

of Power and Politics in Post-colonial Kenya: A Comparative Re- reading of 'Forms', in Texts by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Francis Imbuga

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Abstract:

The main question pursued in this paper is how power is performed and manifested in some of the dramatic texts by post-colonial African writers, especially in the infamously dictatorial contexts such as Kenya. A corollary question raised is how the politically minded dramatist survives, and what indeed are the dramatic ingredients that have made for perishing, imprisonment, banishment and exile in those same circumstances. Lastly, and in passing, the question is posed: what is the role, if any, of the 'Kenyan subaltern', so to speak, in his historical predicament, in the presumed and foregoing relations of power? These questions are answered by way of a comparative foray into the works of two Kenyan playwrights, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Francis Imbuga. An attempt is made to theorise the implications of one's 'lives and methods' as represented by the world famous and widely known, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in fact better known as a major African novelist, and the intensely, even satirically dissident, Francis Imbuga. It is recognised that there is a need to subject the formal elements deployed by some post-colonial African playwrights to more comprehensive analyses, and to in fact, interrogate their own representations of history. A major interest here is to re-read the aesthetic, and/or other formal parameters, especially those outside the political domain that seem to have made Francis Imbuga 'survive', including within the educational curriculum, in spite of his intensely and sometimes highly subversive body of plays. By comparison, Ngugi's methods are [re]considered in the play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, in an attempt to indicate why the dramatist's methods and in-built artistic strategies are critical, not just to our understanding of the reaction of the political establishment, but equally so, to Ngugi's continued prominence in the readings and interpretations of colonial (and postcolonial) Kenyan political history.