

# • ASSIGNMENT

SUBJECT:

CRITICISM

GROUP NUMBER:

07

GROUP MEMBERS:

NOOR.UL.HUDDA.	78
ALEENA SADIA.	62
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SUBMITTED TO: MA'AM KHADIJA

# On the Abolition of the English Department

## Short Questions:-

### Q: Why oral tradition and literature is necessary to be studied in African Universities?

Oral tradition is actually the form of art, cultural material or myths which are transmitted from one generation to another orally. Writer thinks that every art form is interlinked in its culture practice. Literature is essential in creating a truly historical consciousness. **Oral tradition and literature** is necessary to be studied in African Universities because Ngugi believes that the oral tradition provide us a kind of commentary in society. The writer believes that the **oral tradition** is deeply rooted in the society. It is necessary to be studied because **oral tradition** covers every aspects of our society including **music, psychology, sociology, physiology, linguistics, literature, history and religion**. Writers believes that it may provide student an opportunity to come up with fresh approaches and it also provide them a kind of spontaneity and liberty of communication and they can have more opportunities of performing new experiments and they can come up with new techniques and structures. Ngugi emphasis that Africans should use their own **literature and oral tradition** both to understand their culture and to create continuity with their past also appears in the writings of post-colonial authors. In his essay writer makes it clear that the study of **oral tradition** would not replace any existing subject of modern African literature rather it would act as supplement in this field because of this student will have more opportunity to clean their loyalty. Writer emphasis that if student of Africa do experiment on their own oral tradition and literature then they get more liberty and they have more opportunities to make new structures and techniques.

### Q: Briefly discuss Swahili Literature.

Ngugi describe **Swahili Literature** in his essay “**On Abolition of the English Department**”. Swahili literature is, generally speaking, literature written in the Swahili language, particularly b Swahili people of the **East African** coast and neighbouring islands. It also may refer to literature written by people who write in

the **Swahili language**. It is an offshoot of the Bantu culture. The first literary works date back to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when all Swahili literature was written in the Arabic script. **Jan Knappert** considered the translation of the Arabic poem **Hamziya** from the year 1652 to be the earliest **Swahili** written text. Starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, missionaries and orientalist introduced the Latin script for writing the Swahili language. While early writers on East African history considered only the chronicles of Swahili city-states, more recently scholars have begun to write about other narrative genres as well as about Swahili narrative poetry. Historians have also turned to ethnographies, local histories, the more recent genre of autobiographical writing in Swahili, and the Swahili novel. Swahili literature has provided invaluable and diverse sources to historians and other scholars, and an international intellectual community is emerging for whom Swahili is the primary language. **Swahili literature** is the relative heterogeneity of the Swahili language. Swahili poetry has produced many secular works by such poets as Muyaka bin Ghassany and Muhammad Kijuma. **Swahili literature** is classified into three genres the novel, drama and poetry. Swahili literature mainly consisted of oral narrative traditions. Modern Swahili literature is a direct result of the standardization of Swahili. The normalization of Swahili motivated writers, such as George Mhina and Lyndon Harries to promote the development of Swahili by creating a literary corpus. Writer believes that it is actually in oral as well as written form. Writer believes that this literature is enough to study in the department of literature.

**Q: On what grounds the three authors reject the primacy of English literature and culture.**

In “On the Abolition of English Department”, the three authors reject the primacy of English department. Ngugi wa Thiong’o advocated the abolition of English language to promote local language in his writings. He is from Kikuyu Kenyan community and most of his writings are in Kikuyu just to promote the Kikuyu language instead if the English Language which he argued in his Document entitled “**Decolonizing the Mind**”. They argued that “the paper raised importance problems” and they suggested that it should become “the subject of more involved debate and discussion”.

They revolt on the idea that “Africa is an extension of West”. The main question is “if there is a need for a study of the historic community of a single culture, then why can’t this be African? Why can’t African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?”

They said, **“We reject the primacy of English literature and culture.”**

To orient ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa, and then Africa in the centre. All other things are to be considered in their relevance to a situation and their contribution towards understanding ourselves. They also questioned the value of English department in an African context.

They therefore suggest:

- A. That the English Department be abolished.
- B. That a department of African Literature and language be set up in its place.

They also said that Africa is littered with 'oral tradition'. Moreover the study of the oral tradition at the university should therefore lead to a multidisciplinary outlook: Literature, Linguistics, Sociology, Religion, Philosophy, History, and Anthropology. Secondly, it can lead to fresh approaches by making it possible for the students to be familiar with different art forms from Western literary forms. It would supplement Modern African Literature to embrace and assimilate other thoughts without losing its roots.

Concluding, they said, we have argued the case for the abolition of the present English Department in the college, and the establishment of a Department of African Literature and Languages.

**“We have eyes, but we don’t see.**

**We have ears, but we don’t hear.**

**We can read, but we don’t understand what we read.”**

### **Long Questions:-**

**Q: WHY ACCORDING TO THREE WRITERS ENGLISH DEPARTMENT BE ABOLISHED FROM AFRICAN STUDIES?**

In 1972, Ngugi wa Thiong’o published “On the Abolition of the English Department.” It inspired postcolonial students of English to rethink the practices

of our discipline before Edward Said popularized attention to the geopolitics of the disciplines in *Orientalism* (1978). Ngugi offered a choice between an additive model of literary study centred on perpetuating the myths of empire and one that re-conceptualized curriculum from the ground up, starting from the place where readers are toward the world and backward through history from there. For Canadians, Ngugi's challenge meant addressing the complicity of the disciplines in promoting Canadian settler colonialism in ways now being revisited through the challenge issued by the 2015 Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. In suggesting that Kenyans begin with the situations of their local condition and languages, Ngugi's call is linked to feminist and decolonizing initiatives around the globe.

**“WE HAVE EYES, BUT WE DON'T SEE WE HAVE EARS BUT WE DON'T HEAR. WE CAN READ BUT WE DON'T UNDERSTAND , WHAT WE READ .”**

**[LI –LIYONG]**

Three eminent scholars which were behind the cause of abolition were;

**Henry Owuor- Anyumba**

**Taban Lo liyong**

**Ngugi wa Thiong'o,**

The comment paper of Ngugi essay raised important questions at the 42<sup>nd</sup> meeting in the university of Nairobi .First and foremost question raised by the contributors was that if there is a need of studying the historic community of single culture then Why this can't be African? Why can't African culture be at centre so that we can view other literatures in relation to it. Then they deliberately proclaimed that they reject the primacy of English Literature and Culture.

*THOMAS BABINGTON MACULAY once quoted in his book “ minute on Indian Education”*

**“ I blame the British, the education they came to offer was aimed at recruiting candidates for a Christian Heaven and at producing clerks , teachers and servants”**

They questioned the value of English department to orient themselves by placing Kenya , East Africa and Africa in the centre. All other things are to be considered in relevance of their situation and their contribution towards understanding themselves. They therefore suggested that English Department be abolished and the department of African language and Literature be set up in its place.

**“Primary duty of literature department is to illuminate the spirit, animating people, show how it meets challenges ,and possible areas of development and involvement”**

**This all could happen only in one way** that they should learn it in their Native language.

The work of linguistic decolonization cannot be done by writers alone. Governments must change their policy towards the teaching of African languages and create economic opportunities in those languages—whether it’s agricultural extension officers trained in the languages of the communities they serve, or teachers trained in teaching African languages, or interpreters for national and international organizations, and so on. **African languages** have to move from being primarily social languages to vehicles of political, cultural, and economic growth.

Perpetrators of African Language exquisitely proclaimed;

We need literary criticism in African languages. And equally importantly, we have to decolonize African literary theory. Why should literary criticism continue to draw its primary conceptual oxygen from European literary theories? Why not use African literary theory to unlock the aesthetics of African literature? After all, our imaginations draw from our creolized cultures, and our cultures have and have had their own approaches to aesthetics. Literary analytical tools can be found in the cultures that produce **African literature**, but only if we first dig deep into African languages.

Written in the 1980s at the height of the cold war and during Moi dictatorship, this article also captured the contradictions of **neo-colonialism** throughout Africa and the global south. Inherited colonial inequalities were becoming more entrenched, the security apparatus more brutal, and economies were pried open by Western countries, leaving the most vulnerable without access to true



education. ***Decolonizing the Mind*** also demonstrated the way western cultural and linguistic superiority were emphasized while African cultures and languages were debased.

That is why today Africans are out of the net of slavery because they understood well the annihilating effects of colonization through a foreign language.

### **Q: Ngugi as a Critic**

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (James Ngugi) is the most famous, indigenous Kenyan novelist, playwright and a literary critic. This **'warm, witty and unassuming'** literary giant carries not only the noble dreams of his native land but also those of the entire African continent.

**Ngugi wa Thiong'o** born in **5 January 1938** is a and academic Kenyan writer writes primarily in Gikuyu. His work includes novels, plays, short stories, and essays, ranging from literary and social criticism to children's literature. He is the founder and editor of the Gikuyu-language journal Mitiiri. His debut novel, **Weep not Child**, was published in May 1964, becoming the first novel in English to be published by a writer from East Africa. Ngugi's 1967 novel **A Grain of Wheat** marked his embrace of Fanonist Marxism. He subsequently renounced Christianity, writing in English, and the name James Ngugi as colonist; he changed his name to Ngugi and began to write in his native Gikuyu and Swahili. In 1967, Thiong'o also began teaching at the University of Nairobi as a professor of English literature. During this time, he also guest lectured at North-western University in the department of English and African Studies for a year. In 1976 he helped set up The Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre which, among other things, organised African Theatre in the area. The uncensored political message of his 1977 play Ngaahika Ndeenda co-written with Ngugi, provoked the then Kenyan Vice-President Daniel arap Moi to order his arrest. While detained in the Kamiti Maximum security Prison, Ngugi wrote the first modern novel in Gikuyu, **"Devil on the Cross"** on prison-issued toilet paper. Due to his writing about the injustices of the dictatorial government at the time, Ngugi and his family were forced to live in exile.

His most recent books include **"Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance,"** a collection of essays published in 2009, and two autobiographical

works, “**Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir**” and “**In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir.**”

Ngugi is the recipient of several honors, including the **2001** Nonino International Prize for Literature and seven honorary doctorates.

Ngugi’s **critical writings** have increasingly insisted on the integral **relationship** between literature and society. His works navigate the **colonial** and **postcolonial** contradictions of Kenyan and Gikuyu society and the **tensions** between modernity and the past.

He has also written extensively on the **role of language** and the relationship between **literature**, **culture** and **politics**. These writings have been collected in various publications: ***Homecoming (1972)***, ***Writers in Politics***, ***Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature***. He argues that language is a vehicle for continuing the subjugation of peoples.

Ngugi was also **influenced** by the wrings of **Karl Marx** and **Friedrich Engels**, developing an ardent opposition to colonialism, Christianity and other non-African elements in Kenya.

Critics have consistently acknowledged Ngugi as one of the most important voices in African letters. His fiction is noted for its overtly political agenda, its attempts to give a literary voice to the poor of Kenya and its persistent critique of colonialism and oppressive of regimes. He is also praised as an influential post-colonial African writer, particularly in his portrayal of corrupt post-liberation African governments.

Ngugi’s **essays and critical works** have been acclaimed as powerful and insightful explorations of relevant, **political**, **social** and **literary issues** in Africa. Moreover, reviewers have asserted that his non-fiction has provided a much-needed African perspective on world affairs.

**In short**, in all of his writings Ngugi attacked **injustice** and **oppression** and **championed** the cause of the poor and dispossessed in Kenya. He “**set out to develop a national literature for Kenya in the immediate wake of that nation’s liberation from British rule**”. He has also been influential in the field of education in East Africa and is recognized as a humanist who is deeply interested in the growth and well-being of his people and country.