Dear Friends:

Because I am -- I hope -- "disappearing" for a week, and Mike is writing up both the RED Minutes and the Letter of the Week, I thought that my new "Brainstorm" that FFSAET have not only a new introduction but an appendix, written not by us but by two great poets/essayists, one Haitian -- Rene Depestre -- and one a Kenyan -- Ngugi we Thiong'o -- as a critique of negritude, should be further detailed.

These critiques in the 70s and 80s by indigenous revolutionary writers have a very todayish significance and that not only on the concept of negritude but on the inseparability of the black dimension and revolution. That is what originally (1974) so attracted me to Depestre's report to the Tri-Continental Congress that I overcame my dislike of that Congress and published large excerpts in my TW column of June, 1974. The most cogent reason at the time was that as far back as 1938, much as I liked Black Jacobin, I questioned whether CLRJ's analysis of Toussaint L'Ouverture shouldn't have said something on the reality of Haiti, 1938, on the reactionary regime then in power. That is precisely what is the essence of Depestre's critique -- his contrast between the actual peasant dimension's continuation of the African legacy and what the French intellectuals made of it; how one was abstract, and the other, the reality; and how imperative was the revolution in Haiti now.

Now in this period as I worked on the 30-Year Retrospective I was very glad that in the very next issue, July, 1974, John Alan, in his Black/Red column, had taken up Trinidad and the emergence of a Caribbean "New Beginnings" movement. Please do re-read both issues.

As for Ngugi's position which is printed in the New Left Review (March/April, 1985) the editors' "themes" section would make you think this was just an essay on linguistics. Though their major article is a critique by Ralph Miliband of what he calls the New Revisionism in Britain in which he includes such Marxists as Eric Hobsbawm and others of the "New Left", obviously nothing to them relates to the very question that Ngugi has raised about the garrulity that revolution has thrown on the question of language as it relates to class. I propose that that is precisely the section that we will excerpt.

Finally, being able to refer to the appendix in our new introduction jointly signed by myself, Lou Turner and John Alan, creates a new opening for us to say something directly on Grenada and the fact that the counter-revolution came from within the original revolutionary leadership itself. And in that respect I may also directly, or at least in a footnote, critique the fork-tongued article by CLR James on Grenada. Now all I have to do is create time to do this with all the deadlines facing me.

Yours,
Raye
MINUTES OF REV MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 13, 1985


3) The process of working out the new edition of PPSART, which began before the Plenum, has intensified since it. Raya reported on her meeting with Lou and her letter to Allen, which resulted in a proposal for not only a new Introduction to the pamphlet, but a new Appendix as well. It would not be by us, but by two writers, one African, one Car-ibbean, who are critiquing Negritude. Raya then read her DF-Letter of Sept. 13, pointing out that she and Lou will be sending Allen the draft of the Introduction in about a month, with Allen to respond with his comments in a week after that.

Raya recalled two periods in which the state-capitalist tendency was working out the Absolute. There was 1948, when CLRJ was writing Notes on Dialectics, though he had not really read VIL's Philosophic Notebooks; and there was the early 1950s, after I had translated the Notebooks and written letters on them. He took the little critiques of his Notes very seriously; he saw that what I was writing represented a real division. When in that period he looked at Absolute Idea it was to stop at its first paragraph, where the highest contradiction expresses itself as personality. That was it for him. Now all these years I've never given James credit for Nkrumah, because I knew how fake all his "facts" were. But now I see it differently. When I went to Africa and saw what Ghana was like with him in power, with "Osagyefo" everywhere, and all the theses about the "African personality", and I said, isn't that where all the fights with CLRJ began? James sold them "African personality", and had Hegel to "help" him do it. And he can pass himself off as everything from African to Anarchist to "Caribbean uniqueness".
Dear Allen:

We, as you, I am sure, are very, very tired, and therefore any discussion of the future is very tentative. Nevertheless, I met with Lou briefly to discuss the new Introduction for the Frantz Fanon pamphlet, before any of us comes up with a rough draft. And, of course, I immediately came up with another brainstorm. It is that we should not only write the new Introduction, but also have an Appendix. It is not to be written by us, so don’t worry: but I do need your consent for the idea. And the idea is to have Africans speak for themselves on the question of Negritude, which I’m always very self-conscious about, emphasizing only the great part and playing down completely the petty-bourgeois aspects. I dare say it is because I’m white that I feel so self-conscious. Thereafter, I have found the perfect answer — two very concrete and very sharp critiques, one by the great Haitian poet and one by a Kenyan. You know what is great about the Haitian poet? N&L published him. I have no recollection, and yet I must have been very, very excited about it, since it came out of something that was no favorite of mine, the Tri-continental Congress, and I had turned over my TW column to it. Unfortunately, maybe, the name of the author was not played up anywhere, even though my prefatory note gave all the details; I had found it in some magazine when I was on the West Coast, Invisible City, West Coast. Please read it immediately. It’s in N&L February June 1974. The name of the Haitian poet is Rene Depestre. The great part is that the next month, July 1974, you have a pretty good Black-Red column on “The Caribbean: The Realities of Life.” The Caribbean question and the whole Black question is relevant and of the essence for our Introduction and the Appendix. Yours is not to be included in the Appendix. What is to be added to the Depestre article on Negritude is what I believe you know about (unless it was Lou I spoke to about it?) and that is the Kenyan poet, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, whose article was published in New Left Review, March April 1985. I will have Lou excerpt some of it and xerox it to send to you.

The only other thing I can tell you about the meeting with Lou is that just in general the type of three sections in the original pamphlet — FF, Soweto, American Black Thought — is the same three things we wish to concentrate on, and we must be very short since an Introduction should not compete with the actual pamphlet contents. As I told you, when we saw a copy of the draft to you in about a month, you will have only one week for commentary, but there is no reason you cannot start thinking about it right now. Let me know what you think of the idea of the Appendix; I was especially delighted that, as against GPUD, who acts as if nothing happened in Haiti since Toussaint had the revolution, this marvelous Haitian poet shows how Negritude has been misused by the totalitarian Duvalier, and that it’s that counter-revolution that we must confront and not what the Negritude movement in the 1940s in Paris made of it; that what we need now is revolution.

Yours,

[Signature]

Sept. 9, 1985
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, let us call a spade a spade, imperialism in its colonial and neo-colonial phases continuously press-ganging the African hand to the plough to turn the soil over, and putting blinkers on him to make him view the path ahead only as determined for him by the master armed with bible and sword. In other words, Imperialism continues to control the economy, politics and culture of Africa. But on the other hand, and pitted against this, are the ceaseless struggles of African people to liberate their economy, politics and culture from that Euro-American-based stranglehold and to usher in a new era of truly 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 are central to...
people's definition of itself in relation to its 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 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 to be the fate of Africa to have her destiny always decided around conference tables in the metropolises of the western world: her erasure 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 Rome. 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 according to 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, French or Portuguese-speaking African countries.

Unfortunately writers who should have been mapping paths out of that linguistic encirclement 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, in their sentiments and articulation of problems they still took it as axiomatic that the renaissance of African cultures lay in the languages of Europe. I should know...

The Domination of English

In 1963 I was invited to that historic meeting of African writers at Makerere, Kampala, Uganda. The list of participants contained most of the names which have now become the subject of scholarly dissertations. The title of the conference was "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, "No Part Can Be Written," and I wanted him to read it. The year before, 1962, I had completed the first draft of "A Hero of the Republic," my first ever attempt at a novel, and entered it for a writing competition organized by the East African Literature Bureau. I was keeping in step with the tradition started by Chinua Achebe with his publication of "Things Fall Apart" in 1958 or even earlier by Peter Abrahams with his output of novels and autobiographies from "Path of Thunder" to "Tell Freedom," the tradition started by their contemporaries in French colonies, that is the generation of Senghor and Diop included in the (1947)
Koifmba, Seckar Senghor commends him for using French to rescue the spirit and style of old African fables 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 honesty, preserves at the same time all the virtues of the negro-african languages.’ English, French and Portuguese had come to our rescue and we accepted the unsolicited gift with gratitude. ItThuln.~

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IAnguage, said: ‘Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else? It looks like a dreadful betrayal 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;:

A 'Fatalistic Logic'

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

The fact is that we all, that is those of us who opted for European languages—the conference participants and the generation that followed them—accepted that fatalistic logic to a bigger 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; No Longer at Ease) and Gabriel Okara (The Paper Spears) were often held as providing the three alternative models. The length 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 from Dialogue, East in Transition magazine in September 1969: ‘As a writer who believes in the utilisation 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. . . . In order to capture the vivid images of African speech, I had to eschew the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English. It was difficult at first, but I had to learn. I had to study each [language]/expression I used and to discover 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 in 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 humanistic and democratic heritages in the struggles of other peoples in other times and other places to enrich our own? Why not have Balzac, Tolstoy, Sholokhov, Brecht, Lu Hsun, Pablo Neruda, H. C. Anderson, Kim Chi Ha, Marx, Lenin, Albert Einstein, Galileo,
Aeschylus, Aristotle, Plato in African languages? And why not create literary monuments in our own languages? Why in other words should Okara not set out to create in Gikuyu, which he acknowledges to have depths of philosophy and a wide range of ideas and experiences? What was our responsibility to the struggles of African peoples? No, not these questions: what seemed to worry us more was this: after all the literary gymnastics of preying on our languages to add life and vigour to English, and other foreign languages, would the result be accepted as good English or good French? Will the owner of the language criticize our usage? Here we were more assertive of our rights: 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?’

How did we arrive at this acceptance of the facile logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature? In our culture, in our schools, in our minds? Berlin of 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet—was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom. But where the latter was visibly brutal, the latter was visibly gentle, a process best described in Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s novel The 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 resided not at all in the cannons of the first morning but in what followed the cannons. Therefore behind the cannons (was) the new school. The new school had the nature of both the cannon and the magnet: From the cannon it took the efficiency of a fighting weapon. But better than the cannon it made the conquest permanent.”)

The cannon forces the body and the school fascinates the soul.” Let me illustrate this by drawing upon experiences in my own education.

Colonial Education

I was born in 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 fire-side. It was mostly the grown-ups telling the children but everybody was interested and involved. We the children would later the following day re-tell the stories to other children as we worked in the fields picking 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 yet 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 the hostile nature (drought, rain, sun, wind), this confrontation often forcing them to search for forms of cooperation. But we were also interested in their struggles amongst themselves, and particularly between the beast and the victims of prey. These twin struggles, against nature and other animals, reflected real-life struggles in the human world.

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 take a story told by someone else and make it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words, images and the inflexion of voices to effect different tones.

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 lexical 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 content. The 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 pre-primary school, but what is important for our discussion today is that the language of our evening teach-ins, 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 Kamaandura, missionary run, and then to another (Maunguu) run by nationalists grouped around Gikuyu independent and Kastings schools association. Our language of education was still Gikuyu. I remember that the very first time I was ever given an ovation for 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 1968 that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became much more than a language; it was the language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.

The Suppression of Gikuyu

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 the inscription:
One could tell the same old story, always to be fresh to us, the old one someone else and make one's own words. So we arranged words. The language, transpositions of words, the games we played. The magic formula to colonial clture.

The structure of a pyramid: a broad base, a narrowing secondary middle, and an even narrower apex. Selections from the primary into the secondary were through an examination, in my time called *Kenya African Preliminary Examination*, in which one had to pass six subjects ranging from maths to *Nature Study* and *Kiswahili*. All the papers were written in English. But nobody could pass the exam if they failed the English-language paper, no matter how brilliant they were in the other subjects. I remember one boy in my class of 1954 who had distinctions in all the other subjects but did not pass in English. He therefore failed the entire exam and went on to become a roustabout in a bus company. I who had only passes but a credit in English got a place at the University College, Kenya. The requirements for a place at the University, Makerere University College, were broadly the same: nobody could go on to a university without a credit in English. Thus the ticket to higher realms. English became the official language and the literature they carried, and on the other the consequences of, on the one hand, this systematic suppression of our languages and the literature they carried, and on the other the
Language and Human 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 Swedes and Danes, English is only a means of communication with non-Scandinavian peoples. 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 the culture and history of many of those nationalities. However, in parts of Kenya and Tanzania and certainly in Zanzibar, Swahili is inseparably both a means of communication and a carrier of the culture of those peoples 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, which is basic to the whole notion of language, its origin and development. This refers to the relations that people enter 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 cooperation in production through the division of labour, from the simplest between man, woman and child within a household, through the more complex divisions between branches of production (between let's say those who are solely hunters, solely gatherers of fruits, solely workers in metal, etc) to the most complex divisions in modern factories where a single product, say a shirt or a shoe, is the result of many hands and minds. Production is cooperation, 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, i.e. communication in production. The verbal signposts both reflect and aid communication or the relations established between human beings in the production of their means of life. In fact 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 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 signs. The written word imitates the spoken. In fact where the first two aspects of language as communication through the hand and the spoken word historically evolve more or less simultaneously, the third aspect, the written, is a much later historical development. Writing is representation of sounds with visual symbols — from the simplest knot among shepherds to tell the number in a herd, through the hieroglyphics among the Ancient Egyptians.
Language as a means of communication and as a means of cultural expression is a fundamental aspect of human nature. It is both a means of social interaction and a vehicle for the transmission of cultural values.

In its role as a means of communication, language allows human beings to exchange ideas and information, facilitating social cohesion and the development of shared knowledge. This is evident in the way language is used in everyday conversation, as well as in more formal settings such as education and professional discourse.

Language also serves as a cultural medium, shaping and reflecting the values and beliefs of a society. It is through language that cultural narratives, traditions, and myths are passed down from generation to generation, providing a collective memory of a people's history and experience.

Moreover, language is a key component in the development of personal and group identities. It allows individuals to express their unique perspectives and experiences, while also providing a framework for understanding and relating to others. In this way, language helps to build social bonds and establish shared meanings and values.

The interplay between language as a means of communication and as a cultural medium is evident in the way different languages have evolved over time, adapting to the needs of their speakers and reflecting the changing realities of human societies.

In conclusion, language is a fundamental aspect of human identity and culture, serving both as a means of communication and as a means of cultural expression. It is through the use of language that human beings construct, maintain, and adapt their cultural traditions, while also engaging in the ongoing process of social interaction and communication.
the capacity to order sounds in a manner that makes for mutual comprehension. This is the universality of language, a quality specific to human beings. It corresponds to the universality of the struggle against nature and between human beings. But the particularity of the sounds, the words, and the laws of their ordering into phrases and sentences distinguishes one language from another. Thus a specific culture is transmitted through language not in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. Literature (written literature) and orature (oral literature) 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, particularly 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, their politics and the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. 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.

The Roots of Colonial Alienation

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—what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed—to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life. Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economics and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control its tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction, or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, its art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature; and the domination of a people's language by that of the colonizing nation.

Take language as communication. By imposing a foreign language and suppressing the native languages as spoken and written, the colonizer was already breaking the harmony previously existing between the African child and the three aspects of language as communication. Since the new language was a product reflecting the 'real language of life' elsewhere, it could never, as spoken or written, properly reflect or imitate the real life of that community. This may in part explain why technology always appears to us as slightly external, their product and not ours. The word *missile*, for instance, used to hold an alien faraway sound until I recently learnt its equivalent in Gikuyu, *Ngurubali*.
Learning, for a colonial child, became a cerebral 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 aspect. The language of an African child's formal education was foreign. The language of the books he read was foreign. The language of his conceptualization was foreign. Thought, 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 same compound) became divorced from his spoken language at home. There was thus often not the slightest relationship between the child's written world or 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 communication was irreversibly broken. This resulted in the disassociation of his sensibility from his natural and social environment—that we might call colonial alienation. This became reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe.

In fact this disassociation, or 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 a people's history which in turn reflects, the colonial child was exposed exclusively to the product of a world external to himself. He was made to stand outside himself to look at himself. 'Catching them young' as an aim was even more true of a colonial child. Once implanted, the images of this world and his place in it (or even where he stands in it) take years to eradicate, if they ever can be eradicated.

Culture does not just reflect the world but actually conditions a child to see it in a certain way. Since the images of that culture are mostly passed on through orature and literature, the colonial child would now see the world as in the literature of his language of adoption. It does not matter from the point of view of alienation—that is, of seeing oneself from outside as if one was another self—whether that literature carried the great humanist tradition of the best in Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Gorky, Brecht, Sholokhov or 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 that 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 punishment, slow-footed intelligence and ability or downright stupidity, non-intelligibility and barbarism, this was reinforced by the world he met in the works of such geniuses of racism as Rider Haggard or Nicholas Moserrett, not to mention the intellectual pronouncements of such
giants of the Western intellectual and political establishment such as Hume ("the negro is naturally inferior to the whites"); Thomas Jefferson ("the blacks . . . are inferior to the whites on the endowments of both body and mind"); or Hegel (whose Africa was comparable 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).

In her paper read to the conference on the teaching of African literature in school held in Nairobi, Kenya (1971), and entitled African Literature and Black Images, the Kenyan writer and scholar Professor Micere Muga related how a reading of the description of Oedipus as an old African woman in Rider Haggard’s King Solomon’s Mines had for a long time made her feel mortal terror whenever she encountered old African women. In his autobiography This Left-Handed Poet, Ngugi describes how as a result of the literature he had read, he had come to associate Africa with snakes. So on arriving 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 affects their cultural and even political choices in ordinary living.

Thus Leopold Sedar Senghor has said very clearly that although the colonial language was forced upon him, if he had been given the choice he would still have opted for French. He becomes most 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." Senghor has now been rewarded by being appointed to an honoured place in the French Academy—"that institution for safeguarding the purity of the French language.

In Malawi Banda has erected his own monument by way of an institution, The Kamuzu Academy, whose function is to aid the brightest pupils of Malawi in their mastery of English. As the Zimbabwe Herald reported in 1981 "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 elsewhere. The President has instructed that Latin should occupy a central place in the curriculum. All teachers must have had at least some Latin in their academic background. Dr Banda has often said that no one can fully master English without knowledge of languages such as Latin and French. 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?"
cultural establishment such as whites); Thomas Jefferson in the endowments of both was comparable to a land of life of the night as far as the concerned).

A teaching of African literature and cultural literature of African students by Professor Micere Mugo of Gagool as an old African in Kenya has for a long time been encouraged old African Amy Politzer describes how as had come to associate Africa's being put up in a modern setting because he kept on looking at. These two have been able for most others the negative cultural and even political very clearly that although the he had been given the choice to become most lyrical in his native in French since French message is also addressed to others (i.e., African languages) the there is that of sap and blood, ya like diamonds. Senghor has put in an honoured place in the safeguarding the purity of the own monument by way of an expression is to aid the brightest English. As the Zimbabwe Herald of designed to produce boys and like Harvard, Chicago, Oxford, etc., to compete on equal terms with suggested that Latin should occupy teachers must have had at least and. Dr Banda has often said that just knowledge of languages such are no Malawian is allowed to enough—and all the teaching staff lawians might lower the standards, go, can you get a more telling, and a servile worship of what is

The African Petty Bourgeoisie

The twenty years that followed the Makerere conference gave the world a unique literature—novels, stories, poems, plays written by Africans in European languages—which won consolidated itself into a tradition with companion studies and a scholarly industry. Right from its conception it was the literature of the petty bourgeois born of the colonial school and university. It could not be other than that given the gradual access of this class to political and even economic dominance. But the petty bourgeoisie in Africa was a large class with many different strands. At one end of the spectrum were those who saw the future in terms of a permanent alliance with imperialism, in which they would play the role of an intermediary between the bourgeoisie of the western metropolises and the people of the colonies. (This is the section which, in my book Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary, is described as the "comparator bourgeoisie"). At the other end were those who looked towards a vigorous independent national economy in African capitalism or in some kind of socialism, and whom I shall here call the nationalistic or patriotic bourgeoisie. The literature written by Africans in European languages was specifically that of the nationalistic bourgeoisie, in terms of its content, its area of 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 emerge—to explain Africa to the world; Africa had a past and a culture of dignity and human complexity. Internally it gave this class a cohesive tradition and a common literary frame of references, which it otherwise lacked because of its uneven roots in the culture of the postwar and the culture of the metropolitan bourgeoisie. The literature added content to the class: the petty bourgeois as a butt of ridicule, a culture and a literature with which to confront the racist bigotry of Europe. This confidence was manifest in the sharp tone of the critique of European bourgeois civilization; and the implication that Africa had something new to give to the world—which was particularly strong in the ideology of independence—reflected the political ascendancy of the patriotic nationalistic section of the petty bourgeoisie before and immediately after independence.

We are talking initially of a literature whose background was the national-democratic revolutionary and anti-colonial liberation successes in China and India, with arm's-lengthings in Kenya and Algeria, and the independence of Ghana and Nigeria, with others impending. Yet this literature was part of this great anti-colonial movement and general anti-imperialist upheaval in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. It drew its stances and even form from the presiding their proverbs, fables, stories, riddles and wise sayings. It was shot through and through with optimism and had been, when the comparator section assumed political ascendance and strengthened rather than weakened the unbroken 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, and it was almost unanimously in its portrayal, with varying degrees of detail, emphasis and clarity of vision, of the post-independence betrayal of hope. But to whom was it directing its list of mistakes done, crimes and wrong committed, complaints unheeded, or its call for a change of moral direction? The imperialist bourgeoisie and 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 a new audience and new directions was reflected in the question of language, 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 quest was hampered by the very language choice, and in its movement toward the people, it could only go up to that section of the petty bourgeoisie—students, teachers, secretaries, for instance—still in closest touch with the people. It settled there, emasculated, caged within the linguistic fence of its colonial inheritance.

In fact its greatest weakness still lay where it has always been, in its audience: the petty-bourgeois readership automatically assumed by the very choice of language. Because of its indeterminate economic position between the many contending classes, the petty bourgeoisie develops a oscillating psychological make-up. Like a chameleon it takes on the colour of the main class with which it is in the closest touch and sympathy. It can be swept to activity by the masses at a time of revolutionary tide; or be driven to silence, fear, cynicism, withdrawal into self-contemplation, existential anguish, or to collaborating with the powers-that-be at times of reactionary tides. In Africa this class has always oscillated between the imperialist bourgeoisie and its comprador neo-colonial ruling elements on one hand, and the peasantry and the working class (the masses) on the other. This very lack of identity in its social and psychological make-up as a class, was reflected in the very literature it produced: the crisis of identity was assumed in that very preoccupation with definition at the Makerere conference. In literature as in politics it spoke as if its identity or crisis of identity was that of society as a whole. The literature it produced in European languages was given the identity of African literature as if there had never been literature in African languages. Yet by avoiding a real confrontation with the language issue, it was clearly wearing false robes of identity: it was a pretender to the throne of the mainstream of African literature. The practitioners of what [name withheld] called neo-African literature tried to get out of the dilemma by over-insisting that European languages were really African languages or by trying to Africanize English or French or Portuguese usage while making sure it was still recognizable as English or French or Portuguese.

In the process this literature created, falsely and even absurdly, an English-(or French or Portuguese) speaking African peasantry and
have become more and more critical, anciantory in tone, and it was almost trying degrees of detail, emphasis, and a sense of betrayal of hope. But to attract popular attention, crimes and wrongs or the call for a change of moral values. The petty bourgeoisie, in a paradoxical manner, sought to unite the masses and the working class or not. The search for petty audiences the quacks and simple forms, in the often in a direct call for action. It

Instead of seeing Africa as one wrongly blackness, it now is and evaluation of neocolonial skin, the confines of the languages of the masses, with less vigour and confidence. This very language choice, and in its very nature, only went up to that section of the audience, for instance—still in that state, where the potential kept unchallenged.

The Renewal of Language

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 at international conferences. These languages, these national heritages of Africa were kept alive by the peasantry, which saw no contradiction between speaking its mother-tongue and belonging to a larger national or continental geography. It saw no necessary antagonistic contradiction between belonging to its immediate nationality, to its multinational state along the Berlin-drawn boundaries, and to Africa as a whole. These people happily spoke Wolof, Hausa, Yoruba, (Indo-Arabic, Amharic, Kikuyu, Gikuyu, Lolo, Lulua, Shona, Ndebele, Kimbundu/Lozi, Lingala etc) 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 that best and consistently articulated an anti-imperialist position. If anything, it was the petty bourgeoisie particularly, the comprador, with its French and English and Portuguese, with its petty rivalries, its ethnic chauvinism, which encouraged these vertical divisions to the point of war at times. No, the peasantry had no complexes about its languages and the cultures they carried.

The peasantry and the urban working class threw up singers. These sang the old songs, or composed new ones incorporating their experiences in industries and urban life and in working-class struggles and organizations. These singers pushed the language to new limits, renewing and reinvigorating the languages by coining new words, new expressions and 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 among the petty bourgeoisie, who all wrote in African languages. It is these writers—people like Henry Wueli Saidi, German Takla Hwanyat, Shaban Roberts, Abdullatif Abdalla, Ennabim Husein, Euphrasie Kasula, B.H. Vilakazi, J.J. Jolobe, A.C. Jordan, D.A. Fagoona, and many others— whose books are celebrated in Africa. Language, Literature (1981)—who have given our languages a written literature thus ensuring their immortality in print despite the internal and external pressures for their extinction. In Kenya I would like to single out our Gikuyu, Wa Mwana, who was jailed by the British for ten years between 1931 and 1934, because of his writing in Gikuyu. His book, Mwamitski wa Mwek! Iwammbiri, a diary he secretly kept while in political detention, has just been published and...
has won the 1984 Noma Award. It is a powerful work extending the range of Gikuyu-language prose and is a crowning achievement to the work he started in 1946. His inspiration came from the mass anti-colonial movement of the Kenyan people, particularly the militant wing grouped around Mau Mau, the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, which in 1952 ushered in the era of modern guerrilla warfare in Africa.

And finally, from among the European language-speaking African petty bourgeoisie, there emerged a few who refused to join the chorus in accepting the 'fatalistic logic' of the position of European languages in our literary being. It was one of them, 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 in 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. 'What we would like future conferences on African literature to devote time to,' he added, '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, but the importance of his intervention was in its tone and historical timing. It was published soon after the 1962 Makerere Conference of African writers of English expression; it was polemical, 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 the agency of revolutionary break with the neo-colonial status quo are all compelling a lot of soul-searching in some writers, raising once again the entire problem of the language of African literature.

**The Choice for African Writers**

The question is this: we as African writers have always complained about the neo-colonial economic and political relationship to Euro-America. Right. But by continuing to write in foreign languages that pay homage to the metropolis, are we not maintaining, on the cultural level, that neo-colonial servile and cringing spirit? What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages?

While we were busy haranguing the ruling circles in a language which automatically excluded the participation of the peasantry and the working class in the debate, imperialist culture and African reactionary forces had a field day: the Christian Bible is available in unlimited quantities in even the tiniest African language. The comprador ruling cliques are also quite happy to have the peasantry and the working class...
a powerful work extending the
love to themselves: distortions, dictatorial directives, decrees, museum-
type fossils paraded as African culture, feudalistic ideologies, supervi-
sions, lies, all these backward elements and more are communicated to
the African masses in their own languages without any challenges from
those with alternative visions of tomorrow because they have deliber-
ately cocooned themselves in English, French and Portuguese. It is
ironic that the most reactionary African politician, the one who believes
in selling Africa to Europe, is often a master of African languages; that
the most zealous of European missionaries who believed in rescuing
Africa from itself, even from the paganism of its languages, were
nevertheless masters of African languages and often reduced them to
writing. The European missionary believed too much in his mission of
conquest not to communicate it in the languages most readily available
to the people: the African writer believes too much in African literature
to write it in those ethnic, divisive and underdeveloped languages of
the peasantry!

The added irony is that, despite any claims to the contrary, what they
have produced is not African literature. The editors of the Pelican
guides to English literature, in their latest volume, were right to
include a discussion of it as part of 20th-century English literature, just as the
French Academy was right to honour Senghor for his genuine and
talented contribution to French literature and language. What we have
created is another hybrid tradition, a tradition for transfiguration, a minority
tradition that can only be termed Afro-European 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, Ahmadou Kourouma, Senghor and many
others. Who can deny their fertile imaginations has certainly illumina-
ted important aspects of the African being in its continuous 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
literature written by Africans in European languages
in the era of imperialism.

But some are coming round to the inescapable conclusion articulated
by Obi Wall with such polemical vigour twenty years ago: African
literature can only be written in the African languages of the peasantry
and working class, the major alliance of classes in each of our
nationalities and the agency for the coming revolutionary break with
neo-colonialism.

I started writing in the Gikuyu language in 1977, after seventeen years
of involvement in Afro-European literature, in my case Afro-English
literature. It was then that I collaborated with Ngugi wa Thii in the
drafting of the play script, *Njororo*.*Njororo* I have since published a
novel in Gikuyu, *Caitama Matheurata!* and completed a musical drama,
Maina Ngima, (Eng. Ten: Make Sing for Me), three books for children, Njamba Nte Nalaishu i Machuga; Bathetera na Njamba Neer, Njamba Nte na Gidi Kang'ok'ot as well as another novel manuscript, Madigari Njiru. Wherever I have gone, particularly in Europe, I have often been confronted with the question: why are you now writing in Gikuyu? Why do you now write in an African language? In some academic quarters I have been confronted with the rebuke: why have you abandoned us? It was almost as if, in choosing to write in Gikuyu, I was doing something abnormal. But Gikuyu is my mother-tongue. The very fact that the dictates of common sense in the literary practice of other cultures are being questioned in the case of 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 the normality and the normality is viewed as abnormal.

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 schools 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. 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.

Towards a New Harmony

Colonial alienation takes 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, to understand it fully so as to be in a position to change it for his collective good. I would like to see the Kenyans people's mother-tongues (our national languages) carry a literature reflecting not only the rhythms of a child's spoken expression, but also his struggle with external nature and his own 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 complexes about his own language, his own self, his environment.

Chinua Achebe once described the tendency of African intellectuals to escape into abstract universalized in words that apply even more to the
language, a Kenyan language, on the anti-imperialist struggles of us and universities in Kenya many nationalities which make live qualities of awkwardness, disharmony. I do not want to see imperialist-imposed tradition of language that have developed by their communions beyond colonial alienation.

It is not an active (or passive) mental to one's environment. It is the language of conceptualization. A child's development, from the self and in the community. It is so that they are occupying two levels. On a larger social scale this allows and headless bodies.

In the restoration of the harmony language so as to remove the nostril and fully so as to be in a good. I would like to see the language carry a child's spoken expression, as to his own social nature. Language and his environment languages and even enjoy the revolutionary elements in other complexes about his own life.

Some African intellectuals to such 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 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 as a real a very inadequate to deal with an anxiety (italics mine). And if writers should opt for such escapist, who is to meet the challenge? 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. This process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all the other areas of human creative endeavours.

But writing in our languages—although a necessary first step in the correct direction—will not in itself bring about the renaissance in African cultures if that literature does not carry the content of our peoples' 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 to free it from internal and external parasites.

In other words writers in African languages should reconnect themselves to the revolutionary conditions of an organized peasantry and working class in Africa in their struggle to defeat imperialism and create a system of democracy and socialism in alliance with all the other peoples of the world. Unity in that struggle would ensure unity in our multilingual 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 USA.

But it is precisely that writers who speak African languages to the real links in the struggles of peasants and workers that they will meet their biggest challenge. For to the comprador-ruling regimes, the 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, carrying the possibility of prison, exile or even death. For such a writer there are no 'national' accolades, no new year honours, only abuse and slander and innumerable lies from the mouths of the armed power of a ruling minority—ruling that is on behalf of us-led imperialism—who see in democracy a real threat. Democratic participation of the people in shaping their own lives or in discussing their experience 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.