the martyrdom of the hero and allows the play to instruct by strengthening people's faith in their cause and inciting them to continue the struggle until achieving victory.

## Conclusion

Despite the deaths of the heroes of *Historical Miniatures* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, the two plays are not tragedies in the classical sense. Instead of following a tragic hero until his fall is brought about by his tragic flaw, the two plays' protagonists are martyr heroes who fall due to tragic merits rather than flaws. Although the tragic merit of the martyr hero leads to his/her death, he /she is never wished to have lived without that merit as it is the crucial element in rendering the catastrophic end an honorable martyrdom. While the tragic hero falls as a punishment for transgression that is caused by his tragic flaw, the martyr hero dies in a "punishment" for a merit he/she

has. However, the martyr hero is “punished” by a tyrannical and unjust enemy. While a merit in a normal situation is rewarded, it is punished under unfair rulers like Timur Lang and the British colonial authorities. Martyr heroes are characterized by high integrity of character and a solid commitment to an ethical cause. While the death of the tragic hero brings back “justice” and calmness to the world of the play, the Martyrdom of Wannous’s and Ngūgĩ’s heroes deepens the sense of injustice and incites for more action to right the wrongs.

The writers aim at using the transformative nature of martyrdom to move their audiences to more political involvement. Martyrdom narrative becomes an expression of “public recognition of altruistic personal sacrifice in pursuing a higher, more sacred, more transcendental goal.... It is the special character attributed to personal sacrifice as being a rare and honorable thing that gives it its political power” (Citation: see Note 8, above). Death which is basically a defeat is transformed into victory as the will of the martyr overcomes the will of his oppressors. Although people normally fear death and no one would intentionally pursue it even when it is an honorable one, the heroes’ deaths become less feared and even somehow coveted as they gain the status of martyrs. This form of drama entertains and instructs through moving the audience to subscribe to the moral and patriotic convictions of the martyr hero who becomes an inspiration:

Through the altruistic self-sacrifice martyrs gather attention and arouse popular revulsion and moral indignation, which represents a form of capital which political activists seek to transform through ritual into a ‘mass mobilization’ of popular support and action which will sweep them to victory. (Sluka 39)



In a way, the martyr commits his life to his cause and gives an example for his comrades to follow. The writing and performing of these plays is part of commemorating martyrdom by activist writers to transform it “through[the] ritual” of drama into a ‘mass mobilization’” (Sluka 39) to resist colonial rule as well as foreign and domestic exploitation.

## Chapter 6

### Brechtian Drama and Revolutionary Postcolonial Theaters of Ngũgĩ and Wannous

#### 1. Transculturation and Revolutionary Aspects

The Brechtian non-cathartic form has an undeniably significant role in enabling the transculturation of postcolonial drama and rendering it revolutionary. Instead of the traditional dramatic structure and independence incidents of the form, narrative allow for including native elements of song, dance ritual, and ceremony, which in turn are often used to produce A-Effect. Elements such as song and dance are usually interruptive to a masterplot propel towards a climax and a denouement, and they are looked down upon in mainstream Western drama. However, these elements have a strong presence in native performance traditions. Native theatrical forms are not originally performances of a manuscript or text of a play and they do not enact a story with a masterplot. These aspects belong to Western drama where the playwright produces the text and the theater group rehearses the play behind closed doors to present it to the audience as a piece of perfection. The absence of the catharsis in the Brechtian form allows for integrating native performance elements in a play that is written and rehearsed beforehand like a Western play, and which at the same time resembles native theatrical traditions in including song, dance, ritualistic, and ceremonial elements. However, the rehearsal of Ngũgĩ's and Wannous's plays is never used to polish a performance for a pretended perfection as both playwrights involve their audiences in the process of making those plays. The way each playwright involves his audience in making theater remains a space for creativity and invention for each playwright. Ngũgĩ involves the audience in all the stages of making *I Will Marry When I Want* as shown in the chapters

discussing the play, and Wannous involves the spectators during performance and leaves spaces for and encourages their spontaneous improvisation.

Moreover, the absence of catharsis also has a tremendous role in rendering theater revolutionary. In itself, as well as in the different strategies and aspects pertaining to it, the absence of the catharsis is the main instrument that makes Brechtian theater revolutionary. The narrative structure of the plays, the A-Effect, and the involvement of the audience as active participants in the play all interconnect in a collaborative and correlative relationship to non-cathartic ending as they facilitate bringing it about while at the same time are themselves enabled by the absence of its negation (opposite) of the catharsis. All these aspects, tools and strategies work together to bring about the revolutionary effect aims at by the dramatis. The non-cathartic ending prevents the purging of emotion and sends the audience home with the knowledge that there is still work to be done. Contrary to what happens at the end of an Aristotelian play where calmness prevails in the world of the play and vicariously in the real world as the transgressor is punished and the audience is purged of the feelings of pity and fear, a non-cathartic ending leaves emotions charged, and minds alert thinking about solutions to wrong situations. A strongly non-cathartic ending that is discussed in detail in this dissertation is the martyrdom of the hero. Instead of a tragic hero that is deservedly punished for a flaw of character, the martyr hero dies for a just cause setting the example for his community to follow suit. However, martyrdom is not the only example of a non-cathartic endings. Concluding the plays with unjust events like the disintegration of the Kiggūnda family in *I Will Marry When I Want* or the arrest of audience members who dare criticize the government are also non-cathartic. Such

endings are clearly far from bringing calmness to the world of the play, or to that of the spectators. However, calmness still is a quest, not to be achieved in the world of the play, but to make it materialize in the real world through the prevalence of justice.

Needless to say, the A-Effect is also pivotal to the revolutionary aspect of the two dramatists' theaters. As it prevents the audience from overwhelming emotional involvement with characters and action that could disable reasoning and critical approach to the play's unfolding events. Overwhelming emotions are brought about in the cathartic realist drama through the hypnotic pretended realism which the A-Effect does away with. Ngūgĩ and Wannous use different strategies to achieve the A-Effect most important among which are songs and dance, addressing the audience, simple décor that does not aim at verisimilitude, and other creative strategies like Wannous's hakawati tradition and Ngūgĩ's involvement of the audience in revising the manuscript of *I Will Marry* and its rehearsal in the a outdoor theater which is open to the eyes of the audience.

In addition to these elements, the form's flexibility to involve the audience in the making of theater remains one of the most important aspects. It contributes to the playwrights' revolutionary purposes as it gives agency to the audience members and inspire confidence in their ability at thinking critically about the unfavorable conditions of their lives, searching for solutions, and eventually moving to action and bringing about change. Ngūgĩ and Wannous hope spectators carry that confidence and active participation in intellectual dialogue about sociopolitical relationships that impact the conditions of their lives to their communities outside the walls of the theater. Spectators' involvement also helps reaching accurate information about the details of their lives as

they know it better than anyone else including the playwright, which both Ngũgĩ and Wannous attest to. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ tells that “people” participated in all “discussions on the script. They discussed its content, its language and even form” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind* 45). And Wannous has his peasant character Abdul Rahman to object to the stage misrepresentations of a border-village like his village and of fellow villagers like himself (Wannous, *An Evening Party* 73-81). Wannous’s playwright Abdul Ghani also applauds Abdul Rahman and encourages the spectators to speak and correct misinformation and misrepresentations in the inner play (77). Ngũgĩ and Wannous knew that their spectators knew best about their struggles and that they were capable of dialoging about the struggles’ roots in sociopolitical relationships. In the plays where audience participate, the spectator becomes a student-teacher who teaches the playwright as well as the rest of the audience about the reality of their lives and is also educated by them. All these elements and strategies of the form come to existence thanks to the absence of a well-woven masterplot that is tightly developing towards a focused climax and resolution. The absence of the catharsis makes the narrative structure of the plays possible, which in turn leaves space for the A-Effect and the involvement of the audience as active participants in the theatrical action.

Ngũgĩ’s and Wannous’s experiments with revolutionary plays remain significant, not only through the role they try to play in decolonization, but more through the strategies they use and the transculturation of their theaters. The revolutionary plays discussed in this dissertation represent a stage in each of the two playwrights’ career, and consequently, their importance lies not in the achievement of decolonization goals as much as in their response to the historical moment that called for them. The plays

came not very long after the end of direct colonialism at the time people started feeling the disappointment at nationalist governments shortcomings and the national elites' pursuance of their materialist interests and economic gains at the expense of the welfare of their nations and the majority of common people who constitute the backbone of a nation.

## 2. Hope Falling Apart

Although Saadallah Wannous and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'O try to use theater as a tool of mobilization and change, they seem to have different concepts of change and revolution. Speaking about his disappointment that *An Evening Party* failed to mobilize people to rebel against an oppressive government and take action to change socio-political iniquities, Wannous writes:

The word is just a word. Theater is just theater. The word is not action and theater is not the epicenter for insurrection.

Yes, the dream fell to the ground. However, the question of bringing about change is still chasing and worrying me.

The question of how to turn the word into praxis and how to achieve a double, probably contradictory ambitious goals through writing. Or, whether this attempt is pre-condemned to failure! (Wannous, *Bayanat* 286)

It is clear that Wannous hoped for an insurrection against oppression of the Syrian tyrannical government that instead of educating its citizens, it kept them poor and ignorant. Syrian citizens were marginalized and alienated from the political process under the dictatorship of the one-party rule of the Ba'athists.

Wannous starts questioning the role of theater and art in general in reformation and eventually loses hope in bringing about quick change through popular participation in a revolution. He focused on enriching individual taste and experience through literary theater to which the plays of the last stage of his writing career belong as discussed in detail in Chapter 1. Ngũgĩ also echoes this idea of influencing his audience's aesthetic tastes and consciousness of reality as a means of change. Explicating his view about the role of art in changing unfair status quos, Ngũgĩ wrote in an interview with *The Nation* newspaper in 2018:

Art does not incite. Art to me has to do with imagination. Imagination makes possible everything we do as human beings. We can picture all the possibilities and try to realize it in practice... What nourishes the imagination? It is actually the arts, the songs, the culture. (Inani)

In these lines, Ngũgĩ seems, like Wannous, to have backed up from the idea of making theater a “rehearsal for revolution” (Boal 142) to focus on achieving change from the bottom up. In this view, change starts in the individual and in society rather than in a movement that deposes the oppressive government.

However, this position is complicated by Ngũgĩ's preceding assertion that he never meant to stir an uprising when he published his play *I Will Marry When Want* (Inani). If this assertion is taken at face value, Ngũgĩ seems to be saying that he aimed at change from the bottom up from the very beginning, and that revolution was never an agenda for him. However, much evidence supports the idea of his attempts at mobilizing people to revolt against injustices they were subjected to under Kenyan nationalist government at the time of writing his plays. In fact, many critics have

understood Ngũgĩ's plays as a call for revolution. According to Nelson O Fashina "Ngũgĩ's plays—*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982), and *The Black Hermit*—have special social regenerative and revolutionary power, both in the reading of their texts and as catalysts of revolutionary rage wherever they are produced and performed on stage" (9).

The context of writing *I Will Marry* and the previous play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* attests to the idea of aiming at a revolution by the young writer who is influenced by Brecht's drama and theory, and Augusto Boal's theatrical experiments. Ngũgĩ published his novel *Petals of Blood* about a peasant uprising 1977 in English, and immediately followed it with the play *I Will Marry* which is written and performed in a native language to reach the peasants that *Petals of Blood* and other works in English couldn't reach. These circumstances and the content of the play complicates the idea of bringing about change between his later position on art and insurrection and how he felt about the need and the means of achieving social and political change as a young writer in the seventies and early eighties of the last century.

Moreover, Ngũgĩ's play *The Trial* makes untangling the question of whether he aimed at moving people into an uprising easier. Emeka Nwabueze argues that Ngũgĩ and his partner wrote *The Trial* to incite revolution. Uwem Affiah and Patience George En believe that the strong spirit of Kimathi, the revolutionary archetype hero and his persistence in continuing the struggle as well as confidence that even if he is executed his revolutionary spirit will persist in the people till they achieve total liberation attests to the fact that the play is meant to stir an insurrection against oppression (65). Similarly, Nicolas Brown sees that "The Trial of Dedan Kimathi is not much the celebration of a



revolutionary past (although it is this too) as the call to Utopia through a revolutionary future” (60). To Brown, “Kimathi is not so much a martyr for Independence as a martyr for a peasant revolution which is still to come” (60).

The question that surfaces here is more about the nature of that revolution rather than whether these plays carry the energy of a revolution and call for one. Since a lot of evidence supports the idea of revolution in his plays, I am more inclined to think that the uprising he says he never hoped for was a violent uprising. Looks like Ngũgĩ hoped for a revolution at the level of individual edification and moral strength that are necessary for both individual and community liberation. An uprising does not have to be violent and it could be at the level of conception where people start understanding the dynamics of society and the socioeconomic power relationship that result in their marginalization and oppression. And what Ngũgĩ might have meant that he never hoped to incite is violent uprising.<sup>52</sup>

Wannous also realized that words would not materialize in praxis of immediate revolutionary action. As shown in the second chapter, Wannous gave up on political change through revolution that deposes the top for quicker reformation and started using art to influence the imagination of his readers. Ngũgĩ probably became more clear about this role of art later in his life, and that from the beginning, though his hopes were not for violent revolution, he still infused his plays with overt revolutionary energy that critics always point out, discuss and elaborate on each according to his take on the plays.

<sup>52</sup> Critics like Fashina who speak about Ngũgĩ’s Fanonism must have understood such an uprising as a violent revolution. In his article “Alienation and the revolutionary Vision in African Dramatic Literature,” Fashina describes Ngũgĩ as believer in both Marxism and Fanonism (4).

Nonetheless, Ngũgĩ and Wannous do not divorce art from the political and social praxis, but instead of focusing on immediate revolution, they started directing their focus on the imagination of the individual to achieve sociopolitical changes from the bottom up rather than through.

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