"Whose Dystopia? Historicity and Cross-Cultural Socio-Politics in the Dystopian Imagination of George Orwell and Ngugi wa Thiong'o"

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ABSTRACT

This article, "Whose Dystopia? Historicity and Cross-Cultural Socio-Politics in the Dystopian Imagination of George Orwell and Ngugi wa Thiong'o," re-evaluates the literary works of George Orwell and Ngugi wa Thiong'o from a historicist perspective. It examines the origins of George Orwell's and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's dystopian imaginations, with particular attention to how their respective societies and historical periods shape their conceptualisation and development of the dystopian imagination. It also investigates points of both convergence and divergence in their approaches to dystopia from a cross-cultural perspective, with a focus on themes such as capitalism, totalitarianism, imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Drawing on New Historicism, the article argues that literary writers often draw connections between past and present to determine what the future holds for their societies, and that the history of every society defines its dystopia.

Keywords: Dystopia; Historicity; Cross-cultural; Socio-politics; Imagination.

INTRODUCTION

Dystopian literature is a narrative form that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, offering a rich diversity of stories that probe the darker dimensions of society and human nature. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, in A Glossary of Literary Terms (2015), define dystopia as "works of fiction which represent a very unpleasant imaginary world, in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected in some future culmination" (64). In dystopian fiction, utopian ideals have disintegrated, giving way to totalitarianism, repression, and societal decay. Yet the portrayal of dystopia varies significantly across cultures, reflecting the distinct historical, social, and political contexts from which these narratives arise.

The question "Whose dystopia?" invites deeper reflection. Dystopia cannot be examined in isolation, for it is shaped by the histories and societies of its writers. Each writer documents the challenges of their society, often marked by successive historical struggles. From Aldous Huxley's technological dystopia, to George Orwell's socio-political critique of authoritarian regimes, to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Afrocentric condemnation of colonial and neocolonial dominance, each writer's dystopian imagination presents a distinctive perspective on power, resistance, and human agency, thereby enriching the complexity of the genre. Although these variations produce contextual disparities, the uniqueness of each context remains pronounced, shaped by the historical experiences of the society in question.

Historicity is a central concern in the critical study of literature. It refers to the quality of being situated in, produced by, and intelligible only through history. To insist on the historicity of a text is to reject the notion that literature is a timeless aesthetic object, and to insist instead that every text is a response to specific historical conditions, conditions that shape what the text can say, how it says it, and how it is read. As Fredric Jameson famously declared, the dialectical critic must "always historicize" (9). This means that literary forms, genres, and imaginative worlds are themselves historical products. The dystopian imaginations examined in

this article are not, therefore, abstract instances of a universal genre but historically situated responses to the political worlds their authors inhabited.

Jameson, in The Political Unconscious (1981), insists that the literary critic must "always historicize" (9), because "history is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis" (102). These inexorable limits constitute the material ground against which any imagined future is shaped. George Orwell articulates the same principle from within the dystopian form itself in 1984 (1949), where the Party's slogan declares that "who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (37). For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the struggle over the past is inseparable from the writer's vocation. In Decolonising the Mind (1986), he describes language itself as "the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" (15) and insists that "struggle makes history… in struggle is our history, our language and our being" (113).

Edward Said reinforces this view, arguing in "The World, the Text, and the Critic" (1983) that "texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (4). These voices converge on the central claim of this article: that the dystopian imaginations of Orwell and Ngugi are not free-floating aesthetic exercises but historically situated responses to the political worlds they inhabited, responses whose visions of the future are inseparable from the pasts.

Why socio-political imaginaries? The phrase designates the proposition that dystopian imagination is constitutively historical. This means that any critical comparative reading of Orwell and Ngugi must take into consideration the socio-political historicity of their works. Socio-political historicity designates the recognition that literary forms, political categories, and dystopian imaginaries are not free-floating trans-historical structures; they are produced within, and remain intelligible only in relation to, determinate historical and cultural struggles. The choice of imagination in preference to the more familiar dystopian narrative is deliberate. It signals that what is being compared is not a fixed literary form but a mode of political cognition that varies contextually — a mode whose formal architecture is the literary deposit of the conjuncture that produces it.

Despite their differing cultural contexts, Orwell and Ngugi share a deep commitment to a dystopian mode that interrogates colonialism, decolonisation, corruption, and exploitation. Both explore these themes in their seminal works — Orwell in 1984 (1949) and Animal Farm (1945), Ngugi in Petals of Blood (1977) and Matigari (1987/1989) — and these novels provide fertile ground for comparative analysis. Both authors denounce authoritarian regimes and the mechanisms of control such systems employ. Orwell's 1984 portrays a dystopian future in which the government, led by Big Brother, wields totalitarian control through surveillance, propaganda, and repression. Ngugi's Petals of Blood and Matigari, similarly, critique the oppressive postcolonial regimes in Kenya, exposing their perpetuation of the corruption, exploitation, and social injustice that span colonialism and neocolonialism. History, therefore, plays a constitutive role in the works of both writers.

Yet the differences between Orwell's and Ngugi's dystopian imaginations are themselves deeply rooted in their respective cultural and historical contexts. This defines the gap the present article seeks to fill: it argues that historical and cultural contexts, rather than single events, shape and define a writer's dystopia. Orwell raised critical concerns about the political and social dynamics of Europe and the wider Western world, drawing on his experiences with totalitarianism and Soviet communism. Ngugi's works, by contrast, are firmly anchored in the Kenyan colonial and postcolonial context, addressing the specific impacts of colonialism and the struggles of African peoples in the post-independence era.

However, this article examines the origins of George Orwell's and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's dystopian imaginations, with particular attention to how their respective societies and historical periods shape their conceptualisation and development of the dystopian imagination. It investigates points of both convergence and divergence in their approaches to dystopia from a cross-cultural perspective, with a focus on themes such as capitalism, totalitarianism, imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Ngugi vividly illustrates the

devastating effects of colonial exploitation and traces its impact on the social, economic, and religious fabric of colonised societies. Orwell, for his part — despite his association with the imperial establishment — questions imperial policies and condemns the systemic mistreatment of marginalised groups, particularly the impoverished and itinerant labourers.

The article is driven by one central question: how does history shape and define the dystopian narratives of George Orwell and Ngugi wa Thiong'o? It examines the historical contexts of the two authors and the formative experiences that influenced the individual development of their dystopian imaginations. The analysis proceeds in three stages: first, by examining the historicity that forms the basis of their works; second, by identifying the distinctions and intersections between their dystopian imaginations; and third, by situating Orwell and Ngugi within their respective socio-political frameworks.

Theoretical Consideration and Review of Related Literature

Literature, by long-standing critical convention, is defined as a creative art — the adjective creative designating the writer's capacity to produce meaning through the deliberate fashioning of language. This formulation carries a methodological consequence: the work of art cannot be adequately appreciated or interpreted in isolation from the historical and cultural conditions of its production, since meaning is constitutively shaped by those conditions. The recognition that art and context are inseparable furnishes the foundational premise of New Historicism, the theoretical framework that guides the present study. The Oxford English Dictionary defines New Historicism as "a form of cultural analysis which examines the ways in which a cultural product (especially a literary text) interacts with and participates in its historical context, especially with reference to the power relations operating within the society of its time" (3rd ed., 2011).

New Historicism foregrounds the power relations operating within the society of a text's time. It consciously engages the principle that readers inevitably approach the past from the present in order to construct or imagine the future. As the acknowledged initiator of New Historicism, Stephen Greenblatt argues that there is a real social world constantly being shaped and reshaped by the texts it produces. Alan Brannigan, in New Historicism and Cultural Materialism (1998), explains that New Historicism reads the stories of the past as a society's way of constructing narratives that unconsciously serve its own interests.

New Historicists, by their nature, interrogate the historical situations that result in current socio-political upheavals. They focus on a history written from the perspective of ordinary people — often those considered marginal — who are coping with extraordinary world-changing events. New Historicists emphasise that historical values change over time. As a theory, it makes liberal use of historical anecdote in order to inform, contextualise, and illustrate historical concepts. Anecdotes enable the personal to be seen in the context of the political and, according to Brannigan (1998), enable history to be re-situated in the context of contemporary parlance. In essence, New Historicism rejects the idea of literary works as isolated, timeless creations and instead emphasises their embeddedness in the socio-political and cultural conditions of the writer's society and time.

In this article, therefore, we seek to understand the dystopian imaginations of Orwell and Ngugi, though emerging from different contexts, by examining the historical and cultural contexts in which their literary works were produced and by exploring the ways in which these works influence social and political power dynamics. For this critical method, the context of the works is the centre of our analysis. Instead of treating history as a mere background to literary studies, New Historicists see both as intertwined and mutually illuminating. New Historicism further questions the objectivity of history itself, viewing it as a form of narrative subject to interpretation and bias.

Many critical writings have evolved over time on the development of dystopian narrative, with particular interest in how different contexts shape the genre to reflect the social and political realities of their respective societies. In setting a stage for African dystopia, Booker's "African Literature and the World System" (1995) argues that African dystopian fiction is not an imitation of a Western genre but a response to a parallel structure of power. He states that "actual experience in the postcolonial world has been anything but utopian. African

writers of dystopian fiction are always in dialogue with the historical specificity of their collective experience" (86).

Fredric Jameson's methodological imperative, "always historicize!" (9), provides the theoretical warrant for the contextual reading of dystopia, while Edward Said anchors the literary text in its historical moment and claims that "texts are worldly" (4). Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement adds that dystopia is itself historically produced. Ngugi's claim that "language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" (15) makes the contextual argument from within, while Chinua Achebe's insistence on the African writer's historical responsibility reinforces it. Gregory Claeys's Dystopia: A Natural History (2017) traces the genre's evolution across historical periods. Taken together, these voices confirm the central methodological premise of this article.

Peter Davison's George Orwell: A Life in Letters (2013) offers insights into Orwell's life, political beliefs, and literary influences. Davison provides valuable context for understanding Orwell's motivations and the historical events that shaped his writing, including his experiences in colonial Burma and his involvement in the Spanish Civil War. The letters afford a glimpse into Orwell's personal thoughts, struggles, and motivations, shedding light on the development of his ideas and the contexts in which his works were written. Davison's perspective, however, though it captures important dimensions of Orwell's life, beliefs, and literary influences, departs from the historical and cross-cultural socio-political discourse that animates the present study, and is therefore only tangentially engaged here.

Darko Suvin, in his essay "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre" (1972), introduces the concept of cognitive estrangement, which he argues is central to both science fiction and dystopian literature. Suvin's work portrays how dystopian narratives challenge readers' assumptions and provoke critical reflection on social and political issues. Michel Foucault, in works such as Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975), explores the ways in which power operates through disciplinary mechanisms and biopolitical regimes — themes central to many dystopian narratives. Foucault's work provides a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between power and control in dystopian societies. Donna Haraway, in her essay "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985), explores the ways in which technology blurs the boundaries between human and machine, a theme often central to dystopian narratives. Haraway's work offers insights into the intersections of gender, technology, and power in dystopian literature, though it diverges from this study's primary concern with historical and cross-cultural political analysis.

Erika Gottlieb, in Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial (2001), examines dystopian fiction from a comparative perspective, drawing on works from both Eastern and Western literary traditions. Gottlieb analyses how dystopian narratives reflect cultural, political, and social anxieties across different contexts, offering insights into the universality of dystopian themes and motifs. The key strength of the book lies in its comparative approach, which allows readers to explore the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western dystopian narratives — a methodological commitment the present study extends to the cross-cultural comparison of metropolitan and postcolonial dystopia.

Gregory Claeys's Dystopia: A Natural History (2017) provides a comprehensive overview of the history and evolution of dystopian literature, tracing its origins from ancient utopian visions to modern dystopian narratives. Claeys examines the cultural, philosophical, and political contexts that have shaped dystopian fiction over time, offering critical insights into its enduring appeal and significance in the contemporary world. Through meticulous research and analysis, he documents the cultural, philosophical, and political forces that have driven the genre's evolution.

These critical reviews strengthen the understanding of the central idea of this article, drawing on the viewpoints of the sampled critics. One common thread is the historical development of dystopia as a narrative technique — an idea that reflects part of the major concern of this article. These reviews culminate in and strengthen the discussion of the dystopias of Orwell and Ngũgĩ as historical responses, with keen interest in the socio-political development of their respective societies.

Dystopia as Historical Response: Orwell and Ngugi in Comparative Perspective

George Orwell and Ngugi wa Thiong'o were, each by his own declaration, writers whose every line was a response to history. In the seminal essay "Why I Write" (1946), Orwell identified four motives that drive serious prose — sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse, and political purpose — and described the third of these as "the desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity" (3). The formulation is precise: writing is an act of historical preservation, a gathering of the present's truth against the erosion of time and the distortions of power. In the same essay, Orwell collapses the personal and the political into a single historical confession, stating that "every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it" (4). The year 1936 — the Spanish Civil War, the rise of European fascism, the Stalinist purges — functions here as the historical hinge of his entire literary career.

Ngugi makes a structurally identical move from the other side of the colonial divide. In the preface to Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary (1981), he insists that "I have, therefore, tried to discuss detention not as a personal affair between me and a few individuals, but as a social, political and historical phenomenon. I have tried to see it in the context of the historical attempts, from colonial time to present, by a foreign imperialist bourgeois, in alliance with its local Kenyan representatives, to turn Kenya into slaves, and of historical struggles of Kenyan people against economic, political and cultural slavery" (xi). Like Orwell, he refuses the category of the personal and insist that literature is unintelligible apart from the history that produces it. This shared refusal places both squarely within what Fredric Jameson called the dialectical imperative. Jameson's opening injunction in The Political Unconscious, "Always historicize!" (9), is, in effect, a theorisation of what Orwell and Ngugi both practised.

To understand their ideas fully is to read them historically — a reading consistent with the New Historicist principle that the literary text is constitutively embedded in the socio-political conditions of its production, and that those conditions shape not only what the writer can say but how he says it. The formative historical experiences that shaped each writer's dystopian imagination were, however, profoundly different. Orwell's were those of a junior officer of empire who turned against it. His five years in Burma as a police officer (1922–1927) were not warmly welcomed by him; he expressed immense dissatisfaction with holding such a position and with working for the imperial government on account of its excesses against the peasantry, but this very dissatisfaction formed the basis of his later criticisms.

In Why Orwell Matters (2002), Christopher Hitchens writes that "Orwell's thoughts and writings on colonialism are a permanent part of his lifelong commitment to the subjects of power, cruelty, force, and the relationship between the dominator and the dominated" (1–4). Hitchens devotes an entire book to demonstrating that Orwell's literary authority derives from his direct experience of empire, socialism, the Spanish Civil War, the BBC, and totalitarianism. From a New Historicist perspective, Burma functions as the formative historical anecdote that illuminates the political: it is the personal experience through which the larger structure of imperial power becomes legible in Orwell's writing. Ngugi's formative experiences were those of the colonised subject, not the colonial officer. Where Orwell served the imperial apparatus from within, Ngugi was detained and imprisoned by its postcolonial successor — the very regime that inherited the structures of state violence from the colonial state. In Detained, he frames the prison cell as a window onto the longue durée of Kenyan history, not as a personal ordeal. Where Burma turned Orwell against empire, Kamiti Maximum Security Prison turned Ngugi against the neocolonial state that had inherited colonialists' instruments. The two writers thus stand on opposite sides of the same colonial relation, and their dystopian imaginations bear the formal deposits of those opposed positions.

These opposed positions generate a structural parallel in the way both writers treat the state's apparatus of historical fabrication. Orwell's key works, Animal Farm (1945) and 1984 (1949), and Ngugi's Petals of Blood (1977) and Matigari (1987/1989), all accompany historical reflection with the dramatisation of institutions designed to manufacture consent and rewrite reality. In 1984, Orwell sets up the Ministry of Truth (Minitrue), responsible for propaganda, historical revisionism, and censorship, to show how totalitarian governments fabricate and alter historical records to fit the Party's narrative and to wipe out any evidence that contradicts

its version of reality. Through the manipulation of past events, the Party seeks to control the present and to shape the future according to its ideology. This is the New Historicist insight dramatised in fictional form: history is not a neutral repository of facts but a narrative constructed by power, and whoever controls the apparatus of historical production controls the political present.

Ngugi makes a structurally identical move in Matigari, where the Ministry for Truth and Justice functions as an instrument of government propaganda. During the protest led by Matigari, the Minister calls a meeting with the protest's leaders and announces several human-rights-violating policies — prohibiting meetings of more than five people, ending worker strikes, and stating that anyone who discusses communism will face arrest — attended by representatives from several Western nations. This defines the neocolonial setting, which stands against any form of dissent against the governing body. The parallel with Orwell's Ministry of Truth is not accidental: both writers disclose the institutional mechanisms by which the state manufactures consent and rewrites reality, confirming the New Historicist claim that texts and political institutions are mutually constitutive participants in the same field of power. The difference lies in the historical location of the institution: Orwell's Ministry serves a totalitarian party-state modelled on Stalinist Russia, whereas Ngugi's serves a neocolonial regime modelled on the Moi dictatorship and its Western backers.

This same convergence-with-divergence structures the two writers' treatment of language as an instrument of power. In 1984, the concept of Newspeak — a language engineered by the Party to limit freedom of thought and expression — aims to eliminate words and concepts that could challenge the Party's authority or promote independent thinking. The ability to control language gives the Party control over the citizens' thoughts, making it difficult for them to articulate dissent or even to conceive of alternative ideas. Here Orwell discloses the linguistic mechanism through which power secures its reproduction: by colonising the very medium in which thought is possible, the Party forecloses the conceptual space in which resistance could be imagined. Ngugi's language question is structural rather than engineered: where Orwell's Newspeak is a state bureau's invention, Ngugi's is the colonial education system that separated the African child from their mother tongue and privileged English as the language of power, education, and upward mobility. In Decolonising the Mind (1986), Ngugi describes language as "the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" (15) and insists that "struggle makes history… in struggle is our history, our language and our being" (113).

His decision to write Matigari in Gikuyu first and to self-translate into English is a material enactment of linguistic resistance that Orwell's Newspeak cannot perform, because Orwell never abandoned English. For both writers, language is the site at which power and history converge; but where Orwell dramatises the state's engineering of language from above, Ngugi dramatises the colonised subject's recovery of language from below. The dystopian imagination, in both cases, is not futurological projection but diagnostic of a logic already at work in the politics of each writer's present — the manipulation of public language by propaganda in Orwell's Britain, and the colonial alienation of the African subject from their mother tongue in Ngugi's Kenya.

Cultural Variation: Ngugi and Orwell

In dystopian narrative, cultural variation goes beyond adaptation to capture the diverse ways in which cultures, values, beliefs, and traditions are represented and interpreted in literary works. The recognition of such variation is itself a New Historicist move, for it insists that literature cannot be understood as a trans-historical aesthetic category but must be read as the product of a particular culture's historical negotiations with power. Chinua Achebe, in Things Fall Apart (1958), expresses a devastating view of African societies before and during colonisation, focusing on the destructive impact of Western interference on indigenous cultures and highlighting that "he [Nwoye] has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (103). Such works challenge colonial narratives and provide a voice to the suppressed and marginalised — a recuperative gesture that New Historicism recognises as central to the literary act, since the recovery of marginalised voices is itself a historically situated intervention in the field of power.

Cultural variation is significantly shaped by historical contexts, especially colonialism, postcolonialism, and imperialism. These historical periods have left a profound imprint on literature and have shaped the themes,

narratives, and characters depicted by writers from different parts of the world. Ngugi's early works, such as Weep Not, Child (1964) and The River Between (1965), articulate these early concerns against colonial upheaval. They foreground the experiences of African communities under British colonial rule and trace the cultural and social disruption caused by the imposition of Western values and systems. This becomes the birth-root of Afro-dystopia: the disruption of traditional ways of life, the loss of African lands, and the destruction of indigenous culture become the central themes that run across most African dystopian narratives. From a New Historicist perspective, these themes are not merely topical choices but the formal deposits of a determinate colonial conjuncture — the literary trace of the historical violence that produced them.

One of the central aspects of cross-cultural studies in dystopia, therefore, is the recognition of cultural variation in dystopian imaginaries. This recognition sets the pace for discussion and leads toward a more theoretical consideration of dystopia that fits every context that has experienced colonialism. Orwell's engagement with colonialism, by contrast, was informed by his own experiences as a colonial officer in Burma. His writings offer a critical examination of colonisation from a Eurocentric angle and foreground the moral contradictions, social injustices, and psychological impacts of imperial rule on the colonised. Read through New Historicism, Orwell's Burma writings and Ngugi's Kenya writings stand as two opposed positionalities within the same colonial relation: Orwell writes from inside the imperial apparatus, Ngugi from inside the colonised subject. Both positions are historically produced, and both generate dystopian imaginations whose formal features bear the marks of their respective locations in the world-system.

Orwell's 1984 and Animal Farm, as well as Ngugi's Petals of Blood and Matigari, extend the idea of cultural variation to the domain of totalitarianism and oppressive regimes. They draw parallels with the impacts of colonialism, though they focus on different aspects. In 1984, Orwell explores the mechanisms of control and repression within a totalitarian state, while in Animal Farm he satirises the corruption and betrayal of revolutionary ideals. In both works, he examines power dynamics analogous to those of colonialism and emphasises the destructive effects of oppressive systems on individuals and societies. Ngugi, in Petals of Blood and Matigari, examines the oppressive systems set up by the postcolonial elite after independence, exposing how the structures of colonial domination were merely transferred from the colonial officer to the neocolonial comprador. These oppressive systems, set in place after independence, become the birthroot of the two writers' dystopian visions — though Orwell's birthroot lies in the Stalinist corruption of socialism, while Ngugi's lies in the neocolonial corruption of anticolonial liberation.

The omnipresent surveillance in 1984 echoes the control exercised by colonial powers over their subjects. Cultural variation in this text is handled from a different angle, with attention focused on the Party's manipulation of the past to suit its totalitarian control. Unlike traditional colonial powers, which imposed their rule over territories, the Party manipulates and controls the very fabric of reality to maintain its regime. From the very beginning, Orwell establishes a society under constant surveillance. The iconic phrase "Big Brother is watching you" sums it up, drawing attention to the sense of perpetual observation that every citizen endures. This surveillance extends beyond the physical to the psychological, as the Party employs various means to ensure that even dissenting thoughts are detected and punished. The Party's apparatus dramatises the principle that history is not a neutral archive but a narrative constructed by power. Where the colonial state controlled territory and labour, the Party controls memory and language — an intensification, not a departure from, the logic of imperial domination.

Winston constantly questions this distortion, which raises concerns over the conduct of Big Brother's leadership. Winston's job at the Ministry of Truth involves rewriting past newspaper articles to align with the Party's present claims. When the Party decides to alter its enemy from Eurasia to Eastasia, all past records are modified to reflect that Eastasia has always been the enemy. In New Historicist terms, the Ministry of Truth is the institutional embodiment of the principle that texts — including the documentary archive of the past — are worldly participants in, rather than innocent witnesses to, the power relations of their time. History is here disclosed as a narrative produced in the service of present interests, exactly as Brannigan (1998) argues New Historicism reads the stories of the past as a society's way of constructing narratives that unconsciously serve its own interests.

The Party's manipulation of history is not merely about maintaining power; it is also about erasing any cultural variation that could foster independent thought or resistance. Controlling the past eliminates the possibility of learning from previous cultures or ideologies that might contradict that of the Party. Orwell's depiction of Newspeak — the language designed by the Party — serves as a tool to limit the scope of thought by reducing the vocabulary available to the populace, with the aim of making rebellious thoughts impossible to conceive and thereby erasing any cultural or intellectual diversity that could challenge the Party's totalitarian rule. The New Historicist logic here is the same logic that governs colonial language policy in Ngugi's analysis: control the language and you control the conceptual horizon within which resistance can be imagined. Orwell dramatises this logic in its engineered, totalitarian form (Newspeak); Ngugi dramatises it in its structural, colonial form (the displacement of Gikuyu by English in the colonial school). Both are historical responses to actually existing political logics, and both disclose the New Historicist principle that language and power are co-constitutive.

The manipulation of the past and the control over language work together to create a society in which the concept of objective reality is malleable and entirely controlled by the Party. This extends the colonial notion of control over physical territories to control over the mental and emotional landscapes of individuals. Winston's struggle with his own memories highlights this psychological control. He recalls events differently from the Party's official records, such as his memories of life before the Party's rise to power. However, the constant rewriting of history forces him to doubt his own perceptions, leading to a kind of cognitive dissonance that reinforces the Party's control. The famous slogan — "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell 37) — encapsulates this method of psychological domination. The slogan is the theoretical core of the novel: it theorises, in fictional form, the very claim that New Historicism makes as criticism — that the past is not given but produced, and that the production of the past is the central act of political domination.

CONCLUSION

Ngugi has had a profound impact on African literature and postcolonial studies. His advocacy for linguistic and cultural decolonisation has influenced subsequent generations of African writers and scholars. Ngugi's focus on the socio-political realities of postcolonial Africa provides a critical perspective on the challenges facing contemporary African societies and offers a model for integrating indigenous knowledge and traditions into modern literary and cultural practices. Orwell's influence, by contrast, extends beyond literature into political and cultural discourse. His works are frequently cited in discussions of totalitarianism, surveillance, and the ethics of power. Orwell's insights into the mechanisms of control and the manipulation of truth continue to resonate in contemporary debates on political oppression, media influence, and individual freedoms. His works remain relevant as cautionary tales about the dangers of authoritarianism and the importance of safeguarding democratic values.

Ngugi and Orwell, through their respective works, offer critical insights into the socio-political dynamics of their historical contexts. Ngugi's fiction anatomises the legacies of colonialism and the protracted struggles of postcolonial African societies, while Orwell's provides a sustained critique of totalitarianism and the routinised abuse of state power. Their literary contributions reflect a deep engagement with the historical realities of their societies and the political and social crises of their times, and their legacies continue to inform contemporary debates on power, justice, and freedom.

Both writers function as democratic voices in the literary public sphere, drawing on past political felonies to reconstruct the broken promises of modernity. Their respective dystopias interrogate the historical, cultural, and socio-political realities of their societies and aim to re-imagine those societies toward utopian horizons — not merely by projecting the dangers of unchecked power, but by anchoring such imaginaries in the real-time conditions of actually existing political economies.

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