


*African Theatre* provides a focus for research, critical discussion, information and creativity in the vigorous field of African theatre and performance. Each annual issue concentrates on a major topic and through its resolutely pan-African coverage and accessible style, broadens the debates to all interested in drama and the many roles it plays in contemporary African life. The editors and editorial board bring together an impressive range of experience in African theatre.

Wole Soyinka and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o are the pre-eminent playwrights from West and East Africa respectively and their work has been hugely influential across the continent. This volume features directors' experiences of recent productions of their plays, the voices of actors and collaborators who have worked with the playwrights, and also provides a digest of their theatrical output. Contributors provide new readings of Ngũgĩ and Soyinka's classic texts, and a stimulating new approach for students of English, Theatre and of African studies. This volume includes a previously unpublished radio play by Wole Soyinka entitled *A Rain of Stones*, first produced on BBC Radio 4 in 2002.

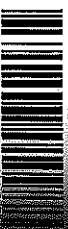
Contents: Editors' Introduction – Reading & performing African drama: how Wole Soyinka & Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o influenced my work by David Kerr – Ayan Contra Ujamaa: Soyinka & Ngũgĩ as theatre theorists by Biodun Jeyifo ENCOUNTERS WITH SOYINKA – I Working with Wole Soyinka: Tunji Oyelana in conversation with Sola Adeyemi – II The difficulties of a neophyte staging Wole Soyinka's *The Beatification of Arua Boy* by Tunde Oshkoyi – III Pentecostalizing Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* by Bisi Adigun – IV *The Lion & the Jewel* in Mombasa by Silivah Namussasi ENCOUNTERS WITH NGUGI – I Choru wa Mfirufi: reflections on the Kamfirithu experience by Mĩgo Mũthia II Producing *I Will Marry When I Want* in South Africa by Frederick Mbogo – III Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: the unrecognized Black Hermit by Oby Obyerodiyambo – IV Kamfirithu in retrospect by Gĩchingiri Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ – Wole Soyinka & Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: plays in production by James Gibbs & Mĩgo Mũthia – The making of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o & Mĩcere Gĩthae Mũgo at the University of California, Irvine by Ken H. Karak Playscript: *A Rain of Stones* by Wole Soyinka – Book reviews

Cover: based on photographs of Wole Soyinka (reproduced by kind permission of Wole Soyinka) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (© Daniel Anderson, University of California, Irvine Communications Dept)

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# *African Theatre*

# 13

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# *African Theatre 13* *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o* *& Wole Soyinka*

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## The Making of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o & Mũcere Githae Mũgo at the University of California, Irvine

KETU H. KATRAK

*Ketu Katrak offers a personal record of a major production of The Trial of Dedan Kimathi at the University of California, Irvine. She describes the process of creating the production, the contribution of Prof. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (UCI) and Mũcere Githae Mũgo, to the experience, and the response of student actors and the audience. This is a graphic description of a rare production of one of the major works of modern African theatre.* (Eds)

The stage was on fire as the British *askaris* stoically defended the British colonial policy of dehumanizing and subjugating the African, and the African, led by the brave Kimathi, courageously fought back against the colonial evil. At the centre of this heated battle is the question of man's liberty, freedom and independence. Such are universal principles that man holds dear anywhere in the world.

Although the drama is based on the Kenyan's struggle against British colonialism in the fifties by distinguished Prof. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (UCI) and Mũcere Githae Mũgo, this is a universal narrative that the UCI drama students staged with impeccable precision and dedication.

As a Kenyan whose family was directly and adversely affected by the struggle, I was personally and deeply moved by the entire play that often ceases to be a play on stage and becomes in my mind, the actual pain and struggle that my family members had to endure. I know now that sometimes one has to fight for what is already his.

Njoroge Njau<sup>1</sup>

Incarceration, control of bodies, military and police power during British colonialism in Kenya pervade the script and the highly successful production, the United States premiere of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Mũcere Githae Mũgo's co-authored play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (8-16 March 2014) at the University of California, Irvine. Mũgo is our treasured colleague, Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine and by undertaking this production we honour him as a playwright. He was most gracious in participating in the entire process of the production from assisting student-actors during the table work, to regaling us with stories from his personal experience of living through Kenya's difficult history, to

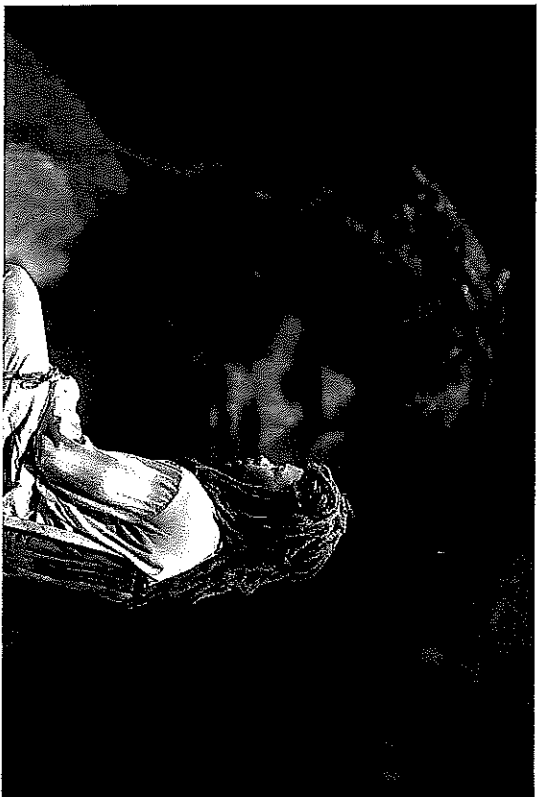


Fig. 1 Oge Agulue as Kimathi with projected image on the wall; The Trial of Dedan Kimathi at the *xmpl* theatre, University of California, Irvine. (Figures 1-6 all taken during the last two technical dress rehearsals (5 and 6 March 2014; © and reproduced by kind permission of Paul Kennedy)

imbuing us with his optimistic spirit of resistance expressed via Kiswahili and Gikuyu freedom songs. This play's remarkable co-playwright, Milcere Githae Mugo also participated in the process of rehearsals and we were graced by her presence (from her position as Meredith Professor for Teaching Excellence in the Department of African American Studies at Syracuse University) for the opening night on 8 March 2014.

After four days of intense table work in late January 2014, and six weeks of rehearsal, going through the rigours and challenges of any production with its small and large crises, the play was ready for an audience. Its unique staging and presentation begins even before the spectators enter the performance area. The lobby itself, of the 'xmpl' (experimental) theatre evokes a prison setting with ominous sounds of changing chains and keys, heavy footsteps, and the visual presence of stern faced *askaris* – Kenyan soldiers, known as the King's African Rifles (KAR) loyal to British colonizers – in khaki shorts, red fez hats, and guns mounted on their shoulders. Many spectators giggle nervously, trying to diffuse the tension; the soldiers remain impassive and threatening. The spectators submit tickets and enter a dark area where they face a guard before a metal gate. Two or three at a time are allowed to enter a narrow corridor with images of Kimathi and other historical scenes of the Kenyan anti-colonial struggle. The spectators are trapped in this confined space as armed soldiers confront them, staring them down, and finally letting them pass through another metal

gate that clangs loudly behind them. Even for spectators who may be familiar with the play, this creative and unique entrance, inducting them into prison for the next two and a half hours, evokes a jarring reality of the control of one's body and will by the colonial prison system with armed guards. As an audience member, Professor Manuel Gómez, UCI's Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs (now retired), commented:

From the moment I walked through the jail doors, hearing the deathly slammung sound, I entered into an extraordinarily creative, emotional, historical wallop to all my senses . . . no, an assault on my heart and consciousness, and at the end I wobbled out still in bone silent emotional contortions. (email, 10 March 2014 to the production's choreographer, Professor Sharon Wray, Dance Department, UCI)

As the audience finally enters the performance area and notes the chairs arranged in the round, their eyes catch the centre where the play's hero, Dedan Kimathi, hands and feet chained, sits on a raised podium behind bars. Oge Agulue, UCI's Master of Fine Arts student who played this particular Kimathi, was masterful in his interpretation of the role: his energy and passion moved many audience members to tears. Ngũgĩ noted that Oge Agulue was the best Kimathi he has seen. Kimathi remains in his jail cell, chained, behind bars throughout the show, silently witnessing the action even when he is not in a scene. Even during the intermission, he remains in character. A cast member brings him water in a tin cup replicating prison conditions. As Mumbi Ngũgĩ in the audience conveys astutely: 'How powerfully Oge portrayed the inner and outer struggle of this global hero, who so nobly refused to be awed in the face of the power of the colonial sovereign – by the literal and metaphysical "chains of its body politic"' (email to Katrak, 9 March 2014). Although Kimathi in the play is in a literal prison, for Ngũgĩ and Mugo, all people living under oppression, or under neo-colonial leaders are equally incarcerated, mentally and psychologically.

The action begins in the Courtroom: White Judge Henderson, in a charade of 'justice', reads out the charge. The time is 1956 during the dark days of the British-imposed Emergency (1952-1960). Martial law fills the atmosphere with terror for ordinary Kenyans. 'Sudden darkness . . . Distant drums grow louder and louder.' Dominated unfairly, ordinary people resist their oppression as expressed in their raised voices in song. From behind the wings, first softly and gradually gaining in strength and energy, the audience hears the words of a freedom song:

Tutanyakua  
Masamba yetu  
Tupigane  
Uhuru wetu

Translated by Ngugi:  
We shall take back our land  
We shall liberate our soil

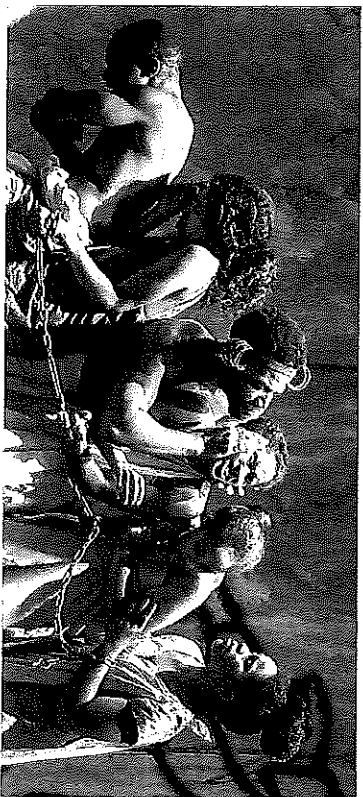


Fig. 2 Ensemble members as chained slaves: Anthony Cloyd, Jessica Mason, Nia-Arina Minor, Martibel Martinez, Jennifer Jones, with black slave trader played by Blake Morris (@ Paul Kennedy 2014)

Live drumming by Amindo Marshall and Tom Mcnally (from Los Angeles, brought into our production by our choreographer Sheron Wray) accompanies the song. The actors emerge singing and dancing this song that asserts that the land belongs to the people, and that this soil will be liberated from foreigners. They chant: 'Away with Oppression. Unchain the People.' As the play's co-author, Micerere Githae Mũgo reminds us: 'the deliberate use of Kenyan/African orature was to affirm the creativity of the masses. In African orature, song and dance are important mobilization tools that liberation struggles have used to great effect' (email to Kartrak, 5 May 2014). A loud gunshot interrupts the song as the villagers scatter. Our attention is drawn to a dramatized pageant of Black people's history' (*Trial, 4*), where an African slave trader sells chained humans to a white slave buyer. The play throws the audience into the brutal past, recreating slaves' inhumane treatment in captivity with sounds of whiplashes and screams. Through skilful lighting, four such scenarios are depicted using movement, stylized and expressive dance choreographed by our faculty colleague, talented choreographer, Sheron Wray. As the play's co-author, Micerere Githae Mũgo notes most usefully (email to Kartrak, 5 May 2014):

The evocation of 'slavery' as a theme historically connects various forms of imperialist enslavement under settler colonialism in Kenya (and continental Africa) to the Middle Passage and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. It is an important *Sankofa* moment with critical symbolic linkages to the Pan Africanist and Internationalist sites: a reminder that imperialist domination and oppression against Black (and other dominated people) go centuries back.

These effective portrayals immediately implicate the audience as witnesses, not as distant spectators to this nightmare of human history unfolding at close quarters as they sit at the edge of their chairs. The play's director, Dr Jaye Austin Williams (Visiting Assistant Professor at UCI) staged the action

evocatively, not only in the round, but took this further as dancers and actors moved between the rows of chairs, often making direct eye contact with the spectators, at times, brushing them with their costumes, and indeed, their very breath. This performance 'presents a unique opportunity' comments Dr Williams in her Director's Note in the programme, 'to confront roundly (i.e. in the sense-surround) the violent meld of Transatlantic Slavery and African Colonization.' Njoroge Njau notes: 'Many thanks go to the director, Jaye Austin Williams for wonderful and great work that no doubt took time, energy, effort and dedication to bring to fruition.'

As director Dr Jaye (as we fondly called her) notes, the play 'mediates on what a trial would have looked like if justice had actually been carried out. It's a series of four trials that play out in the mind of this legendary figure.' At the outset, in the Courtroom the white Judge Henderson, who also plays the prosecutor, the 'friend/enemy of the African people', emerges from the bowels of the stage in his full legal regalia complete with a wig, reciting the charge that is repeated over and over again in the play. Kimathi is in custody ironically enough not for being the leader of an armed guerilla struggle but on a technicality, namely that he was found 'at or near Thururu in possession of a firearm, namely a revolver which under Special Emergency Regulations constitutes a criminal offence. Guilty or not guilty?' Ngũgĩ notes (email to Director Williams, 14 February 2014) that

all the courtroom speakers are aware of the audience around them in the courtroom and by extension the actual audience in the auditorium who can be seen as an extension of the courtroom. So, some of Kimathi's words and even the Settler's direct appeals to their followers as if the crowd/the public is the real judge/real jury. There are two sets of judges in the courtroom: the judge himself and the public. Kimathi sequence leading to the 'unchain my soul' is addressed to the public jury. The also are the settler's words: 'I had a wife and a daughter. My property. Where are they now?' (*Trial, 29*)

The play portrays a cast of Kenyan revolutionaries who support Kimathi—Woman, symbolic of all working mothers with tenacious commitment to Kenya's liberation, and ordinary Kenyans. A young Boy and Girl, deeply influenced by the Woman, represent the nation's youth who will direct its future. The Boy and Girl are significant 'as youth' notes the play's co-author Micerere Githae Mũgo, 'who take on the baton in the race against colonial oppression and neo-colonial treachery' (email to Kartrak, 5 May 2014). There are also 'hooded collaborators' who betray their own people, literally hiding behind hoods and pointing out the Kenyan fighters to the British for arrest.

The play powerfully and affectively portrays the injustices endured by ordinary Kenyans during the period of Emergency imposed mainly to destroy the Mau Mau struggle headed by leaders such as Dedan Kimathi. As Ngũgĩ comments in a local newspaper article: 'To see the struggle that (the protagonist) had to go through, fighting against the British Empire still near its height, that's a David-versus-Goliath story, and that kind of message and struggle is always relevant.'<sup>4</sup> Kimathi faces 'four trials' in his jail cell. He sees through every 'trick'





Fig. 3 Girl played by Sakina Ibrahim (© Paul Kennedy 2014)

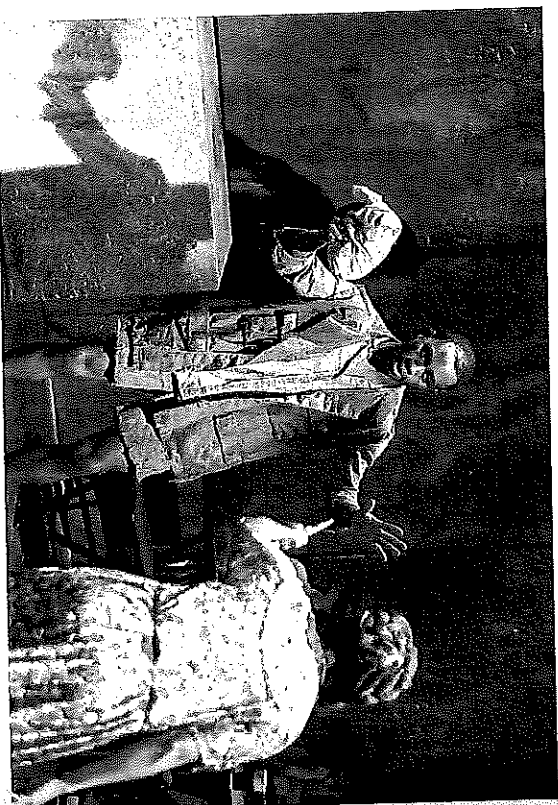


Fig. 4 Girl and Boy: Sakina Ibrahim as Girl and Anthony Clourd as Boy (© Paul Kennedy 2014)

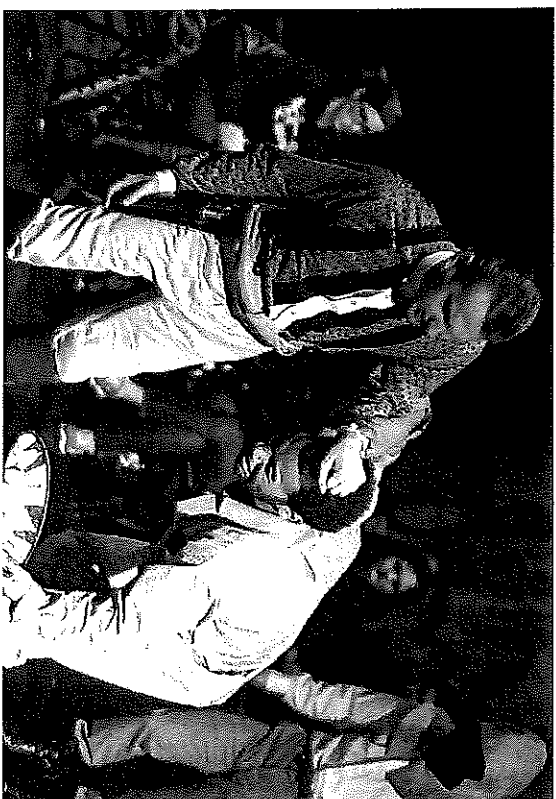


Fig. 5 Jacob Dresch as Colonial officer tormenting an ordinary villager, a fruit seller, played by Blake Morris, and a hooded collaborator played by Daniel Song in the background (© Paul Kennedy 2014)

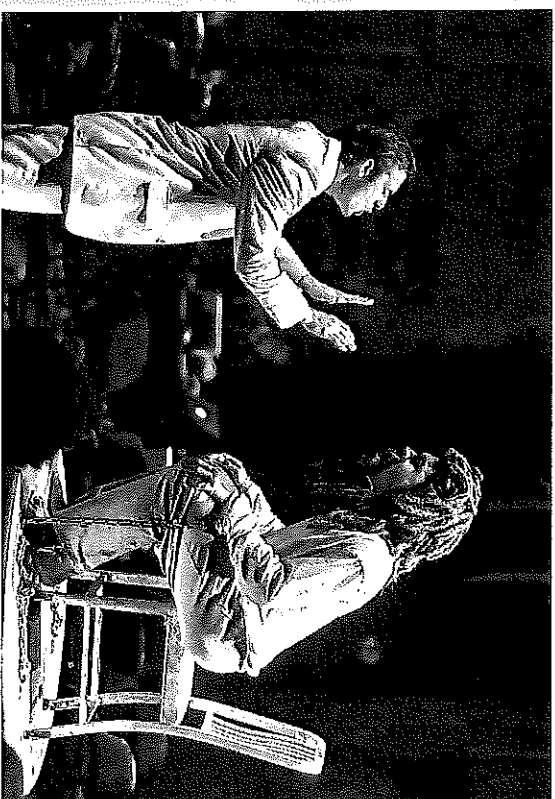


Fig. 6 Oge Agulue as Kimathi being visited in his cell by the Judge Ian Henderson played by Matt Koenig (© Paul Kennedy 2014)



Fig. 7 The cast and creative team of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi at the xmpl theatre, University of California, Irvine, Opening Night, 8 March 2014. Centre, Oge Agulue as Dedan Kimathi; to her left, the co-authors, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mũgo* (© Ketu H. Kartrak 2014)

presented to him by Henderson who visits him twice – once to be conciliatory, offering to 'spare' Kimathi's life if he would call off the fighting in the forests, and when he cannot break him, to order that Kimathi be tortured. Next, neo-colonial politicians and bankers visit Kimathi in his cell – European, Asian, and African – whose capitalist purpose overrides their racial identity. Co-opted black politicians, neo-slaves, 'black skins and colonial settler's hearts', 'drunkers of blood' as Kimathi calls them only spout the colonizers' line about giving up the armed struggle, of working towards independence by getting a few seats in the Legislative Council, lured by sitting around 'conference tables in London, getting shares in motor companies, and other bribes of wealth and power. The co-author, Micere Githae Mũgo's interpretive comment is astute, namely that the Banker, Politician and Priest are 'the representatives of the institutions of the superstructure under capitalism. The kind of "freedom" they offer Kimathi all foreshadows current oppressive conditions under neo-liberalism' that continue in Kenya today (email to Kartrak 5 May 2014). The reality of the masses of destitute Kenyans, portrayed in the play, with many still fighting in the forests to reclaim their land are entirely left out of these discussions on 'Partnership in Progress'. They have also missed out on getting the 'English education' that becomes key to success after independence.

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* masterfully portrays different segments of these co-opted Africans – the KAR African soldiers who fought for their colonial masters during World War II and who continue to serve the *mzungu* (whites) in Kenya, controlling and killing their own fellow Kenyans. A crucial moral



Fig. 8 Centre, Oge Agulue as Dedan Kimathi, with co-authors Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mũgo (© Ketu H. Kartrak 2014)



Fig. 9 Centre, Ketu H. Kartrak (dramaturg) with co-authors Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mũgo (© Ketu H. Kartrak 2014)

dilemma confronts Kimathi in his flashback to the forest when he is faced with his own brother Wambarara who has now become a collaborator with the British. Should Kimathi order that his kindred brother be killed since he is a traitor to their cause? He is torn and he cannot order his brother's murder. In this vacillation, this great leader, as the Woman narrates to the Boy and Girl, was 'too human'.

The play ends on a positive note of continuing struggle with ordinary workers and peasants singing a thunderous freedom song:

Tutapigana mpaka mwisho  
Tutuge vita na tutashinda  
Majembe jiu mapanga jiu  
Tujikomboe tujenge upya

Translated by Ngũgĩ:

We shall fight for our land,  
We shall fight and succeed.  
We liberate ourselves.  
We build a new society

Both Ngũgĩ and his wife Njeeri wa Ngũgĩ assisted us with pronunciation and melodies of the freedom songs in the play in Gikũyũ (Ngũgĩ's mother-tongue) and Kiswahili. Again, Njoroge Njau voices what Ngũgĩ told me is 'a people's endorsement' of our production. Njau continues:

I was greatly impressed, in particular, by their dedication and the hard work they had put in the mastery of the play and understanding of the culture, history and the people they played on the stage. They were pronouncing with ease names of people and places that I know they could only have been so articulate through a sustained effort and commitment to the task. I salute you all for your stellar performance.

The power of this production and the successful embodiment of Kenyan history and culture by young students in the Department of Drama was a team effort by the director, choreographer, dramaturg, and the design team working on sound, lighting, costume, and stage-management under faculty mentors. The planning stages began in fall 2013 for the play opening in March 2014. The students received high praise from none other than the Kenyan community in the audience who valued the validation of seeing their own history depicted with such sensitivity and thought. As Njoroge Njau remarks:

Kenyans who came to see the play have given glowing tributes of the beautiful work that UCI drama students did in executing the play. Many have even confessed that they really hadn't grasped properly the pain and anguish our people had endured in order to free our beautiful country from the yoke of colonialism. Indeed, they were grateful for a renewed lesson in their own history.

Kenyans in Diaspora are immensely thankful and indebted to all the UCI drama students for telling our story. We are full of praise to you and wish somehow you will have a chance to go to Kenya and visit with the people you so proudly presented on stage. Now, you too are children of our struggle. Since you have felt the weight and price of the struggle, you no doubt know the value of freedom.

## History and its discontents

The student performers along with the design and creative team of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* prepared to enter the colonial world of Kenya in the 1950s with its atmosphere of fear, threat, arrests of entire villages, fear of detentions at the whim of colonial officers, by reading a packet of materials compiled by myself as dramaturg along with two assistant dramaturgs, doctoral students in the Department of Drama, Allison Rotstein and Sonia Desai. The readings included classic essays on colonialism, neo-colonialism, race, culture by Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Mireere Githae Mũgo, Orlando Patterson, theoretical readings on slavery, on Black being, British propaganda about Kimathi including a documentary that we screened as part of our four-day intense table work.<sup>5</sup> We provided the readings to the cast and creative team as a 'gift' for the holidays in December 2013, so that by the time work began in January they were equipped with some basic information on colonialism, and Kenya's history.

Our purpose in sharing these materials with the actors and creative team was to layer their understanding of the play, to grasp its *political purpose*. We aimed to equip the actors to take the next challenge of inhabiting these ideas in their bodies as they enacted their roles on stage. The director, Dr Jaye who has worked as a Literary Dramaturg, welcomed this engagement of ideas with actors and designers.

Ngũgĩ himself attended all four days and enlightened the students with many fine insights into interpreting the text, and historical details of the colonial situation in Kenya from his own research and life experience. He told us that this is a very personal play for him and that although he has published many novels, and volumes of essays, including his recent memoirs, drama has had the most impact on his life. It was, after all, his co-written play, *I Will Marry When I Want* (with Ngũgĩ wa Miriri) at Kamirithi community centre with collaboration from local peasants and workers on the script, production, including building a 2,000 seat theatre, that proved so threatening to the Kenyan State under Jomo Kenyatta that Ngũgĩ was imprisoned for a whole year (1977-78) at Kamiti Maximum security prison. During his long days in prison, he recognized the power of using not English but the peasants' local language, and telling the stories significant to their lives. Ngũgĩ also asserted to the students that physical incarceration, difficult as it undoubtedly is, did not imprison his imagination; hence, he managed to write his first Gikũyũ novel, *Caitani mutharaba-ini* (later translated in English as *Devil on the Cross*) on toilet paper while in prison.

Ngũgĩ explained to the students that the play primarily explores the relationship, and often the disjuncture, between law and justice, and that such issues are still with us. He asked whether one can have justice under criminal laws such as during colonial times, and more recently, under Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' law that freed the white perpetrator of the cold-blooded murder of unarmed black teenager Trevon Martin? The production ended with the freedom song

by the ensemble and then as the stage went to black, the projected images on the walls included dark renderings of justice to blacks in the US – Rodney King, beaten brutally by Los Angeles police officers (2 March 1991) whose unconscionable acquittal led to the Los Angeles Riots, and more recently (26 February 2012) the unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin, shot by a white murderer supposedly ‘standing his ground’ in Florida.

Ngũgĩ shared the daily threat that Kenyans faced under the British and the specific fight over land in Kenya since this became a settler colony where the whites appropriated the best land, dispossessed the indigenous owners of the fertile Highland (renaming them the White Highlands) and forced the local people to labour on the land for the colonizers’ profit. Much of this history was new for the student-actors.

Further, it was important for the actors to understand that although the play takes us into the heart of this segment of Kenyan history during the British imposed Emergency (1952–1960), it recreates an imaginative history as in what might have transpired if the British had actually held a trial for Kimathi. As a black man, he is already guilty before the trial even begins. Ngũgĩ and Mũgo excavate a misrepresented segment of Kenyan history, reconstructing it imaginatively, even resurrecting Dedan Kimathi as a hero of the Kenyan people, disrupting British propagated negative myths about Kimathi.

A central exchange about law and justice takes place between Judge Henderson enacting the charade of ‘even-handed justice’, and Kimathi’s challenge to the lie that ‘There is only one law, one justice’. Rather, Kimathi retorts that there are ‘Two laws. Two justices. One law and one justice protects the man of property, the man of wealth, the foreign exploiter. Another law, another justice, silences the poor, the hungry, our people’ (25–26).

Ngũgĩ pointed out to the students that since Kenya was the first among the African colonies to confront the British via an armed struggle, the colonizers were determined to denigrate the movement as inhuman, as driven by primitive oath-taking ceremonies, by barbaric killing sprees, all of which totally belied the organization and discipline of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army led by charismatic figures such as Dedan Kimathi. If the armed resistance succeeded in Kenya, this would be a dangerous precedent for other British colonies. Indeed, in a battle over naming, the British misnamed the struggle as Mau Mau indicating *mumbo jumbo* pervaded by dark deeds and motives. The Mau Mau put a high price on loyalty, inducting members into the movement through a secret oath ritual. The British were hell-bent to get these oaths out of the captured Mau Mau: the ones who were captured were taken to ‘reeducation camps’, often subjected to physical and psychological torture. Throughout the struggle, the British lost less than 100, whereas 11,000 Mau Mau were killed. Along with physical killings, the British demonized Mau Mau as terrorists; hence Kenyans themselves, especially the neo-colonial elite who came to power after independence, despised the movement as demonic and wanted to wipe it out. The British colonial tactic of divide and rule effectively divided Kenyans who were loyal to the British from their kinsmen belonging to the Mau Mau.

Ngũgĩ narrated a personal incident when he and Mũcere Githae Mũgo, both colleagues at the University of Nairobi in 1971, saw a play with completely false and negative portrayals of Kimathi. As they left the theatre, they both felt compelled to write a play correcting these falsehoods, and indeed they felt responsible to ‘resurrect Kimathi’ as Ngũgĩ noted in our table work; from such disparaging myths. As they note in their Preface to the text:

There was no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic struggle of Kenyan people fighting foreign forces of exploitation and domination . . . We agreed to co-author a play on Kimathi . . . a hero of the Kenyan masses.

Ngũgĩ himself enjoyed the entire process of the table work, and then rehearsals, always providing useful insights though never overtly interfering with the director’s vision. I was often the scribe keeping notes and then sharing them with the director, assistant director, and choreographer. Everyone had the highest respect for Ngũgĩ and valued his views enormously. I was deeply heartened to hear from Ngũgĩ’s wife Njeeri that this entire experience of working on the play’s production had inspired a light-hearted buoyancy in Ngũgĩ making him feel ten years younger. Indeed, whenever I met with him to talk about the play, he would express an infectious excitement. He is always the most patient and generous teacher, addressing any questions or concerns from the young actors for whom the fabric of this play, initially foreign and distant, became through the process of a true educational experience, very close to their own hearts. Ngũgĩ himself feels like the team has become his family and he shares with them the events and honours that he continues to receive in his distinguished life.<sup>5</sup>

The Drama Department generously hosted Mũcere Githae Mũgo who joined us (with her daughter Mumbi wa Mũgo) from Syracuse University for the Opening Night. And before that, with the use of modern technology, Mũcere Githae Mũgo was with us via skype on the first day of our table work. As we traversed the rehearsal hall, to listen to the presentations by the set designers, then the costume designers, and so on, Mũcere and also entered our hearts and looked into the scenery and the costumes and also entered our hearts with her words of encouragement. Both she and Ngũgĩ at that first memorable session reminisced about the time over 40 years back when, as colleagues at the University of Nairobi, they had agreed to write a play together on Kimathi, ‘to set the record straight’ to use Chinua Achebe’s well-known phrase upon the publication of his classic first novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Later, Mũcere Githae Mũgo was present for the final dress rehearsal when she provided key insights to the student who played the Woman – a role that Mũcere herself had played many years back. She contributed significantly to an interview/conversation with Ngũgĩ that was filmed for a documentary on ‘The Making of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*’ at UCT, and for our celebratory Opening Night. Ngũgĩ and Mũgo succeed in what they note in the Preface to the play as ‘the challenge to truly depict the masses (symbolized by Kimathi) in the only historically correct perspective: positively, heroically, and as the true makers of history.’

### My personal journey to the production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

The idea of having the Department of Drama undertake a production of one of Ngũgĩ's plays was a dream of mine that I kept filed away in my mind for many years. Ngũgĩ and I have been colleagues at UCI since 2002 when he joined the University of California, Irvine, as the Inaugural Director of the International Center for Writing and Translation. We had talked often about doing one of his plays on campus. In 2013-2014, the time was right for the Department of Drama to undertake this project. At UCI, in 2013, Ngũgĩ was awarded the University's highest honour, namely the UCI Medal. He had already been nominated twice for the Nobel Prize in Literature along with receiving ten honorary doctorates from institutions worldwide over the years and many other honours. Among these accolades, none had specifically honoured Ngũgĩ as a playwright. Our production of *Trial* aimed to recognize his work in this area.

The Department of Drama's annual season usually includes six full productions that are selected via a democratic process involving input and discussion by the department faculty, especially those involved in the acting and design aspects of production. As a member of the doctoral faculty in the Department, I also had an interest in the practical aspects of theatre making, particularly as a dramaturg where I could combine my scholarly skills with the realities of production. I had served as dramaturg at one of the most prominent regional theatres in the United States – the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) – when their Artistic Director, Bill Rauch, had invited me to be the dramaturg for OSF's production of the ancient Sanskrit play, *The Little Clay Cart*. I could not have had a better location to learn both the skills required of a dramaturg, and the realities of production.

The theme of the annual season of plays selected in 2013-14 by the Department of Drama was 'justice'. Perfect, I thought to myself. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was concerned centrally about law and justice, indeed 'two laws, two justices' as Kimathi resolutely declares in the court during his imagined trial. One law protects the wealthy, and another law is served out to the poor and destitute. Issues of injustice, of the haves and have-nots, of the struggles of ethnic minorities in many of the inner cities of the United States all made this play a relevant choice for production.

I presented, tentatively at first, my idea of doing Ngũgĩ's play at the Department of Drama's Season planning meeting in March 2013. Our Department Chair, Professor Gary Busby and other faculty came on board as the idea of honouring Ngũgĩ as a playwright was very appealing. Further, the prospect of this production facilitating connections between our Department and Humanities and even beyond to other Schools, was deeply appealing.

In a historic gesture uniting a large segment of our campus, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, was co-sponsored by Deans of the Schools of Arts, Humanities,

Social Sciences, Social Ecology, and Law; Ngũgĩ had expressed a desire to have a professionally made film of the production and we managed to get funding for that along with making a documentary film, 'On the Making of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* at UCI' from our Provost, Professor Howard Gillman, and University Extension. The documentary – including table work with actors, Ngũgĩ and the creative team, rehearsal shots, interviews with the co-authors – will showcase our work in time for UCI's 50<sup>th</sup> year celebrations in 2014-2015.<sup>7</sup>

Let me end with a few testimonials from audience members who were deeply moved by this production. One of our first year doctoral students, Anna Renee Hansen wrote to me in an email (23 March 2014):

I am so glad that UCI is putting on such important, relevant plays. It made me feel very proud to be a part of this program. The show was moving, powerful, and thought-provoking – everything theatre should be in my estimation! The most powerful part for me was the Brechtian audience involvement, the way we couldn't escape – we were implicated in our spectatorship. It was uncomfortable, maddening, entertaining, heartbreaking, beautiful. I know you and your team worked very hard on it and I want to thank you for everything you did to make this production so excellent.

Dr John Daly, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Human Resources at UCI commented in an email to Njeeri wa Ngũgĩ (9 March 2014):

Never did I feel immersed in a play [as I did watching *Trial*]. Tonight I felt like a participant . . . I wanted to get up from my seat and free Kimathi from his chains. I wanted to grab a gun from one of the British soldiers. I was completely caught up in the moment. It became live theatre to me and not a play . . . The actors were amazing. You would never know they were college students in Irvine! They completely made me believe they were citizens of Kenya in the 1950s.

Another spectator whom I had invited, 90-year-old, prominent Japanese-American author, Mitsuye Yamada, one who had undergone incarceration (along with 110,000 Japanese-Americans during World War II in the US) remarked (email to Katrak, 10 March 2014):

I want to congratulate you for this enormous success of a play where everything, from the language, the music, the acting, and the presentation all came together in such a stunning way! I've never seen a play where I was completely drawn in emotionally in the first few minutes and kept on this emotional intensity throughout (until the intermission). At the same time, there were so many intertwining political and social issues I felt as though my heart (or brain?) would burst!

Finally, Kenyan Njoroje Njau, whose words began this personal reflection, are equally fitting to end with. I could not have hoped for a stronger 'people's endorsement' as Ngũgĩ noted to me, of our efforts than Njau's words:

This, our story is now yours as well. Thank you.

And thanks to one and all organizers and contributors including The University of California, Irvine (UCI) for giving a voice to our people who fought so courageously; not for a price or recognition but for human freedom and dignity.

## NOTES

- 1 Njoroge Njau sent this via email (17 April 2014) to Ngugi, who shared it with the cast and creative team. Njau was an audience member along with others from the Kenyan community who attended the production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). Njau and others travelled nearly three hours by car from Bakersfield to Irvine (around 150 miles) to see this play.
- 2 Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo (2006) *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam: East African Educational Publishers, Ltd. First pub. 1976. Published in USA (2014) by Waveland Press, Inc. Long Grove Ill.
- 3 Director Williams quoted in Joel Beers, 'Ngugi Wa Thiong'o Is the Lion in Exile,' *OC [Orange County] Register*, 3 March 2014, 5.
- 4 Ngugi quoted in Joel Beers, 'Ngugi Wa Thiong'o Is the Lion in Exile,' *OC [Orange County] Weekly*, 6 March 2014, Arts page.
- 5 Some of the readings in the packet were from Frantz Fanon (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. R. Philcox. NY: Grove Press, Repr., 2004; from Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: Heinemann, and *Globalistics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, New York: Columbia University Press, (2012); from Micere Githae Mugo 'Art, Artists and the Flowering of Pan-Africana Liberated Zones,' Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Distinguished Lecture, 2012 (Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam, 2013); Micere Githae Mugo (2012) *Speaking and Writing from the Heart of My Mind: Selected Essays and Speeches*, Trenton NJ/London: Africa World Press; British Colonial Office (1960) *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau*, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Colonies by Command of Her Majesty, May 1960 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office); Ian Henderson and Philip Goodhart (1958) *The Hunt for Kimathi*, London: Hamish Hamilton; Donald I. Barnett and Karari Njama (1966) *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press; Orlando Patterson (1982) *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press.
- 6 Recently, Ngugi wa Thiong'o was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a well-deserved honour.
- 7 For the third consecutive year, UC Irvine was ranked first among US universities under 50 years old by *Times Higher Education*.

## A Rain of Stones

### A Play for Radio

First broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2002.

Cast: Dr Meklis: Patrice Naimabana; Dedaui/Sekurmi: Madhav Sharma;

Risela: Pityangga Eian; Hezra: Rashid Karapiet. Directed by Pauline Harris.

### WOLE SOYINKKA

#### CHARACTERS

DR MEKLIS	Archeologist
RISELA	His Assistant, daughter to Hezra
SEKURMI	An old family retainer
HEZRA	Guardian of the Scroll
DEDAU	City Elder