

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Ngugi Wa Thiongo of course requires little, if any introduction. His interview with Enekwe was originally recorded more than fifteen years ago when he last visited Nigeria. The fortunes of the exiled novelist have however not changed much over the years, neither his politics, nor those of his beloved land, Kenya, which provides the setting for all of Ngugi's creations.

Ngugi and Enekwe were to meet yet again, this time on the staff of the New York University where until last year they both taught Performing Arts in the Department of Comparative Literature. It afforded Ngugi the opportunity to revise the transcript - whose ideas are not significantly amended - and we have the privilege of printing for the first time.

G

R: Anybody who is familiar with your work will not fail to notice that you have been consistently concerned about the condition of people in Kenya: One, the impact of colonialism, the advent or coming of the white man; two, the economic exploitation of Africans by Europeans; three, the economic exploitation of Africans by Africans. What is your attitude to your work before *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*?

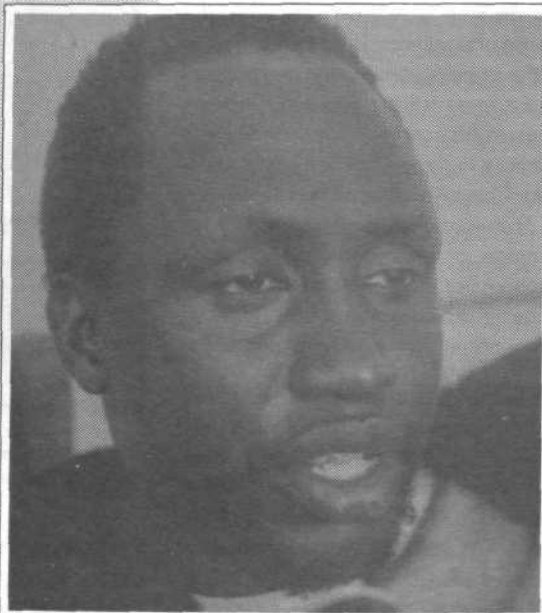
NGUGI: I have been concerned with imperialism in Kenya in its two stages: the colonial and the neo-colonial. Imperialism is a total phenomenon - an economic, a political and a cultural phenomenon. So, its impact on the people tends to be all embracing. So, we can say that the struggle against imperialism is also total: it's economic, it's political and it is also cultural. Writings by Africans then needs to be seen in that context. I would say that my earlier work like *The River Between* tended to be a bit more concerned with the cultural aspect of imperialism but to the near exclusion of economic aspects. And in *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood* and in my latest work, I try to see imperialism in all its aspects - economic, political and cultural, and see all the aspects of the struggle against the same.

GR: What do you think you achieved in your first novels *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*?

NGUGI: Well, the struggles against

We Are All Learning from History

All Ngugi photographs by Ossie Enekwe



INTERVIEW WITH NGUGI WA THIONGO

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cultural imperialism are very important, since they tend to deal with the liberation of the mind, liberation of the soul, if you like. So, any novel that contributes, even a bit, towards that cultural struggle is important. *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child* did contribute their bit towards an appreciation of this struggle against cultural imperialism. However, *The River Between* tends to exclude economic and political factors. This contributes to its weakness. The world-view in the novel is

idealistic. It does not see sufficiently that values are rooted in political and economic realities.

GR: Could you, then, say that *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood* are reflecting a new ideological perspective?

NGUGI: There is a definite shift in the two novels, particularly in the *Petals of Blood*. I consider *A Grain of Wheat* to be a transitional novel in the ideological sense. It stands between my two novels (*The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*) and my later works, like *Petals of Blood* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. I feel that there is a shift of emphasis in the sense that I tried to look at the different aspects of the African journey of emancipation from slavery, colonialism to neo-colonialism. There is, for instance, in *Petals of Blood*, an examination of the class structure in African societies and the the class struggles that are inherent in that kind of structure. Now my previous works rarely show the class character of African societies.

GR: How did you get to this stage?

NGUGI: My involvement with the conditions in Kenya, particularly in the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi. I was lucky to be in a department which had brilliant scholars who were continually asking themselves about the relevance of literature to life and particularly to the Kenyan situation. In the course of my stay in that department, we collectively tried to work out how the study of literature could be made more relevant to the Kenyan situation. We tried to devise a new syllabus of literature for the University and for the schools in Kenya. Again, in asking ourselves questions about the relevance of literature to life, we held public lectures at

the University of Nairobi and these lectures were very useful because of the types of debates and discussions generated. Again, still in the pursuit of that objective of 'Making Literature Relevant to Life', we established the *University of Nairobi Free Public Theatre*, which travelled all over the country during the long vacation. So, I would say that my involvement in the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi was very important in my own ideological development.

GR: In *Petals of Blood*, we come across a young lawyer, a man of ideas, who seems to be an ideologue of the group. He articulates the ideas of the revolution. Considering what happened in Kenya at the time (or before) you wrote *Petals of Blood*, are the activities of the lawyer and the young people in the book similar to what you have in Kenya? Do they reflect the situation in Kenya?

NGUGI: Yes, the lawyer's views do reflect the ideological position of a certain class. Kenya is a class structured society with different classes standing in different positions vis-a-vis the forces of production and vis-a-vis the forces of imperialism. There is the comprador bourgeoisie that actively collaborates with foreign economic interests. There is also a national bourgeoisie, which is very tiny, very rudimentary. By this I mean, that class of Kenyans that try to operate a national capitalism. I don't think that foreign capital will ever allow for a liberated national capitalism. Then there is a petty-bourgeois class in Kenya, comprising small traders, farmers, teachers, etc. And finally, peasants and workers. These classes are basically economic, but they do have their ideological reflections. They, that is, these classes, have their ideological spokesmen. In other words, there is an ideological position that corresponds to the

economic position of each class. I would say that the lawyer's position represents not necessarily the ideological mind of the working class, but patriotic nationalism of a national bourgeoisie.

GR: We don't know how you came about the character of Wanjia. We think she is a very powerful person and we see such a character in *God's Bits of Wood* by Ousmane Sembene. They are of the same upbringing and similar experience. Were you trying to create that character (Wanjia) deliberately or were you trying to portray what could have happened? Did you want this character to carry some message?

NGUGI: Well, I have always been interested in the position of women in Africa. I feel

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that we can never talk of total liberation of Africa unless the woman is also completely liberated. That the success of our liberation should be measured by the extent to which the African woman is liberated. I am interested in the women struggles and in the position that the Kenyan woman occupy in the history of our country. One of

our earliest nationalist leaders was in fact a woman Mekatilili a Giriama from the coastal parts of Kenya. She organised coastal nationalities in a struggle against the British occupation of Kenya in the early part of this century. She was old - about sixty years old or more - but she organised the youth, gave them the oath of unity. She armed them and they started fighting against the British. Later, she was arrested and imprisoned many, many miles from her home area. She escaped from prison and walked all the way about three hundred miles back to her people to continue the struggle. In 1924, Harry Thuku who was then the leader of the working class in Kenya was detained without trial by the British. It was a woman,



Mary Nyanjiru Muthon, who organised a demonstration demanding his release. It turned out to be one of the biggest demonstrations that had ever been seen in Kenya. Demonstrators marched to the government house demanding the release of their leader. Nyanjiru was the first to be shot by the British along with a hundred and fifty other workers. In the fifties, again, the Kenyan woman played a very important role in the

kitchen, in the forest, feeding the guerrillas and even in fighting. Some of the fiercest guerrilla fighters among the Mau Mau were women. Some were sent to the detention camps, others to ordinary prisons and so on. The Kenyan woman has played a very very important role in the Kenyan history. And a novelist cannot ignore this particular role.

GR: In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, what you are trying to do is to create the role of woman as not only the mother, but also a leading figure in the revolution. I think that it is a very important play. Can you please say a few

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words about the role of that woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, especially in relation to the girl and the boy?

NGUGI: Well, as you know, I wrote this play together with Micere Mugo, a colleague in the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi. Now, and we try also to show the need for total liberation. We show the role of the Kenyan woman in Kenyan history. The woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is important in the sense that she carries a revolutionary consciousness. She can see much more than the boy and the girl can see. In the forest, she can see a bit more than some of the other guerrillas can see. So, she is important in the play as a carrier, if you like, of this revolutionary consciousness.

GR: Can you compare Wanja to this woman in the *Trial of Dedan Kimathi*?

NGUGI: Well, I'd say they are different. The woman in *Dedan Kimathi* is much more conscious of her political role, much more conscious of the need for a revolutionary change in Kenyan society. I'd say that Wanja is not as politically conscious as this particular woman in the play. Wanja has revolutionary energy, without a revolutionary consciousness. I think this is the difference in the two.

GR: So what you are saying is that Wanja has a potential for a revolutionary role through experience. How could she develop to become like the woman?

NGUGI: It is a potentiality, of course. In that sense, I am more concerned with the waste of women in a neo-colonial society. Their energy is often imprisoned, if you like, between the bed and the kitchen. Society is the loser for imprisoning or confining women to that position. Take it this way, since women form half of the population of the country, if you imprison their total abilities, you are in fact imprisoning the abilities of the population as a whole.

GR: It seems that the main achievement of the woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is inculcating revolutionary awareness in the young people, and also in unifying the people; it appears that you in fact introduced her symbolically as a kind of Mary in the trial of Jesus Christ. Did you want to use the figure of Mary as a kind of symbol here?

NGUGI: We were not conscious of the parallel. I didn't see that parallel myself, but of course, another reader may well see it. It does not mean that parallel is not there. But we were not conscious of it in writing the play. The play carries our belief that Kenya and Africa would be liberated the time African women become fully politically conscious. The moment they become politically conscious, then things will happen in Africa. And the woman figure is a symbol for these potentialities in the Kenyan and African women.

GR: You seem to be using the Bible in your writing, even in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. It appears that you see the trial as a parody of the trial Jesus underwent.

NGUGI: As I said before,

we were not very conscious of these parallels. Now, about the Biblical references in my works, this is not accidental, because for a long time as a child, the Bible was my only literature. The Bible is the one book which is available in nearly all the African languages. It is a common literary heritage. And so, it is quite natural that if I want to make references which will be recognized, I will go to the Bible. I make the same kind of use of traditional stories, proverbs, riddles, etc. In other words, the Bible is part and parcel of the literary framework within which I have been writing.

GR: So that explains why in every book you have written there are quotes from the Bible. But one can see a definite shift in your attitude to the Bible as from *A Grain of Wheat*, and definitely, in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. In the latter, for example, you consistently undercut certain ideas in the Bible. Does this correspond to the shift in your ideological position?

NGUGI: Yes, it's definitely part of this shift that we talked about earlier. Obviously my recent works have become more critical, not of the Bible, but of Christianity as a whole. So, you are quite right, Christianity is much more critically examined in *Petals of Blood* than it was, let's say, in *The River Between*. Even in *A Grain of Wheat*, I think, Christianity is not held in an uncritical light.

GR: So what exactly is your response to Christianity right now in relation to the whole struggle?

NGUGI: Well, in all my writings, especially in *Homecoming*, I have been very critical of the role that Christianity has played in the colonisation of the African people. I have taken the position that Christianity was part and parcel of cultural imperialism. Even at a very simple level of symbolism, we can see

how Christianity weakened African people. If you look at the Christian imagery of God and Satan, as the devil is seen in terms of blackness. So in pictures in most churches God was displayed as being white; angels were white and of course, people who went to heaven eventually wore white robes of purity. The devils and their angels wear black. African people then were seen as sons of Ham who were cut away from God. African Christians were made to sing songs like: *Wash Me Redeemer, I Shall Be Whiter Than Snow*. Quite apart from that, the Bible was used by the missionaries to preach the doctrine of non-violence, the doctrine of turn the other cheek once the other cheek has been hit by your enemy, the doctrine of giving your enemy the inner garment after he has already taken your outer garment; the doctrine, if you like, of your giving Caesar things that are Caesar's, etc. These meant colonial Caesar, etc. You can see that some of these doctrines are designed to weaken African people in the face of imperialist exploitation and oppression. Christianity and the Bible were part and parcel of the doctrine of pacification of the primitive tribes of lower Africa. This doctrine of nonviolence is a contrast to the doctrine of struggle, of resistance to foreign aggression,

foreign exploitation and foreign occupation of our people's country.

GR: You just mentioned the pacification of the primitive tribes and immediately one remembered Captain Winterbottom in Chinua Achebe's book. I also see Winterbottom in *Kimathi* and Mr. Smith too. Is this part of or a continuation of the joke as we see Winterbottom, one of the British soldiers tried in *Dedan Kimathi*?

NGUGI: Well, yes, it is a continuation of the joke. It is a very appropriate name for this category of people. It is also a kind of intertextual dialogue with Achebe's work.

GR: Also, is the Smith there in a way related to the Smith in *Arrow of God*?

NGUGI: Novels like *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* have now become part of our common heritage. Borrowing the name consciously or unconsciously is part of the intertextual communication.

GR: We suppose you would place *The Black Hermit* in the same group as your early works, *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*, in terms of their attitude to revolution?

NGUGI: Yes, that play belongs to that period, the period of *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*. I would say that the play is not as politically clear as, let's say, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* or in my plays in Gikuyu language. The ideological position in *The Black Hermit* is a bit hazy; it is misty; it is not clear and is one of the shortcomings of that particular play.

GR: Apart from the ideological problem in *The Black*



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Hermit, what other problems do you find in the play? For instance, the problem of structure?

NGUGI: It has got some weaknesses. As you know, it's one of my earliest plays and I was then not as much involved in the theatre as I have come to be. There are a lot of weaknesses in structure, in characterization, in the whole dramatic movement of the play. But remember, ideological mistiness and haziness can also ruin the structure of a play or a novel. It is this ideological haziness or mistiness in certain levels that weakens the play.

GR: So what you are saying is that in fact, it is not possible to write a play that is structurally correct unless the idea is also correct?

NGUGI: The idea and the tone have to be clear. The clarity of idea, or clarity of content often brings about the clarity of structure. But whenever the central idea is not clear, it leads to the general unclarity of content and structure.

GR: So in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* this problem has been dealt with as it is essentially a very ideological work. What you achieve there is to deal with the ideological question more conclusively and more effectively. We refer to some of the problems you have been talking about in other works. Even though it's a short script, you have succeeded in bringing the whole problem to life. Would this be an accurate assessment?

NGUGI: Yes. I would say that the central ideas in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are much more clear than it was in the previous plays. But remember that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was a work of two hands, two minds.

GR: You talked about the theatre group that moved round

the country in Kenya, the one that travelled from your department in the University. What did you learn from those tours, from the people?

NGUGI: The group was called the *University of Nairobi Free Travelling Theatre*. I was not myself individually part of the travelling troupe. That is, I did not travel with it, but it was part of our departmental programme. It was led by teachers like John Rugando and Waigwo who were involved in theatre in the department. This 'Free Travelling Theatre' was instrumental in my later interest in having a theatre based in villages. In other words, some of us came to the conclusion that while the travelling troupe was important, theatre could never take root in Kenya unless it was based in the villages and towns with the people themselves writing their own scripts and performing them themselves. It is this kind of idea that was behind

play. Some would hire buses, others public transport to come and see the play which was obviously reflecting their own history, their own lives. You, of course, know that the play was later stopped by Kenyan authorities and I was subsequently detained in prison without trial.

GR: Would you like to tell me what happened in the night or day of performance of the *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. How did the audience respond?

NGUGI: As I said, the audience was very enthusiastic. Some of them had followed the production from the initial stages of rehearsal right through the formal presentation. They were part of the play.

GR: You mean the peasants who were not directly involved



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the setting up of 'Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre', based in a village called Kamiriithu in Limuri that is twenty miles from Nairobi. Members had been present at some performances of the *University of Nairobi Free Travelling Theatre*. And they were the ones who asked for a play to perform. This resulted in my collaboration with Ngũgĩ Wa Miri in the writing of a play in Gikuyu called *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. The play was written in 1977 and performed the same year for these people in the same village. The standard of performance was very high indeed. All the actors were peasants and workers from the area. The impact they made on the people was also very significant indeed. Peasants and workers would travel for miles and miles to come and see the

with the acting

NGUGI: They were involved in everything. Yes, they added to the script. The production had done a number of things which were a departure from tradition. For instance, the readings were all open to the public. The selection of actors again was done in the open. So, right from the beginning we had audiences. And the audiences grew with the growth of the production. And still, many of them later came in as part of the fee paying crowd. The performances reflected an ever increasing audience. The people who came to see the play were growing day in and day out. And anybody who had seen the play before would still come to see the play a second, third, fourth, or fifth time. I know some who were with the play right

through all the rehearsals and right through all the performances. So, these were anticipating lines from actors. They knew the whole play by heart and they knew what the actor was going to say. If an actor missed his lines, they would correct him. By the way, the rehearsals and the performances were so arranged as to keep in line with the rhythm of life in the village. That is, the rehearsals took into account the working pattern of the peasants and workers. The rehearsals were only done in those periods when these workers were not going to be all that busy in their homes. The formal performances for instance, were never done at night. They were done in daytime, mostly in the afternoons of Sundays and Saturdays, but towards the end, you could find all the performances on Sundays only. The theatre was open, of course, in the heart of the village and incidentally the whole theatre with the stage was built by the people themselves.

GR: What type of structure did they construct?

NGUGI: They had a raised stage, but it had no curtains or roof. Behind the stage, there were rooms where the actors could change their dresses, etc. There were no walls separating the actors from the audience. The audience could see the actors coming in or getting out of stage. They had built their seats for the audience. The type of seats you see in a stadium so that people who sit in front would not obstruct the view of those sitting at the back.

GR: How would you describe the response of the audience during the performance?

NGUGI: Very, very enthusiastic. I can remember a number of times when the rain fell, but instead of going to their homes, people sat back or

sheltered themselves in nearby huts to wait for the rain to subside. The actors would rush back to the stage, and the whole audience would return to their seats to see the continuation of the play. So even during the formal performances, when they were paying entrance fees, the audience was still very very enthusiastic. And as I said, the audiences came from afar and not only the peasants and workers from the village, but people also trekked from distances of well over a hundred miles to come and see the play. They came on foot, in hired buses, etc.

GR: What exactly do you think made them do so?

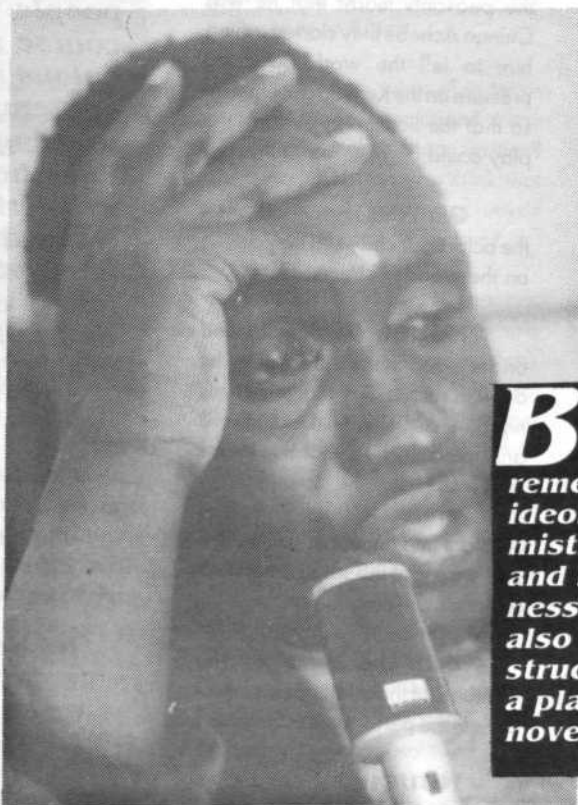
NGUGI: As I said, the play correctly reflected their history and their lives. And for the first time, the peasants and the workers could see themselves reflected on the stage, not in a negative light, but in a positive manner. They saw themselves being portrayed as the true makers of history which, of course, they are. So I would say that the content was very important in eliciting this kind of response, as well as the standard of performance. Some people, critics, doubted whether these were really peasants. They thought that these were university students dressed like village people, which of course was ridiculous and showed contempt for the working people. But, the standard of performance was

extremely high and nothing like it had ever been seen on the Kenyan stage.

GR: Did this response spill over into the community in terms of discussions, reactions, etc?

NGUGI: Definitely, yes. We started receiving delegations from other villages for advice on how they too could start similar adventures in their own communities. So the play had an impact and effect on people in and beyond the borders of the immediate community.

GR: When you were



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detained, did these people continue to perform?

Ngugi: Their morale was very depressed by my detention. As I told you, the licence to perform the play was stopped by the government. So these people could not continue with the play.

What they did, however, was to continue with their singing. When I came from detention, a year later, I found that they had brought out two records of the songs they had been composing when I was in detention in the Maximum security jail.

GR: The songs were part of the play?

NGUGI: Yes, the play drew very very heavily on oral tradition, singing and dancing, etc. It was almost like a musical. So the songs they brought out were part and parcel of the play. I remember once taking Chinua Achebe around to see the village theatre and when the peasants learnt that he was Chinua Achebe they started asking him to tell the world to bring pressure on the Kenyan government so that the licence to perform the play could be restored to them.

GR: What happened when the actors danced? Did they dance on the wooden structure?

NGUGI: Yes, they danced on the wooden structure. But it was done in such a way that there was no real wall between the audience and the actors so that the actors could see and be seen by the audience, etc. There was also constant movement between the audience and the stage actors - no real wall dividing the two.

GR: Did some of the members of the audience come out to meet the performers sometimes?

NGUGI: The audience joined in singing some of the songs with which they were familiar.

GR: I would like to return to *The trial of Dedan Kimathi*. You start off with this objective of writing it around Dedan Kimathi but in fact by the time you finish the play, you have not given much attention to his history. What you have done is, in fact, to concentrate on the



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people, on the woman and the girl and then also on the dialectical confrontation between Dedan Kimathi, the Bankers and the other exploiters. Was this done purposely?

NGUGI: We saw Kimathi as being much more than an individual. We saw him as symbolizing the people, the masses, who in our view were the key makers of history. So Kimathi is not seen as an individual. He is a symbol of a collective will of the Kenyan people.

GR: So that is why, even though the play is named after him, you spend more time on the people than on Kimathi?

NGUGI: Yes, that is it.

GR: Why did you and Micere

introduce the scene where Kimathi has to deal with his brother's betrayal of him? I mean the hesitation, the doubt, the inability to take a firm decision at that time? There is a kind of indecision on the part of Dedan Kimathi once we begin to know about his mother and his brother.

NGUGI: We wanted to show the pitfalls of kinship in a revolutionary struggle. If you put kinship above the need of the revolution, you are bound to fail. But, Dedan realises that and advises his followers never to again put kinship or considerations of kinship above those of the struggle. Dedan Kimathi himself says that his brother and his sister are only those who are with him in the struggle and those who share his ideology and the revolutionary objectives.

GR: We have Dedan Kimathi of history, that is, Dedan Kimathi that we discuss in history and the one that we have read about. But you seem to have created your own Dedan Kimathi. You have made him more like a Marxist fighter. How much of the two Dedan Kimathis do you have in this play?

Ngugi: Well, the Kimathi in the play, as well as the Kimathi in history, are people who were leaders of a revolutionary struggle. Let me recommend to you a book called *Thunder from the Mountains*. The sub-title is 'Mau Mau patriotic songs'. It is edited by Maina-wa-Kinyatti and published in London by the Zed Publishers. This particular book is very important because it is a record of the songs composed by the Mau Mau guerrillas themselves. So the songs do in fact contain a correct record of the views and objectives of Mau Mau guerrilla fighters. And the songs will prove that the Dedan Kimathi of *The Trial* is closer to the

historical Kimathi. Remember that we also did a lot of research on the history of Kimathi. Micere and I even visited the place he was born. And we visited the forest from which he used to operate, and even the place where he was finally captured. We talked to the people who knew him as a child, as a teacher, and as guerrilla leader. Remember that it was not Marx who created workers and class struggles. Marx learnt from history and not history from Marx.

GR: Yes, in any case it seems to me that because of the fundamental role that economic factors play in Marxist ideology, you can say that in as far as Dedan Kimathi and the other fighters were conscious of this fundamental economic fact, they are in fact, operating within marxist ideology.

NGUGI: The workers are the producers of the wealth that they themselves have to purchase. This is true of the workers in Kenya and the workers everywhere. They want to be in control of the wealth which they have produced. And they don't need to read books to have this particular objective. It's part of their lives. It's part of their needs, it's part of their struggle, their very lives that they want to control.

GR: I would like to ask a question about *Petals of Blood*. I see that you worked on that book when you were in the Soviet Union. Do you think the novel would have been different if you had written it in Kenya?

NGUGI: The novel, *Petals of Blood*, was started when I was in Evanston in the United States, where in 1970/71, I was an Associate Professor of literature at North-Western University. But the bulk of the novel was written when I was in Kenya and only the last few chapters were finished when I was in Russia. The novel took about five years to write and four of those years were

spent in Kenya. And only one month in the Soviet Union. So it was the finishing touches which were worked out when I was in the Soviet Union.

GR: Now, when you were finishing the novel, in the Soviet Union, was there anything that happened that could have influenced the work?

NGUGI: Not necessarily. I was all by myself in a place called Yalta, on the Black Sea. I needed that particular month to be all by myself in a place where I did not know the language of the people and where I would not get any disturbance in the course of putting the finishing touches to the novel. The atmosphere at Yalta was very very peaceful. It was very peaceful, the atmosphere, very conducive to writing. It was named after the great Russian writer Chekov.

GR: Would you like to talk generally about African writers. You know that many things have been said about African Literature. What would you say, in assessment of this Literature, especially considering its growth, up to this point?

NGUGI: Let me say something about my latest book of essays called *Writers in Politics*. In this book, you will find my views on the evolution and growth of African Literature. There has been an important departure in my position. These have to do with the issues of language. I've come round to the view which was articulated in the Sixties by Obi Wali about the necessity for African writers to use our African Languages for their

creative expressions. And I have come to the view that the literature written by Africans in foreign languages like French, English, Spanish, Danish, etc falls into a category of its own. It is a misnomer to call it African literature. It can only be called Afro-European literature generally. And more particularly Afro-Saxon literature when the Literature is written by Africans in English Language, or Afro-French Literature which is written by Africans in French language. But, collectively, I would call them Afro-European literature. According to the new view, African Literature is that literature written by Africans in African languages like the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Swahili, Gikuyu, etc, languages which are indigenous to Africa.

GR: Now, what of in terms of the African revolution? How would you assess African writers? Or rather, what do you think that the African writers have achieved in terms of African revolution?

NGUGI: Well, I cannot talk about the African writers as a whole since they hold different positions vis-a-vis the African revolution, etc. But, on the whole, I think they have made an important contribution to all the cultural emancipations of the people. Although often written in a foreign language, it is still a literature that reflects the African environment and personalities, and history. And these are important. After all our children are now able to read a literature that on the whole shows the Africans in a positive light instead of the way they used to be portrayed in the novels by foreigners. But those African writers who have tried to analyse the Africans in terms of classes obviously are very significant indeed. Here, I am thinking of a writer like Osmani Sembene whose books, especially *Gods Bits of Wood* have contributed a lot towards our understanding of the struggle for total liberation of the Africans. **GR**

Remember
that it was not
Marx who created
workers and
class struggles.
Marx learnt from
history and not
history from
Marx.