A Statement

In 1977 I published Petals of Blood and said farewell to the English language as a vehicle of my writing of plays, novels and short stories. All my subsequent creative writing has been written directly in Gikuyu language; my novels Chemsa amu Mbone Njogu and Mwagamia Mte Njogu, my plays Ngashika Ndooni (written with Ng'giri wa Mirii) and Maita Njogu, and my children's books, Namiti Nene na Mbaahi i Mbaahi, Babithoora ya Njogu Nene and Njogu Nene na Gidi Kipang'ari.

However, I continued writing explanatory prose in English. Thus Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary, Writers in Politics and Barred of a Pen were all written in English.

This book, Decolonizing the Mind, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way.

However, I hope that through the age-old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all.

Introduction

This book is a summary of some of the issues in which I have been passionately involved for the last twenty years of my practice in fiction, theatre, criticism and in teaching literature. For those who have read my books Homecoming, Writers in Politics, Barred of a Pen and even Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary there may be a feeling of déjà vu. Such a reaction will not be far from the truth. But the lectures on which this book is based have given me the chance to pull together in a connected and coherent form the main issues on the language question in literature which I have touched on here and there in my previous works and interviews. I hope though that the work has gained from the insights I have received from the reactions — friendly and hostile — of other people to the issues over the same years. This book is part of a continuing debate all over the continent about the destiny of Africa.

The study of the African realities has for too long been seen in terms of tribes. Whatever happens in Kenya, Uganda, Malawi is because of Tribe A versus Tribe B. Whatever erupts in Zaire, Nigeria, Liberia, Zambia is because of the traditional enmity between Tribe D and Tribe C. A variation of the same stock interpretation is Muslim versus Christian or Catholic versus Protestant where a people does not easily fall into 'tribes'. Even literature is sometimes evaluated in terms of the 'tribal' origins of the authors or the 'tribal' origins and composition of the characters in a given novel or play. This misleading stock interpretation of the African realities has been popularised by the western media which likes to deflect people from seeing that imperialism is still the root cause of many problems in Africa. Unfortunately some African intellectuals have fallen victims — a few incurably so — to that scheme and they are unable to see the divide-and-rule colonial origins of explaining any differences of intellectual outlook or any political clashes in terms of the ethnic origins of the actors. No man or woman can choose their biological nationality. The conflicts between peoples cannot be explained in terms of that which is fixed (the invariables). Otherwise the problems between any two peoples...
would always be the same at all times and places; and further, there
would never be any solution to social conflicts except through a change
in that which is presently fixed, for example through genetic or
biological transformation of the actors.

My approach will be different. I shall look at the African realities as
they are affected by the great struggle between the two mutually
opposed forces in Africa today: an imperialist tradition on one hand,
and a resistance tradition on the other. The imperialist tradition in
Africa is today manifested by the international bourgeoisie using the
multinational and oil companies, and their legions of flag-waving
native ruling classes. The economic and political dependence of this
African neo-colonial bourgeoisie in reflected in its culture of sycophancy
and parrotry enforced on a Passive population through police boots, barbed
wire, a gowned clergy and judiciary; their ideas are spread by a corpus of state
intellectuals, the academic and journalistic laureates of the neo-colonial
establishment. The resistance tradition is being carried out by the
working people the peasantry and the proletariat aided by patriotic
students, intellectuals (academic and non-academic), soldiers and other
progressive elements of the petty middle class. This resistance is
reflected in their patriotic defence of the peasant worker roots of
national cultures, their defence on the democratic struggle in all the
nations they inhabit the same territory. Any blow against imperialist,
on matter the ethnic and regional origins of the blow, is a victory
for all anti-imperialist elements in all the nationalities. The sum total
of all these blows no matter what their weight, size, scale in time
and space makes the national heritage.

For these patriotic defenders of the fighting cultures of African
people, imperialism is not a slogan. It is a real, it is palpable in content
and form and in its methods and effects. Imperialism is the rule of
consolidated finance capital and since 1884 this monopolistic parasitic
capital has affected and continues to affect the lives of the peasants
in the remotest corners of our countries. If you are in doubt, just count
how many African countries have now been mortgaged to IMF, the
new International Ministry of Finance in which Julius Nyere once called it.

Who pays for the mortgage? Every single producer of real wealth (use
value) in the country so mortgaged, which means every single worker
and peasant. Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military,
cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world
today. It could even lead to holocaust.

The freedom for western finance capital and for the vast trans-
national monopolies under its umbrella to continue stealing from the
countries and people of Latin America, Africa, Asia and Polynesia is
now abetted, by conventional and nuclear weapons. Imperialism,
led by the USA, presents the struggling peoples of the earth, for all those
calling for peace, democracy and socialism with the ultimatums:
accept death or death.

The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance:
liberty from theft. But the biggest weapons wielded and actually daily
unleashed since imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural
bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief
in their own identity, in their languages, in their environment, in their
heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in
themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-
achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that
wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest
removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages
rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is
decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own
springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness
of struggle. Possibilities of success or victory are seen as remote,
ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a
collective death wish. Amidst this wasteland which it has created,
imperialism presents itself as the force and demands that the dependant
sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: 'Thief is holy'. Indeed,
this refrain sums up the new creed of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie in
many independent African states.

The classes fighting against imperialism even in its neo-colonial stage
and form, have to confront this threat with the higher and more
creative culture of resistant struggle. These classes have to wield even
more firmly the weapons of the struggle contained in their cultures.
They have to speak the united language of struggle contained in each of
their languages. They must discover their various tongues to sing the
song: 'A people united can never be defeated'.

The theme of this book is simple. It is taken from a poem by the
Guyanese poet John Carter in which he writes about the experience of
ordinary men and women hungering and living in rooms without lights; all those
men and women in South Africa, Namibia, Kenya, Zaire, Ivory Coast, El
Salvador, Chile, Philippines, South Korea, Indonesia, Grenada,
Farnoo's 'Wretched of the Earth', who have declared loud and clear that
they do not sleep to dream but dream to change the world.

I hope that some of the issues in this book will find echoes in your
hearts.
The Language of African Literature

The language of African literature cannot be discussed meaningfully outside the context of those social forces which have made it both an issue demanding our attention and a problem calling for a resolution.

On the one hand, imperialism in its colonial and neo-colonial phases continuously press-ganged the African hand to the plough to turn the soil over, and putting blinkers on him to make him view the gun and the sword. In other words, imperialism continues to control the economy, politics, and cultures of Africa. But on the other, and pivoted against it, are the ceaseless struggles of African people to liberate their economy, politics and culture from that Euro-American-based stronghold to usher a new era of true communal self-regulation and self-determination. It is an ever-continuing struggle to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space. The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe. Hence language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces in the Africa of the twentieth century.

The contention started a hundred years ago when in 1884 the capitalist powers of Europe sat in Berlin and carved an entire continent with a multiplicity of peoples, cultures, and languages into different colonies. It seems it is the fate of Africa to have her destiny always decided around conference tables in the metropolises of the western world; her submersion from self-governing communities into colonies was decided in Berlin; her more recent transition into neo-colonies along the same boundaries was negotiated around the same tables in London, Paris, Brussels and Lisbon. The Berlin-drawn division under which Africa is still living was obviously economic and political, despite the claims of bible-wielding diplomats, but it was also cultural. Berlin in 1884 saw the division of Africa into the different languages of the European powers. African countries, as colonies and even today as neo-colonies, came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of Europe: English-speaking, French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking African countries.

Unfortunately, writers who should have been mapping paths out of that linguistic entanglement of their continent also came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of imperialist imposition. Even at their most radical and pro-African position in their sentiments and articulation of problems they still took it as axiomatic that the resurgence of African cultures lay in the languages of Europe. I should know!

In 1962 I was invited to that historic meeting of African writers at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda. The list of participants contained most of the names which have now become the subject of scholarly dissertations in universities all over the world. The title? 'A Conference of African Writers of English Expression'.

I was then a student of English at Makerere, an overseas college of the University of London. The main attraction for me was the certain possibility of meeting Chinua Achebe. I had with me a rough typescript of a novel in progress, Weep Not, Child, and I wanted him to read it. In the previous year, 1961, I had completed The River Between, my first-ever attempt at a novel, and entered it for a writing competition organised by the East African Literature Bureau. I was keeping step with the tradition of Peter Abrahams with his output of novels and autobiographies from Path of Thunder to Tell Freedom and followed by Chinua Achebe with his publication of Things Fall Apart in 1959. Or there were their counterparts in French colonies, the generation of Sylar Senghor and David Diop included in the 1947/48 Paris edition of Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie noire et maghrébine de langue française. They all wrote in European languages as was the case with all the participants in that momentous encounter on Makerere hill in Kampala in 1962.
The title, ‘A Conference of African Writers of English Expression’, automatically excluded those who wrote in African languages. Now, looking back from the self-questioning heights of 1968, I can see this contained absurd anomalies. I, a student, could qualify for the meeting on the basis of only two published short stories, ‘The Fig Tree (Mugwomu)’ in a student journal, Penpoint, and ‘The Return’ in a new journal, Translation. But neither Shabani Roberts, then the greatest living East African poet with several works of poetry and prose to his credit in Kiswahili, nor Chief Fijianwa, the greatest Nigerian writer with several published titles in Yoruba, could possibly qualify.

The discussions on the novel, the short story, poetry, and drama were based on extracts from works in English and hence they excluded the main body of work in Swahili, Zulu, Yoruba, Arabic, Amharic and other African languages. Yet, despite this exclusion of writers and literature in African languages, no sooner were the introductory preliminaries over than this Conference of ‘African Writers of English Expression’ sat down to the first item on the agenda: ‘What is African Literature?’

The debate which followed was animated: Was it literature about Africa or about the African experience? Was it literature written by Africans? What about a non-African who wrote about Africa; did his work qualify as African literature? What if an African set his work in Greenland; did that qualify as African literature? Or were African languages the criteria? OK: what about Arabic, was it not foreign to Africa? What about French and English, which had become African languages? What if an European wrote about Europe in an African language? If ... if ... if this or that, except the issue: the domination of our languages and cultures by those of imperialist Europe; in any case there was no Figure or Shaban Robert or any writer in African languages to bring the conference down from the realm of evasive abstractions. The question was never seriously asked, did we write or were we written to write as African literature? The whole area of literature and audience, and hence of language as a determinant of both the national and class audience, did not really figure; the debate was more about the subject matter and the racial origins and geographical habitat of the writer.

English, like French and Portuguese, was assumed to be the natural language of literary and even political mediation between African people in the same nation and between nations in Africa and other continents. In some instances these European languages were seen as having a capacity to unite African peoples against divisive tendencies inherent in the multiplicity of African languages within the same geographic state. Thus Érezeli Mphahlele later could write, in a letter to Transitions number 11, that English and French have become the common language with which to present a national face against white oppresors, and even where the whiteman has already retreated, as in the independent states, these two languages are still a unifying force. In the literary sphere they were often seen as coming to save African languages against themselves. Writing a foreword to Birago Diop’s book Contes d’Amadou Koumba Séder Senghor commends him for using French to rescue the spirit and style of old African fablus and tales. ‘However while rendering them into French he renews them with an art which, while it respects the genius of the French language, that language of gentleness and poetry, preserves at the same time all the virtues of the Negro-African languages.’ English, French and Portuguese did come to our rescue and we accepted the unsolicited gift with gratitude. Thus in 1964, Chima Achebe in a speech entitled ‘The African Writer and the English Language’, said:

‘Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else? It looks like a dreadful hogwash and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it.’

See the paradox: the possibility of using mother-tongues provokes a tone of levity in phrases like ‘a dreadful hogwash’ and ‘a guilty feeling’, but that of foreign languages produces a categorical positive embrace, what Achebe himself, ten years later, was to describe as this ‘fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature’.

The fact is that all of us who opted for European languages – the conference participants and the generation that followed them – accepted that fatalistic logic to a greater or lesser degree. We were guided by it and the only question which preoccupied us was how best to make the borrowed tongues carry the weight of our African experience by, for instance, making them ‘prey’ on African proverbs and other peculiarities of African speech and folklore. For this task Achebe (Things Fall Apart; Arrow of God), Amos Tutuola (The Palmwine Drinkard; My Life in the Bush of Ghosts), and Gabriel Okara (The Voice) were often held as providing the three alternative models. The lengths to which we were prepared to go in our mission of enriching foreign languages by injecting Senghorian ‘black blood’ into their rusty joints, is best exemplified by Gabriel Okara in an article reprinted in Transitions.
As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as medium of expression. I have endeavoured in my words to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions. For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people.

In order to capture the vivid images of African speech, I had to exhaust the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English. It was difficult at first, but I had to learn. I had to study each word, each phrase, each word-context in order to find the probable situation in which it was used in order to bring out the nearest meaning in English. I found it a fascinating exercise.

Why, we may ask, should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues? Why should he see it as his particular mission? We never asked ourselves: how can we enrich our languages? How can we ‘prey’ on the rich humanist and democratic heritage in the struggles of other peoples in other times and other places to enrich our own? Why not Balzac, Tolstoy, Shukok, Brecht, Lu Hsun, Pablo Neruda, H. C. Anderson, Kim Chùa Hà, Marx, Lenin, Albert Einstein, Galileo, Aeschylus, Aristotle and Plato in African languages? And why not create literary monuments in our own languages? Why in other words should Africa not swear to it out to create in Ibo, which he acknowledges to have depths of philosophy and a wide range of ideas and experiences? What was our responsibility as the struggles of African peoples? No, these questions were not asked. What seemed to worry us more was that after all the literary gymnastics of preying on our languages to add life and vigour to English and other foreign languages, what would the result be accepted as good English or good French? Will the owner of the language criticise our usage? Here we were more assertive of our rights! Chinua Achebe wrote:

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings.

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Gabriel Okara’s position on this was representative of our generation:

Some may regard this way of writing English as a desecration of the language. This is of course not true. Living languages grow like living things, and English is far from a dead language. There are American, West Indian, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand versions of English. All of them add life and vigour to the language while reflecting their own respective cultures. Why shouldn’t there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way? 7

How did we arrive at this acceptance of ‘the fatalistic logic of the unsayable position of English in our literature’, in our culture and in our politics? What was the route from the Berlin of 1884 via the Makerere of 1962 to what is still the prevailing and dominant logic a hundred years later? How did we, as African writers, come to be so flexible towards the claims of our languages on us and so aggressive in our claims on other languages, particularly the languages of our colonization?

Berlin of 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the sight of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the 19th and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefront was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom. But where the former was visibly brutal, the latter was visibly gentle, a process best described in Chukh Hamlouan Kane’s novel Ambiguous Adventure where he talks of the methods of the colonial phase of imperialism as consisting of knowing how to kill with efficiency and to heal with the same art.

On the Black Continent, one began to understand that their real power rested not at all in the canons of the first morning but in what followed the canons. Therefore behind the canons was the new school. The new school had the nature of both the cannon and the magenta. From the cannon it took the efficiency of a lighting weapon. But better than the cannon it made the conquest permanent. The cannon for an era and the school sacrifices the soul. 8

In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bulletin was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation. Let me illustrate this by drawing upon experiences in my own education, particularly in language and literature.
Decolonising the Mind

III

I was born into a large peasant family: father, four wives and about twenty-eight children. I also belonged, as we all did in those days, to a wider extended family and to the community as a whole.

We spoke Gikuyu as we worked in the fields. We spoke Gikuyu in and outside the home. I can vividly recall those evenings of story-telling around the fireside. It was mostly the grown-ups telling the children how everybody was interested and involving. We children would re-tell the stories the following day to other children who worked in the fields picking the pyrethrum flowers, tea-leaves or coffee beans of our European and African landlords.

The stories, with mostly animals as the main characters, were all told in Gikuyu. Here, being small, weak but full of innovative wit and cunning, was our hero. We identified with him as he struggled against the brutes of prey like lion, leopard, hyena. His victories were our victories and we learnt that the apparently weak can outwit the strong.

We followed the animals in their struggle against hostile nature - drought, rain, sun, wind - a confrontation often forcing them to search for forms of co-operation. But we were also interested in their struggles amongst themselves, and particularly between the beasts and the victims of prey. These twin struggles, against nature and other animals, reflected real-life struggles in the human world.

Not that we neglected stories with human beings as the main characters. There were two types of characters in such human-centred narratives: the species of truly human beings with qualities of courage, kindness, honesty, fair play, attention to others; and a man-ear-man two-motivated species with qualities of greed, selfishness, individualism and hatred of what was good for the larger co-operative community. Conspiracy as the ultimate good in a community was a constant theme. It could unite human beings with animals against ogres and beasts of prey, as in the story of how dove, after being fed with comor oil seeds, was sent to fetch a snitch working far away from home and whose pregnancy was being threatened by these man-ear-man two-motivated ogres.

There were good and bad story-tellers. A good one could tell the same story over and over again, and it would always be fresh to us, the listeners. He or she could tell a story told by someone else and make it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words and images and the inflexion of voices to effect different tones.

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We therefore learnt to value words for their meaning and nuances. Language was not a mere string of words. It had a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and literal meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words.

So we learnt the music of our language on top of the Gikuyu content. This language, through images and symbols, gave us a view of the world, but it had a beauty of its own. The home and the field were then our primary school but what is important, for this discussion, is that the language of our evening teaching and the language of our immediate and wider community, and the language of our work in the fields were one.

And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. I first went to Kamandura, missionary run, and then to another called Mang'ombe run by Roman Catholic Missionaries and the Gikuyu Independent and Karima School Association. Our language of education was still Gikuyu. The very first time I was ever given an ovation for my writing was over a composition in Gikuyu. So for my first four years there was still harmony between the language of my formal education and that of the Limuru peasant community.

It was after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952 that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was the language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment - three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID OR I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were forced money they could hardly afford. And how did the teachers catch the culprit? A button was installed on a pupil who was supposed to hand it over to whoever was caught speaking his mother tongue. Whoever had the button at the end of the day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day. Thus children were turned into witch-hunters and in the process were being taught the literature value of being a traitor to one's immediate community.
The attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige, appointments; the ticket to higher realms. English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences, and all the other branches of learning. English became the main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education.

As you may know, the colonial system of education in addition to its spurious racial demarcation had the structure of a pyramid: a broad primary base, a narrowing secondary middle, and an even narrower university apex. Selections from primary into secondary were through an examination, in my time called Kenya African Preliminary Examination, in which one had to pass six subjects ranging from Math to Nature Study and Kiswahili. All the papers were written in English. Nobody could pass the exam who failed the English language paper no matter how brilliantly he had done in the other subjects. I remember one boy in my class of 1954 who had distinctions in all subjects except English, which he had failed. He was made to fail the entire exam. He went on to become a bus driver. I had had only passes but a credit in English got a place at the Alliance High School, one of the most elite institutions for Africans in colonial Kenya. The requirements for a place at the University, Makerere University College, were broadly the same: nobody could go on to wear the university red gown, no matter how brilliantly they had performed in all the other subjects unless they had a credit — not even a simple pass — in English. Thus the most coveted place in the pyramid and in the system was only available to the holder of an English language credit card. English was the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial eldorado.

Literary education was now determined by the dominant language while also reinforcing that dominance. Orange [oral literature in Kenyan languages] stopped. In primary school I now read simplified Dickens and Stevenson alongside Rider Haggard, Jim Hawkins, Oliver Twist, Tom Brown, etc. Here, Leopard and Lion were now my daily companions in the world of imagination. In secondary school, Scott and G. B. Shaw viec with more Rider Haggard, John Buchan, Alan Paton, Captains W. E. Johns. At Makerere I read English; from Chaucer to T. S. Eliot with a touch of Graham Greene.

Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to others worlds.

What was the colonial system doing to us Kenyan children? What were the consequences of, on the one hand, this systematic suppression of our languages and the literature they carried, and on the other the elevation of English and the literature it carried? To answer those questions, let me first examine the relationship of language to human experience, human culture, and the human perception of reality.

Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Take English. It is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people, English is only a means of communication with non-Scandinavians. It is not a carrier of their culture. For the British, and particularly the English, it is additionally, and inseparably from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history. Or take Swahili in East and Central Africa. It is widely used as a means of communication across many nationalities. But it is not the carrier of a culture and history of many of those nationalities. However, in parts of Kenya and Tanzania, and particularly in Zanzibar, Swahili is inseparably both a means of communication and a carrier of the culture of those people to whom it is a mother-tongue.

Language as communication has three aspects or elements. There is first what Karl Marx once called the language of real life; the element basic to the whole notion of language, its original and development; that is, the relations people trace with one another in the labour process, the links they necessarily establish among themselves in the act of a people, a community of human beings, producing wealth or means of life like food, clothing, houses. A human community really starts its historical being as a community of co-operation in production through the division of labour; the simplest is between man, woman and child within a household; the more complex divisions are between branches of production, such as those who are sole hunters, sole gatherers of fruits or sole workers in metal. Then there are the more complex divisions such as those in modern factories where a single product, say a shirt or a shoe, is the result of many hands and minds. Production is co-operation, is communication, is language, is expression of a relation between human beings and it is specifically human.

The second aspect of language as communication is speech; and it imitates the language of real life, that is communication in production.
The verbal signposts both reflect and aid communication or the relationships established between human beings in the production of their means of life. Language as a system of verbal signposts makes that production possible. The spoken word is to relations between human beings what the hand is to the relations between human beings and nature. The hand through tools mediates between human beings and nature and forms the language of real life: spoken words mediate between human beings and form the language of speech.

The third aspect is the written word. The written word imitates the spoken. Where the first two aspects of language as communication through the hand and the spoken word historically evolved more or less simultaneously, the written aspect is a much later historical development. Writing is representation of sounds with visual symbols, from the simplest knot among the Gikuyu gacangi singers and poets of Kenya, to the most complicated and different letter and picture writing systems of the world today.

In most societies the written and the spoken languages are the same, in that they represent each other; what is on paper can be read to another person and he recognizes as the language which the recipient has grown up speaking. In such a society there is broad harmony for a child between the three aspects of language as communication. His interaction with nature and with other men is expressed in written and spoken symbols or signs which are both a result of that double interaction and a reflection of it. The association of the child's sensibility is with the language of his experience of life.

But there is more to it: communication between human beings is also the basis and process of evolving culture. In doing similar kinds of things and acting over and over again under similar circumstances, similar even in their mutability, certain patterns, moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences and knowledge emerge. Those experiences are handed over to the next generation and become the inherited basis for their further actions on nature and on themselves. There is a gradual accumulation of values which in time become almost self-evident truths governing their conception of what is right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, courageous and cowardly, generous and mean in their internal and external relations. Over a time this becomes a way of life distinguishable from other ways of life. They develop a distinctive culture and history. Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eye-glasses, through which they come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next.

Language as culture also has three important aspects. Culture is a product of the history which it in turn reflects. Culture in other words is a product and a reflection of human beings communicating with one another in the very struggle to create wealth and to control it. But culture does not merely reflect that history, or rather it does so by actually forming images or pictures of the world of nature and nurture. Thus the second aspect of language as culture is as an image-forming agent in the mind of a child. Our whole conception of ourselves as a people, individually and collectively, is based on those pictures and images which may or may not correctly correspond to the actual reality of the struggles with nature and nurture which produced them in the first place. But our capacity to confront the world creatively is dependent on how those images correspond or not to that reality, how they distort or clarify the reality of our struggles. Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self, between my own self and other selves; between me and nature. Language is mediating in my very being. And this brings us to the third aspect of language as culture. Culture transmits or imparts those images of the world and reality through the spoken and the written language, that is through a specific language. In other words, the capacity to speak, the capacity to order sounds in a manner that makes for mutual comprehension between human beings is universal. This is the universality of language, a quality specific to human beings. It corresponds to the universality of the struggle against nature and that between human beings. But the particularity of the sounds, the words, the word order into phrases and sentences, and the specific manner, or laws, of their ordering is what distinguishes one language from another. Thus a specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries.

Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture; culture is a means of
communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, parti-
cularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by-
which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How
people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, as
their politics, and at the social production of wealth, as their entire
relationship to nature and so on. Language is thus inseparable from
ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form
and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.

V

So what was the colonialist imposition of a foreign language doing to
us children?

The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth, which
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 area of domination was the mental universe of
the colonised, 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.

For colonialism was involved in two aspects of the same process: the
destruction or the deliberate underdevelopment of a people's culture, their
art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and
literature, and the conscious element of the language of the coloniser.
The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising
nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the
colonised.

Take language as communication, imposing a foreign language, and
suppressing the native language as spoken and written, were already
breaking the harmony previously existing between the African child
and the three aspects of language. Since the new language as a means of
communication was a product of and was reflecting the 'real language of
life' elsewhere, it could never be spoken or written properly reflect or
imitate the real life of that community. This may in part explain why
technology today appears to us as slightly 'external', their product and
not ours. The word 'mission' used to hold an alien far-away sound until
I recently learnt its equivalent in Gikuyu, njag'arembi, and it made me
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venerable activity and not an emotionally felt experience.

But since the new, imposed languages could never completely break
the native languages as spoken, their most effective area of domination
was the third aspect of language as communication, the written. The
language of an African child's formal education was foreign. The
language of the book he read was foreign. The language of his
conceptualisation was foreign. Though, in him, took the visible form
of a foreign language. So the written language of a child's upbringing in
the school (even his spoken language within the school compound)
became divorced from his spoken language at home. There was often
not the slightest relationship between the child's written world, which
was also the language of his schooling, and the world of his immediate
environment in the family and the community. For a colonial child, the
harmony existing between the three aspects of language as communi-
cation was irreversibly broken. This resulted in the disassociation of
the sensibility of that child from his natural and social environment,
what we might call colonial alienation. The alienation became
reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where
bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe.

This disassociation, divorce, or alienation from the immediate
environment becomes clearer when you look at colonial language as a
carrier of culture.

Since culture is a product of the history of a people which it in turn
reflects, the child was now being exposed exclusively to a culture that
was a product of a world external to himself. He was being made to
stand outside himself to look at himself. Catching Them Young is the
title of a book on racism, class, sex, and politics in children's literature
by Bob Dixon. "Catching them young as an aim was even more true of
a colonial child. The images of this world and his place in it implied
in a child take years to eradicate, if they ever can be.

Since culture does not just reflect the world in images but actually,
through those very images, condition a child to see the world in a
certain way, the colonial child was made to see the world and where he
stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the
language of imposition.

And since those images are mostly passed on through orature and
literature it meant the child would grow only see the world as seen in
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the literature of his language of adoption. From the point of view of
alienation, that is of seeing oneself from outside oneself as if one was another self, it does not matter that the imported literature carried the
great humanistic tradition of the best in Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac,
Tolstoy, Gorky, Brecht, Sholokhov, Dickens. The location of this
great mirror of imagination was necessarily Europe and its history and
culture and the rest of the universe was seen from this centre.

But obviously it was worse when the colonial child was exposed to
images of his world as mirrored in the written languages of his
colonizer. Where his own native languages were associated in his
impressionable mind with low status, humiliation, corporal punish-
ment, slow-footed intelligence and ability or downright stupidity,
non-intelligence and barbarism, this was reinforced by the world he
met in the works of such geniuses of racism as a Rider Haggard or a
Nicholas Monsarrat; not to mention the pronouncement of some of
the pangs of western intellectual and political establishment, such as
Hume’s "the negro is naturally inferior to the whites ...";12
Hablot Browne’s (Kaleidoscope), "the blacks ... are inferior to the whites on
the endowments of both body and mind ...";13 or Hegel with his Africa
compares to a land of childhood still enveloped in the dark mantle of
the night as far as the development of self-conscious history was
concerned. Hegel’s statement that there was nothing harmonious with
humanity to be found in the African character is representative of the
racist images of Africans and Africa such a colonial child was bound to
encounter in the literature of the colonial languages.14 The results
could be disastrous.

In her paper read to the conference on the teaching of African
literature in schools held in Nairobi in 1973, entitled "Written
Literature and Black Images",15 the Kenyan writer and scholar
Professor Micere Mugo related how a reading of the description of
Gagool an old African woman in Rider Haggard’s King Solomon’s
 mine had for a long time made her feel mortal terror whenever she
encountered old African women. In his autobiography This Life
Sydney Gover describes how, as a result of the literature he had read,
he had come to associate Africa with snakes. So on arrival in Africa
and being put up in a modern hotel in a modern city, he could not sleep
because he kept on looking for snakes everywhere, even under the bed.
These two have been able to pinpoint the origins of their fears. But for
most others the negative image becomes internalised and it affects their
cultural and even political choices in ordinary living.

Thus Léopold Sédar Senghor has said very clearly that although the
colonial language had been forced upon him, if he had been given the

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choice he would still have opted for French. He becomes lyrical in his
subservience to French:

We express ourselves in French since French has a universal
vocation and since our message is also addressed to French people
and others. In our languages [i.e. African languages] the halo
that surrounds the words is by nature merely that of sap and blood;
French words send out thousands of rays like diamonds.16

Senghor has now been rewarded by being anointed to an honoured
place in the French Academy - that institution for safeguarding
the purity of the French language.

In Malawi, Bandas has erected his own monument by way of an
institution, The Kapiri Academy, designed to aid the brightest pupils
of Malawi in their mastery of English.

It is a grammar school designed to produce boys and girls who will
be sent to universities like Harvard, Chicago, Oxford, Cambridge
and Edinburgh and be able to compete on equal terms with others
down.

The President has instructed that Latin should occupy a central
place in the curriculum. All teachers must have at least some
Latin in their academic background. Dr Bandas has often said that no
one can fully master English without knowledge of languages such as
Latin and French ...17

For good measure no Malawian is allowed to teach at the academy -
none is good enough - and all the teaching staff has been recruited
from Britain. A Malawian might lower the standards, or rather, the
purity of the English language. Can you get a more telling example of
hatred of what is national, and a servile worship of what is foreign even
though dead?

In history books and popular commentaries on Africa, too much
has been made of the supposed differences in the policies of the various
colonial powers, the British indirect rule (or the pragmatism of the
British in their lack of a cultural programme) and the French and
Portuguese conscious programme of cultural assimilation. These are a
matter of detail and emphasis. The final effect was the same: Senghor’s
embrace of French as that language with a universal vocation is not to
different from Chinku Achebe’s gratitude in 1964 to English - “those of
us who have inherited the English language may not be in a position to
appreciate the value of the inheritance”.18 The assumptions behind the
practice of those of us who have abandoned our mother-tongues and
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...adopted European ones as the creative vehicles of our imagination, are not different either.

Thus the 1962 conference of 'Afrikan Writers of English expression' was only recognising, with approval and pride of course, what through all the years of selective education and rigorous tutelage, we had already been led to accept: the 'fallacious logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature'. The logic was embodied deep in imperialism; and it was imperialism and its effects that we did not examine as Makereke. It is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues.

VI

The twenty years that followed the Makereke conference gave the world a unique literature – novels, stories, poems, plays written by Africans in European languages – which soon consolidated itself into a movement with common purpose and a scholarly industry.

Right from its inception it was the literature of the petty-bourgeoisie born of the colonial schools and universities. It could not be otherwise, given the linguistic medium of its message. Its rise and development reflected the gradual accretion of this class to political and even economic dominance. But the petty-bourgeoisie in Africa was a large class with different strands in it. It ranged from that section which looked forward to a permanent alliance with imperialism in which it played the role of an intermediary between the bourgeoisie of the western metropolises and the people of the colonies – the section which in my book Dated: A Writer’s Prison Diary I have described as the comprador bourgeoisie – to that section which saw the future in terms of a vigorous independent national economy in African capitalism or in some kind of socialism, what I shall here call the nationalistic or patriotic bourgeoisie. This literature by Africans in European languages was specifically that of the nationalistic bourgeoisie in its creators, its thematic concerns and its consumption.

Internationally the literature helped this class, which in politics, business, and education, was assuming leadership of the countries newly emergent from colonialism, or of those struggling to so emerge, to explain Africa to the world: Africa had a past and a culture of dignity and human complexity.

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Internally the literature gave this class a cohesive tradition and a common literary frame of references, which it otherwise lacked with its literary roots in the culture of the peasantry and in the culture of the metropolitan bourgeoisie. The literature added confidence to the class; the petty-bourgeoisie now had a past, a culture and a literature with which to confront the racist bigotry of Europe. This confidence – manifested in the tone of the writing, its sharp critique of European bourgeois civilisation, its implications, particularly in its negritude mould, that Africa had something new to give to the world – reflected the political ascendancy of the patriotic nationalist section of the petty-bourgeoisie before and immediately after independence.

So initially this literature – in the post-war world of national democratic revolutionary and anti-colonial liberation in Ghana and India, armed uprisings in Kenya and Algeria, the independence of Ghana and Nigeria with others impending – was part of that great anti-colonial and anti-imperialist upheaval in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Caribbean islands. It was inspired by the general political awakening; it drew its stamina and even form from the peasantry: their proverbs, tales, stories, riddles, and wise sayings. It was shot through and through with optimism. But later, when the commodity section assumed political ascendancy and strengthened rather than weakened the economic links with imperialism in what was clearly a neo-colonial arrangement, this literature became more and more critical, cynical, disillusioned, bitter and denunciatory in tone. It was almost unanimous in its portrayal, with varying degrees of detail, emphasis, and clarity of vision, of the post-independence betrayal of hopes. But to whom was it directing its list of mistakes made, crimes and wrongs committed, complaints unheeded, or its call for a change of moral direction? The imperialist bourgeoisie? The petty-bourgeoisie in power? The military, itself part and parcel of that class? It sought another audience, principally the peasantry and the working class or what was generally conceived as the people. The search for new audience and new directions was reflected in the quest for simpler forms, in the adoption of a more direct tone, and often in a direct call for action. It was also reflected in the content. Instead of seeing Africa as one undifferentiated mass of historically wronged blackness, it now attempted some sort of class analysis and evaluation of neo-colonial societies. But this search was still within the confines of the languages of Europe whose use it now defended with less vigour and confidence.

So its roots was hampered by the very-language choice, and in its movement toward the people, it could only go up to that section of the
VII

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But African languages refused to die. They would not simply go the way of Latin to become the fossils for linguistic archaeology to dig up, classify, and argue about the international conquests of the 20th century. These languages, these national heritages of Africa, were kept alive by the peasantry. The peasantry saw no contradiction between speaking their own mother-tongues and belonging to a larger national or continental geography. They saw no necessary antagonistic contradiction between belonging to their immediate nationality, to their multinational state along the Berlin-drawn boundaries, and to Africa as a whole. These people happily spoke Wolof, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Arabic, Amharic, Kikuyu, Luo, Shona, Ndebele, Kimbundu, Zulu or Lingala without this fact tearing the multinational states apart. During the anti-colonial struggle they showed an unlimited capacity to unite around whatever leader or party best and most consistently articulated an anti-imperialist position. In anything it was the petty-bourgeoisie, particularly the compradors, with their French and English and Portuguese, with their petty rivalries, their ethnic chauvinism, which encouraged these vertical divisions to the point of war at times. No, the peasantry had no complexes about their languages and the cultures they carried!

In fact when the peasantry and the working class were compelled by necessity or history to adopt the language of the master, they Africanised it without any of the respect for its ancestry shown by Senghor and Achebe, so totally as to have created new African languages, like Krio in Sierra Leone or Pidgin in Nigeria, that owed their identities to the syntax and rhythms of African languages. All these languages were kept alive in the daily speech, in the ceremonies, in political struggles, above all in the rich store of orature – proverbs, stories, poems, and riddles.

The peasantry and the urban working class threw up singers. These sang the old songs or composed new ones incorporating the new experiences in industries and urban life and in working-class struggle and organizations. These singers pushed the languages to new limits, renewing and reinvigorating them by combining new words and new expressions, and in generally expanding their capacity to incorporate new happenings in Africa and the world.

The peasantry and the working class threw up their own writers, or attracted to their ranks and concern intellectuals from among the
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What we would like future conferences on African literature to devote time to, is the all-important problem of African writing in African languages, and all its implications for the development of a truly African sensibility.

Obi Wall had his predecessors. Indeed people like David Diop of Senegal had put the case against this use of colonial languages even more strongly.

The African creator, deprived of the use of his language and cut off from his people, might turn out to be only the representative of a literary trend (and that not necessarily the least gratuitous) of the conquering nation. His works, having become a perfect illustration of the assimilatorist policy through imitation and style, will doubtless arouse the warm applause of a certain group of critics. In fact, these praises will go mostly to colonialism which, when it can no longer keep its subjects in slavery, transmutes them into docile intellectuali patterned after Western literary fashions which besides, is another more subtle form of bastardization. 14

David Diop quite correctly saw that the use of English and French was a matter of temporary historical necessity. Surely in an Africa freed from oppression it will not occur to any writer to express, otherwise than in his rediscovered language, his feelings and the feelings of his people. 15

The importance of Obi Wall's intervention was in tone and timing: it was published soon after the 1962 Makere conference of African writers of English expression; it was polemical and aggressive, poured ridicule and scorn on the choice of English and French, while being unapologetic in its call for the use of African languages. Not surprisingly it was met with hostility and then silence. But twenty years of uninterrupted dominance of literature in European languages, the reactionary turn that political and economic events in Africa have taken, and the search for a revolutionary break with the neo-colonial status quo, all compel soul-searching among writers, raising once again the entire question of the language of African literature.

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penny-bougeoisie, who all wrote in African languages. It is these writers like Henry Wadki Sellasie, Germacv Taba Hawaray, Shabanz Robert, Abdullahi Abdalla, Ebrahim Hussein, Euphraz Kezihab, B. H. Vilkan, Okon p'Tiik, A. C. Jordan, P. Mboya, D. O. Fagunwa, Marin Kamene and many others rightly celebrated in Albert Gerard's pioneering survey of literature in African languages from the tenth century to the present, called African Language Literatures (1981), who have given us languages a written literature.

Thus the immortality of our languages in print has been ensured despite the internal and external pressures for their extinction. In Kenya I would like to single out Gakakana wa Wanjia, who was jailed by the British for the ten years between 1952 and 1962 because of his writing in Gikuyu. His book, Mau Mau wa Mau Mau Ithaamwianzi, a diary he secretly kept while in political detention, was published by Heinemann Kenya and won the 1984 Noma Award. It is a powerful work, extending the range of the Gikuyu language prose, and it is a crowning achievement to the work he started in 1946. He has worked in poverty, in the hardships of prison, in post-independence isolation when the English language held sway in Kenya's schools from nursery to University and in every walk of the national printed world, but he never broke his faith in the possibilities of Kenya's national languages. His inspiration came from the mass anti-colonial movement of Kenyan people, particularly the militant wing grouped around Mau Mau or the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, which in 1952 ushered in the age of modern guerrilla warfare in Africa. He is the closest example of those writers thrown up by the mass political movements of an awakened peasantry and working class.

And finally from among the European-language-speaking African petty-bourgeoisie, there emerged a few who refused to join the chorus of those who had accepted the 'faralistic logic' of the position of European languages in our literary being. It was one of these, Obi Wall, who pulled the carpet from under the literary feet of those who gathered at Makerere in 1962 by declaring in an article published in Transition (10, September 1963), 'that the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture', and that until African writers accepted that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would merely be pursuing a dead end.

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European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European languages. It has produced many writers and works of genuine talent: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Sembene Ousmane, Agostino Neto, Sedar Senghor and many others. Who can deny their talent? The light in the products of their fertile imaginations has certainly illuminated important aspects of the African being in its continuing struggle against the political and economic consequences of Berlin and after. However we cannot have our cake and eat it! Their work belongs to an Afro-European literary tradition which is likely to last for as long as Africa is under this rule of European capital in a neo-colonial set-up. So Afro-European literature can be defined as literature written by Africans in European languages in the era of imperialism.

But some are coming round to the inevitable conclusion articulated by Obi Walli with such polemical vigour twenty years ago: African literature can only be written in African languages. That is, the languages of the African peasantry and working class, the major alliance of classes in each of our nationalities and the agency for the coming inevitable revolutionary break with neo-colonialism.
of other cultures is being questioned in an African writer is a measure of how far imperialism has distorted the view of African realities. It has turned reality upside down: the abnormal is viewed as normal and the normal, as abnormal. Africa actually corrects Europe: but Africa is made to believe that it needs Europe to rescue it from poverty. Africa's natural and human resources continue to develop Europe and America: but Africa is made to feel grateful for aid from the same quarters that still sit on the back of the continent. Africa even produces intellectuals who now recognize this upside-down way of looking at Africa.

I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples. In school and universities our Kenyan languages—that is the languages of the many nationalities which make up Kenya—were associated with negative qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment. We who went through that school system were meant to graduate with a hatred of the people and the culture and the values of the language of our daily humiliation and punishment. I do not want to see Kenyan children growing up in that imperialist-imposed tradition of contempt for the tools of communication developed by their communities and their history. I want them to transcend colonial alienation.

Colonial alienation takes two interrelated forms: an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the reality around; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one's environment. It starts with a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualization, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a larger social scale it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies.

So I would like to contribute towards the restoration of the harmony between all the aspects and divisions of language so as to restore the Kenyan child to his environment, understand it fully so as to be in a position to change it for his collective good. I would like to see Kenya's peoples—mother-tongues (our national languages) carry a literature reflecting not only the rhythms of a child’s spoken expression, but also his struggle with nature and his social nature. With that harmony between himself, his language and his environment as his starting point, he can learn other languages and even enjoy the positive

humanistic, democratic and revolutionary elements in other people's literatures and cultures without any complex about his own language, his own self, his environment. The all-Kenya national language (i.e., Kiswahili); the other national languages (i.e., the languages of the nationalities like Luo, Gikuyu, Masai, Luhyा, Kikuyu, Kamba, Mijikenda, Sambas; Galla, Turkana, Arab-speaking people, etc.); other African languages like Hausa, Wolof, Yoruba, Ebo, Zulu, Nyanja, Lingala, Kimbundu; and foreign languages— that is foreign to Africa—like English, French, German, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish will fall into their proper perspective in the lives of Kenyan children.

Chinua Achebe once decried the tendency of African intellectuals to escape into abstract universalism in the words that apply even more to the issue of the language of African literature:

Africa has had such a fate in the world that the very adjective African can call up hideous fears of rejection. Better then to cut all the links with this homeland, this liability, and become in one giant leap the universal man. Indeed I understand this anxiety. But running away from oneself seems to me a very inadequate way of dealing with an anxiety (italics mine). And if writers should not look for such escapism, who is to meet the challenge?25

Who indeed? We African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages what Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all the other areas of human creative endeavours.

But writing in one's languages is—although a necessary first step in the correct direction—will not itself bring about the renaissance in African cultures if that literature does not carry the content of our people's anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control; the content of the need for unity among the workers and peasants of all the nationalities in their struggle to control the wealth they produce and so free it from internal and external parasitism.

In other words writers in African languages should reconnect themselves to the revolutionary traditions of an organised peasantry and working class in Africa in their struggle to defeat imperialism and
create a higher system of democracy and socialism in alliance with all the other peoples of the world. Unity in that struggle would ensure unity in our multi-lingual diversity. It would also reveal the real links that bind the people of Africa to the peoples of Asia, South America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Canada, and the U.S.A.

But it is precisely when writers open our African languages to the real links in the struggles of peasants and workers that they will meet that biggest challenge. Due to the comprador-ruling regimes, their real enemy is an awakened peasantry and working class. A writer who tries to communicate the message of revolutionary unity and hope in the languages of the people becomes a subversive character. It is then that writing in African languages becomes a subversive or treasonable offence with such a writer facing possibilities of prison, exile or even death. For him there are no 'national' accolades, no new year honours, only abuse and slander and remembrance lies from the mouths of the armed power of a ruling minority – ruling, that is, on behalf of U.S.-led imperialism – and who see in democracy a real threat. A democratic participation of the people in the shaping of their own lives or in discussing their own lives in languages that allow for mutual comprehension is seen as being dangerous to the good government of a country and its institutions. African languages addressing themselves to the lives of the people become the enemy of a neo-colonial state.

Notes
1. European languages become so important to the Africans that they defined their national block or identity in them. In North Africa, Egypt, Sudan, and the Arab countries, the languages become such that they are written in English, French, and Spanish-speaking states. Arabic-speaking states.
2. African languages become so important to the Africans that they defined their national identity with them. In North Africa, Egypt, Sudan, and the Arab countries, the languages become such that they are written in English, French, and Spanish-speaking states. Arabic-speaking states.
3. The conference was organized by the non-Communist Paris-based but African-inspired and funded Socialist Union for Cultural Freedom which was later dissolved actually to have been financed by CIA. It showed how certain directions in our cultural, political, and economic choices can be undermined from the monopolistic centre of imperialism.
4. This is an argument often repeated by colonial spokesmen. Compare McHoul's comment with that of Godfrey Onwubiko in On the Rhetoric of Imperialism.
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Blaise, Agot’s novel, ‘Africa’ and his Writer’s work in Morning in Creative Days, p. 27.