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**A Tribute in Honor of Ngugi's recent  
Demise: A Forensic Analysis of the Paradigm  
Shift to Fanonist Marxism in the Fictions of  
Ngugi wa Thiong'o**

**Anoop MP  
Dr. Usha Savithri. K**

**Abstract**

This paper systematically attempts a forensic literary survey of the paradigm shifts of the allegories and allusions in the fictions of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, with a particular emphasis on his complex assessment of Christianity as both a spiritual and colonial force on the occasion of his demise on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2025. This analysis finds three diverse stages in Ngugi's narrative representation of Christian religion—from ambivalence to open agitation. The article uncovers how Ngugi employs Christian allusions and allegories—such as martyrdom, prophecy, and moral betrayal—not only to depict colonial injustices but also to provide a radical re-articulation of African identity through socialist and Marxist outlines. Christian themes are reinterpreted as tools of both resistance and critique, revealing the tensions between African conventionalism, colonial modernity, and post-independence neocolonial realities. Through references to Fanonist Marxism, historical redrafting, and spiritual allegory, Ngugi alters the Bible from an instrument of imperial control into a disputed site of ideological struggle. This study ultimately stresses that Ngugi's fictions present Christian discourse to dramatize the psychological

and material decolonization of African consciousness, concluding in a literary theology of liberation deeply ingrained in historical materialism. This paper is a scientific attempt to find out the differences of allusions and allegories flavoured in the fictions with two paradigm shifts of ideologies.

**Keywords;** Allegories, Allusions, Marxism and Fanonist Marxism, Colonial Bourgeoisie, Subjugation.

## **Introduction**

Religious texts are abundant sources of inspiration for literature and revolutions in history. There are innumerable pieces of writings in literature which borrow its essence from the religious texts of the world. So, the contribution of religious texts towards literature is indescribable. Religious texts are the books that explicate the existence of God through human intelligible forms and language. The divine truths buried in these scriptures are excavated and explained through various allegories and allusions which convey in a more fathomable way. The exegesis of divine myths and truths are devised through various literary allusions and allegories. Allusions and allegories play a crucial role in every religion to explicate the religious truths and myths.

Bible is the richest source of allusions and allegories right from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It spans from the story of creation to the apocalyptic literature of Revelation, the Bible's final book. Jesus in the gospels is the person who imparted all of his teachings through various parables and allegories. The four gospels of the Bible abound with imagery, parables, and allegories. Ngugi extensively used these Biblical parables and allegories to reach his largely illiterate African audience. The deepest and unintelligible divine truths are communicated to the people in a simple language of their familiar backgrounds by the usage of imageries and allegories.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o was heavily influenced by the Christian religion, and he was reared and baptized in the same and was also given adequate catechesis of the religious teachings of the same (Thiong'o, 1994). Christianity has shaped the thought pattern of him in his earlier periods but later we notice that he was slipped from the thought pattern of Christianity with the influence of Marx and Fanon.

Even amid these influences, Ngugi cleverly adapts Christian allusions and allegories in his novels, employing a two-phase understanding that his target audience—the village peasantry and Christianized folk—would readily grasp (Thiong'o 1981).

### **Understanding Allusions and Allegories and in Ngugi's Usage**

Allegory can be simply defined as the story within a story about which the audience is familiar, whereas allusion is the indirect reference to someone or something. It is a herculean task to make a clear and sharp semantical distinction between them, but it can be the compressed representation of name of persons, places, incidents, or things etc.... It allows the author to compress the great meaning in a phrase or a word. They are employed to flavor the oeuvre which in turn enriches the meaning of the text. Each writer is doubtlessly influenced by the social, historical, cultural, and religious background of his age, and the allegories and allusions of that age are picked up by him to communicate effectively. It is quite normal for the narrator sometimes to render the service of Christian idioms, which the audience in their immediate environment is familiar with, although they cannot be easily reconciled with the content of their work. The primacy of making the desired impact must have necessitated this as in much of Ngugi's fiction (Okunoye, 2001).

Evidently, Christianity remained a constant subject throughout Ngugi's writing career. His use of Biblical idioms and imagery, as well as his treatment of Christianity as a marker of ideological development, underscores this focus (Andindilile 2017, 42). But it will be immature to label him as a religious writer per se which he does not want to be. He immersed himself in employing the Bible and its images as literature and rhetoric instruments rather than to espouse the faith (Andindilile, 2017).

Kenya being a country with staunch Christian basis and the people who are familiar and sentimental with its Biblical imageries, Ngugi twists them to converse with them of the corrupted socio-political scenario that gripped around him. He condemns and even ridicules the practice of Christianity on the one hand and on the other hand has no hesitation whatsoever about evoking Christian imagery in a very vociferous way. In this respect, Ngugi turns the weapon that

was employed to oppress the Africans during colonialism and neo-colonialism in post-independence Kenya to criticize any kind of exploitation (Andindilile, 2017).

Even as Ngugi distances himself from Christianity, he continues to employ Christian allegories in his later novels to critique the socio-political landscape. For example, in *The Trail of Dedan Kimathi*, the person of Kimathi is portrayed as a Christ-like figure, symbolizing the fight for liberation (Okunoye, 2001). Ngugi also critiques the weaponization of Christianity in Africa, suggesting that the Bible was used as an instrument of both colonization and oppression, particularly in the subjugation of women (Haruna, 2022). In *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi articulates through Munira that Biblical prophecy is used to naturalize the resistance and to justify suppressing strikes, and housewives' protests: "They trusted too much in the wisdom of this world they would not open the book of God to see that these things had been prophesied" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1991, p. 43). This complex relationship with Christianity in Ngugi's works reflects a nuanced approach: while he rejects colonial Christianity, he acknowledges its cultural impact and uses its symbols to address African liberation (Lovesey, 2015). But occasionally we find some of the characters identify themselves with the persecuted disciples in the Bible as in the case of Munira; "Murder was not *irio* [food] or *njohi* [beer]...Peter and Paul...in jail hearing voices from the Lord" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1991, p. 43).

Ngugi's early works, particularly *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*, display an ambivalent stance toward Christianity. Amoko (2010) views that Ngugi affirms the prophetic lineage of indigenous seers while also using this imagery to foreshadow colonial violence, as seen in the prophecy of Mugo wa Kibiro. James Ogude (1999) emphasizes how these early novels reflect the possibilities of a syncretic culture—one that seeks to reconcile Christian and African worldviews. The heroes in these novels are caught in moral dilemmas, attempting to mediate between antagonistic traditions.

### **Colonial Alignment of Christianity in Kenya**

At the very outset, one might ask: Is Ngugi against Christianity? The answer would be that he is not at all against the

Christian dogmata but the institution of church and its misrepresentation by the European colonizer in those colonial days. Ngugi saw Christianity as an integral capitalist project of brainwashing Kenyans (Biersteker & Gikandi, 2018). Critiques questioned Ngugi's stand on his membership in any church as a believer, but he later denies it publicly (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981). He even removes the Christian reminiscent of his identity—"James Ngugi"—for Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Siundu and Wegesa, 2010). Ngugi identified Christianity with colonialism and the inversion formed out of it pushed him to criticize the hypocrisy of the religion. The religion preached about forgiveness and love but the white missionaries snatched the lands and suppressed the indigenous people. He also blames the White man's religion for alienating the natives from their ancestral tradition, and culture. He doubted the impartial God of the Whites who racially discriminated them (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981). Ngugi elucidates it in *The River Between*: "Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1965, p.20). He associates the colonial master with those armed with Bible and sword (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1994). According to him, Christianity "... had always been used by the colonial system to rationalize inequalities; the colonial state encouraged that brand of Christianity that abstracted heaven from earthly struggles" (Haruna, 2022, p. 5). Ngugi through his article identifies church as the right hand of the ruthless ruler who continually exploits the colonized and its allegiance to the perpetuation of slavery (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981).

### **Ngugi, Marxism and Frantz Fanon (Fanonist Marxism)**

Marxism—which has fired and triggered many revolutions worldwide—famously condemns religion as "the opium of the people." Marx's idea of God as the projection of alienated human beings, whereby God grows rich as humanity grows poor, forms its core critique. Its disappearance is the necessary pre-condition for any radical amelioration of social conditions (McLellan, 1987).

Ngugi was considerably influenced by Frantz Fanon and his concept of violence for decolonization (Gordon, 2015). Fanon was in turn shaped by Marx's ideas but took them further, moving beyond class consciousness as liberation's trigger toward militant Marxism,

where violence becomes the primary solution. (Gibson, 2020). Fanon believed and professed that “Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them. Without that struggle, without that knowledge of the practice of action, there is nothing but a fancy-dress parade and the blare of the trumpets” (Fanon, 1991, p. 146). It is not secret that Ngugi was exposed to the works of Marx and Fanon and the general influence of a group of cohort scholars that were of African descent when he attended Leeds University. Reading Fanon, especially, must have changed the perspectives of Ngugi on several matters, including the use of violence in the name of liberation, as well as the essence of neocolonialism. The critical attitude of Fanon to the national bourgeoisie and his anticipation of their neocolonial mindset are resonated in the postcolonial fiction of Ngugi as well as the concept of violence accepted by Fanon as a cardinal rule in the decolonization process.

Fanonism is a combination of psychoanalysis and Marxian-cum-Hegelian dialects applied to the colonial situation from inside the colony (Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 2012). Fanon takes an uncompromising attitude toward religion and writes: “The colonialist bourgeoisie is helped in its work of calming down the natives by the inevitable religion. All those saints who have turned the other cheek, who have forgiven trespasses against them, and who have been spat on and insulted without shrinking are studied and held up as examples” (Fanon, 1991, p. 66). This perspective is reflected throughout his fiction.

### **Pre Fanonist Ngugi**

Ngugi’s first three novels namely *The River Between*, *Weep Not Child* and *A Grain of Wheat* share identical ideologies (Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1981), and we notice a mild attitude of Ngugi towards religion. Ngugi employed the images and allegories from Christianity, and he was not strongly against the religion of the Whites. During this phase, he upheld the view that salvation and liberation can be attained through education (Lovesey, 2015). The novel *The River between* incorporates several Biblical figures into it. We come across the protoevangelium of Isaiah is used as “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Ngugi wa Thiong’o,

1965, p. 29) where the protagonist himself is depicted as the incarnation of Christian God. The cultural morality is defined by the Christian faith especially in the case of circumcision as inappropriate to a daughter of God (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1965, p. 23). The scapegoat of circumcision, Muthoni dies with the vision of Jesus which blends Christ-vision with tribal faith (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1965, pp. 74-75). The early novels of Ngugi have high appreciation of Christian images and parallelisms.

The protagonist of *Weep not, Child* Njoroge equates the Gikuyu people with the Israelites who lost their land and are in exile. The leader of Mau Mau movement Jomo Kenyatta is allegorized as "Black Moses" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1969, pp. 77-80). Njoroge; the protagonist is very fond of Biblical narratives such as David, Job, young Jesus, Sermon on the Mount and even he imagines harmonious concept of God walking with Gikuyu and Mumbi as Adam and Eve (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1969, pp. 77-78). Even Njoroge prays to Christian God in the phase of adversaries; "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, help Thy children" amid family strife (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1969, p. 83). So, all these instances from the text demonstrate that the earlier novels of Ngugi had a great enchantment to Christianity where he tries to harmonize Christianity with tribal faith. The allusions and allegories which were employed, never had an atheistic or Marxist connotation.

The previous novels of Ngugi had aimed at capturing the moods and emotions of the people and the land as he had explained to his interlocutors in 1964 and by the 1970s, he was contemplating upon how art could be turned into a tool of knowledge and social transformation. His initial narratives were premised on the romance of African or Gikuyu culture popularized by nationalists in Kenya since the 1920s. Ngugi's early novels had dramatized the process by which cultural nationalists sought to appropriate and nativize colonial institutions. So that his art and his thought might be made out of what he himself was later to describe as a crisis, Ngugi had to re-write the history of colonialism and nationalism in such a manner that he might re-think his own relation to the past and re-assess his project within the political and symbolic economy of neo-colonialism. The values

promoted by the church - hard work, thrift, and education - were central to the ethics promoted in Ngugi's early works (Gikandi, 2009).

### **Post Fanonist Ngugi**

In the life of Ngugi, we witness some kind ideological shift persuaded by Fanonist Marxism in which the Christian images and allegories have been mutated to enhance nuance of the class struggle. This is evidently visible in *A Grain of Wheat* where General R.'s Bible interrogation exposes Mugo: "He shall judge the poor of the people...and shall break in pieces the oppressor" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1967, p. 27). This is a quote from Psalm 72 which is underlined in red color which evokes the revolutionary symbolism in the readers. In this connection, we observe that the ideological change, finding its expression in subsequent modifications of the initial text influences the way Ngugi uses the Bible as intertext.

Ngugi opines that "Marx made me reflect on many things including my conception of history and narrative practice" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 2012, chap. 1). How radical and ideologically hardened Ngugi has become is evident in his later novels especially *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*; the Gikuyu intermediate novels. One of the examples goes like this; "A Day comes when brother shall give up brother, a mother her son, when you and I have heard the call of a nation in turmoil," nuancing Biblical sacrifice while promoting Fanonist violence and Marxist collective struggle against colonial oppression. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1967, p. 19). Here the Biblical words are inverted to arouse the spirit of revolution. It is generally agreed among scholars of his work, that Ngugi's stories which were composed after his graduate education experience at Leeds University were greatly affected by his introduction there to Marxism and to the postcolonial theoretical texts of Fanon (Biersteker & Gikandi, 2018).

The epigraph in his novel from I Corinthians 15:36—"that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it dies"—recasts resurrection as Mau Mau sacrifice: "Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity...is Christ" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1967, p.110). Unlike Andindilile's spiritual reading, this reveals Ngugi's Fanonist pivot: Christian grain becomes Marxist class weapon. Ngugi's ideological evolution is evident in his shift from early explorations of cultural

synthesis to a more radical Marxist critique in his later works. His early novels grapple with the conflict between Christian converts and traditionalists, but his posterior works, particularly after his engagement with Marxist thinkers like Fanon, focus on class struggle and the exploitation of the poor in a postcolonial society (Gibson, 2020; McLellan, 1987). His embrace of Marxism is reflected in his commitment to revolutionary change, which, as suggested by thinkers like Fanon and Marx, involves a brutal confrontation with the material realities of oppression (Gibson, 2020; Gordon, 2015).

The transition in Ngugi's fiction is most apparent in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, where moral ambiguity gives way to open ideological conflict. Ngugi's essay *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* situates this shift: "My first three novels... were set in different phases of Kenyan history... Through them, I came to realize that I most seem to understand the inner logic of social processes when I am deep inside imaginative territory" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 2012, p. 27).

These novels mark a significant paradigm shift in which Ngugi's characters become increasingly aligned with Marxist class analysis. He urges vigilance with "Watch ye and pray," citing the Swahili proverb *Kikulacho kiko nguoni mwako* (the enemy is in your house), blending Christian prayer with calls for revolutionary unity and class betrayal awareness. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1967, p. 19). Ngugi's later heroes no longer search for reconciliation but are committed revolutionaries involved in the materialist struggle for justice. This understanding undergirds the radical tone of Ngugi's later novels, such as *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, which recast Christian allegory into revolutionary symbolism.

### **Cultural cum Class Subjugation and Christianity**

Simon Gikandi's (2009) work on *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* discusses the cultural identification of the colonized with Western religion. Ngugi's initial stories are to be understood as part of a venture where culture is decoded and converted from an agent of colonialism to a tool of liberating the nation. In *The River Between*, culture, its contested meaning and effect, served as the battleground between the colonial invader and the invaded, also among the colonial subjects

themselves. The 1930s saw a shift, with new forms of culture emerging to challenge colonialism. Ngugi's narrative serves as a critique, highlighting the failure of Christianity to support nationalism, while simultaneously trying to reinterpret Christian values in the phase of African socialism.

In *Decolonising the Mind*, Thiong'o (1994) analyzes the colonial trajectory that bulldozed indigenous and aboriginal culture, systematically devaluing African art, religion, and history while canonizing colonial language and culture. The Christian missionaries, in their ardent zeal to "civilize" the natives, anathemized native culture as devilish, a programme that was scheduled by the colonial regime. This custom of cultural conquest continues to be an echoing theme in Ngugi's critique of colonial framework, as he highlights the tragic irony of the church's alignment with imperial masters rather than with the oppressed masses.

Church is represented in the later novels as an institution which perpetuates inequality. In *Devil on the Cross*, Mireri wa Mikiraa invokes heavenly ranks to justify inequality: "God sits on the throne. On his right side stands his only Son. On his left side stands the Holy Spirit...one rank standing below another" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987, p. 78). This satirizes Christianity's role in perpetuating class oppression, shifting from *Grain of Wheat's* Mau Mau typology to Devil's Devil Feast inversion. A staunch criticism is brought against the church as the pacifier of revolution which is echoed in the verses: Kimeendeeri's farm churches preach: "Blessed are they that mourn...Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987, p. 134). A close reading of it reveals Ngugi's shift that beatitudes are weaponized to pacify laborers. Ngugi again blames Christianity that it substitutes metaphor for material justice which he points out in the later novel of *Petals of Blood* as: "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have...the bread and fish of Jesus" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1991, pp. 147-148) and "The Bible is then clearly against a life of idleness and begging...henceforth he was to work and sweat" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1991, p. 144). This is a mockery reply by Rev. Brown to the famine hit people and he strangely thinks poverty as the outcome of laziness than structural exploitation.

The posterior works of Ngugi, for example *Petals of Blood* and *A Grain of Wheat*, radiate a deepening critique of Christianity's role disenchantment of nativism in postcolonial Africa. In *Homecoming*, he describes how Christianization paved the way for rejecting African customs and values, thereby adopting a corrupted European middle-class lifestyle. The Church not only staunchly opposed the native Mau Mau movement for African liberation but also actively supported the colonial powers (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981). Kihika's sermon in *A Grain of Wheat* weaponizes Biblical rhetoric: "We went to their church...When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1967, p.18). This extract justifies colonial character and the reason of disenchantment toward church. In his later novels, Christian imagery becomes a tool for exposing the failures of both pre- and post-independence governments. Christianity became a tool to divide the people than unite them which leads Karega to reject the faith in *Petals of Blood*. Munira contrasts unrest with evangelism: "Karega...had rejected...the most important brotherhood...of religion, of being born anew in the Lord" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1991, p. 43).

### **Allegory, Prophecy, and Redemptive Violence: Literary Tools for Liberation**

Ngugi uses literary mechanisms—such as allegory, allusion, and prophecy—not only to dramatize psychological decolonization but also to envision material liberation. In this way, his novels engage in a "forensic" redrafting of history, dismantling the colonial archive and archetypes and rebuilding it through indigenous and socialist perspectives. The parable of the prodigal child in the Bible is symbolically rewritten with an anticapitalist echo. Gatuiria in *Devil on the Cross* does not want to reconcile with the capitalist father: "Apart from money, what else is worth struggling for?" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987, pp. 132–133). This filial rupture allegorizes prodigal's homecoming as anticapitalist awakening. The parable of the talents in the Bible is interpreted in the sense of exploitation by capitalist trade: Mireri recasts parable of talents for comprador theft: "He that had received the five talents went and traded...made five talents more" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987, p. 98).

Apollo Obonyo Amoko's (2010) reading of prophecy in Ngugi's fiction shows how traditional modes of knowledge (e.g., prophecy and oral history) are reinterpreted as historical tools of resistance. These techniques become essential in reclaiming African futurity beyond colonial temporality. Furthermore, in *Globalectics*, Thiong'o (2012) acknowledges that literature helped him better understand the forces of globalization than direct political analysis did. This underscores the dialectical power of fiction as both imaginative and ideological praxis.

In aligning with Fanonist principles, Ngugi transforms the Bible—from a colonial instrument into a contested ideological battleground, revealing the contradictions in both Christian morality and colonial logic. The revolutionary concept of shedding blood is mixed up with the Christian concept of Eucharist: “Take, eat, this is my body...Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood” (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987, pp. 190–191). Ngugi subverts sacrament into Kimecndeer's blood-milking, proving original analysis: Christian ritual becomes Marxist allegory for worker exploitation. His later works embody a literary theology of liberation, where salvation lies not in spiritual submission but in revolutionary awakening.

## **Conclusion**

Through his complex use of Christian allegory and allusion, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's literary journey symbolizes a fundamental reconsideration of the cultural, spiritual, and ideological legacy of colonialism. His early books depict the agonizing turmoil of Gikuyu identity and Western religiosity, reflecting the internal conflicts of a people divided between imported faiths and indigenous customs. However, as Ngugi's political and ideological beliefs mature stronger—particularly as a result of Marxism and anti-colonial intellectuals like Fanon—his writings start to characterize Christianity as a tool of neocolonial dictatorship. He carefully crafts the Christian allegories and allusions to portray the stark atrocities of colonialism. The reason for his selection lies in the familiarity of his target audience, who know little beyond Biblical narratives.

Ngugi's constant use of Christian symbolism is a retrieval of narrative power rather than a rejection of spirituality. He puts African voices back at the forefront of their own recovery narratives by using multi-layered allegories and cultural references. Thus, the storyline of Ngugi's literature becomes a departure to origins that were never really lost, simply silenced, and a creative act of decolonization as well as a spiritual and intellectual homecoming. Ngugi's greatness and brilliance lie in the fact that he used the same weapon against the colonizers that had once served as their spiritualized tool of colonization.

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