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Narrating Imprisonment in Petina Gappah's the Book of Memory And Ngugi Wa Thiongo's Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary

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**NARRATING IMPRISONMENT IN PETINA GAPPAH'S *THE BOOK OF
MEMORY* AND NGUGI WA THIONGO'S *DETAINED: A WRITER'S PRISON
DIARY***

NICODEMUS NGENO

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN
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CONFERMENT OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KABIANGA**

UNIVERSITY OF KABIANGA

NOVEMBER, 2025

DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work. It has not been presented before in this or any other institution for the conferment/award of degree or diploma.

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APPROVAL

This thesis has been submitted with our approval as the university supervisors.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved wife Gladys, my children: Theophilus, Gaius, Roy and Kenyans in general.

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ABSTRACT

Prison narratives have emerged as a distinct genre within global literature, offering profound insights into the lived realities of confinement. Although imprisonment has existed for centuries, the narrated experiences of detained writer's have not been subjected to sufficient literary scholarly inquiry. This study investigates the challenges associated with incarceration of writer inmates and strategies adopted by them to cope with their circumstances. The objectives of this research are to examine the artistic representation of prison life in the selected texts, to discuss the characters' psychological frame as reflected by prison life in the selected texts, and to explore themes projecting the dehumanizing nature of prison life in the selected texts. The study adopts Karl Marx's Marxist Literary Criticism, advanced by Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), as a lens through which to interrogate the socio-economic and ideological dimensions of incarceration in the selected texts. It also employs Psychoanalytic Literary Theory, proposed by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), to explore the psychological depths of the characters and decode their mental and emotional responses to imprisonment. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive research design, the study emphasizes description, interpretation, and the in-depth understanding of meanings embedded within the chosen literary works. The findings strive to make a modest contribution to the existing scholarship on prison narratives. The study illuminates the authors' depiction of the core elements of prison life, examines the psychological toll of incarceration on the characters, and ultimately reveals cognitive freedom as a powerful means of transcending the constraints of mental imprisonment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION AND APPROVAL.....	ii
COPYRIGHT	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	x
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Overview	1
1.1.1 Petina Gappah	1
1.1.2 Ngugi wa Thiong’o	2
1. 2 Background of the study	3
1.3 Statement of the problem	7
1.4 Purpose of the study	8
1.5 Objectives of the Study	9
1.6 Research Question	10
1.7 Justification of the Study	10
1.8 Scope and limitation	11
1.9 Literature Review.....	12
1.10 Theoretical Framework.....	15
1.11 Research Methodology	17
1.11.1 Research design	18
1.11.2 Sampling Procedure	18
1.11.3 Data Collection	19
1.11.4 Data Analysis and Presentation	20
CHAPTER TWO	21
NARRATING PRISON LIFE	21
2.1 Introduction.....	21
2.2 Artistic representation of prison life in Petina Gappah’s <i>The Book of Memory</i> and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s <i>Detained: a Writer’s Prison Diary</i>	21
2.2.2 Defining the elements of narration	21

2.2.3. Plot in Petina Gappah's <i>The Book of Memory</i>	24
2.2.4 Characters in Petina Gappah's <i>The Book of Memory</i>	28
2.2.5 Setting in Petina Gappah's <i>The Book of Memory</i>	34
2.2.6 Voice in Petina Gappah's <i>The Book of Memory</i>	37
2.2.7 Style in Petina Gappah's <i>The Book of Memory</i>	41
2.2.7.1 Flashback	41
2.2.7.2 Suspense and foreshadowing	43
2.2.7.3 Humour	46
2.2.7.4 Allusion.....	49
2.3 Plot in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's <i>Detained: a Writer's Prison Diary</i>	53
2.3.1 Characters in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's <i>Detained: a Writer's Prison Diary</i>	57
2.3.1.1 Ngugi wa Thiongo	57
2.3.1.2 Fellow Prisoners.....	61
2.3.1.3 The Oppressors (Warders, state and authorities)	64
2.3.2 The Setting in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's <i>Detained A Writer's Prison Diary</i>	66
2.3.2.1 Introduction.....	66
2.3.2.2 Prison Notes	67
2.3.2.3 Letters from prison.....	72
2.3.3 Style in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's <i>Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary</i>	75
2.3.3.1 Irony	75
2.3.3.2 Epistolary	78
2.3.3.3 Witticism.....	82
CHAPTER THREE	86
CHARACTERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAME AFFECTED BY PRISON.....	86
3.1 Introduction.....	86
3.2 Psychological Frame of characters in the <i>Book of Memory</i> and <i>Detained a Writer's Prison Diary</i>	86
3.2.1 Psychological Frame of characters in the <i>Book of Memory</i>	88
3.2.1.1 Mnemosyne.....	88
3.2.1.2 Memory's Mother.....	93
3.2.1.3 Mavis Munongwa	98
3.2.2 Psychological frame of characters affected by Prison life in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's <i>Detained: A writer's prison diary</i>	101
3.2.2.1 Ngugi wa Thiong'o	101
3.2.2.2 Martin Shikuku	107

3.2.2.3 Muhoro wa Muthoga.....	110
CHAPTER FOUR.....	116
THEMES PROJECTING THE DEHUMANIZING NATURE OF PRISON LIFE	116
4 .1 Introduction.....	116
4.2 Themes projecting dehumanizing nature of prison in <i>The Book of Memory</i>	116
4.2.1 Colorization (Albinism).....	116
4.3 Themes projecting dehumanizing nature of prison life in <i>Detained A Writer's Prison Diary</i>	125
4.3.1 Resistance	125
CHAPTER FIVE	132
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	132
5.1 Introduction.....	132
5.2 Summary of findings.....	133
5.4 Conclusion	137
5.5 Recommendations.....	138
REFERENCES.....	140

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Psychological Frame:

Psychological is anything connected with a person's mind, and the way in which it works; it is the mental and emotional state of a person rather than physical Diana (2020). The psychological frame is the individual's frame of mind when they enter a situation. Generally, it relates to the human mind and feelings. The terminology is essential to this study as the research will burrow into the psyche and emotions of characters given their traumatic experiences in jail.

Physical Imprisonment:

Refers to the actual confinement of an individual within a prison or any restricted space, denying them physical freedom and mobility. It is the tangible form of incarceration imposed by legal or political systems as punishment or control.

Mental imprisonment:

This occurs when one's capacity to think freely, question norms, or express individuality is curtailed. It is a state of psychological bondage where fear, guilt, indoctrination, or internalized oppression restricts one's intellectual and emotional freedom.

Societal (patriarchal) imprisonment:

This form extends beyond physical or mental boundaries to include the invisible chains imposed by social structures, particularly patriarchal systems. It confines individuals, especially women, within gender roles, cultural expectations, and societal norms that limit autonomy, self-expression and equality.

Literary Representation:

Things that can be represented in the literature include but are not limited to the feelings of the writer and how he presents his/her characters. The representation of these is what comprises the meaning of the text and shapes our response to it. It is the way ideas are represented to readers. The terminology is important to the study, as the study will look at how the authors in the two selected texts use language to present their feelings on imprisonment given stylistic devices and thematic concerns.

Artistic or representation:

Artistic or representation meaning, is constructed, made up of Representative essentials or best described as a signifier representing signified and their relationship. In a story, the representative elements include; plot, character, setting and style.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter primarily presents a summary of the authors and their profiles, the background of the study, a review of related literature, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the objectives of the study, the scope and limitations, the justification of the study, and the theoretical framework.

1.1.1 Petina Gappah

Petina Gappah is a Zimbabwean Lawyer who later on embraces writing; she was born in Zambia in the Copper Belt province, where her father was working. Her parents returned to Zimbabwe when she was only nine months old. She grew up in Zimbabwe, specifically in Harare where her parents relocated, when Zimbabwe acquired independence. Her early education was in a primary school that was initially reserved only for whites. She started her primary education; at the time she was the only black child. Gappah developed an interest in writing at her tender age, at the age of fourteen her original story was first published in the school magazine; this was whilst in St. Dominic's Secondary school.

Petina Gappah later studied law at the University of Zimbabwe, then in the year 1995, she went to Austria to pursue a doctorate in international trade law at the University of Graz, concurrently, she did a Master's Degree at the University of Cambridge. Upon completion of her studies, she was engaged in Geneva, Switzerland as an international lawyer.

Gappah has authored the following books; '*An Elegy for Easterly*' a collection of short stories published in 2009, '*The Book of Memory*' a Novel published in 2015, '*Rotten Row*' a collection of short stories published in 2016.

1.1.2 Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan author and academician who was also the foremost East African novelist, was born James Ngugi on 5 January 1938. He was born in Kamiriithu, near Limuru in Kiambu District, Kenya. Ngugi's family was caught up in the Mau Mau Uprising; Mwangi, his half-brother, was an active member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army before being killed. Another of his brothers was shot during the state of emergency, and his mother was tormented at the Kamiriithu home guard post.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o studied at Alliance High School before joining Makerere University in Uganda. At Makerere, his creative writing skills began to develop, and he participated actively in programmes that enhanced creative writing. Among other engagements, he attended the African Writers Conference held at Makerere in June 1962, where his play *The Black Hermit* premiered at the National Theatre. At the event, Chinua Achebe became Ngugi's creative advisory editor and agreed to read the manuscripts of his novels *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*, which subsequently led to their publication by Heinemann's African Writers Series in the same year. *Weep Not, Child*, his first novel, was published in May 1964 and became the first English-language novel to be published by a writer from East Africa. In that same year, he won a scholarship to the University of Leeds to study for an MA and was in England when his second novel, *The River Between*, was published in 1965.

Ngugi's teaching career began in 1967 when he was engaged as a professor of English Literature at the University of Nairobi. In the same year, he published his novel *A Grain of Wheat*, which marked a turning point in his writing. Influenced by Frantz Fanon and Marxist thought, he renounced writing in English and dropped his first name, "James," which he termed colonialist, adopting instead the name Ngugi wa Thiong'o and committing to writing in his native language, Gikuyu.

Ngugi lectured at the University of Nairobi for over a decade. In 1967, he also assisted in the establishment of the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre, which sought to plan and promote African theatre in the area. His novel *Petals of Blood*, published the following year, along with the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*, carried strong political messages that angered Kenya's Vice-President Daniel arap Moi, leading to Ngugi's arrest. His plays and works by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin were confiscated. He was imprisoned without trial at Kamiti Maximum Prison.

Upon his release from detention in December 1978, Ngugi was forced into exile, partly because the University of Nairobi failed to reinstate him as a professor and partly due to continued harassment of his family by the government. His later works included *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981), *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), and *Matigari* (translated by Wangui wa Goro) (1987). Ngugi later became a Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine

1. 2 Background of the study

Globally, prison narratives stretch back to the narrations of released slaves in America who found themselves back in slavery through the laws of Jim Crow and convict

leasing. These laws were intended to restrict the new freedom of liberated African Americans by limiting their mobility and forcing them into an employment economy founded on low income and debt. Under these laws, individuals narrated their stories to interviewers from the Works Progress Administration, recounting their ordeals and loss of freedom. This formed the essence of prison oral literature, where political dissidents, white citizens, Chicanos, and even homosexuals wrote about their experiences as a way of rejecting oppression.

Similarly, prison epistles existed during the early Christian era. In 62 AD, the preaching of St. Paul the Apostle angered the Jews in Jerusalem, leading to his arrest and imprisonment in Caesarea for two years. During this time, St. Paul wrote four well-known epistles in the New Testament: *Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon*.

Likewise, in 520 AD, the philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, jailed for attempting to reconcile the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy* while awaiting execution. His reflections on suffering and virtue inspired medieval writers such as Dante Alighieri, who immortalized him as a character in *The Divine Comedy*.

Historically, it has been proven that while authorities could imprison the body, they could not colonize the intellect. Repressive regimes attempted to suppress writers viewed as threats, yet these authors used writing as resistance. Their works endured long after the regimes vanished, reminding readers that even in confinement, the written word could preserve liberty.

In many cases, imprisonment became a blessing in disguise. According to Rivkah Zim, detention often turned into a paradox of “gain or loss.” Authors used confinement to defend their integrity and reaffirm their moral convictions. Writing thus became both a survival mechanism and a form of spiritual liberation (Ahsan, 2020).

Similarly, in Asia, imprisonment shaped the works of notable authors. For instance, the Iranian writer who produced *Missing Soluch* composed it entirely in his head while incarcerated and later transcribed it within seventy days of release. His feat exemplified how adversity could foster extraordinary literary creativity.

Across Africa, prison narratives became powerful testimonies of resistance and human endurance. Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, detained for visiting the secessionist territory of Biafra, demonstrated remarkable resilience. Without access to paper or pens, he wrote on cigarette packets using a broken pencil and hid the notes in cracker tins. These fragments became the foundation of *The Man Died* (1971) and *Madmen and Specialists*, both vivid accounts of his Biafran War imprisonment (1967–1970).

Similarly, in North Africa, Moroccan writer Fatna El Bouih’s *Talk of Darkness* recounts her arrest as a young student leader, her torture, and her unbroken intellectual spirit during detention. Despite imprisonment, she completed her studies and continued writing as a means of self-defence (Elison, 2023).

In Egypt, Nawal El Saadawi’s memoir *Walking Through Fire: A Life of Nawal El Saadawi* documents her imprisonment under Anwar Sadat’s regime in 1981. Writing

with an eyebrow pencil on toilet paper, she portrayed the torment faced by women prisoners and exposed gendered injustices within the prison system.

Arab women writers more broadly have enriched the continent's prison literature. As Elison (2023) notes, scholars like Radwa Ashour and Marilyn Booth highlighted the vital contributions of women through testimonies and memoirs that blend gender, politics, and resilience.

Within East Africa and southern Africa, prison narratives have provided deep insight into colonial and postcolonial struggles. In Southern Africa, Nelson Mandela's prison writings elevated this literary tradition. Imprisoned for defying apartheid, Mandela's letters to his wife Winnie in the late 1960s and early 1970s blended love, endurance, and hope. His reflections, particularly those from solitary confinement, reveal the psychological cost of resistance and the enduring power of affection in the face of repression (Mandela, n.d.; African Studies Quarterly, 2017).

In Zimbabwe, Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* depicts an albino female inmate recounting her life from death row. Through flashbacks and introspection, Gappah intertwines memory, fate, and politics to explore identity, loss, and societal hypocrisy (Gappah, 2015).

In Kenya, prison narratives have evolved into profound reflections of social injustice, political oppression, and reform. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kenya's foremost novelist, captured this in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981), chronicling his incarceration without trial in 1977. Through his accounts, Ngũgĩ portrayed the prison as a microcosm of Kenyan society, marked by class tensions, ethnic diversity, and

ideological control. His depictions of daily rituals and the absurdities of confinement symbolized broader struggles against postcolonial inequities (Thiong'o, 1981).

Similarly, John Kirihamiti transformed from a notorious criminal to a celebrated author. After serving thirteen years of a twenty-year sentence, he reformed through writing. His novels *My Life in Crime* (1989) and *My Life in Prison* depict the grim realities of solitary confinement and the underworld of Kenyan crime during the 1960s and 1970s, especially his incarceration at Naivasha Maximum Security Prison (Kirihamiti, 1989).

Moreover, voices from within Kenya's correctional system have emerged. Wanini Kireri, a former Assistant Commissioner General of Prisons, authored *The Disruptor*, a memoir that presents both personal and institutional perspectives on prison reform. As highlighted by Thatiah (2020) in the *Daily Nation*, Kireri's account illuminates the challenges of transforming Kenyan prisons while humanizing those behind the walls.

In conclusion, the scholars and writers reviewed in this background provide a solid foundation for the study, offering critical insights into the historical and thematic dimensions of prison life across different contexts. Their contributions illuminate the evolution of incarceration literature and highlight the psychological and physical toll endured by inmates. Collectively, these perspectives justify the relevance of this research and affirm the need for a deeper exploration of prisoners' lived experiences as depicted in selected literary texts.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Despite the growing corpus of global prison literature, a significant scholarly gap persisted in the focused exploration of how African prison narratives, particularly

those by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Petina Gappah, uniquely represented the psychological, political, and cultural dimensions of incarceration. This study sought to address that gap by analyzing the literary strategies these African authors employed to depict imprisonment, thereby enriching the global discourse on prison writing through a distinctly African lens. The research examined Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, not merely as prison narratives but as works that engage deeply with the literary and psychological representation of incarceration. Through a qualitative descriptive analysis, the research examined artistic representation, psychological states, and character behaviour to uncover the emotional landscapes of anguish, solitude, hope, and despair embedded in prison life. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a broader understanding of narrating imprisonment not only as a socio-political phenomenon but as a deeply human experience that blurs the boundaries between imagination and lived reality. By analyzing the point of convergence between fiction and life writing, the study enhances literary discourse on how narratives of confinement become spaces for both personal testimony and creative reimagining.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to undertake a critical examination of how imprisonment is artistically and thematically represented in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the literary strategies through which both authors reconstruct the experience of incarceration, not merely as physical confinement, but as a complex psychological and emotional reality.

Through a comparative reading of the two texts, the research aimed to analyze how imprisonment shapes the characters' identities, consciousness, and sense of self, thereby reflecting the broader socio-political contexts that give rise to such experiences. The study also intended to interrogate the dehumanizing conditions of prison life as depicted in the narratives, showing how these conditions expose the tension between oppression and resistance within prison.

Furthermore, the study endeavoured to highlight the intersection between fiction and literary life writing, demonstrating how both genres engage with the human condition under captivity. By examining the authors' use of language, narrative structure, and character development, the research sought to reveal the transformative and redemptive dimensions of imprisonment how confinement, paradoxically, becomes a site of reflection, resistance, and self-discovery.

In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on prison narratives by situating the selected texts within the continuum of African literary responses to injustice, human endurance, and the struggle for freedom.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This study sought;

1. To examine the artistic representation of prison life in the selected texts
2. To discuss the characters' psychological frame as reflected by prison life in the selected texts
3. To explore themes projecting the dehumanizing nature of prison life in the selected texts

1.6 Research Question

1. How is the artistic representation of prison life achieved in the selected texts?
2. In What ways are the characters' psychological frames affected by prison life in the selected texts?
3. Which themes project the dehumanizing nature of prison life in the selected texts?

1.7 Justification of the Study

The prevalence of unjust imprisonment across the world made this study both timely and relevant. In numerous contexts, individuals were detained under questionable legal and political circumstances, often due to their socio-political affiliations, race, gender, or outspoken criticism of those in power. Conversely, individuals guilty of serious crimes sometimes are released due to their proximity to political authority or systemic privilege. This imbalance in justice systems reflected deeper structural inequalities and called for critical engagement through both legal and cultural frameworks, particularly literature.

This study explored these issues through a literary analysis of Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. Both texts provided firsthand or intimate fictionalized accounts of incarceration, offering valuable insights into the lived realities of imprisonment. While Gappah's novel presented the fictional story of a woman on death row in Zimbabwe, it drew heavily on real-world injustices and postcolonial prison systems. Similarly, Ngũgĩ's prison diary was a nonfictional account of his detention without trial due to his political activism and literary work. These texts highlighted how imprisonment was used as a mechanism for silencing dissent and maintaining authoritarian control.

The research was significant because it examined not only the physical realities of

prison life but also the psychological, emotional, and socio-political implications of incarceration. Literature functioned as a powerful medium for bearing witness to injustice and giving voice to the silenced. The study contributed to ongoing scholarly conversations in African literature, prison narratives, postcolonial theory, and human rights discourse by demonstrating how literature operated as a space of resistance and remembrance.

The study was justified by its potential to deepen academic understanding of how literary texts engaged with real-world issues of justice and oppression. By drawing connections between fictional and autobiographical representations of prison, the research aimed to highlight the enduring relevance of literary work in critiquing power structures and advocating for social transformation.

1.8 Scope and limitation

The study focused exclusively on two literary works: *The Book of Memory* by Petina Gappah and *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Entitled *Narrating Imprisonment*, the research was confined to a critical analysis of these selected texts. It examined how imprisonment is represented through artistic portrayal, characterization, and thematic development. The research was confined to literary and interpretive approaches to understanding imprisonment and did not extend to sociological or legal examinations of prison systems. The findings of this study are limited to the scope of the two selected texts and may not represent the entire spectrum of prison literature. The interpretation was also limited by the availability of critical materials and the subjective nature of literary analysis, which may influence the researcher's perspective. Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insights into how fiction and life writing converge in narrating imprisonment

1.9 Literature Review

Early prison narratives, such as John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748), also known as *Fanny Hill*, marked an early literary engagement with incarceration. Written during Cleland's imprisonment for debt in London, the work explored the life of a young prostitute rather than the realities of prison life. Although controversial for its explicitness, it lacked the psychological and emotional depth evident in later prison writings, including Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. This absence of inmate subjectivity and emotional turmoil prompted this research to explore how African writers internalized and politicized imprisonment in their narratives.

A moral and political voice emerged through Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963). Writing from confinement, King differentiated between just and unjust laws, asserting the moral duty to resist injustice. His argument resonated with the spirit of resistance portrayed by Ngũgĩ and Gappah, where prison becomes a site of defiance. However, unlike their works, King's letter gave limited attention to the psychological and emotional experiences of incarceration. This study therefore highlighted how African prison narratives expand the discourse by integrating both the political and the inner dimensions of imprisonment.

Lois (2006) examined Napoleon's memoirs, written during his imprisonment and exile. Napoleon's reflections revealed his sense of self-worth and legacy despite defeat, illustrating how incarceration could serve as a medium for introspection and historical self-justification. However, Lois's analysis focused more on historical explanation than on literary artistry, the stylistic techniques through which imprisonment shaped the text. This research therefore extends the conversation by

considering artistic representation as a significant lens for interpreting prison literature.

In India, Anjum's (2019) prison memoir documented her five years of confinement in Tihar Prison, revealing the harsh realities of incarceration for women, especially those from marginalized regions such as Kashmir. Her narrative powerfully depicted physical suffering and gendered oppression but did not fully address the psychological effects of solitary confinement. The present study draws upon such omissions to foreground the mental dimensions of imprisonment in literary works.

Similarly, Liu Xiaobo, the Chinese author and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, continued to write from detention, using his pen as a weapon against political oppression. His defiance exemplifies how prison writing in Asia functions as both personal testimony and political resistance, echoing themes later developed in African prison narratives.

Across Africa, imprisonment has often been a tool of political control and resistance. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* received critical attention from Kone (2010), who portrayed Ngũgĩ as both a writer and a revolutionary thinker. Kone's interpretation emphasized the socio-political context of the narrative but paid little attention to its literary and stylistic construction, an area this research explored in depth.

Allen's (2018) study of Nelson Mandela's unpublished prison letters revealed deep emotional connections between the imprisoned leader and his family, as well as his reflections on justice and humanity. While the focus was biographical, this study takes a literary approach, analyzing how confinement itself shapes artistic voice and consciousness.

McCann (2016) analyzed *A Tragedy of Lives* and Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*, relating societal, economic, and gender-based imprisonments in Zimbabwean narratives. While he highlighted women's resistance to oppression, he did not examine the artistic depiction of Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison, a dimension this research investigated.

Moyo (2018) explored identity and gender in Southern African fictional prison narratives, particularly in Gappah's *The Book of Memory*. Using a feminist lens, he argued that the protagonist's identity was fluid and shaped by her imprisonment. His study, however, did not focus on the psychological aspects of confinement, which this research expanded upon.

Spemba (2022) interpreted Gappah's work through the lens of myth and fate, examining Memory's lack of agency but neglecting the artistic and psychological portrayal of confinement. Similarly, Ngom (2022) discussed collective memory in the novel without delving into the behavioural and emotional implications of imprisonment dimensions central to this study's focus.

In East Africa, Stella Nyanzi's prison writings, as documented by Ndangire (2020), portrayed a defiant feminist voice using poetry as a means of resistance. Her *No Roses from My Mouth* collection captured her personal pain, courage, and the injustices faced by women under repressive regimes. This study, rather than focusing solely on her activism, examined how the prison environment itself shaped her literary

In Kenya, scholarship on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o remains rich yet evolving. Jumba (2018) examined *Detained* to understand how Ngũgĩ's narrative form intertwined with his ideological and historical context but did not consider the psychological experiences

of political prisoners, an issue this research bridged. Isaac (2010) compared crime and imprisonment in South African and Kenyan autobiographical writings, reading *Detained* mainly through colonial and postcolonial frames. In contrast, the present study centred on the psychological and artistic representation of solitary confinement in Ngũgĩ's work.

From Cleland's early European narratives to African, Asian, and American prison writings, the global literature on incarceration reveals recurring themes of resistance, identity, and transformation. Yet, few studies have examined imprisonment as both a psychological and artistic experience, a perspective this research advances through an in-depth analysis of Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*

1.10 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by two key theoretical lenses: Karl Marx's Marxist theory and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. These frameworks provided complementary perspectives on the structural and psychological dimensions of imprisonment, which were central to the analysis of Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*.

Marxist theory, as articulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2002), offered a socio-political and economic interpretation of human existence based on the concept of class struggle. It asserted that social life was fundamentally shaped by the material conditions of production and the resulting stratification into classes, namely, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argued that the bourgeoisie maintained dominance by controlling both the means of production and the ideological apparatuses that reinforced their supremacy. Ideology,

in this context, was not neutral but a tool used to justify the oppression of the working class and mask their suffering. This study drew on Marxist literary criticism to explore how the selected texts represented systemic oppression, institutionalized injustice, and the use of prison as a tool of ideological control. The theory informed the formulation of research questions focusing on class, power dynamics, and social exclusion, while also shaping the thematic analysis of the texts.

Freudian psychoanalysis, on the other hand, provided a psychological framework for interpreting human behaviour and inner conflict. Freud (1918) proposed that behaviour was influenced by the interaction between the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious levels of the mind. The unconscious, in particular, harboured repressed memories, anxieties, and desires that manifested through symbolic actions, dreams, or neurotic behaviour. Within the context of incarceration, the psychoanalytic approach allowed for an examination of how prison affected the mental and emotional states of characters, revealing how trauma, isolation, and powerlessness were internalized. This theory was instrumental in analyzing character psychology, coping mechanisms, and the narration of suffering, especially in the deeply personal and introspective passages of the selected texts.

The intersection of Marxism and psychoanalysis was particularly relevant to this study. While Marxism interrogated the external structures of power and economic inequality, psychoanalysis focused on the internal consequences of these structures, especially how individuals internalized oppression. Together, these theories offered a holistic lens to examine both the ideological representation and psychological impact of imprisonment. The dual framework guided the methodology by informing both textual and thematic analysis, and it shaped the data collection by focusing on

narrative elements that reflected material conditions (Marxist) and psychological states (Freudian). During analysis, passages depicting class-based injustice and mental deterioration or resistance were examined to understand how imprisonment was both socially constructed and psychologically endured.

Ultimately, the use of these two frameworks enabled a richer understanding of how incarceration was represented in literature, particularly in the African context, where colonial legacies, political repression, and individual trauma intersected profoundly

1.11 Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology, which assisted it in the description, interpretation, and understanding of in-depth meaning within the selected texts. This approach was suitable for the study because it emphasizes a detailed examination of literary works, focusing on how meaning is constructed and conveyed through language, themes, and characterization. The qualitative nature of the research allowed the study comprehensively explore the authors' artistic portrayal of prison life and the psychological experiences of the characters.

The study was library-based, relying on both primary and secondary sources. The primary data consisted of the selected prison narratives, while secondary sources included scholarly articles, books, journals, and credible online materials relevant to the research topic and theoretical framework. These materials provided critical insights and supported my interpretation of the texts.

The study analyzed the data through close reading and textual analysis. The analysis was guided by Karl Marx's Marxist Literary Criticism and Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Literary Theory, which served as theoretical lenses for interpreting the social, ideological, and psychological dimensions within the selected works.

The qualitative descriptive approach enabled the study to relate the literary works to their social, psychological, and ideological contexts, ensuring that my interpretation was grounded in both textual evidence and theoretical understanding. This methodology was therefore instrumental in achieving the objectives of the study and in providing a comprehensive analysis of the selected prison narratives.

1.11.1 Research design

This study was library-based qualitative research, focusing on a close and detailed analysis of two primary texts: *Petina Gappah's The Book of Memory* and *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. The qualitative approach enabled the study to explore how imprisonment was represented in literature, particularly through the experiences, emotions, and ideologies expressed in the two works.

Being library-based, the study relied on secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and academic papers to support the analysis of the texts and to provide relevant background and theoretical context. Close reading and textual analysis were employed to examine how each author presented themes such as oppression, trauma, resistance, and identity.

This research design allowed for a deep understanding of how African prison narratives represented both the external realities and the inner experiences of incarceration.

1.11.2 Sampling Procedure

Petina Gappah's The Book of Memory and *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* were the primary texts for this research. They were selected through purposive sampling due to their distinctive portrayal of unique characters and

experiences. *The Book of Memory* explores this uniqueness through the dual aspects of Memory's skin colour, her circumstance of being black but not black, white but not white and the liminality of albinism. In contrast, *Detained* details the persistence of colonial subjugation in post-colonial Kenya and vividly captures the brutality inflicted upon political detainees and inmates in Kenyan prisons.

Other prison narratives, such as Wanini Kireri's *The Disruptor*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wrestling with the Devil*, Maina wa Kinyatti's *A Season of Blood – Poems from Kenyan Prisons*, Chris Abani's *Kalakuta Republic*, and Nelson Mandela's *Conversations with Myself*, were excluded from this study because the uniqueness that underpins the selected works was not as pervasive in them.

1.11.3 Data Collection

The study employed a library-based qualitative research design. Primary data were obtained through close reading and textual examination of Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. The researcher conducted several readings of the two texts to identify and extract relevant themes, motifs, and stylistic devices that align with the objectives of the study. Emphasis was placed on depictions of imprisonment, identity, and resistance as reflected in the characters, setting, and narrative techniques.

Secondary data were collected from academic and critical sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, theses, and online academic repositories such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Research Gate. These materials provided theoretical perspectives and critical insights that helped to contextualize and support the interpretation of the primary texts. All data sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the central focus of the study.

1.11.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

The collected data were analyzed through qualitative content and thematic analysis. The researcher systematically identified and categorized emerging themes, patterns, and ideas from the primary texts. Key themes such as resistance, colorization (Albinism), and oppression were coded and compared across the two works. The analysis involved interpreting how each author employs narrative voice, symbolism, and imagery to articulate the experiences of confinement and the broader socio-political implications of imprisonment.

To enrich interpretation, insights from secondary data were incorporated to support and validate the findings drawn from the primary texts. These critical materials were used to establish links between the authors' portrayals and wider literary and theoretical discourses. The analysis remained interpretive and descriptive, focusing on meaning, representation, and context rather than quantifiable data.

The presentation of data followed a thematic structure aligned with the research objectives.

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATING PRISON LIFE

2.1 Introduction

The chapter elucidates on the aesthetics of depicting prison life in the selected texts. In other words, the chapter will discuss the narrative features that are used to lay bare prison life. They are: plot, character, setting, voice and style particularly in relation to the depiction of prison conditions in the selected texts.

2.2 Artistic representation of prison life in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: a Writer's Prison Diary*

2.2.2 Defining the elements of narration

This artistic work serves as a captivating portal into a richly woven world, inviting readers to immerse themselves in a narrative that transcends mere words. Through its intricate layers of meaning, the piece engages the audience on a profound level encouraging them to explore the subtleties and nuances that lie beneath the surface. The artistry not only attracts but also challenges the reader to reflect on their own perceptions and interpretations fostering a deeper understanding of the human experience. By skilfully camouflaging its messages within the fabric of the story, this work exemplifies the power of art to evoke thought and emotion, ultimately leaving a lasting impression that resonates long after the final page is turned. Art is constructed of representative essentials which are best described as signifiers representing signified and the relationship between them. In a story, the representative elements include; plot, character, setting, Voice and style.

The concept of plot serves as the backbone of any literary work intricately weaving together a sequence of events that not only captivates the reader's attention but also

propels the narrative forward through a dynamic interplay of cause and effect. Each event within the plot is meticulously crafted to influence subsequent occurrences, creating a chain reaction that enhances the complexity and depth of the story. This structured arrangement allows for the development of characters, themes, and conflicts, as the consequences of one event inevitably led to the next, thereby establishing a coherent and engaging storyline.

The effectiveness of a plot lies in its ability to evoke emotional responses and provoke thought, as readers become invested in the unfolding drama and the fates of the characters involved. Ultimately, a well-constructed plot is essential for delivering a compelling narrative that resonates with audiences, inviting them to explore the intricate relationships between actions and their repercussions within the fictional world. Dibel (2023) an American science fiction writer perceives plot as a ‘thing’ that can serve up as an action, referring to either to the author’s ordering of events or rather planning of future actions in the story.

The plot used in creative writing can be grouped into the following styles: Linear, episodic, parallel and flashback, according to Pardede (2020). The length of the writing will dictate the nature of the plot. A Linear plot for example is majorly employed in short narratives, while episodic and parallel plots are use in long creative writing like novels.

A character; is a person, a being, a creature, or things in a creative work are used to perform an action, which creates a message that is meant to reach the target audience. According to Breth (2021) a character is equally essential in a story, therefore each story must have the beings that take part in the events in the story. Most stories have many characters interacting amongst themselves. One of the primary elements in a

story is character(s), which are uniquely portrayed by the author as they plays different role in moving a narrative along.

The word setting is mostly used to imply the social milieu in which the events of a novel occur. The setting; entails the passage of time, which maybe static in some narratives or dynamic.

Setting exists in three main forms: for example, the natural world, where the landscapes of the earth play essential part in the story or the living creatures which adapt themselves to the conditions and seasons as presented by time. The second form exists in the cultural and historical background in which the story resides. Past events that have impacted on the cultural background of characters or the locations bear grave consequences. The third form of setting is a public or private place that has been formed maintained and inhabited by people. Examples of this include: a residential estate, a park, a street, a school, among others.

The setting plays a crucial role in literature, as it enhances the story's atmosphere and aids in expressing its themes. It encompasses the time period, location, and social context in which characters exist, influencing their speech, thoughts, and behaviours. Whether grounded in reality or crafted as an imaginative realm by the author, the setting significantly shapes the story and the reader's experience.

Voice in literature is a mode of expression employed by and author or narrator to shape a distinct personality and influence the reader's experience. This concept encompasses various components, including diction, syntax, tone and the overall stylistic approach all of which contribute to the creation of a recognizable and engaging narrative. Diction refers to the choice of words and their connotations,

which can evoke specific emotions or set a particular mood. Syntax involves the arrangement of words and phrases, affecting the rhythm and flow of the text, while tone conveys the author's attitude towards the subject matter further enriching the reader's understanding. Voice may manifest as the author's own voice, that of the narrator, or the voices of the characters featured in the narrative, each contributing to the complexity and depth of the story. The interplay of these elements not only defines the narrative's identity but also shapes the reader's engagement, guiding their interpretation and emotional response to the text.

In a narrative, the way the writer writes or tells a story is what is known as a style. Style arise what distinguishes one writer from another and creates the "voice" that the audience hears when they read. There are many essential pieces that jointly make up an author's style; like tone, word choice, grammar, language, descriptive techniques among others. The mood in any literary work can also be determined by the style employed by the writer.

2.2.3. Plot in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*

The story of 'Memory', the protagonist in *The Book of Memory* is a gripping one. She is an albino lady languishing in Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she has been convicted for murder. The novel exposes humanity showing not only the failures of human beings, but also the goodness that is inherent when one chooses to dig deeper than what is glaring out. The novel was described by Jaggi (2015) as the most powerful narrative of innocent lives shattered by family secrets and sexual envy, unfairness and unacknowledged kinship.

The story is a narration by an albino lady named Memory. It is a testament from death row life, put down in a book at the behest of her legal representative, to give support

to an appeal against her sentence for suspected murder. She is accused of killing her foster father Lloyd (a white man), thus arrested and sentenced to death. After her swift trial and murder conviction, she lives out her days in jail.

At the beginning of the story Memory's murder case seems a difficult one as the public sees her as a remorseful criminal. The police came for her the night Lloyd died whisked her to highland police station where she was starved. She was not given anything to eat for three days or anything to drink, she wept hoarse but it did less to assist her. To form a strong appeal, her lawyer advises her to sit and reflect about her past and more-so what led to her detention and then to record all in paper. This was a good avenue for her to heal, to have a flashback and reconcile with it while being optimistic about her future. Memory wrote all the accounts while in jail.

Memory, in her defence, informs the court that she was sold to Lloyd by her parents, a narration that is dismissed by the court of law as just a mere fable as it is not accepted in Zimbabwe. This belief has been in her mind all through, until when she gets a complete picture at the tail end of the narrative. She felt all along that she was abandoned by her family leading her to a sense of loss.

When the scenery shifts to Lloyd's place, Memory finds a new family. She became part and parcel of Lloyd, Liz and Sandy. The Professor's apartment replete with libraries of books, horses and servants is a sharp contrast with Mufakose her birth place, where she lived until the age of nine. All was going on well in Lloyd's place until Zenzo stepped in the picture. For the second time, Memory started feeling that sense of betrayal the same way she felt when she was rejected and abandoned by her parents.

The state of loneliness in Lloyd's apartment is similar to her experiences in Chikurubi Maximum Prison. The isolation she endured during her twelve-hour daily confinement within the harsh, unadorned walls of the prison cell mirrors this. During this period, time stretches endlessly, amplifying the weight of solitude that bears down on her. This relentless isolation is not merely a physical state; it is a psychological crucible that can drive even the most resilient individuals to the brink of madness. The absence of human interaction and the monotony of her surroundings create a suffocating environment where despair can easily take root. As Gappah (2015) writes,

“Verity claims that the activist who was kidnapped from her home two years ago [is] actually here in Chikurubi, hidden away in solitary confinement in an underground room with a special security officer that we have never seen. The idea of being alone horrifies them” (Gappah, p. 77).

She plans her revenge but in spite of it all, her affection for Lloyd transcends the twinge until he is painfully put to death and Memory is seen at the crime scene. The reality was that Lloyd had already succumbed to death before Memory discovered him. Initially, she struggled to comprehend the scene before her: his lifeless body, clad only in yellow socks, with plastic wrapped around his face. However, when she accidentally opens his laptop, the content displayed on the screen provided her with an immediate understanding of his last moments.

Disturbed by the thought of him being found in such a state, Memory devised a plan to stage Lloyd's death as caused by a violent robbery. Her intention was to shoot his lifeless body and then drag it to the pool, but her scheme was thwarted when Alexandra unexpectedly discovered her just after she had disposed of the body. Consequently, Alexandra who is Lloyd's sister became the sole witness in the ensuing murder investigation.

This epic narrative explores several thematic concerns, including friendship, betrayal, courage, racism, family, colourization, and political upheaval. While in solitary confinement, memory bonds with the women of the prison. Most of the women are unreceptive, for instance, the guards did not even take time to give an orientation to a new inmate to them the prisoner will learn by doing, picking things up as they go along, a method they refer to it as the 'Montessori method of Prison instruction'. Inmates learn through mistakes, as each error leads to increased punishment, ultimately fostering a quicker understanding of their roles. They come to realize communication with the guards is permitted only while kneeling before them. However, some of them such as Loveness, exhibit a greater capacity for empathy. Loveness treats Memory with particular kindness, recognizing in her the image of her own daughter, who was also an albino.

The terrible state of prison system and Judiciary system of Zimbabwe as well as the hypocrisy among the leaders is exposed in the novel. The worst hit by this rot are the women, who are detained like animals in the most unsanitary conditions. The society's religion and superstitions are also conveyed in the novel, but the most essential pit is the matter of racism, majoring on how the colour of the narrator is viewed.

The women inmates were prohibited from using forks and knives, and even the simple act of eating with their hands was denied to them. Instead, they were relegated to consuming their meals with tablespoons, a routine that included everything from watery porridge to lumpy *sadza* and cabbage that carried a pungent odour. Memory and her fellow inmates had to adapt to the challenge of cutting into a rubbery substance that the guards, in a cruel twist of language, referred to as meat.

“There is no medium to our food; it is either overcooked or undercooked, or it has too much salt or not enough, or there is not enough oil in the fried vegetables or there is so much.” (Gappah, 2015, p. 16).

The dire state of the prison kitchen is exacerbated by the severe water shortage at Chikurubi, leaving the women without access to clean water for weeks. This lack of hygiene has led to an infestation of flies around the waste buckets, which they grimly refer to as *gamashura*. Their only means of personal cleanliness is to wipe their bodies with a dry towel, hoping to absorb some of the dirt and odour that cling to them.

The plot in the *Book of Memory* is not linear as it shows memories are not linear. The thoughts can interject other thoughts therefore a linear plot is next to impossibility. The trial that Memory is subjected to, makes her comprehend the world better. She accepts that things take place for a cause and the recognition of that fact makes her come to harmony with self.

At the end of the Novel, the cause of Lloyd’s death is still unknown. Memory as a narrator remains in custody, with no end in sight for her legal case. The result of her murder conviction ironically turns out to be of little importance once she has capitulated to her plight.

In spite of her bleak position, she is able to replicate on the restorative muscle of writing and speech, which has allowed her to amalgamate various conflicting traumas, failures, and successes into a unified story.

2.2.4 Characters in Petina Gappah’s *The Book of Memory*.

The protagonist in the *Book of Memory*, Mnemosyne or better known as Memory has been created as a special and unique person by the author. An albino character is not something common in most narratives. Memory is confined in a state prison called

Chikurubi Prison in Harare, after being accused of murdering a wealthy white man named Lloyd. Memory is a name given to her by her parents, and that name itself is an irony in that they shared a few very few memories of their own with her; she did not know a lot about her grandparents or any information about their ancestral home.

Petina Gappah strongly probes the harrowing experiences of Memory, the first woman in more than 20 years to be sentenced to death. As part of her petition. She begins writing down her reminiscences of what happened and her notes form the novel. Gappah in this story was influenced by her knowledge as a lawyer.

Memory spent most of her time documenting her painful and emotional experiences of being an ‘outsider.’ It shows how her skin, cracks and blisters in the sun as she was an albino. She was regarded with fear mixed with attraction and suspicion. She even contemplates ripping off her skin and in order to be replaced by a darker one. She felt like disappearing and just become an observer. “I spent much of my life trying to be invisible,” says memory. Her misery was even escalated by her family life, with her volatile, cruel some mother, and affectionate yet wretchedly sad father, both coming to terms with the demise of two of Memory’s siblings, named Gift and Moreblessings.

Gappah masterfully develops a rich tapestry of characters and settings that extend beyond the protagonist, Memory. Within the confines of Chikurubi Prison, she skilfully uses Memory's perspective to illuminate the lives of fellow inmates, both those incarcerated and those living outside the prison walls. Memory, deemed one of the most hazardous prisoners, faces the harsh reality of an extended sentence, which subjects her to intense scrutiny from the warders, despite their small numbers.

In contrast to the male inmates, who are referred to as “Staff,” the women’s section lacks sufficient personnel to earn the same designation. Those perceived to be the

most dangerous, including Memory, are relegated to cell “D,” a designation that threateningly signifies a place of danger and death, in reflection to the grim atmosphere that permeates their existence. Through vivid descriptions and intricate details, Gappah not only brings to life the realities of prison life but also highlights the complex dynamics of fear and power that govern the relationships within these walls.

The letter 'D' signifies danger, death, and the deadly nature of the place. It currently holds fourteen women from various parts of the country, including Mavis Munongwa, Nomvula Khumalo, Ellen Gumbo, Ruvimbo Mherekuvana, Benhilda Makoni, Manyara Makonesa, Sinfrey Mapuntu, Evernice Gundani, Jimmy Blue, Butter, Verity Gutu, Monalisa Mwashita, Beulah Shereni, Esnath Matema, and the narrator, who is the only woman on death row

The novel *The Book of Memory* presents a compelling exploration of identity and societal perception through the lens of its uniquely slippery albino narrator. Memory who is the albino character in the story has been subjected to painful experiences while in Chikurubi more so because of her skin colour. Her experiences, marked by open stares and ridicule from other inmates, highlight the pervasive stigma surrounding albinism, which is often steeped in superstition and misunderstanding. The author skilfully employs humour as a narrative device, allowing the protagonist to navigate these challenges with a blend of resilience and wit, as exemplified by the scene where Memory unnervingly stares at an inmate during mealtimes, showcasing how her difference can both alienate and empower her in a confined environment.

Mavis, a character who was incarcerated before Zimbabwe gained its independence, represents the profound disconnect from a society that has embraced freedom, prompting reflections on liberty and the enduring scars of colonialism. Unlike many

of her fellow inmates, she has faced immense hardship, which has toughened her resolve. She is female inmate, sentenced for murder at Chikurubi even though not on death row. Her imprisonment stems from the shocking act of poisoning her brother's young children; two boys and two girls. The harsh realities of prison life have transformed her cruelty into a form of madness, as she often screams the names of the children she murdered, appearing to be possessed by tormented spirits. Any fellow inmate sharing her cell would likely be terrified by her unsettling cries.

Mavis is an inmate who has become profoundly disconnected from the current events unfolding in Zimbabwe. This disconnection stems from the lengthy prison sentence she has been serving, which has relegated her to a state akin to solitary confinement for the majority of her life. As a result, she has earned the distinction of being the longest-serving prisoner at Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison. The isolation she has experienced not only limits her access to information about the outside world but also profoundly impacts her mental and emotional well-being.

Over the years, the absence of social interaction and the lack of engagement with contemporary society have contributed to her detachment, leaving her in a state of suspended reality, where the passage of time is marked more by the walls of her confinement than by the events that shape the lives of those outside. As Gappah (2015) describes, *“for thirty years or more she has roamed the halls of the prison, moving between the condemn and the canteen and the canteen, between her cell and the prison farm”* (p. 78).

Mavis, as the longest-serving inmate, remains completely isolated from the outside world, leaving her unaware of the significant events that have transpired in Zimbabwe over the past three decades. This disconnection highlights the extent to which inmates

are cut off from external realities. She lacks knowledge of the complex social and political dynamics within the country, including the unity forged through violent conflicts in the south and the ongoing discrimination faced by white citizens. Mavis exists in a state of ignorance, oblivious to the profound contradictions that characterize contemporary Zimbabwe.

Gappah (2015) notes that the character is unaware of the discrimination faced by white people, whose Olympic achievements are considered central to the nation's proclaimed successes. She is also oblivious to the numerous laws that promote gender equality and the prevailing culture that simultaneously ensures women remain subordinate.

Mavis has been isolated in a prison environment for an extended period, cut off from the events occurring outside. Similarly, the other inmates share this disconnection, as their understanding of the world is limited to the time they were incarcerated, which ranges from a few months to a few years, unlike Mavis's thirty years in prison.

Verity Gutu, an inmate who has been moved to cell D despite being meant for cell C, which houses those serving shorter sentences, is actually only serving four years for fraud and theft. Her bold scheme to deceive a European embassy through a fake organization highlights the moral complexities and desperate actions people may take when faced with systemic injustices. The author uses these inmates to critique societal standards while encouraging readers to ponder the deeper meanings of identity, power, and the human experience. Unlike her peers, Verity views her prison sentence as a mere slap on the wrist compared to her crimes. In fact, she is adored by her fellow inmates; whenever she shares her stories and experiences from the outside world, she captivates them, providing a temporary escape from their own struggles.

Verity seems to be the only one for whom the concept of remorse is entirely alien. She openly shares with her fellow inmates how she deceived the International Olympic Committee, and she feels no regret whatsoever.

“What they jailed me for is nothing compared to what I did,” she says. “Who do you think bought my house and paid for my son to go to university” (Gappah, 2015, p.23)

Through the character Verity, we gain insight into why certain inmates, despite committing serious crimes, are released before completing their sentences. Verity expresses confidence that she will be free from prison quicker than a javelin can hit the ground, attributing this to her connections with influential figures in the society.

The overcrowding in cell C compelled Verity and her fellow inmate Monalisa to resort to bribery in order to transfer to cell D, a move that seems peculiar since cell D is home to more dangerous criminals. Verity finds cell C unbearable, crammed with over a hundred women, including baby dumpers, who sleep alongside drug traffickers, fraudsters, and thieves. In some instances, inmates even share this cell with their infants. This particular cell in Chikurubi prison is a hive of activity, with frequent fights among the inmates being the most common occurrence. Fights often break out, sometimes triggered by something as simple as one woman giving another a strange look or by frustration over a baby crying too loudly and disturbing others

The circumstances were not in favour of Verity, the prison's beauty queen. Inside the cell, there was merely a single toilet bucket shared among over a hundred women. This dire situation prompted the inmates to establish rules regarding its use. One such rule dictated that urination in the bucket was only permitted after lock-up. The toilet bucket often became a catalyst for conflict in Block C; for example, two inmates, Truthness and Locadia, clashed in the garden after Truthness accidentally spilled a

bucket onto Locadia's baby. Locadia sought revenge with a physical confrontation the following day. The chaos and overcrowding in Block C led Verity to choose the perilous Block D instead.

The myriad experiences endured by inmates in prison vividly illustrate the harsh reality of a system that inflicts suffering on those it should be rehabilitating; transforming what should be a correctional facility into a place of torment.

2.2.5 Setting in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*

The Setting of the *Book of Memory* is in Zimbabwe, a place where the writer grew up. Petina Gappah was born in Zambia in 1971 but brought up in Zimbabwe. Her profession as a lawyer also shaped the happenings in the Story.

The transitions of the story through various places surrounding the protagonist, Memory, ultimately shift to the notorious Chikurubi Prison in Harare. The environment in the prison serves as a reminder of the harsh realities faced by the prisoners. The inmates grapple with overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and limited access to basic requirements which even increases their mental torture, furthermore, the oppressive atmosphere fosters a sense of despair and hopelessness.

Chikurubi Prison in Harare takes the centre stage in the story. In this solitary confinement jail, we encounter a woman in her death row, an inmate who is waiting for the presidential reprieve. The eponymous protagonist is found guilty of the Murder of Lloyd.

The infamous Chikurubi prison is presented as one of the most humiliating and degrading detention centres particularly to Memory and by extension to the other prisoners. The women in their section are congested because two to three hundred of them living in close proximity. The humiliation was intensified since the prisoners

sometimes were forced to collect their soiled sanitary protection, “foul – smelly and bloody pads” with their bare hands. This made them to wash out the blood before disposing their pads because that reduced their humiliation.

The prison guards impose a variety of labour on the inmates ranging from mopping and washing to weeding flower beds and assisting with the ironing of warders’ uniforms. Memory finds a way to transform this oppressive environment by teaching Yeukai, the daughter of Loveness one of the warders. Yeukai also happens to be an albino just like Memory. Through this connection, Memory manages to transcend the harsh realities of her confinement, effectively reshaping the prison space by crafting her own narrative. The story vividly shows clearly the challenges that the women prisoners face.

Inmates at Chikurubi Prison receive fragmented information about the outside world primarily through snippets of conversations overheard from the guards. This deliberate withholding of information serves as a form of psychological torture, confining their discussions to the grim realities of prison life. It is difficult to comprehend that, despite their current suffering; there was a time when the conditions faced by these inmates were even more challenging.

The cholera epidemic that struck a year ago resulted in the deaths of ten women in Chikurubi, with the toll being significantly higher among the male population due to overcrowding. With over twenty thousand prisoners in Zimbabwe, more than half are crammed into Chikurubi, exacerbating the already challenging living conditions and highlighting the urgent need for reform within the prison system.

Throughout the cholera epidemic, the sounds of men singing at night often filled the air, a poignant attempt to ward off the spectre of death. The inmates engaged in this

continuous act of singing, both day and night, as a means of coping with the pervasive fear and despair that accompanied the outbreak.

This ritual persisted for months, serving as a form of solace and resistance until the epidemic finally subsided. The unwavering commitment to song reflected not only their struggle against the disease but also a shared sense of community in the face of adversity.

In Chikurubi prison, the institution of religion has been co-opted by guards who exploit it as a means of oppression, reflecting a disturbing trend of hypocrisy among the prison staff. One notable figure in this scenario is Synodia, a warder who has aligned herself with a Pentecostal congregation known as the "Church of God," which is led by the controversial evangelist Ismael.

This church, while ostensibly a place of spiritual refuge, has become a platform for Ismael to showcase dubious miracles that raise questions about their authenticity and ethical implications. The intertwining of faith and authority within the prison environment not only undermines the genuine spiritual needs of the inmates but also serves to reinforce the power dynamics at play, as guards like Synodia manipulate religious beliefs to maintain control and exert psychological dominance over the incarcerated inmates.

“The lame walk, the blind are healed, the overweight experience instant weight loss. The short gain centimetres. I read in the papers last week that he had paid doctors to perform eye surgery on people with cataracts. Considering that he claims to have power to heal without medical intervention” (Gappah, 2015 p. 114)

Synodia has emerged as a transformative figure in Chikurubi, guided by the principles of evangelist Ismael. Her mission is to enlighten the inmates about the depths of their moral failings before she can offer them salvation. She believes she possesses the

moral authority to assess their spiritual states, asserting that all will face judgment for their actions.

With a commanding presence, she proclaims the inevitable consequences that await each inmate, emphasizing the gravity of their situation. The prisoners are severely judged and labeled as immoral and criminal, often branded as prostitutes, murderers, thieves, and sinners deemed unworthy of divine mercy or grace. With time, they have grown used to these accusations and react as society anticipates. Synodia maintained that they are all destined for hell and that none will receive God's salvation.

The setting of *The Book of Memory* plays a crucial role in elucidating the unfolding events, thereby enhancing our appreciation for the characters who strive to overcome their challenges. Central to the narrative is Chikurubi maximum prison, which serves as the primary backdrop against which the characters' struggles and efforts to find solutions are vividly portrayed. This environment not only shapes their experiences but also highlights the resilience and determination of those who navigate the complexities of their circumstances.

2.2.6 Voice in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*

In literature, voice refers to authors or narrator's distinctive style and personality, conveyed through their writing. It's a combination of elements like vocabulary, tone, point of view, and syntax that gives a text its unique feel and connects with the reader. Essentially, voice is how the author's personality and perspective shine through the text.

Voice is, the way a story is told. Just as how the same piece of music sounds quite different if played on a violin versus a flute (or sung by a choir or a rapper), a story

that involves that same plot, characters, world, etc, can still change a lot depending on the voice used to tell it. Jones (2013).

The narrator's voice, as crafted by the author, offers a profound insight into the harsh realities of prison life. Through vivid descriptions, we are drawn into a world marked by suffering, where inmates endure not only the physical pain of confinement but also the psychological toll of mistreatment and unsanitary conditions. The starkness of this environment is palpable, yet amidst the despair, an unexpected element emerges: laughter. This laughter, often juxtaposed with sudden outbursts of conflict, reveals a complex social fabric woven with threads of malice, gossip, and surprising acts of kindness. It serves as a coping mechanism, a fleeting escape from the grimness that surrounds the prisoners, highlighting the resilience of the human spirit even in the darkest of places.

Memory illustrates the paradoxical nature of relationships within the prison walls, where animosities can shift as quickly as the weather. It is not uncommon to witness two women, who just days prior were vehemently accusing one another of grave offenses such as witchcraft, suddenly engaging in friendly gestures, clapping hands and exchanging smiles as if their previous hostilities had never occurred. This fluidity of emotions underscores the unpredictable dynamics of life behind bars, where alliances can form and dissolve in an instant. Such interactions reveal the intricate dance of survival in a confined space, where the need for companionship often outweighs the weight of past grievances, creating a unique social landscape that is both fragile and resilient.

“It is not possible to sustain one emotion for too long. It is too taxing on the mind to always be angry, or always sorrowful. Pain in particular is too big a burden when you are in a confined space” (Gappah, 2015, p.71)

In the confines of prison, inmates find that the one aspect of their lives they can truly govern is their own minds. Their emotions, often confused and raw, become the only territory they can claim as their own amidst the harsh realities of incarceration. With this realization, many prisoners dedicate their scarce free time to assist women navigating the complexities of court cases. They engage in a collaborative effort to craft compelling narratives of innocence, drawing from their own experiences and insights. This process not only serves a practical purpose but also fosters a sense of purpose and connection among the prisoners, allowing them to channel their energies into something meaningful.

To enhance their understanding of the legal system and to refine their storytelling skills, these inmates often organize mock court sessions. In these lively re-enactments, they take on various roles; advocates, judges, witnesses, and the accused, transforming the sterile environment of the prison into a vibrant courtroom filled with laughter and comradeship. The atmosphere is electric, as the participants immerse themselves in their roles, often leading to moments of hilarity that break the monotony of prison life. Through this creative outlet, they not only hone their legal acumen but also build a supportive community, finding joy and solidarity in their shared experiences.

Mock court sessions offer inmates a rare escape from the harsh realities of confinement. These playful re-enactments provide amusement as a fundamental source of relief, allowing them to temporarily set aside the burdens of mistreatment and emotional strain.

The narrator's voice provides insight into the prison experience, revealing how the system functions and how inmates cope with its brutal realities. The emotions of the

prisoners often mirror those of society; for example, Memory's albinism is viewed as a deformity by her fellow inmates, just as it is outside the prison walls. The superstitions surrounding her condition cause other inmates to avoid her, shrinking away whenever she passes by. To add to her plight, Memory is the first woman in over two decades to receive a death sentence.

At a certain point, she leveraged this fear to manoeuvre through the trials of prison life. In Chikurubi, like in any other correctional facility, a complex social structure exists among the inmates. The hierarchy within the prison was crucial for survival, as new arrivals dared not confront the established seniors. In her initial months at Chikurubi, Memory fell victim to this dynamic but cleverly used her albinism to her advantage. An inmate named Marvellous made her life particularly difficult, demanding her food during meal times and putting Memory at risk of hunger. In response, Memory began to fix Marvellous with long, unwavering stares as she ate. This tactic inadvertently led to a turning point; just three days later, Marvellous learned of her son's death and connected it to Memory's intense gaze.

At the following meal, when she again took Memory's food, Memory maintained her piercing stare. After a week of this, Marvellous requested a transfer away from Memory, claiming to the guard that the look she received from Memory was the cause of her son's demise. This incident temporarily disrupted the social hierarchy among the inmates in Chikurubi Prison.

In conclusion, the narrative voice in *'The Book of Memory'* plays a crucial role, allowing readers to gain a deeper insight into the lives of the inmates at Chikurubi prison, their struggles, the injustices they face, and the strategies they employ to cope with their grim circumstances.

2.2.7 Style in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*

Style in literary works refers to the distinctive manner in which an author conveys their ideas, encompassing the choice of language and the technique employed to engage a broad readership while ensuring clarity of the message for the intended audience. It serves as a hallmark that differentiates one author from the other.

According to Keene (2018) literary style is the material, articulation in whatever genre and form of an author's attempt to record their vision, sensibility and apperception of the world.

Style in literary work is the way the way the author Style distinguishes authors in literature. Literature is not only about the storyline and the content but sometimes how the storyline and content is brought out by the specific writer. Petina Gappah has employed Flashback, suspense, foreshadowing, humour, allusion among other stylistic devices in *The Book of Memory*;

2.2.7.1 Flashback

Flashback serves as a narrative device in literature which allows a shift to a previous event or scene that disrupts the standard chronological flow of the storyline. According to (Griffin, 2019) a flashback interrupts chronological sequences of a story. The front-line action or present line of the story to show readers a scene that unfolded in the past.

The narrative is predominantly a flashback, a recount of what the protagonist Memory experienced before she was condemned to death. Her lawyer instructs her to have a recount of her past in order to aid her case. At the moment she is confined in Chikurubi Prison. The detailed account has broadened our perspective, enabling us to grasp the complexities surrounding her arrest beyond the mere allegations of

murdering her adoptive father, Lloyd. Furthermore, her childhood experiences and how she endured racism because of her skin colour is clearly brought out.

We have several instances of flashbacks, for instance while on her way to the guard's lodging though technically imprisoned, Memory finds herself taken a back into her past. What she encounters triggers a past memory relating it with the present happenings.

A network of ties is formed between this stifling yet familiar house and her childhood homes in Mufakose, drawing a bleak contrast between the dreadful perimeter wall of confinement and the domestic green hedge that encircles the guards' residence. Regardless of her surroundings, memory encounters the same sufferings. The anguish, however, is magnified within the confines of Chikurubi prison.

Hearing children playing games outside the guard's house evokes past memories in Memory's mind, reminding her of when she was forced to stay indoors, merely watching and listening to others enjoy themselves. The arrival of the guard's daughter, Yeukai who, like Memory, is also an albino triggers a deeper emotional response, as Memory sees a reflection of herself in the child (Gappah, 2015, p. 242).

She recalls the way her peers treated her during her childhood. These memories prompted her to delve deeper into Yeukai's interactions with the other kids. Fortunately for Yeukai, she wasn't the sole albino student at school, so the other children had grown accustomed to their presence. In contrast to Memory, Yeukai enjoys good health and receives proper care.

The intertwining of past recollections and the present deepens when we reflect on the significance of Yeukai's name. In Shona, 'Yeukai' translates to 'remember.' This

connection serves as a catalyst for Memory to revisit her earlier experiences and transcend them. Just by gazing at Yeukai and recognizing that her name signifies remembrance, Memory embarks on a journey back in time. The silver lining is that she has moved beyond those memories, no longer allowing them to impact her.

Memories of former prison experiences illuminate the harsh treatment faced by inmates from the guards, exposing a disheartening reality of how inmates are managed. Among the guards, Synodia stands out as particularly cruel; wielding her authority to exploit the weaknesses of weaker prisoners for her own pleasure a distressing example of this abuse is Sinfree. A newcomer who arrived six months prior, whose delicate demeanor and lack of preparation for the harsh realities of prison life made her an easy target. To Memory, Sinfree appeared fragile and bewildered, thrust into an environment governed by complex rules and social hierarchies that she did not comprehend. Her inability to understand Shona, the predominant language spoken among the inmates and guards, further isolated her, rendering her defenseless against Synodia's relentless aggression. The guard's repeated slaps and verbal taunts not only inflicted physical pain but also eroded Sinfree's spirit, ultimately leading her to succumb to the abuse, a tragic testament to the pervasive culture of violence and intimidation that characterizes the prison system.

In summary, the narrator employs flashbacks to connect past events with the present, allowing us to gain a broader perspective and a deeper insight into life behind bars.

2.2.7.2 Suspense and foreshadowing

Suspense in literature is crafted when authors intentionally hold back vital information, igniting a sense of curiosity that drives readers to keep turning the pages.

This tension cultivates a strong urge to unravel the story's mysteries, as readers become emotionally invested in the outcome and eager to see what unfolds next.

Foreshadowing acts as a compelling narrative tool, offering hints about future events that build anticipation and heighten tension. By weaving subtle clues throughout the narrative, authors lead readers toward forthcoming developments, enhancing the reading experience. This technique not only amplifies suspense but also invites readers to engage more deeply, as they become detectives piecing together hints to foresee outcomes. Skilful foreshadowing can elevate a straightforward plot into a rich tapestry of interconnected events, making the eventual revelations resonate even more powerfully.

The interplay between the present and the past in *'The Book of Memory'* serves as a sad reflection of the often-chaotic nature of human reminiscence, illustrating how memories are frequently intertwined with current events. Characters intentionally withhold certain details from the story, creating a sense of suspense that compels readers to yearn for revelations about the fates of various characters. This anticipation builds as the story unfolds; leading readers to a culmination that ultimately resolves their curiosity regarding the characters' journeys.

Moreover, the suspense woven throughout *'The Book of Memory'* is frequently entangled with elements of foreshadowing. Each moment of tension is accompanied by significant flash-forwards that hint at future developments. As readers navigate through these intricacies, they are not only engaged by the immediate suspense but also by the broader implications of what is yet to come, enhancing their overall experience of the storyline.

Zenzo, a crucial figure in *The Book of Memory*, is introduced by Petina Gappah with a striking lack of detail enveloping him in an aura of mystery that draws readers in. This purposeful ambiguity stirs curiosity, urging us to delve deeper into the narrative to uncover his true role and importance. Phrases like “all the ugliness with Zenzo” and “after business with Zenzo” are presented without further explanation, amplifying the suspense and leading readers to ponder the complexities of his character and his influence on the unfolding story.

This enigmatic portrayal not only piques interest but also invites speculation about Zenzo's past and future interactions within the plot. The deliberate choice to withhold information creates a tension that permeates the narrative, making readers eager to piece together the fragments of his story. As we navigate through the text, the questions surrounding Zenzo's character become a driving force, compelling us to engage more deeply with the themes and dynamics at play.

In the opening chapter of the second part, Gappah introduces a compelling phrase that resonates deeply: “Zenzo's arrival marks a pivotal moment, as everything around him begins to wither.” This statement encapsulates the essence of change that Zenzo brings, hinting at a significant transformation that is not immediately apparent. The weight of this moment suggests that his presence is not merely a new addition to the narrative but a catalyst for a deeper, more complex evolution within the story. The initial ambiguity surrounding Zenzo's character piques the reader's interest, inviting them to delve further into the unfolding drama.

As the story progresses, Gappah skillfully unravels the layers of Zenzo's persona, gradually revealing the intricacies of his influence on those he encounters. Each subsequent chapter builds upon the initial intrigue, offering richer insights into his

motivations and the effects of his actions on the lives of others. This narrative technique not only maintains the reader's engagement but also enhances the story's overall depth, as we begin to understand the far-reaching implications of Zenzo's presence.

The unfolding complexity of relationships and emotions surrounding Zenzo creates a tapestry of interconnected lives, each affected in unique ways by the enigmatic figure of Zenzo.

2.2.7.3 Humour

Humour is a literary device employed by authors to inject amusement into their works, captivating readers and keeping them engaged throughout the narrative. By weaving wit and playful elements into their storytelling, writers create an enjoyable experience that encourages readers to continue turning the pages.

The painful experiences which the protagonist and other characters pass through, more so in Chikurubi Prison, are brought out in a manner that leaves us amused. Memory humorously depicts the prison meal, leaving readers in fits of laughter. The vivid descriptions transform a grim setting into a source of amusement, showcasing the absurdity of the situation.

Through clever wordplay and sharp observations, the narrative captures the essence of culinary misadventures behind bars. This light-hearted approach not only entertains but also highlights the resilience of the human spirit in challenging circumstances. For instance, one inmate humorously remarks that “there is not enough oil in the fried vegetables or there is so much that you almost fear that America will invade, as they did in the Middle East” (Gappah, 2015, p. 16).

The stories shared by the inmates at Chikurubi serve as a strategic means to distract themselves from their ongoing challenges. Often they resort to humorous anecdotes; for example; the story of the *nanga* woman, who was caught and arrested while trying to cross into Mozambique, is humorous. Rotina Muvhunga, infamously known as the ‘diesel nanga’ from Chinhoyi, captured the attention of her fellow inmates as she recounted her audacious claim to the cabinet secretary that she could extract diesel from a rock. The absurdity of the situation was not lost on those present, as she boldly requested a farm and seventy billion dollars to demonstrate her supposed miracle. In a surprising turn of events, half of the cabinet members were convinced, even going so far as to remove their shoes and socks as they await the miracle.

“They exclaimed and clapped when the fuel came out. The women ministers ululated. All the while, behind the rock, she and her boyfriend had a tanker of diesel from Zambia,” (Gappah, 2015, p.202).

Petina Gappah fuses humour with metaphorical statements, making the narrative interesting. A perfect example from the narrative is when Memory is recalling the three occasions when her mother took her to a traditional healer. In one of the visits, they went to a dusty little room of little round men and women in Harare. Her mother waited for ancestral spirits to visit them as they acted as mediums. When they made another visit to the same place, they found a little boy whose description is entertaining.

The harsh reality in Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison is fortunately offset with humour. The inmates and the prison warders might not sound like fertile ground for amusement but it is seen in scenes where the prisoners hold mock court appearances, relying on flawed understanding of laws to rehearse their testimonies.

Gappah while drawing our attention to, societal beliefs of the power of witchcraft and dark magic in Zimbabwe, she uses humorous phrases that leave the reader laughing. Such instance is evident when, Mavis Munongwa is explaining to Memory the reason why she was jailed. She uses a lot of humour. Mavis was married in Gutu and when her husband died, she was not convinced about the true cause of his death, therefore, she decided to visit a diviner to seek answers.

According to the diviner, Mavi's husband was killed by her sister-in-law and her sorcerer friend. During a night visit to the graveyard, the diviner vividly describes the horror, claiming that *"they feast on his flesh and drink his blood. They made his penis into a whistle that they use to summon each other"* (Gappah, 2015, p. 79).

Synodia's humorous remarks serve to mock Zimbabwean English, particularly through her sarcastic use of exaggerated pronunciation and dismissive tone when responding to others.

The superstition that surrounds albinism in the novel is described with a pinch of humour. For instance, there is a section where Memory decides to scare an inmate by just staring at her, during mealtimes. The fact that most people are unable to cope with albinos played out in her favour. What also added to her mystique is the chameleon that she picked in the third month. She was not scared of holding chameleon in her hand, unlike most of the other women. Without having the slightest idea of what she was arousing, she rushed out to take it into her hands and instantaneously there was a cry that rang out. She at first didn't know that it had anything to do with her. The other prisoners kept close to one another, seemingly believing that their unity could protect them from the perceived danger she

represented. The news quickly circulated around the prison, and as a result, she was shielded from bullying, at least by the other inmates.

The narrators' description of the charges that were levelled against the inmates before their sentencing opened the door to their past world. As should have been the case, the crimes committed should have been displeasing to the ear, but nonetheless the author is able to wittingly describe their experiences arousing laughter. A case to remember, where humour had been infused, is the crime committed by Jimmy. Jimmy looks like a cartoon lesbian would look, except that she had had sex with more men than all the women in the prison, according to the narrator. She has served four of her six years for attempted murder. The sentence was a penalty for, biting the genital of a man who refused to pay her after sex at a nightclub.

“Jimmy’s attack was so ferocious that her victim fainted from blood loss. When he recovered, it was to find that Jimmy had fled to the women’s toilets, where she spat out an essential part of him into Harare’s sewers.” (Gappah, 2015, p.22).

Inmates endure numerous painful experiences while in prison, however, moments of humour can occasionally alleviate their suffering.

In conclusion, Humour serves as a vital tool for the writer, providing a much-needed respite from the grim realities of prison life. It injects a sense of amusement into the narrative, energizing readers and encouraging them to continue. This light heartedness not only enhances the overall appeal of the work but also skilfully addresses the difficult themes of suffering, making them more accessible and engaging.

2.2.7.4 Allusion

An Allusion in literature refers to a person, event, location or another literary work that is not directly stated but is expected to be recognized by the audience. This

technique allows writers to enhance their writing by linking to a well-known concept and introducing additional dimensions of meaning. According to Irwin, (2001), the purpose behind allusion is to transport and predicate the resemblance 'An author must intend these indirect references and must be in principle possible that the intended audience could detect it.' To him allusion is the key part of literature through which the memory is refreshing by occurring by time and again in literary pieces.

The exploration of allusion in literature reveals a deep and complex interplay between individual narratives and broader historical contexts, particularly evident in the works of Petina Gappah. In her storytelling, Gappah introduces a character who grapples with the haunting belief that her parents sold her to a wealthy white businessman named Lloyd. This poignant situation resonates with the tragic tale of Elizabeth-Jane Henchard from Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, drawing striking parallels that illuminate the character's internal struggles. Through this connection, Gappah not only underscores the themes of loss and identity but also crafts a narrative that invites readers to empathize with the character's plight, reflecting on the weight of personal history and its impact on one's sense of self.

Moreover, the character's identification with Oliver Twist, another figure who faced the harsh realities of being sold into servitude, adds further depth to the narrative. This allusion serves to highlight the pervasive societal issues of exploitation and the relentless search for belonging that many individuals endure. By weaving these literary references into her work, Gappah encourages readers to confront the lingering effects of historical injustices while simultaneously recognizing the power of literature to shed light on both personal and collective experiences. Allusion not only enhances the emotional resonance of the story but also fosters a deeper understanding

of the human condition, inviting reflection on the shared struggles that transcend time and culture.

Biblical allusion is strikingly illustrated in the assessment of hypocrisy among the characters, particularly the warders in Chikurubi prison. In the story of '*Book of Memory*,' the author competently uses Synodia, a prison guard whose name is laden with ironic significance, to highlight the oppressive nature of fervent evangelicalism.

Synodia's behaviour is characterized by her overzealous enforcement of rules, as she barks orders at the prisoners while peppering her commands with bible verses. This juxtaposition of authoritarianism cloaked in religious fervour serves to underscore the dangers of zealotry that masquerades as moral righteousness, revealing the darker side of faith when it becomes a tool for oppression.

The overstated demeanour of Synodia not only paints her as a figure of authority but also as a symbol of the broader societal issues surrounding the misuse of religious conviction. Her relentless quoting of Bible verses while exerting control over the inmates creates a contrast between her supposed piety and the harsh reality of her actions. This discord invites readers to reflect on the ways in which individuals can distort spiritual teachings to justify their oppressive nature. The irony of her character lies in the fact that her attempts to instil fear and obedience through scripture ultimately reveal her own moral shortcomings, as she embodies the very hypocrisy she seeks to condemn.

In an act of rebellion, the inmates respond to Synodia's fervent proselytizing with mockery, showcasing their resilience in the face of cruelty. Their laughter and derision serve as a powerful counter-narrative to Synodia's authoritarianism,

illustrating the enduring strength of the human spirit even in the most dehumanizing circumstances.

“You must fill your blood with his power, so that even the mosquitoes that bite feel that power. They will suck the power in your blood.” “Power in the blood!” echoes Evernice. (Gappah, 2015, p.28).

Synodia emphasized that the inmates must embody the strength of God, by infusing their very essence with his power, to the extent that even the smallest of creatures, like mosquitoes, can sense it. These insects will draw from the vitality coursing through your veins, absorbing that potent energy. Evernice's exclamation of "Power in the blood!" reverberates with a sense of urgency and fervour, highlighting the profound connection between one's inner strength and the external world.

Through this strikingly grotesque metaphor, Gappah presents a darkly ironic perspective on the idea of contagion, likening it to a disease transmitted by mosquitoes. This imagery serves to illustrate how power can be both a source of strength and a means of oppression, suggesting that the very essence of authority can be parasitic in nature. Evernice's response laden with subtext, acts as a subtle yet powerful reminder of the small acts of defiance that individuals can muster in the face of overwhelming forces, hinting at a deeper resilience that exists within them.

The intricate dynamics among the characters not only enrich the narrative but also invite readers to reflect on the overarching themes of faith, authority, and resistance that permeate societal structures. As the characters navigate their complex relationships, they reveal the multifaceted nature of power and its implications for personal and collective identity. This exploration encourages a deeper understanding of how individuals can assert their agency, even in the most challenging circumstances, ultimately prompting a contemplation of the broader societal

implications of their struggles.

In view of the above, an author's choice of words significantly enhances the effectiveness of their writing by enabling readers to visualize concepts and internalize the underlying messages. A diverse writing style not only captivates the audience but also improves comprehension. In the narrative *"Book of Memory,"* the author employs various stylistic techniques to vividly depict the realities of Chikurubi Prison.

2.3 Plot in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* present a persuasive story that chronicles his time in prison. The diary looks into the psychological and emotional turmoil experienced by Ngugi as he tries to overcome the challenging experiences of Prison. Through vivid description and painful reflection, he explores the themes of oppression, identity, and the power of communication ultimately highlighting the resilience of the human spirit in the face of hardship. The memoir allows for an intimate glance into the thoughts and struggles, making it profound on the political climate of his time.

The text is organized into three distinct sections: prison notes, letters from prison, and prison aftermaths. The prison notes, which constitute three-quarters of the text, represent the most critical part of the narrative, vividly illustrating the challenges faced by the inmates. The second section, 'letters from prison,' consists entirely of correspondence written by Ngugi during his detention, serving as a vital connection between him and the outside world. Finally, the 'Prison Aftermaths' documents Ngugi's efforts to reclaim his position as chairperson of the literature department at the University of Nairobi. This last section reveals that the struggles of the inmates extend beyond prison walls, highlighting their ongoing suffering despite their innocence.

Ngugi's experiences during challenging times with fellow inmates are vividly captured during his incarceration at Kamiti Maximum Prison. Detained without trial in December 1977. He joined eighteen other political prisoners in Cell 16. His diary reveals the severe conditions he endured, serving as a critique of the Kenyan government. Ngugi denounces the influence of "foreign capital" and "foreign economic interests," arguing that the core issue lies in the encroachment of Western culture and its domination over African societies. Since the early 1970s, he has been a prominent advocate for preserving traditional Kenyan culture against the threats posed by Western influences.

He argues that, the present Kenyan political leaders are today's neo-colonialist who just replace their colonial masters and become their tool boys. He noted that even though some of Kenya's leaders were among the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950's, many have since independence vowed to protect the power and status of neo-colonialist by collaborating with the western economic interest. Ngugi wonders how fast these leaders have changed. To him it is so ironic that the former detainees are now detainers and the former freedom fighters are now denying others their freedom.

Ngugi made it known that he is in the side of the workers and the poor peasants who are struggling against the vast inequities of wealth between the haves and the have-nots. *Detained: a Writers Prison Diary* also captures historical summary of colonial and post-colonial Kenya from an underclass perspective. Ngugi applauded the poor peasants and workers for continued traditional resistance.

Ngugi, a university professor, starts to use art to criticize the government. He produces a play that he wrote known as, *Ngaahika Ndeeenda* (I Will Marry When I want). Its original version is in Gikuyu intending to open eyes of the peasants to the

fact that they were being oppressed by the capitalist system. He organized the Kamiriithu culture centre to showcase the play. It became unfortunate because both the play and the writer were squashed by the government, the former being banned as a threat to public security while the latter was whisked to Kamiti Maximum Prison, where he was jailed without trial.

In his diary, Ngugi vividly recounts how the production of his play *I Will Marry When I Want*, ultimately led to his imprisonment in Kamiti. The arrest was exacerbated by the use of the Gikuyu language within the play, which the authorities perceived as a threat. Ngugi argues that both the government and its foreign allies are motivated by a deep-seated fear, rooted in their colonial legacy, particularly of the unyielding spirit displayed by the peasants and workers.

This experience prompted Ngugi to reflect on the harsh realities of the prison system, where he observed the mistreatment of inmates by government officials and prison warders. His insights reveal a troubling dynamic, highlighting the oppressive measures employed by the state to maintain control and instil fear among those who dare to challenge the status quo.

'Am in cell 16 in a detention block enclosing eighteen other political prisoners. Here I have no name. I am just a number in a file: K6, 77. A tiny iron frame against one wall serves as a bed and a tiny board against another wall serves as a desk. These fill up the minute cell' (Ngugi, 1981, p.3).

In Kamiti, Ngugi started capturing all the accounts before and after his arrest. The records were kept on a toilet paper roll which was the only available writing material. The memoir written in brief episodic form capturing his experiences with the guards, the treatment he received, the health care in prison, the unity of the inmates and the

lack of communication whatsoever with the outside world, reveals evident suppression. He suffered both psychologically and physically.

He narrates the feelings of despair and psychological torture in prison. He further describes the paralysing anxiety of political prisoners. Wondering if he will be released the next day or fifty years to come, Ngugi spent sleepless nights. Apart from the diary Ngugi also completed a novel and title *Devil on the Cross* Heinmann (1982) and all of this was written on toilet papers originally in Gikuyu Language.

Ngugi was eventually released in December, 1978 after serving for one year in Prison. The release was a result of worldwide protest. Free at last, he tried to regain his teaching in Nairobi University without success.

The Inmates at Kamiti face significant restrictions regarding family visits, as highlighted by Ngugi, who describes the process as disheartening. Family members must apply to the Ministry of Home Affairs or through security officers for permission to visit, creating an imbalance where the detainee has little agency in the matter. Even when applications are submitted, the criteria for approval or denial lack transparency, leading to uncertainty. If visits are granted, they are often orchestrated in a manner that feels more like a spectacle than a genuine reunion, with families instructed to report to a nearby police station early on the designated day. At Kamiti, the fortunate detainee receives a mere thirty minutes' notice to prepare for the visit, which involves changing into civilian attire while still in chains. They are then transported in a police vehicle with drawn blinds to a waiting room, where the chains are removed before entering.

However, the interaction is severely limited, allowing only five minutes of conversation with loved ones, such as a spouse, all while being closely monitored by

security personnel and prison warders in civilian clothing. This environment underscores the desolate reality of the inmates' lack of autonomy and the dehumanizing nature of the visitation process.

To sum up, Ngũgĩ offers a compelling and personal narrative of his experiences with detention, shedding light on the grim realities of political imprisonment. His work delves into the challenges faced in resisting authoritarian regimes and explores the wider societal implications of such oppression.

2.3.1 Characters in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: a Writer's Prison Diary*

2.3.1.1 Ngugi wa Thiongo

The memoir is a recollection of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's life that eventually led to his incarceration and details about his experiences in jail. The events, occurrences and happenings are purely narrated by the writer himself. He is therefore the narrator as well as the main character in this story.

Narratives play an essential role in autobiographical literature, as they enable authors to convey their distinct viewpoints and life experiences. Through these narratives, readers gain insight into the personal journeys of the writers, as well as the historical and cultural contexts that shaped their lives. Autobiographical narratives are not mere recounting of events; rather, they represent a curated reconstruction of the past, highlighting significant moments and choices that have contributed to the formation of the individual's identity. This selective storytelling allows authors to emphasize particular themes and experiences that resonate with their understanding of self, thereby inviting readers to engage with their unique life stories on a deeper level.

Furthermore, autobiographical narratives facilitate an exploration of the complexities surrounding decision-making and the various dimensions of life that influence

personal development. By reflecting on their past, authors can examine the interplay of different factors; such as family dynamics, societal expectations, and cultural influences that have shaped their agency and choices. This introspective process not only sheds light on the authors' motivations and struggles but also encourages readers to consider their own experiences.

Ngugi's arrest is a case in point, as he tries to separate fiction from fact in order to dismiss false accusations that were levelled against him and state the real reason that led to his being jailed. According to him, his 'crime' was to co-author and assist in the production of a play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I will marry when I want, 1982), in a Kenyan language, Gikuyu. According to authorities, it was subversive to involve ordinary people as actors, stagehands and consultants in a culturally revolutionary exercise. Ngugi believes that in history the utmost fear of the colonial masters has been an aroused populace aware of its traditional culture.

Ngugi's narration centres on the following; One, a diary which he records her personal thoughts and action, Two a statement it subordinates the personal to collective good, last as a historical observation, Ngugi tries to give an explanation from the reality, but also as a pedagogical and ideological tool, which must convince and address a certain aggrieved group of people. His literary training played a major role in that; it made him unify and shape his political theme in an artistic manner. Ngugi's spiritual nature and even mystical tendencies work with some anxiety against the Marxist materialistic position and put as much importance on personal freedom and thoughts as on political deed, historical exactness, and ideological steadiness.

In the Story as both a character and a prisoner, Ngugi vividly recounts his experiences within the confines of Kamiti Maximum Prison, offering a unique perspective shaped

by his own trials. Essential to his story, is his profound passion for writing, which he clings to as a lifeline against the encroaching loneliness that threatens to engulf him. Faced with the disheartening challenge of limited access to writing materials, he ingeniously turns to toilet paper as his canvas, a choice that underscores the lengths to which he will go to express himself. This unconventional medium becomes a crucial outlet for him and his fellow prisoners, allowing them to maintain their mental clarity amidst the oppressive environment. "Free thoughts on toilet paper," he reflects, acknowledging the arduous task he has set for himself. The other detainees, too, find solace in the written word, using it not only as a means to pass the time but also as a way to document their tormenting experiences. They nurture the hope that their words will one day escape the prison walls, raising awareness of the grim realities they endure and connecting their suffering to the outside world.

The urge to write is nearly irresistible for political prisoners. At Kamiti, almost all detainees engage in writing or composing. Wesonga Sijeyo documents his life extensively, Koigi wa Wamwere writes numerous political essays and a long poem about his prison experience, Gicheru wa Njau has authored a Swahili novel, Thairu wa Muthiga has written a few poems, Simba Ongongi composes emotionally powerful songs, and Mahat Kuno Roble, despite being illiterate, is a remarkably gifted poet.

The correctional facilities in both Kamiti and Shimo la Tewa fell short in providing prisoners with adequate writing materials, fuelling their resourcefulness and creativity. In the absence of writing materials, prisoners resorted to using tissue paper as their only hope. A scenario reminiscent of other inmates globally who chronicled their experiences on what they humorously referred to as "good old toilet paper."

“Now the same good old toilet-paper-which had been useful to Kwame Nkrumah during his confinement at James Fort Prison and Dennis Brutus on Robben Island, as well as long-term inmates like Abdilatif Abdalla in Kamiti’s G Block.” (Ngugi, 1981, p.6).

Meanwhile, Ngugi, a figure of considerable literary distinction, found himself restricted to his cell for up to 22 hours each day, with only two hours allotted for daily work and a brief respite for sunshine and exercise. This short time was primarily consumed by unpleasant chores such as emptying a chamber pot filled to the brim with excrement, urine, ugali, infested beans, and spoiled vegetables. These unwelcoming conditions openly spotlight the harsh realities of prison life while simultaneously illustrating the unyielding spirit of creativity amid adversity among the inmates.

Ngugi emerges as both the author and the central character, embodying a profound sense of reflection and political awareness. His narrative is profoundly influenced by his experiences of being imprisoned without trial, a consequence of his activism and outspoken criticism of the government. This backdrop shapes him into a figure of resilience and courage, demonstrating remarkable strength amidst the physical and psychological challenges he faces.

Throughout his time in detention, Ngugi endures significant humiliation, navigating a landscape marked by isolation and uncertainty. Despite these adversities, he maintains his dignity, showcasing an unwavering commitment to his principles. His character serves as a testament to the human spirit's capacity to withstand oppression while remaining steadfast in the pursuit of justice and truth.

Ngugi's imprisonment did not lead him to succumb to fear or abandon his convictions. Instead, he viewed this confinement as an opportunity for intellectual and spiritual development, believing that prison could serve as a catalyst for self-discovery. His

writings during this period resonate with the broader struggles faced by African writers and freedom fighters that resist authoritarian regimes.

The transition in Ngugi's writing from English to Gikuyu signifies a pivotal aspect of his identity, establishing him as both a cultural patriot and a linguistic activist. He perceives language as fundamental to cultural identity and a vital tool for resistance, emphasizing its role in the fight against oppression and the preservation of heritage.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, as depicted in his work *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, exemplifies remarkable resilience in the face of adversity. His unwavering commitment to his beliefs highlights his courage, making him a powerful symbol of the influence that the written word can wield. Through his experiences, he illustrates the profound impact of literature as a tool for resistance and expression.

2.3.1.2 Fellow Prisoners

In *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o meticulously explores the lives and personalities of his fellow detainees, each representing diverse aspects of Kenyan society and the oppressive forces they face. Through these characters, he effectively conveys themes of injustice, solidarity, and the remarkable resilience of the human spirit.

Although the individual narratives of these prisoners are often succinct, Ngugi's portrayal underscores their collective suffering and the courage they exhibit in the face of adversity. This emphasis on shared experiences not only highlights the impact of systemic oppression but also celebrates the strength found in unity among those who endure it.

Ngugi's fellow inmates hailed from diverse backgrounds, primarily consisting of peasants, workers, and farmers who faced unjust imprisonment at the hands of the

government. These individuals, characterized by their humility and strong work ethic, often lacked formal education and were not inherently political activists; rather, they were victims of state oppression. This context deepens Ngugi's empathy for their plight, as they endure detention without trial while exhibiting remarkable resilience and a steadfast commitment to preserving their dignity.

Among the stories Ngugi recounts is that of a farmer who was imprisoned solely for being perceived as a potential political threat due to his advocacy for peasant rights. This narrative highlights the arbitrary nature of state repression, where individuals are targeted not for any wrongdoing but for their efforts to champion the rights of their communities. Through these accounts, Ngugi sheds light on the broader implications of political repression and the human spirit's capacity to endure in the face of injustice.

The peasants in the text embody the silent majority, the ordinary people crushed by the states machinery but whose humanity and integrity shines through. The British colonial government initiated a decade-long campaign involving the large-scale imprisonment of Kenyan peasants and workers in concentration camps such as Mackinnon Road, Langata, Manyani, Megata, and Hola. At the same time, the rest of the population was relocated into heavily guarded concentration villages.

Among the detainees are politically aware intellectuals, often well-educated individuals engaged in anti-government activism. Their commitment to justice remains steadfast, as they continue to engage in discussions and debates about political issues, even while incarcerated. These individuals play a vital role in fostering solidarity and enhancing political consciousness within the prison environment.

“It may sound a strange thing to say to you, but in a sense I am glad they brought you here. The other day – in fact a week or so before you came – we were saying that it would be good thing for Kenya if more intellectuals were imprisoned. First, it would wake most of them from their illusions. And some of them might outlive jail to tell the world. The thing is ...just watch your mind... don't let them break you and you'll be alright even if they keep you for life ...but you must try ...you have to, for us, for ones you left behind” (Ngugi, 1981, pp.8-9).

Wasonga Sijeyo who have been imprisoned for nine years but has managed to keep a razor-sharp mind and a heart of steel knew it all. He now understands the system, how it operates and how it is used with the aim of breaking the inmates. He informed Ngugi to be strong enough to overcome the experiences of Jail to live to tell.

Ngugi shares his prison experience with veteran inmates, individuals who have endured long-term detention and have frequently cycled in and out of prison over the years. These prisoners are often incarcerated due to their opposition to both colonial and post-colonial regimes, reflecting a deep-seated resistance to oppressive systems.

Their prolonged imprisonment has not only hardened them through years of struggle but has also enriched their understanding of the socio-political landscape. Despite the challenges they face, these individuals remain steadfast in their convictions, embodying a resilience that stems from their shared experiences and unwavering commitment to their cause.

In Kamiti maximum security prison, older inmates frequently recount their experiences from the colonial era, drawing connections between their historical struggles and contemporary challenges. These narratives not only highlight a legacy of resistance but also position these veteran prisoners as mentors to the younger population, imparting valuable insights gained from years of fighting against oppression. While many of these individuals remain unnamed in Ngugi's accounts presumably to safeguard their identities their collective wisdom is palpable.

Notably, figures such as Bildad Kaggia and General Bamuigi, along with their associates, are specifically acknowledged in these discussions. Their stories serve as powerful reminders of the enduring spirit of resistance, reinforcing the importance of historical context in understanding the present. Through these shared experiences, the older prisoners foster a sense of solidarity and resilience among the younger inmates, emphasizing the continuity of their struggle against injustice.

In conclusion, the characters depicted in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, represents a rich tapestry of humanity, each playing a role in the overarching themes of solidarity, suffering, and resistance. This diverse group encompasses individuals from various social strata, ranging from impoverished peasants to educated intellectuals, all united in their common struggle against an oppressive system. Ngugi illustrates that the pursuit of justice is complex and inclusive, drawing participants from all segments of society.

2.3.1.3 The Oppressors (Warders, state and authorities)

The state agents, while not always identified by name, serve as persistent antagonistic forces characterized by repression, anonymity, and manipulation. The portrayal of the state often emphasizes its collective and oppressive nature, underscoring a systematic cruelty that transforms Kamiti maximum security prison into a potent symbol of authoritarianism. Through this lens, Ngugi effectively reveals the dehumanizing aspects of authoritarian regimes and the inherent brutality of the prison system, illustrating how state power functions to stifle dissent and exert control.

Although Ngugi refrains from naming individual warders or police officers, he employs these figures to represent the broader system of oppression, surveillance, and psychological manipulation that characterizes Kenya's post-independence

governance. This approach allows him to critique the pervasive nature of state authority without focusing on specific individuals, thereby highlighting the collective impact of such a repressive system on society.

By using these symbolic representations, Ngugi underscores the insidious mechanisms of control that permeate the state apparatus. His work invites readers to reflect on the implications of such a system, revealing how it not only dehumanizes its victims but also perpetuates a cycle of fear and compliance that stifles individual agency and dissent.

In Kamiti maximum security prison, the warders act as the primary enforcers of oppression within the penal system. They are responsible for the daily physical abuse and exertion of control over the inmates, often exhibiting cruel and sadistic behavior. Ngugi highlights how these warders serve as instruments of state violence, illustrating the dehumanizing impact of the prison environment on both the prisoners and those who condone their mistreatment.

Despite their brutality, the warders often remain anonymous and impersonal, functioning as mere cogs in a larger machinery of state repression. This detachment reflects the systemic nature of violence within the prison system, where the warders, while directly inflicting harm, are also products of a broader institutional framework that perpetuates inhumanity.

“Ah, well: it is at least good to know that the ill-treatment and torture in prison are not the results of personal aberration on the part of a few the warders and officers, but that it is a calculated and directed from the top” (Ngugi, 1981, p.144).

Ngugi portrays the warders as individuals clad in the garb of authority, yet their true identities and personal characteristics become obscured within the overarching framework of power.

In this repressive regime, the police and intelligence officers play a significant role as agents of oppression, engaging in arrests, torture, and surveillance. These security forces are often portrayed as threatening and violent, operating with little to no accountability for their actions. Ngugi highlights the brutal interrogation techniques employed by the police, which aim to undermine his resolve through relentless psychological pressure, ultimately seeking to extract false confessions regarding crimes he did not commit against the state.

The methods of coercion and intimidation used by these authorities are designed to break the spirits of detainees, employing tactics such as isolation, torture, and instilling fear. This systematic approach to repression not only targets individuals but also serves to create an atmosphere of terror that stifles dissent and undermines the very fabric of society.

In summary, the figures of authority within Kamiti maximum security prison namely the warders, police, intelligence agents, and state officials embody the mechanisms of a repressive and authoritarian regime that prioritizes the preservation of power above all else. These individuals are depicted as faceless and merciless, engaging in a dehumanizing process that strips both prisoners and themselves of their humanity through the enforcement of oppressive control systems. Ngugi employs these characters to highlight the pervasive nature of systematic repression and the political silencing faced by those who dare to oppose authority.

2.3.2 The Setting in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained A Writer's Prison Diary*

2.3.2.1 Introduction

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* is set in Kenya during the turbulent political climate of 1978, a period when Ngũgĩ's literary works particularly

the play *I Will Marry When I Want* were viewed as subversive by the ruling elite. His outspoken criticism of political and social injustices led to his detention without trial, exposing the repressive nature of the regime. The narrative also references his home village of Kamiriithu, where he co-founded the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre, which became a platform for political awareness through theatre. While the text briefly reflects on the events surrounding his arrest, its primary focus lies in chronicling Ngũgĩ's experiences in prison, offering deep personal reflections and critiques of systemic oppression during one of the most challenging periods of his life.

In literary studies, setting refers to the time, place, and environment in which a narrative unfolds. It serves as more than just a backdrop; it shapes characters, drives the plot, and reinforces the thematic concerns of a work. In *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, the setting is vividly illustrated through two central sections; *The Prison Notes* and *Letters from Prison*. These parts offer exact depiction of Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, not only outlining its harsh physical conditions but also revealing the psychological strain endured by political detainees. Through this setting, Ngũgĩ exposes the mechanisms of state repression while simultaneously asserting the power of resistance, memory, and intellectual freedom.

2.3.2.2 Prison Notes

This section, "Prison Notes," reveals the foundational setting of Kamiti Maximum Security Prison and is a crucial part of *"Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary,"* spanning from Chapter one to Chapter nine. It primarily consists of the reflections and observations that Ngugi penned during his time in detention. The main objective of

these notes was to document his experiences and to provide a mental escape from the harsh realities of prison life.

This is where Ngugi vividly recounts his experiences of incarceration and the harsh realities of prison life. In addition to narrating his personal ordeal, he utilizes this platform to express his views on Kenyan history, language, culture, and the political landscape of his time.

The distressing circumstances endured by Ngugi and his fellow inmates are powerfully illustrated in this section, revealing the harsh realities of Kamiti Maximum Prison that were largely unknown to the public. Ngugi highlights the inadequate and infested food provided, which was often spoiled.

“At Kamiti, we daily saw the same faces in the same white Kuunguru prison uniforms; we daily fed on unga and beans in the morning, at noon and at three o’clock;... “the government could not have been ignorant about the possible results of these experiments in mental torment : valium was the most frequently prescribed drug in Kamiti Prison. The doctors expected a detainee to be mad or depressed unless proved otherwise. (Ngugi, 1981, p.7).

Ngugi spent long hours in isolation, confined to his cell for thirteen to twenty-three hours each day. This situation was exacerbated by a constantly burning 100-watt light bulb, which severely disrupted his sleep. Despite the grim circumstances, the inmates clung to a glimmer of hope for eventual freedom, even as some had languished in detention for nearly a decade without any clear resolution.

In Kamiti, falling ill was a risky situation, as guards often exploited sickness as a means of physical torture. Medical aid was rarely provided, only in dire circumstances and typically after significant delays. The underlying intention seemed to be to prolong suffering until death, only to hastily transport the deceased to the hospital, minimizing the distance to the morgue. When Ngugi experienced severe dental pain,

he requested permission to seek treatment, which was granted under the humiliating condition that he be shackled during the journey a stipulation he strongly resisted. Despite the distressing environment and its implications, Ngugi's resilience and spirit remained unbroken.

At Kamiti Prison, political detainees were most commonly tormented by disease and the emotional strain related to family. Among these, disease was especially feared and considered the most dangerous threat. Fellow detainees warned that falling ill was highly risky, as treatment was often delayed until the illness had severely progressed. Even then, medical attention was not aimed at healing, but merely served as a formality to show that treatment had been provided.

The distressing conditions within Kamiti Maximum Prison have come to light, revealing a grim reality for the inmates who are often only transported to Kenyatta National Hospital when they are on the brink of death. Ironically, these prisoners are shackled and heavily guarded, even as they are wheeled into surgery, raising the question of whether a patient in such dire pain and under anaesthesia would even consider escaping. The sheer absurdity of the situation highlights the inhumane treatment they endure, as their suffering is met with skepticism rather than compassion.

Ngugi's observations about the plight of inmates in Kamiti paint a heart-wrenching picture. One particular inmate, plagued by swollen veins, endures relentless agony, desperately hoping that the indifferent prison system might acknowledge his cries for help. Instead, he is often dismissed as a malingerer, a label that only adds to his torment. Each time his pain becomes unbearable, he is escorted to Kenyatta under strict surveillance, only to return to his cell where his lamentations resume. This cruel

cycle persisted for seven long years, culminating in his hospitalization at Kenyatta just as news of his impending release was announced.

Another inmate faced a harrowing choice between enduring hunger or suffering from his debilitating condition as he was having a wound in the anus. Stricken with advanced piles, he experienced frequent blood loss and found it agonizing to eat, he often lie on his side due to extreme pain. To alleviate the pain associated with waste discharge he opted to skip meals.

In Kamiti, it seems that every detainee grapples with one or more ailments, ranging from headaches and backaches to toothaches and skin issues. Yet, the response from the warders remains dismissive, labelling their suffering as mere malingering, further compounding the despair that permeates the prison environment.

The grim conditions faced by political prisoners in Kamaiti can profoundly undermine their spirit, psyche, and overall well-being. In such an oppressive environment, the act of resistance becomes a vital means of preserving one's sanity and humanity. For the inmates, asserting their rights and holding steadfast to their beliefs in the face of systematic oppression is crucial.

This resistance manifests not only in overt actions but also in the subtler forms of solidarity that can be conveyed through gestures such as a silent photograph or the unspoken sentiments embedded in a letter. Each of these expressions serves as a significant contribution to their struggle, reinforcing their resolve to maintain their mental stability amidst the relentless pressures of incarceration. In this context, the importance of solidarity cannot be overstated; it acts as a lifeline, reminding prisoners that they are not alone in their fight against dehumanization and despair.

“To the prisoners condemned to isolation such messages from the outside sound like Joshua’s trumpets that brought down the legendary walls of Jericho” (Ngugi, 1981, p.27).

Ngugi's experience of silent resistance proved to be profoundly impactful during his time in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison. The arrival of a photograph of Njooki, sent through the post, alongside Wariinga’s image that he sketched on rationed toilet paper, resonated deeply with him. These visual tokens served as powerful symbols, akin to a thousand trumpets, breaking through the oppressive barriers of his confinement. They provided him with a sense of solidarity, reinforcing the notion that he was not isolated in his struggle. Wariinga’s image, in particular, awakened in Ngugi a heightened awareness of his connection to a broader historical narrative, while Njooki’s photograph reminded him that his imprisonment was intrinsically linked to the Kamiriithu community and its collective fight for justice.

Together, these two images functioned as a constant reminder to Ngugi that his detention transcended personal suffering; it was symbolic of a larger historical context marked by the relentless struggle of the Kenyan people. They underscored the ongoing efforts to cultivate a revolutionary culture characterized by outspoken courage and patriotic heroism. In this way, Ngugi's confinement became a microcosm of the national struggle, illustrating how individual experiences of oppression are interwoven with the collective aspirations of a society yearning for freedom and dignity. The silent yet potent resistance embodied in these photographs not only fortified his resolve but also reaffirmed his commitment to the cause of his people, highlighting the enduring power of art and connection in the face of adversity.

The challenges faced by inmates in Kamiti Maximum Prison require sustainable solutions. Individuals like Ngugi exemplify resilience against oppressive conditions, which plays a crucial role in prompting the government and prison authorities to adopt a more humane approach towards prisoners.

2.3.2.3 Letters from prison

Letters from prison is a section that focuses on the correspondence written by Ngugi during his time in Kamiti Prison, aimed at the outside world. Although the narrative is set within the confines of this maximum-security facility, Ngugi's letters vividly convey his experiences and the realities of prison life. Through these writings, readers gain insight into both his personal struggles and the broader environment of the prison, as he articulates the conditions within the cells and the emotional landscape of incarceration.

‘Under a shining bulb in my tiny cell at Kamiti, suffering seemed to have taken on the nature of infinity. Wasonga Sijeyo, in an interview with Viva, 3 October 1980’ (Ngugi, 1981 p. 169).

The section further highlights the intense torture suffered by the inmates, leading Martin Shikuku to describe Kenya as a leading example of a torture chamber, even suggesting that the country could export torturers to others in need.

When he attempted to be in touch with his wife regarding the problems and adversities he encountered within the prison system, his letters faced restriction from the high-security prison authorities. This censorship likely stemmed from the prison's wish to prevent any revelations about the handling of inmates from reaching the public eye. Throughout many of these letters, Ngugi expressed an ardent call for the cessation of various elements contributing to the deplorable conditions prevalent within the prison environment.

In one of his touching letters to his wife Nyambura, Ngugi vividly recounted the excruciating experiences he faced during his imprisonment. Among these was a severe toothache that escalated to the point where one of his teeth began to decay, leaving him with no choice but to eat on one side of his mouth. This condition was exacerbated by persistent bleeding from his gums, which added to his discomfort and distress. In an effort to seek relief, Ngugi reported his dental issues to the prison doctor, who advised him to consult a dentist. However, the bureaucratic process that followed was frustratingly slow; he was required to fill out a consultation form, which went unanswered for several months, leaving him in a state of prolonged suffering.

In his correspondence, Ngugi expressed his strong objections to the conditions imposed upon him for receiving medical care. He was informed that he would be shackled during the transport to the hospital, a stipulation he vehemently opposed. To Ngugi, the act of being chained was a dehumanizing treatment that he felt was unjust, as he did not consider himself a criminal, either by his actions or through any legal conviction. His refusal to be restrained ultimately led to the authorities denying him the medical attention he desperately needed, highlighting the harsh realities of his imprisonment and the systemic disregard for the well-being of inmates. This situation not only underscores the physical pain he endured but also reflects the broader issues of human rights and dignity within the prison system.

Furthermore, Ngugi articulates his method of protest against the conditions of his detention, specifically highlighting his appeal to the security officer responsible for overseeing detainees. He formally requested dental treatment, presenting two potential solutions to address his needs. The first option entailed being taken to a hospital without the degrading requirement of being shackled, while the second option

proposed that, should the initial request be denied, a dentist should be brought to his place of confinement. This letter also recounts a significant moment when Ngugi firmly refused to be chained in preparation for a visit with his wife, Nyambura. His steadfast objection to the humiliating condition of being restrained ultimately prevented him from seeing her, underscoring his commitment to maintaining his dignity even in the face of oppressive circumstances.

The environment within the prison severely restricts the inmates' access to external information, as they are prohibited from reading newspapers or listening to the radio. This deliberate isolation is further compounded by the warders, who are expressly forbidden from discussing any matters related to the outside world. Such measures are designed to eliminate any potential sources of information that could provide the prisoners with a sense of connection to life beyond the prison walls. Consequently, the lack of news and communication not only exacerbates the psychological strain on the detainees but also reinforces the oppressive atmosphere of their confinement, leaving them in a state of uncertainty and isolation.

In a recent letter addressed to the Security Officer responsible for overseeing detained and restricted individuals in Nairobi, Ngugi expressed his grievances regarding the officer tasked with escorting him to Kenyatta National Hospital's Kabete Clinic for the treatment of a severely painful and abscessed tooth, as advised by the prison physician. He elaborated on the troubling behaviour of the police, particularly highlighting the actions of Mr. Kimeto, who he claims exploits his medical condition as a means of psychological torment. This manipulation of Ngugi's health not only exacerbates his suffering but also raises serious ethical concerns regarding the

treatment of detainees and the responsibilities of law enforcement in ensuring their well-being.

In these letters, Ngugi not only articulated his personal struggles but also highlighted the broader systemic issues that plagued the prison system. His writings serve as a poignant critique of the injustices faced by inmates, reflecting a deep-seated concern for human rights and dignity. By voicing his demands for reform, Ngugi sought to shed light on the harsh realities of prison life, emphasizing the urgent need for change in the treatment of those incarcerated. His letters thus stand as a testament to his resilience and commitment to advocating for a more humane and just prison system, despite the oppressive circumstances he faced.

2.3.3 Style in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*

2.3.3.1 Irony

Irony represents a condition characterized by a significant disparity between reality and expectation. This prominent literary device manifests when the intended meaning of a word or phrase contrasts with its literal interpretation, thereby highlighting a sense of absurdity. Such a situation often reveals a disconnect between what is perceived and what is actually true, creating a compelling tension that invites deeper reflection. Irony can serve various purposes in literature, from critiquing societal norms to enhancing the emotional depth of a narrative, as it encourages readers to question their assumptions and recognize the complexities of human experience. Through this lens, irony not only enriches the text but also fosters a more nuanced understanding of the characters and themes at play.

Besides, according to Malewitz (2019), Irony occurs in literature and in life whenever a person says something or does something that departs from what they (or we) expect them to say or do.

Irony is among the main literary devices embraced by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Detained A writer's Prison Diary*. This technique occurs when ideas, words or situations are contrary to what we would expect, as evident in most instances in the diary. An Irony can be situational that is when an event or episode is quite different from or opposite from what we expect. It can also be verbal in which case is treated as sarcasm. This is when a person says one thing but means another that is opposite.

During his time in the solitude of Kamiti Maximum Prison, Ngugi found himself immersed in deep contemplation about the state of Kenya as a nation. The reality he observed contrasted with his expectations; he was disheartened to witness the ruling elite perpetuating injustices against the peasant class, despite the country having ostensibly achieved independence from colonial rule. He reflected on the Kenyans who had once fought in the Mau Mau rebellion during the 1950s, only to turn against their fellow citizens in a bid to safeguard their own power and status. This betrayal was compounded by their alliances with Western nations, which further entrenched their dominance. Such realizations ignited a sense of solidarity within Ngugi, compelling him to stand alongside the peasants in their struggle against the oppressive government.

In *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o vividly illustrates the paradox of his situation as he finds himself imprisoned in a nation that is ostensibly independent and progressing. With only scraps of toilet paper at his disposal, he begins to document his thoughts and reflections, a sharp contrast to the technological

advancements and educational reforms taking place in Kenya at the time. This irony underscores the dissonance between the promise of freedom and the reality of oppression, highlighting the struggles faced by many citizens who, despite the country's growth, remain marginalized and voiceless. The juxtaposition of his dire circumstances against the backdrop of a supposedly enlightened society serves to amplify the urgency of his message and the need for social change.

The act of writing on such rudimentary materials transcends mere survival; it becomes a profound symbol of resistance for Ngugi. Through his words, he seeks not only to document the injustices he witnesses but also to ignite a sense of collective consciousness among his fellow Kenyans. His writings, born from the confines of a prison cell, resonate with the broader themes of oppression and the quest for liberation. By transforming the most basic of materials into a medium for expression, Ngugi challenges the status quo and inspires hope, urging his compatriots to awaken to their own potential for change. In this way, his diary serves as both a personal testament and a rallying cry for a nation yearning for justice and equality.

The beginning of Ngugi's contemplations was marked by a striking irony that highlighted the peculiarities of his situation. In a rather unexpected turn of events, the usually cautious prison warders, oblivious to the absurdity of their own behaviour, approached him with the intention of delivering a lecture on the complexities surrounding the elite class in Kenya. This encounter was particularly ironic given that these warders, who typically exhibited a pronounced disdain for their own indigenous languages, seemed to embody a profound disconnect from the very populace they were meant to oversee. Their actions not only underscored their lack of awareness but

also revealed a deeper cultural estrangement, as they appeared to be more invested in critiquing the elite than in understanding the societal dynamics at play.

The situation took on an almost comical dimension when one considers that these warders had chosen to adopt European names, a decision that further emphasized their alienation from their cultural heritage. This choice of identity not only reflected their desire to distance themselves from the common people but also illustrated a broader trend of cultural dislocation prevalent among certain segments of society. By rejecting their native languages and embracing foreign nomenclature, the warders inadvertently highlighted the very issues they sought to address in their lecture.

The violence inflicted upon inmates at Kamiti maximum security prison exceeds what one might expect from a modern penal system. This entrenched culture of sanctioned brutality reflects a ruling-class mentality rooted in fear, perpetuated by an oppressive minority that seeks to silence a discontented majority. Such practices were legitimized during the colonial era, leading to what inmates refer to as the 'Mbwa Kali culture.' It is paradoxical that prison guards continue to subject inmates to such suffering, a legacy of brutality that originated from colonial governance.

Irony serves as a reminder of the complexities of identity and belonging in a post-colonial context, where the struggle for authenticity often collides with the remnants of colonial influence.

2.3.3.2 Epistolary

In *Detained: A Writer's Prison*, Ngugi employs letters as a narrative style that significantly enhances the storytelling, particularly in the second section. This epistolary approach not only maintains a seamless flow throughout the narrative but also deepens the reader's understanding of the harsh realities faced by Ngugi and his

fellow inmates at Kamiti. Through these letters, the brutality inflicted upon them becomes vividly apparent, allowing readers to grasp the emotional and physical toll of their imprisonment.

When Ngugi drafted a letter to his wife, highlighting his plight in Prison, his letters were not allowed through the prison censors. The first letter written to Nyambura, detailed Ngugi's lack of medical care and in extension lack family visits. In the first case, he was suffering from a toothache as a result of which he was forced to eat using one side of his mouth. He reported the matter without hesitation to the prison doctor requesting him to be allowed to see a dentist.

The report somehow fell on deaf ears only to resurface months later with a condition that he be chained as he was being taken to see a dentist, a thing that he totally objected. Firmness is portrayed in the letter as Ngugi refused totally to be chained. According to him, he was neither a criminal in practice nor a convict of a court of law, so chaining him was out of the question therefore he didn't receive medication nor was he allowed to see the family members.

All the other letters were addressed to various officials and demanded a stop to a variety of aspects of the horrendous prison situations. All the letters authored by Ngugi, except the last one which was authored by Adam Mathenge, a colleague prisoner who was not allowed an X-ray and electro-therapy for severe back pain.

In a letter addressed to Mr. Muhindi Munene, the officer in charge of security for detained and restricted individuals in Nairobi, Ngugi articulates his concerns regarding the negligence exhibited by police warders. He highlights their deliberate refusal to facilitate his medical treatment, imposing unreasonable conditions that hindered his access to necessary healthcare. This treatment reflects a broader attitude

of arrogance among the warders, as evidenced by Mr. Kimeto's remark that Ngugi was not merely a detained individual but rather a common prisoner, drawing a parallel to the historical fact that even Mzee Jomo Kenyatta had once been in handcuffs. Such comments underscore the dismissive and dehumanizing approach taken by those in authority, further exacerbating the plight of individuals in custody.

The contents of Ngugi's letter reveal his unwavering commitment to advocate for the rights of mistreated Kenyans. His arrest and subsequent detention appear to be a calculated effort to stifle his ability to express his thoughts on the prevailing social conditions and to foster dialogue surrounding these issues. By attempting to silence him, the authorities not only infringe upon his personal freedoms but also undermine the collective voice of those who suffer under similar circumstances. Ngugi's determination to speak out against injustice serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of free expression in the face of oppression, highlighting the need for continued discourse on the realities faced by marginalized communities in Kenya.

“Some people, it seems would rather smash the mirror that may show them the warts on their faces and then sit back with a smile or relief, saying: Thank God I now have no warts. But no matter how many mirrors one may smash, one cannot wish away Kenya’s social reality. Arresting and detaining writers who hold up the mirrors will not succeed” (Ngugi, 1981, p. 175).

The health conditions of inmates are often neglected, leaving many to endure significant pain without adequate medical attention. Among those who have voiced their concerns are individuals like Ngugi and Adam Mathenge, who have resorted to writing letters to authorities in an effort to advocate for better healthcare within the prison system. Mathenge, in particular, addressed a letter to the security office responsible for detained and restricted persons in Nairobi, urgently requesting proper medical treatment. His appeals highlight the dire circumstances faced by inmates, as

he has been suffering from a severe aching back condition that required both an x-ray and electro-therapy.

Mathenge's health issues predate his incarceration, yet he has found himself without the necessary medical care that he previously received while at Kamiti, where he underwent electro-therapy every three to four months. His situation underscores a broader systemic failure to address the medical needs of prisoners, raising ethical questions about the treatment of individuals in custody. The lack of attention to their health not only exacerbates their suffering but also reflects a disregard for their basic human rights, emphasizing the urgent need for reform in the healthcare provisions within correctional facilities.

In summary, the memoir intricately intertwines various storylines that look into the intricate realities of confinement, shedding light on the psychological and emotional turmoil experienced by those trapped within the prison system. Both in Petina Gappah's, *The Book of Memory* and Ngugi's *Detained A writers prison diary*. The characters are crafted with great care, each representing distinct backgrounds and motivations that resonate with larger societal themes, thus encouraging readers to connect with their stories of both resilience and despair. The setting plays a pivotal role, vividly illustrating the harsh conditions of prison life and accentuating the divide between freedom and imprisonment. The writing style ranges from realism to poetic expression, skilfully encapsulating the diverse experiences of incarceration. This work stands as a vital resource for both scholars and enthusiasts, offering a comprehensive insight into how these elements converge to depict the profound effects of prison life on individuals and the broader society.

2.3.3.3 Witticism

Witticism has been foxily used by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in the diary '*Detained A writer's Prison Diary*,' to enable us endure the agonizing experiences that he, together with other inmates were made to pass through in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison. Witt cuts across the diary from the onset to the end.

One notable instance that brings a smile is when Muhoro wa Muthoga recounted to Ngugi his fortune in avoiding solitary confinement. He chuckled at Ngugi's plight, who had to endure significant suffering during his initial month in detention, which paled in comparison to the harrowing experiences Muhoro faced in isolation. Known as Fujika, Muhoro shared that his own introduction to prison life at Kamiti involved a grueling six-month stint in a desolate cell within the isolation block.

Every effort was exerted to make him live and feel the reality behind that name. His only contact was with the warders who brought him food; let him out for an hour of sunshine exercise, and who guarded the empty silent corridors. One guard always tiptoed and another would open the cell door, push food inside, and jump back quickly, shutting the door as if the inmate was a dangerous animal in a cage. Yet another warder, the most liberal, would speak to him words through clenched teeth as if they were being painfully pulled out of his tongue at some cost, and even then, the words would come out as whispers. Otherwise, the others communicated with him only in gestures. He started doubting himself.

“Gradually he grew into the habit of also speaking in whispers or gesturing whenever he wanted to ask something. On a few occasions he caught himself walking on tiptoe.” (Ngugi, 1981, p. 22).

The after effect of this torturous confinement is what the system wanted to achieve. The system wanted to reduce the influence of the rebellious group, those who are opposed the government.

The conditions within Kamiti maximum prison are far from tolerable, as Ngugi highlights the pervasive and unpleasant odours that characterize the environment. He vividly recalls the stench of excrement and urine, alongside the acrid scent of human sweat and breath. This portrayal of the prison atmosphere is striking, illustrating the harsh realities faced by inmates and evoking a sense of discomfort that lingers in the reader's mind.

‘This was fairly accurate for a young imagination. Prison has its own smell: Permanent heavy pall of perpetually polluted air. On arrival at Kamiti, the smell hits me in the face, it descends on me, it presses me down, it courses down my nostrils and throat, am gasping for breath and am really scared of an attack of asthma.’ (Ngugi, 1981, p.119).

Shifting focus from the smell of air, Ngugi humorously draws attention to yet another odor, that of the warders and fellow prisoners. He prompts readers to imagine the pungent and often unpleasant scents typical of a prison environment. Initially, he finds himself recoiling from the smell of others and wonders whether they, too, detect the scent of an outsider perhaps in the same way animals sense a stranger among them.

Over time, however, he notes that he no longer notices any smell at all, questioning whether he had imagined it in the first place. This change in perception leads him to the unsettling realization that he has become part of the prison system. He reflects on whether, if someone were to visit him now, they would perceive in him the same odour he once noticed in the inmates and warders upon his arrival.

Ngugi was perplexed by the changes in scent, questioning whether they were a result of his civilian attire. As soon as he donned the white *kuungurus* and collarless shirts, he noticed that he began to smell like those around him.

In conclusion, the plot intricately weaves narratives that explore the complexities of confinement, highlighting the psychological and emotional struggles faced by individuals within the prison system. The characters are meticulously developed, each embodying unique backgrounds and motivations that reflect broader societal issues, thereby inviting readers to engage with their journeys of resilience and despair. The setting serves as a critical backdrop, with vivid descriptions that transport readers into the realities of prison environments, emphasizing the oppressive atmosphere and the contrasts between freedom and confinement. Finally, the style of writing employed in these texts varies from realism to lyrical prose, effectively capturing the multifaceted experiences of incarceration. This research is an essential resource for scholars and enthusiasts alike, providing an understanding of how these elements converge to portray the profound impact of prison life on individuals and society as a whole.

Chapter Two has critically examined the stylistic choices, settings, character portrayals, and plot structures in *The Book of Memory* by Petina Gappah and *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Through the use of vivid imagery, symbolism, and introspective narration, both authors effectively immerse readers into the grim realities of incarceration.

Character analysis has revealed deeply personal struggles shaped by memory, injustice, and resistance. In Gappah's text, Memory serves as both a narrator and a symbol of flawed justice and identity, while Ngũgĩ emerges in his diary as a defiant intellectual who uses the prison space as a platform for cultural and political

resistance. The plotlines, although distinct in form; fictional versus autobiographical, intertwine in theme, reflecting the trauma and resilience born out of oppressive systems.

Overall, this chapter has shown how the authors utilize various literary elements to explore broader issues of power, identity, and injustice within prison environment. The artistic representation of prison in both texts not only personalizes the experience of incarceration but also invites critical reflection on societal structures and human rights.

CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAME AFFECTED BY PRISON

3.1 Introduction

The chapter entails the psychological frame of characters in Petina Gappah's *Book of Memory* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* and their behaviour given the experiences they underwent in Prison. This chapter will provide an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of a select group of inmates, examining the profound impact that incarceration has on their psychological well-being. By delving into the daily realities faced by these individuals, the analysis will highlight how the harsh conditions of prison life ranging from social isolation and loss of autonomy to exposure to violence and the stigma of criminality contribute to a range of mental health issues.

The chapter will also consider the coping mechanisms employed by inmates, as well as the role of institutional support systems, or the lack thereof, in shaping their psychological resilience or vulnerability. Through a comprehensive examination of these factors, the discussion aims to illuminate the complex interplay between the environment of confinement and the mental health outcomes for those who inhabit it, ultimately contributing to a broader understanding of the psychological ramifications of incarceration.

3.2 Psychological Frame of characters in the *Book of Memory* and *Detained a Writer's Prison Diary*.

The depiction of life behind bars in both *The Book of Memory* and *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* is profoundly troubling. In these narratives, the incarcerated individuals face immense suffering that deeply affects their mental well-being. The harsh realities of prison life constrict their minds, rendering them susceptible to the

stifling atmosphere that surrounds them. Yet, amidst this turmoil, the decision of these inmates to capture their experiences of psychological distress emerges as a powerful form of resistance. By documenting their struggles, they reclaim a sense of agency, allowing them to foster a more positive self-image despite the dehumanizing conditions they endure. The harsh realities unfolding within the walls of Chikurubi and Kamiti maximum security prisons serve to erode the prisoners' sense of identity, pushing them to resist the oppressive nature which they are subjected to.

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, the intricate relationship between anxiety and defense mechanisms can be effectively analyzed through the framework established by Freud. He posited that the self must cultivate various strategies to protect itself from the often harsh and unforgiving nature of reality Cherry (2024). Within the context of prison narratives, the act of writing emerges as a crucial defense mechanism for inmates, serving as a means to process and cope with their psychological turmoil. By putting their thoughts and feelings into words, these individuals not only confront their inner anxieties but also construct a narrative that reaffirms their sense of humanity. This act of articulation becomes a powerful tool for self-exploration and understanding, allowing them to navigate the complexities of their emotional landscapes.

Furthermore, the process of self-expression through writing serves as a vital buffer against the oppressive conditions prevalent in the prison environment. In a setting where identity and dignity are often stripped away, the ability to articulate personal experiences and pain enables inmates to retain a sense of self amidst overwhelming adversity. This narrative construction not only fosters resilience but also empowers them to assert their existence and individuality in a space that seeks to diminish it.

Ultimately, the therapeutic nature of writing in prison highlights its significance as a means of psychological survival, illustrating how creative expression can facilitate a deeper understanding of oneself and the world, even in the most challenging circumstances.

3.2.1 Psychological Frame of characters in the *Book of Memory*

3.2.1.1 Mnemosyne

Mnemosyne commonly referred to as Memory is the central female character in Petina Gappah's *Book of Memory*. She is a black albino woman who has been imprisoned in Chikurubi Prison for the murder of Lloyd Hendricks. Memory experiences both physical and psychological confinement leading to significant suffering.

Memory's albinism leaves her with delicate, pale skin that is particularly susceptible to the harsh rays of the sun. Lacking access to protective gear like hats or soothing ointments, she faces a constant battle against potential skin damage. According to Ngom (2022), the condition Memory has transformed her into a symbolic figure within her community. Whereby, sometimes appearing clear and defined, yet often shrouded in ambiguity and contradiction, her painful experiences serve as a reflection of the broader social issues that permeate all layers of society. Instead of receiving the support she desperately needs, those around her often exacerbate her pain making her feel isolated and desperate.

The deeply ingrained stereotypes associated with albinism, including the grotesque notion that giving birth to an albino child is a curse, further entrench her suffering even whilst in prison. As an inmate her struggles intensify as she faces hostility from both fellow inmates and warders, who harbor an irrational dislike for her simply

because of her albinism. One warder named Synodia assigned Memory more work to make sure her physical person is punished;

“But to make assurance doubly sure, as it were, to make sure that my physical person was punished in addition to the spiritual deprivation she had devised for me, she assigned me to sanitary duty, a polite way of saying that I spent two weeks collecting foul-smelling bloody pads with my bare hands before piling them into the large metal drum that serves as an incinerator” (Gappah, 2015. p.67)

This pervasive negativity shapes her experience, amplifying her feelings of alienation and distress. The harsh realities of her environment, combined with the relentless torment, create a suffocating atmosphere that weighs heavily on her mind. In this bleak situation, writing becomes her only shelter, a means of escape and expression that allows her to process her pain and find a semblance of solace despite the hard times. Through her words, she seeks to reclaim her identity and assert her existence in a world that often overlooks her humanity.

The anguish Memory experienced during her time in prison is profound. In her early days at Chikurubi, she was horrified to find herself sharing a cell with Mavis Munongwa, a woman convicted of murdering several children. At night, Mavis would scream the names of her victims, instilling a deep sense of terror in Memory, who would curl up in fear. Reflecting on those moments, Memory explains that she was “insulated by her sense that none of this was real. That none of this was true,” adding that although she still feels fear at times, “it is mostly in her dreams that fear comes, and she finds herself drowning before she startles herself awake” Gappah (2015, p. 6). As she delves deeper into her past, she begins to recover fragmented memories of her own life, encouraged by her long-time advocate, Vernah Sithole, to share her story with an American investigative journalist.

Memory was subsequently confined in her cell, where the isolation of solitary confinement exacerbated her previous struggles. She spent her time reflecting on past experiences, which overwhelmed her thoughts and inspired her to begin writing her life story, guided by the advice of her lawyer, Vernah Sithole. Vernah encouraged her to document her narrative for Melinda Carter, an American journalist who had shown interest in her case. Melinda was the first person from the outside world to visit her during the two years and three months she had been incarcerated. Through her story, readers gain insight into Memory's harrowing past and the painful realities she currently faces. The deteriorating conditions of her cell reignited old nightmares that had once jolted her awake.

“The nights that I spent at Highland police station and those early nights at Chikurubi in the cell that I Shared with Mavis Munongwa brought back the old dreams that had shuddered me awake, the dreams that had not disturbed my sleep since my first two years with Lloyd” “For reasons that will be obvious to you, we are not allowed forks and knives. But nor are we allowed to use our hands like normal people. We eat all our food with tablespoons, everything from the waterlogged porridge to the lumb – filled *sadza* and the cabbage that smell of sweat” (Gappah, 2015, p. 48)

The dietary limitations at Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison are commonplace as is the inconsistent water supply; however, the prevalence of beatings and solitary confinement is striking. In this facility, food is not regarded as a fundamental necessity, and whether inmates receive it is largely left to chance. They are compelled to consume the meals provided, as no alternatives exist. The term 'tasty' holds little meaning for them, as all meals served in Chikurubi lack flavour. According to Gappah (2015, p. 16), there is no balance in their food; it is either overcooked or undercooked, excessively salty or lacking salt altogether, and fried vegetables are either devoid of oil or drenched in it to the point of concern.

Every facet of life for inmates is influenced by their environment; from their sleeping arrangements to the meals they are served. Interestingly, even the speed at which they consume their food is regulated. Personal items are also predetermined for them. In essence, they lack autonomy over their companions, their speech, their thoughts, and their aspirations. Everything is dictated to them, originating from the sixth floor of the New Government complex.

Memory highlights the severe material deprivation experienced by female inmates, emphasizing the inadequacy of basic hygiene provisions. Each prisoner receives only half a roll of toilet paper, twenty-five milliliters of toothpaste per week, and four and a half sanitary pads per month each pad already halved and equipped with a single wing. When these limited supplies are exhausted before the scheduled redistribution, inmates are compelled to rely on improvised alternatives such as newspapers or other printed materials.

The limited supplies provided to inmates have fostered a sense of innovation, leading them to repurpose items such as pages from the Bible for tissue. During an inspection in Block C, Synodia was taken aback to discover Bible pages mixed with waste in the toilet bucket, referred to as ‘gamashura,’ or catcher of wonders.

“After she saw pages from the Proverbs and Psalms and the first letter to the Corinthians mingled in with other wonders, she gave us a two-hour sermon ...” (Gappah, 2015, p. 17).

The foundation of Memory's isolation stems from the systematic punishment inflicted upon female inmates serving lengthy and severe sentences. The psychological torment primarily targeted those incarcerated for their political activism. Verity asserts that activists abducted from their homes two years prior were held in Chikurubi, confined in a hidden underground cell under the watch of an unfamiliar guard. The twelve

hours spent in confinement each day often drives inmates to madness. Unlike her fellow prisoners, Memory's resilient spirit has enabled her to endure the harsh treatment.

In this context the prison authorities wield isolation as a calculated method of punishment, effectively using it as a tool for control. By stripping inmates of their social connections and subjecting them to prolonged periods of solitude, they exploit the inherent human need for companionship and community. The psychological impact of such enforced isolation is profound often leading to a deterioration of mental health and a sense of hopelessness. This strategy not only serves to discipline the inmates but also reinforces the power of dynamics within the prison system illustrating how solitude can be used by prison system to maintain authority and suppress the inmate's spirit.

Memory's recollections of her time as a prisoner in Chikurubi are far from trivial; the insights she has shared with the outside world serve as a powerful call for meaningful change. According to Ngom (2022), the memories that stand out to Memory are particularly significant in their depth and emotional weight. Her reflections highlight the injustices of the legal system and the brutality of the guards, which are dictated by the prevailing regime. Her prolonged stay on death row, coupled with the sham trial that led to her sentencing, is profoundly distressing. These experiences represent a past from which she seeks to distance herself.

The traumatic events that Memory endures are rooted in the death of Lloyd and the circumstances surrounding her transfer to her adoptive father. Despite her profound poverty and the family tragedies following the loss of her loved ones. The memories

of her life under Lloyd's care continue to haunt her. She recalls the judge's indifferent demeanour during her trial which ultimately resulted in her placement on death row.

“In the wood – panelled courtroom, the judge and his two assessors sat on green leather chairs with backs as high as gravestones. The judge to his right was asleep. The one next to him, a woman of Indian origin had a face that was twisted into a victor of concern ‘Notwithstanding the fact that there were no ‘forensic reports’ and ‘post mortem’ to prove beyond reasonable doubt the culpability of Memory, ‘The judge concluded that I was guilty of the crime that I was charged with’ Gappah, 2015, p. 223).

The disparities within the Judiciary and the atmosphere of despair are effectively captured in Memory's account of her murder trial and the ensuing sentencing. The realization that she was tried and convicted on baseless charges inflicted significant emotional distress upon her. The judge rendered the verdict solely based on the testimony of one witness, Alexander, who notably is also Lloyd's sister.

In conclusion, Memory is a character marked by resilience, navigating the challenges of her upbringing and her current imprisonment. Despite being wrongfully accused of murdering Lloyd, she remains undeterred, channeling her experiences into writing, which serves as a source of relief for her. Her unwavering optimism fuels her belief that brighter days lie ahead, showcasing her ability to persevere in the face of adversity.

3.2.1.2 Memory's Mother

Memory's mother exists not within the confines of a physical prison, but rather in a more insidious form of captivity that ensnares both her body and mind, imprisonment of the mind and soul. She stands as a living testament to the shadows cast by a patriarchal legacy, where her spirit is shackled by the weight of societal expectations and personal trauma.

The deep-seated roots of her debilitating depression can be traced back to the enforced servitude of her early marriage, a union that stripped her of autonomy and self-worth. Despite her courageous attempt to escape the clutches of her first oppressive husband, she found herself trapped once more, this time with Memory's father. Yet, even in this second marriage, the cycle of entrapment continues, as she grapples with the remnants of her past, leaving her unable to fully engage with the world around her.

In this domestic landscape, Memory's father becomes a reluctant prisoner as well, bound by love and duty to care for his troubled wife. His role is fraught with challenges, as he navigates the complexities of her mental anguish while striving to protect their children from the emotional captivity that permeates their home. The atmosphere is thick with unspoken pain, as the family grapples with the shadows of their mother's despair. Each day unfolds like a delicate dance, where he attempts to shield his children from the devastation that threatens to engulf them, yet he remains powerless against the tide of their mother's struggles. In this intricate web of relationships, the echoes of a patriarchal past reverberate, leaving scars that are both visible and hidden, shaping the lives of all who inhabit this fractured space.

The turmoil in Memory's mother manifests in her erratic church attendance, as she drifts from one congregation to another, dragging her family along with her. At one point, during a baptism at 'The Salvation Army,' Memory nearly drowned in the chaotic ritual meant to welcome new members. The process was both wet and violent, with the newly repentant being submerged three times. When it was Memory's turn, the baptist inquired if she accepted Christ and renounced Satan. In a shocking twist, Memory clung to the baptist, crying out that she do not accept Jesus!

For Memory, baptism was not a simple religious ritual but a terrifying confrontation with a deeply rooted cultural fear. She perceived the act as her only protection against the *njuzu*, a malevolent spiritual entity believed to inhabit water and prey on children. Faced with what felt like a life-or-death decision, she viewed immersion in the river as synonymous with rejecting evil, while accepting salvation required surrendering herself fully to the water. As the Baptist fervently urged her to renounce Satan and embrace Jesus, she resisted in fear, panic overwhelming her body as she fought against the forceful plunge, nearly drowning in the process.

The Church of Felicitous Tidings marked a pivotal moment for Memory's mother in her journey to break free from the prison of a patriarchal society. This church felt distinct from the others and for the first time Memory's thoughts shifted from her desire for dark skin to a new yearning: a tambourine. She found herself praying fervently for one discovering a newfound love for music. Inspired by Sister, Lucia a fellow congregant who skilfully played the tambourine, Memory dreamed of emulating her. Meanwhile, her mother was swept up in the experience; within just two weeks, she began speaking in tongues, mimicking the women who often succumbed to ecstatic frenzies their tambourines clattering to the ground.

"Then raising their voices to speak in a bubble that they call 'tongues,' a large wall of nonsense seemed to rise and make its way to heaven." (Gappah, 2015, p. 111).

Memory's mother, however, took a different approach often fainting and collapsing on the floor. In a humorous twist, as they all tumbled they managed to cling to their dresses, ensuring their underwear remained hidden despite their wild movements. The Holy Spirit seemed to keep their spiritual encounters above the waist never allowing them to be caught in a state of disarray. (Gappah, 2015, p. 111) Unfortunately for

Memory, it was in this very church that a significant event unfolded, her mother received a prophecy that would ultimately lead to her sale.

Memory's mother was ensnared by the chains of past traditions that gripped her mind with relentless force. Caught between two worlds, she found herself torn between her native beliefs and the allure of Christianity. Religion became her refuge, a means to unravel the agony of her past. She morphed into a wanderer of faith perpetually searching for solace.

Memory observed that her mother had one foot planted firmly within the realm of Christianity a haven filled with assured prayers, the rhythmic beat of tambourines, stirring organ music, Latin hymns, and the enigmatic offering of communion that blurred the lines of reality.

At the same time, Memory remained deeply influenced by traditional belief systems, particularly the pervasive fear of witchcraft. Her worldview was shaped by her mother's syncretism faith, which embraced both indigenous spiritual practices and Christian teachings. Her mother placed trust in spirit mediums, healers, and diviners, while simultaneously maintaining her belief in the Christian faith as represented by figures such as Reverend Bergen.

In her mind, it is apparent to believe in anything that might be a solution to the situations that a person is experiencing, which is the reason why she believes in traditions as well as in Christian doctrines. This duality coexisted in a complex tapestry of belief.

Since fleeing her first forced marriage, Memory's mother found herself in a continual state of mental confinement. Benson, Memory's father, was not her first husband; he

emerged as her saviour from the grasp of those oppressive traditions. Their story began long ago when at merely thirteen; Memory's mother faced a horrific fate of being wed to an old man four times her age whose desire was to make her his third wife. Her parents adhering blindly to archaic customs sought to offer their youngest daughter as appeasement to the ancestors whose wrath stemmed from the death of a family member tied to her first husband.

Memory's mother lived in a state of profound unhappiness and isolation ultimately feeling compelled to return to her parents for solace. However, instead of offering her the support she desperately needed, her father resorted to violence punishing her and sending her back to her husband. Once in her marital home she faced relentless abuse. Her husband, accusing her of disobedience and treating her like a servant. The weight of her suffering became so unbearable that thoughts of ending her life crept in. In a moment of despair, she attempted to hang herself but was saved only to be confined for three days as punishment for her actions.

In the midst of her turmoil she found an ally in Benson, a carpenter from the nearby village. Together they devised a plan to escape her cruel husband. They fled leaving behind her young son who tragically drowned while playing by the river. Both Benson and Memory's mother believed that the boy's death was the wrath of a *Ngozi*, a malevolent spirit seeking revenge. This belief coupled with her past traumas continued to haunt Memory's mother throughout the story. In a tragic turn, she ended the lives of her other children, Gift and Moreblessings (Mobhi) being convinced that the *Ngozi* was guiding her actions. Her attempts on Memory's life led to the latter being placed in the care of Lloyd. Memory uncovered these painful truths while in prison, learning from her sister Joyi.

In many African cultures mental health issues are often stigmatized and misunderstood dismissed as mere madness or curses. Mavima (2018) interprets Memory's mother as a character grappling with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. He describes her as a woman who can be joyful and celebratory one moment, throwing parties only to suddenly transform into someone unrecognizable carrying a cake through the living room, leaving her husband and children bewildered as they struggle to comprehend the woman they love.

In view of the above, it is evident that individuals can find themselves trapped in psychological bondage, which not only impacts their own well-being but also affects those around them. Such mental confinement can have dire consequences, potentially leading to tragic outcomes, as exemplified by the fate of Memory's mother.

3.2.1.3 Mavis Munongwa

Mavis Munongwa is the only woman facing murder charges before Memory, the story's protagonist. Her time in solitary confinement was characterized by an overwhelming sense of isolation, as she navigated the harsh realities of life behind bars. Having spent an extended period in the Chikurubi Maximum Security Women's Section, Mavis experienced relentless anguish that occasionally pushed her toward the edge of insanity. This deterioration not only affected her but also instilled a deep-seated fear among her fellow inmates. Memory, in particular, felt the weight of this fear as she was compelled to share a cell with Mavis during her early days of incarceration. The psychological toll of Mavis's condition created a tense atmosphere, complicating Memory's own adjustment to prison life.

Mavis frequently exhibited behaviour reminiscent of someone under the influence of dark forces, her unpredictable actions instilling a profound sense of fear in Memory. She would cry out the names of the children, whose tragic fates had resulted in her confinement, creating a chilling resonance that compelled Memory to cover her ears and dread the prospect of sleep.

The only comfort Memory could grasp was the fragile notion that the terrors enveloping her were simply products of her imagination. This belief provided a temporary refuge from the overwhelming reality of her circumstances, allowing her to momentarily escape the haunting echoes of Mavis's lamentations.

Mavis navigates the desolate hallways of the prison, oscillating between the starkness of her cell and the sparse canteen. This monotonous routine threatens to erode her sanity, especially as she endures the unyielding isolation of solitary confinement. Completely cut off from the outside world, she remains blissfully ignorant of the significant transformations that have taken place over the last three decades.

The current realities of Zimbabwe are a complete enigma to her; her mind is perpetually anchored in the past, replaying the events of her life prior to incarceration. This disconnection from time and place underscores the psychological toll of her imprisonment, as she grapples with memories that no longer align with the present.

Gappah effectively draws a comparison between Mavis and a Japanese soldier who continued to fight long after Japan's surrender in World War II. Both figures embody a profound sense of dislocation, illustrating how the passage of time can render individuals trapped in their own narratives, unable to reconcile their past with the evolving world around them.

Mavis ultimately fell victim to the unyielding harshness of prison life, having endured an unimaginable level of suffering throughout her prolonged incarceration. On that fateful night, Memory heard Mavis's desperate cries but was too consumed by her own pain to realize that her fellow inmate was facing the end of her life.

It was only the following day that Memory received the devastating news of Mavis's death, a tragic revelation that underscored the profound isolation and despair that permeated their shared experience within the prison walls.

In Chikurubi, Mavis's death was marked by a profound absence of dignity, as she was laid to rest in a prison blanket, a stark symbol of her dehumanization. The act of interment was carried out by Synodia, one of the individuals who had tormented her during her life, further compounding the tragedy of her final moments. This choice of burial attire not only reflects the harsh realities of her existence within the prison system but also underscores the lack of respect afforded to her, even in death.

The involvement of a tormentor in her burial process serves as a haunting reminder of the systemic cruelty that permeated her life, leaving an indelible mark on the narrative of her suffering. Such circumstances raise critical questions about the treatment of individuals within correctional facilities and the moral implications of denying them basic human dignity, even in their final rites.

Memory recounted, "The next day, we carried her to a new grave, wrapped in a prison blanket, and laid her to rest. She landed with a soft thud." (Gappah, 2015, p.247)

Mavis's experiences of struggle and suffering during her time in Chikurubi prison, culminating in her tragic demise due to torture, highlight the relentless cruelty of the prison system. This environment inflicts profound pain on inmates, demonstrating that their suffering knows no bounds. The only moment of respite for the institution seems

to arrive with the death of an inmate, underscoring a grim reality where human life is devalued and the cycle of torment continues unabated.

3.2.2 Psychological frame of characters affected by Prison life in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A writer's prison diary*.

The brutal torture endured by prisoners in post-colonial Kenya was a calculated effort to silence those who dared to oppose the government. Many of these individuals were political dissidents, voices of dissent that threatened the status quo. For those fortunate enough to evade the lethal bullets of assassins, the grim reality of Kamiti Maximum Security Prison awaited them. This facility, notorious for its harsh conditions, became a symbol of the oppressive regime that sought to crush any form of resistance during the neo-colonial period. Within its cold, concrete walls, the prisoners faced not only physical torment but also psychological degradation, as their spirits were systematically broken by the relentless brutality of their captors.

Caught in this web of oppression, these individuals found themselves trapped in a system designed to stifle dissent and maintain control. Their only crime was standing up against a government that wielded power with an iron fist, and in doing so, they became martyrs for a cause that many would not dare to champion. The isolation in Kamiti was not just a physical confinement; it was a deliberate attempt to erase the identities of the inmates and diminish their resolve. As the prisoners languished in their cells, the echoes of their struggles reverberated beyond the prison walls, inspiring a new generation to challenge the injustices of their time, even as they faced unimaginable suffering.

3.2.2.1 Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a prominent figure in the post-colonial literary landscape, stands

apart from his contemporaries due to his unique background. Growing up in an extended family of landless, uneducated peasants, his experiences of colonial brutality, anti-colonial struggle, and neo-colonial oppression have profoundly shaped him into an exceptional scholar Lovesey (2015, p.3).

Ngugi's life as an African navigating both colonial and post-colonial eras can be divided into two distinct phases: before and after his intellectual awakening. Initially publishing under the name James Ngugi, he later embraced his heritage changing his baptized name and opting to write in his native Gikuyu. This transformation had a profound effect on his life; ironically, while writing in English posed no issues it was his choice to write in Gikuyu that marked him as a target for the state leading to his imprisonment.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o faced the full force of the government's fury. In his poignant work, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, he vividly recounts the harrowing experiences he endured during his imprisonment which began on December 12, 1978 when he was detained without trial. Reflecting on his ordeal, Ngugi remarked;

“Detention without trial is not merely a punitive measure that inflicts physical and mental anguish on a handful of patriotic souls; it is a calculated act of psychological terror aimed at millions who are struggling. This psychological siege of the nation mirrors a program of terrorism. The entire process of detention, from arrest to release is steeped in mystifying rituals. My own arrest for example...” (Ngugi, 1981, p.14).

He found himself among eighteen other political prisoners in Cell 16, where their shared experiences were both mentally and physically devastating. At that time, Ngugi held a belief that intellectuals must confront certain adversities to truly understand the realities of their nation. He viewed his perseverance in prison as a crucial awakening for the educated elite. The government's handling of prisoners

raised significant questions for him, leaving him astonished at how his fellow detainees managed to endure the horrific conditions they faced.

Ngugi and his fellow inmates were subjected to severe mental torment. The prison guards spared no effort in their mission to erase the prisoners' memories. The meagre and tasteless meals they received, consisting mainly of bland porridge and beans, seemed designed to do more than just fill their stomachs; they aimed to sap their energy and dull their minds.

Ngugi reflects on the unsettling monotony of his surroundings, where each day is marked by the same familiar faces dressed in white uniforms of Kuunguru prison. The meals served, consisting solely of a bland mixture of unga and beans which are delivered at the same times each day: dawn, noon, and three in the afternoon, contributing to a sense of unending repetition.

This daily existence unfolds within an environment characterized by relentless dust and cold, grey stones that seem to absorb the very essence of life. The prison's detention block is dominated by a palette of white and grey, colours that evoke a profound sense of desolation and despair, symbolizing, in Ngugi's view, the very essence of death itself. This oppressive atmosphere not only confines the body but also stifles the spirit, creating a landscape where hope feels like a distant memory, overshadowed by the bleakness of the surroundings.

The government was acutely aware of its actions employing Valium as a means to manipulate the minds of the inmates. This drug, often prescribed for anxiety, insomnia, and memory issues, was a tool in their psychological experiment. The medical staff at Kamiti expected the detainees to either be mad or significantly less depressed unless proven otherwise.

Long-term inmates could only watch helplessly as he spiralled into madness ultimately reduced to the point of consuming his own body waste. The once-respected warders aimed to sever all ties between the detainees and the outside world knowing that the connection to their loved ones provided a vital source of hope. This hope was crucial for their survival, even in the face of brutal beatings, tear gas, and the ominous sound of bullets. The authorities sought to plunge the inmates into a void of fear and humiliation, ensuring they felt utterly isolated.

The harsh environment that enveloped Ngugi during his initial month of imprisonment left him pondering how the other inmates managed to endure. Confined to cell 16 for twenty-two hours a day he was granted a mere two hours to attend to his daily responsibilities. His daytime tasks included emptying a chamber pot that was perpetually overflowing with excrement and urine, the by-products of meals consisting of porridge, ugali, beans teeming with worms and spoiled vegetables. The scant few minutes left were reserved for a brief taste of sunlight and a chance to stretch his limbs.

Isolation was yet another cruel tactic employed to sever connections between new arrivals and those already incarcerated. Ngugi was not spared from this torment; even during mealtimes a guard would create a barrier forcing him to eat alone. In response to this enforced solitude the creativity of the inmates flourished. They found ways to breach the invisible walls shouting across the open space to connect with Ngugi.

The detainees devised numerous inventive methods to reach out to him offering reassurance of their shared humanity while others sought to glean snippets of life beyond the prison walls. Some would subtly relay information by discussing various aspects of prison existence, sharing advice and strategies for coping with their grim

reality. This exchange fostered a sense of mutual support creating a bond that while beneficial did little to alleviate Ngugi's profound sense of isolation.

"Despite the efforts of my fellow detainees to break the walls of segregation, the feeling of being alone would often steal into me and I would be seized with the momentary panic of a man drowning in a sea of inexplicable terror. I often felt like those lepers in Medieval Europe who had to carry small bells around their necks to announce their leprous presence to the healthy, or those untouchables in Achebe's novels who had to jump into the bush and let a freeborn pass." (Ngugi, 1981, p. 21)

The torment endured by inmates in Kamiti Maximum Prison profoundly impacts their mental well-being, leading to bizarre behaviours. Take Muhoro wa Muthoga, for example; after spending six months in solitary confinement, he transformed into someone who feared his fellow detainees as if they belonged to another realm. He began to communicate with them in hushed tones, a direct result of the harsh treatment he faced. The warders' intention to instil fear in Muhoro's mind was undeniably effective.

Ngugi's experiences in prison even though less severe still left its mark. The persistent reminders of his social alienation and the brutal isolation from others began to take a toll on his psyche making him increasingly restless and anxious even in the presence of friendly warders. Dark thoughts of violence occasionally crossed his mind though they never manifested physically. However, he eventually found himself lashing out at unsuspecting fellow inmates.

For political detainees, acts of resistance are essential to safeguarding both their psychological stability and sense of humanity. Even seemingly minor efforts to establish a link with the outside world, whether through symbolic gestures or coded messages serve as powerful assertions of identity and resilience. Expressions of solidarity, such as a silent photograph or a carefully worded letter, become vital

lifelines. In the context of isolation, such gestures hold immense symbolic weight, evoking the force of transformative acts that challenge and destabilize systems of oppression.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's photograph arrived in the mail, while Njooki and another friend crafted a message on rationed toilet paper, lifting Wariinga's spirits. It resonated like a thousand trumpets, silently piercing the fortified walls of Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, assuring him of their unwavering support.

The roots of the detainees' suffering trace back to foreign colonizers, a legacy now perpetuated by the current elite. Their fear drives them to inflict pain on innocent Kenyans, terrified of the peasants and workers who boldly resist neo-colonialism. Many, including the residents of Kamiriithu, expressed their discontent with a quiet bravery, a fierce patriotism that unsettled the ruling class.

The authorities aimed to impose both mental and physical torment on the inmates, seeking to force them into submission, to make them echo the government's demands. They sought to colonize their thoughts, ensuring that every word spoken aligned with the rulers' wishes.

In a tragic turn of events, the death of an inmate reverberates through the halls of Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, leading to intensified physical and psychological torment. The prison warders often remark, "he was defeated by prison," a phrase that casts them as referees in a brutal contest between the institution and the individual, a battle that the defeated entered with the bravado of a champion like Muhammad Ali.

"The expression is, of course, a cover-up for any fatal or near-fatal ill-treatment of a political detainee: the moral accountability for the disablement is thus thrown back to the victim, like Karen Blixen's magistrate holding the murdered Kitosch responsible for his death because he had moaned in pain, '*Nataka Kufa*,' 'I am about to die.' The detaining system does not get satisfied by only inflicting the wound, they will relentlessly twist the hot knives into the wound to ensure that it continually causes excruciating pain. This will be ensured through; physical beating to eliminate the victim, strait-jacketing to guarantee total bodily immobility; sleep on cold or wet bare cement floors – this was intended to cause ailment to the individual; denial of news or book to weaken the intellect; undernourishment to weaken the body; segregation and solitary confinement to weaken the spirit. One or an amalgamation of these sadistic customs was used to keep the wound fresh." (Ngugi, 1981, p.100).

For political detainees, acts of resistance are essential to safeguarding both their psychological stability and sense of humanity. Even seemingly, minor efforts to establish a link with the outside world whether through symbolic gestures or coded messages serve as powerful assertions of identity and resilience. Expressions of solidarity, such as a silent photograph or a carefully worded letter, become vital lifelines. In the context of isolation, such gestures hold immense symbolic weight, evoking the force of transformative acts that challenge and destabilize systems of oppression.

In a tragic twist of fate one inmate endured the agony of illness for an astonishing seven years. Ngugi described the torment of swollen painful veins that left him in constant lament yet the authorities dismissed his suffering as mere malingering. Then, in a cruel turn, he would be shackled and rushed to Kenyatta National Hospital, only to return to his cell a few days later where the cycle of pain and lamentation would resume. This cruel charade of neglect and inadequate care persisted for seven long years even extending to his time at Kenyatta National Hospital upon his release.

3.2.2.2 Martin Shikuku

The prison authorities appeared to follow a harsh mandate aimed at breaking the spirits of political prisoners, ensuring that even if their resolve remained intact, their

bodies would bear the scars of their confinement. Ideally, they sought to dismantle both the will and the physical integrity of their captives. The distressing experience of Martin Shikuku at Kamiti serves as a perfect illustration of this cruel approach.

Joseph Martin Shikuku Oyondi was born on December 1932 and died in August 22, 2012. He was a prominent Kenyan politician. Shikuku's political career was marked by significant events, including his detention by President Jomo Kenyatta after he sarcastically labelled the Kenya African National Union (KANU) government as "dead." While imprisoned at Kamiti, he met Ngugi wa Thiongo. Martin was released in 1978 following Kenyatta's death and Daniel arap Moi's ascension to the presidency. In the subsequent year, Shikuku reclaimed the Butere parliamentary seat and was appointed Assistant Minister for Livestock Development. He successfully retained his seat in the 1983 elections but faced defeat in 1988.

At Kamiti maximum security prison, Ngugi once discovered Martin slumped on his bed, a victim of a debilitating illness that had taken a severe toll on his body. The relentless cycle of vomiting left Martin in a unstable state, necessitating that he consume food nearly fifteen times a day, merely to maintain some semblance of sustenance in his stomach. This grim reality reflects the harsh conditions that plagued him. The struggle for survival was clear, revealing the extent to which illness can ravage the human spirit and body when faced with such overwhelming hardship.

During a moment of enforced isolation, as Ngugi was being escorted back to his cell, he caught a glimpse of a figure painfully crawling along the corridor. Straining to see through the iron bars, he was struck with horror upon recognizing Martin Shikuku, who was unable to stand upright and had to rely on the cold, unforgiving wall for support. The sight of Martin, once a vibrant individual, now reduced to such a state,

this shows the tragic reality of life in captivity, where hope often seemed a distant memory.

Martin Shikuku found himself in a dire situation, beset by unrelenting bouts of vomiting that rendered him incapable of walking without assistance.

“Each time he belched, he would vomit into the pail. He had to eat about fifteen times a day so that on Vomiting something would remain behind to sustain his life” (Ngugi, 1981, p.103)

To the guards stationed around him, his condition appeared to be a mere act, a façade of illness designed to elicit sympathy or leniency. However, the attending physician recognized the underlying truth: Shikuku was grappling with profound depression, a mental state that manifested physically in his inability to maintain basic functions. This contrast between the perceptions of the guards and the insights of the medical professional highlighted the complexities of mental health in prison.

Ironically, despite being confined to a hospital bed, Shikuku's situation was far from one of comfort or recovery. He was shackled, a grim reminder of his status, and was under constant surveillance by armed police and warders who maintained a vigilant watch at every possible entry and exit point, day and night. This oppressive environment not only stripped him of his autonomy but also exacerbated his mental anguish.

The very presence of armed guards, coupled with the physical restraints, created a prison-like atmosphere within the hospital, further isolating him from any semblance of hope or healing. The juxtaposition of medical care and punitive oversight illustrated a troubling reality where the boundaries between health and punishment became increasingly blurred.

Compounding his suffering was the pervasive fear of contracting an illness, a concern that loomed large in his mind and became yet another source of torment. In a setting where he was already vulnerable, the dread of disease transformed into an additional affliction, feeding into his depressive state and further diminishing his will to recover. The sterile environment of the hospital, typically associated with healing, instead became a breeding ground for anxiety and despair.

Shikuku's plight serves as a reminder of the complexities of inmates in Kamiti Maximum security prison; they are subjected to both mental and physical torture, particularly in situations where individuals are subjected to both medical treatment and punitive measures.

3.2.2.3 Muhoro wa Muthoga

The experience of isolation within the confines of Kamiti Maximum Security prison is profoundly agonizing, designed to extinguish any semblance of hope or resilience in the inmates. For those incarcerated, the psychological torment of isolation is often perceived as a harsher punishment than solitary confinement itself, as it strips away the last vestiges of human connection and support.

Muhoro wa Muthoga is an inmate at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, commonly referred to as Fujika. According to Ngugi, he has faced a significantly harsher sentence than many of his fellow prisoners. The initial six months of his incarceration were particularly gruelling, marking a period of suffering that surpassed that experienced by other inmates.

One notable case is that of Muhoro wa Muthoga, who endured a gruelling six-month initiation period characterized by extreme isolation. This phase not only tested his mental fortitude but also reminds us of the dehumanizing conditions that prevail

within the prison system, where the intent is to break the spirit of the individual rather than rehabilitate or reintegrate them into society.

Muhoro's initial encounter with Kamiti took place within the confines of an Isolation block, a harsh and eerie section designated for solitary confinement. Ngugi was informed that Muhoro's first months of detention were severe;

“Months later when I told the other detainees about my feelings during those weeks of January, they laughed and assured me how lucky I was to have had them around me, that the sense of isolation is thousand times more intense of those in solitary confinement” (Ngugi, 1981 p.21)

This area was designed to ensure that inmates fully grasp the implications of their isolation, as the warders meticulously enforced the conditions of confinement. In this bleak environment, Muhoro was prohibited from interacting with other prisoners and was restricted to the confines of his cell. The only semblance of contact he experienced came from the warders, who delivered his meals and permitted him a mere hour of sunlight and exercise each day. This limited interaction served to heighten the sense of desolation that permeated the isolation block.

The warders maintained a vigilant presence in the empty corridors surrounding Muhoro's cell, effectively sealing off any potential avenues for escape. Their watchful eyes ensured that he remained confined within the isolation block, reinforcing the psychological weight of his situation. The reality of his confinement was not merely physical; it was a profound psychological ordeal that stripped away any semblance of normalcy. The isolation block, with its oppressive silence and unyielding restrictions, became a crucible for Muhoro, forcing him to confront the depths of his solitude for the sake of his survival.

The conduct of the warders during their interactions with Muhoro illustrates the lengths to which the prison system will go to inflict psychological torment on its inmates. For example, one warder, while delivering meals, would approach the isolation block with exaggerated caution, tiptoeing as if the very act of walking could provoke a violent response from the inmate. Another would open the cell door only to hastily shove the food inside, retreating swiftly as if Muhoro were a ferocious beast poised to attack.

“One warder always walked on tiptoe another would open the cell door, push food inside, and then jumped up quickly, shutting the door as if the inmate was a dangerous animal in a cage.” (Ngugi, 1981 p.21)

This behaviour not only dehumanizes the inmate but also reinforces a pervasive atmosphere of fear and hostility within the prison environment. The warders' actions suggest a deliberate strategy to maintain control through intimidation, treating the inmates as threats rather than individuals deserving of basic dignity.

Moreover, the communication style of the warders further exemplifies the oppressive nature of the prison system. The one who seemed the most approachable would speak to Muhoro with his teeth clenched, as if each word was a painful effort, emerging only as barely audible whispers. This method of communication, fraught with tension, served to reinforce the power dynamics at play, as the warder's reluctance to engage openly reflected a broader culture of mistrust and animosity. In some instances, warders resorted to non-verbal gestures, further stripping away the humanity of their interactions. Such behaviours not only highlight the psychological strain placed on inmates but also reveal the systemic issues within the prison system that prioritize control and punishment over rehabilitation and respect.

The experiences Muhoro endured in isolation led him to grapple with profound self-doubt, prompting him to question whether he might have inadvertently committed a more grievous offense than merely requesting application forms from the attorney general to establish a new democratic political party. This introspection was fuelled by the unsettling thought that he could have misinterpreted the Kenyan constitution, which ostensibly permits the formation of multiple political parties. The application forms, which had been sent to him, were duly completed and returned, accompanied by the constitution of the proposed party. However, the response he received was not the anticipated approval but rather an arrest, culminating in his transfer to Kamiti Maximum Security Prison.

In the confines of his cell, the weight of his situation bore heavily on him, as he reflected on the implications of his actions within the broader context of Kenya's political landscape. The stark contrast between the constitutional provisions that seemingly supported democratic plurality and the harsh reality of his imprisonment left him in a state of confusion and despair.

He could not shake the feeling that his pursuit of political legitimacy had been misconstrued as a threat to the status quo, leading to his unjust detention. This dissonance between his intentions and the repercussions he faced underscored the precarious nature of political expression in an environment where dissent was often met with severe consequences.

The psychological torment that Muhoro endured during his time in the isolation block profoundly affected his mental state, leaving him feeling as though he were living under a death sentence, perpetually awaiting its grim execution. This harrowing experience led him to adopt peculiar behaviours; he began to communicate in hushed

tones and relied heavily on gestures to express his needs and inquiries. In moments of heightened anxiety, he even found himself walking on tiptoe, a physical manifestation of his fear and the oppressive atmosphere that surrounded him. The isolation stripped away his sense of normalcy, transforming his interactions into a silent dance of apprehension and uncertainty.

Upon his release after six months of this relentless ordeal Muhoro faced a disconcerting reality when he rejoined the other detainees in the main block. The contrast between his previous solitary confinement and the presence of fellow inmates left him feeling alienated and intimidated, as if he were encountering beings from an entirely different realm. His instinctive response was to continue speaking in whispers, a habit ingrained during his time in isolation, as he struggled to navigate the challenges of social interaction in a group setting.

In summary, Muhoro's persistent fear illustrates the profound effects of his time in solitary confinement, revealing the deep psychological wounds that often result from such traumatic experiences. The prison system effectively stifled his spirit, leading to a significant transformation in his identity. He now presents as a diminished version of himself, reflecting the dehumanizing consequences of his incarceration.

In view of the above, the psychological impact of imprisonment emerges as a central concern in both *The Book of Memory* and *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. Through their respective narratives, Gappah and Ngũgĩ offer intuitive insights into how prison life distorts, challenges, and reshape the psychological and emotional states of those restricted within prison spaces. Memory's incident is marked by a deepening sense of trauma, isolation, and the fragility of self, reflecting the intersection of personal history and systemic injustice. In contrast, Ngũgĩ's

psychological resilience is rooted in ideological resistance, intellectual engagement, and cultural affirmation, which serve as tools for mental survival and defiance. Despite the differences in genre and narrative voice, both texts reveal the prison not merely as a site of physical confinement but as a psychological battlefield, where identity, memory, and sanity are persistently negotiated. This chapter has therefore demonstrated that the internal lives of the incarcerated are not passive responses to suffering, but active terrains of struggle, resistance, and redefinition.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEMES PROJECTING THE DEHUMANIZING NATURE OF PRISON LIFE

4.1 Introduction

The experience of incarceration often exposes individuals to the harshest forms of systemic oppression, marginalization, and psychological torment. In both *The Book of Memory* by Petina Gappah and *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the dehumanizing nature of prison life is a central motif that permeates the narratives. While the texts explore a wide array of themes, this chapter narrows its focus to two particularly salient ones: colorization, particularly the stigmatization of albinism, in *The Book of Memory*, and resistance in *Detained Awriter's prison diary*.

These themes not only recur throughout their respective texts but also serve as powerful lenses through which the authors interrogate the loss of dignity, identity, and agency within Prison. The decision to concentrate on these two themes is informed by their thematic prominence and their ability to capture the psychological and social degradation experienced by prisoners. By examining how colorization and resistance function as vehicles of both oppression and survival, this chapter aims to unpack the multifaceted ways in which prison life is rendered dehumanizing in the two narratives

4.2 Themes projecting dehumanizing nature of prison in *The Book of Memory*.

4.2.1 Colorization (Albinism)

Albinism in *The Book of Memory* not only marks Memory as physically different but also subjects her to a profound form of social and psychological imprisonment long before her literal incarceration. As an individual with albinism, she is alienated within her own Black community and remains equally unaccepted by white society, leaving

her stranded in hollow and rejection. Scholars such as Aaron Chando (2022) argue that the albinism body in African fiction is often positioned as a “liminal presence”—neither fully inside nor outside the racial, social, or cultural norms, which makes the body itself a prison, constantly scrutinized, misread, or mythologized.

The stigma and superstition surrounding Memory’s condition reduce her humanity in the eyes of others, casting her as an object of fear, myth, or ridicule. This aligns with Longwe (2020) reading of Gappah’s work through the lens of Foucault’s abnormality, which highlights how Memory becomes imprisoned by society’s fixed notions of what constitutes the “normal” body. From childhood, she confronts verbal abuse and emotional violence deeply rooted in ignorance and cultural prejudice, particularly the Shona term *sope*, a derogatory name for people with albinism. Kadenge et al. (2023) explore how such naming conventions linguistically encode stigma, reinforcing her outsider status even before she is institutionally punished.

The internalization of this societal rejection fosters in Memory a sense of worthlessness and deep-seated self-loathing. This is reinforced by her confession of feeling invisible and even wanting to escape her own skin, an idea echoed by Baker (2018), who links the experience of women with albinism to gendered and psychological forms of violence, especially in postcolonial African societies. Gappah, therefore, does not merely present albinism as a biological condition but as a social sentence, rendering Memory voiceless and unseen long before she is legally silenced by the justice system.

Gappah uses Memory’s lived experience to reveal how constructs such as race, appearance, and myth operate as psychological chains, imprisoning individuals in silence, shame, and invisibility. Here, Memory’s albinism becomes a powerful

metaphor for the unseen forms of incarceration that society imposes on the marginalized. Chando (2022) asserts that Gappah reconfigures the albinism not just as a site of suffering but also as a site of narrative resilience. Indeed, through writing, Memory resists erasure, reclaims her agency, and breaks free from internalized captivity.

Ironically, while Memory is physically imprisoned in Chikurubi Prison becoming the first woman in over two decades to receive a death sentence in Zimbabwe, her deepest form of captivity predates this. It lies in the way her skin marked her for exclusion, rejection, and objectification. Lipenga and Ngwira (2022) describe such portrayals as “literary interventions,” where the fictional world confronts real-world injustice by offering marginalized characters a narrative voice. Memory’s act of documenting her life, her trauma, her estrangement, and her identity becomes a redemptive act of liberation. She writes to be seen, to be heard, and most of all, to reclaim her humanity.

Thus, Memory’s journey is not only one of physical confinement and legal injustice but also of emotional recovery and self-realization. Her albinism, once the symbol of her exclusion, becomes the very medium through which she reclaims subjectivity. In doing so, *The Book of Memory* contributes meaningfully to the broader literary and scholarly discourse on albinism, identity, and social imprisonment in African narratives.

Gappah employs Memory’s albinism as a lens to reveal the stark divide between the affluent and the underprivileged. This theme is illustrated when, at the age of nine, Memory’s parents sell her to a wealthy white man named Lloyd. “For when Memory was nine years old her parents sold her to Lloyd and she moved from Impoverished Township, Mufakoze, to a grand house. Crippled by fear and longing for home, she

was saved by books. The books that she discovered which became as necessary to her as breathing” Sethi (2015)

Raised under Lloyd’s guardianship, Memory is aware of her parents’ actions, yet she eventually uncovers the complete narrative surrounding her so-called ‘sale.’ To her surprise, she learns that Lloyd’s initial intention was to care for her after recognizing the struggles she was facing. The plan involved temporarily housing Memory while she and her father sought medical assistance for her ailing mother, with the aim of also finding a remedy for Memory's skin condition.

The reality of Memory’s history was disclosed to her by her sister Joyi, who recounted, “Lloyd talked to my father for a long time. He asked to see him again in town next day. He told him that my mother was not cursed but dangerously ill and that their children were at significant risk. Could he not arrange for all of us to attend school? Lloyd proposed he could help my mother receive treatment.” (Gappah, 2015, p.258) The necessity for Lloyd to take in Memory stemmed primarily from her albinism.

Memory recalls, “When my father mentioned the lack of funds, Lloyd volunteered to cover the school fees for Joyi and me. However, my father insisted Joyi could attend school but what about Memory, the daughter who was perpetually unwell?” “Could she not be enrolled in a special school?” Lloyd inquired. Memory’s father elaborated on her condition, prompting Lloyd to assure him that he would care for her until her mother recovered, an act that stemmed purely from kindness. However, events shifted dramatically the following day when both of Memory's parents were found deceased, leaving her in Lloyd’s care for an extended period.

Memory transitioned from the impoverished area of Mufakose to Lloyd's opulent residence known as Summer Madness. This non-linear story reflects the journey of Memory looping back and forth through time. It passes over sore points and later returning to prod the painful Moments. In her state of solitude she thought of driving to Mufakose because of the partially healed wound relating to her sale to Lloyd which pains her so much but she did not want it disturbed. Memory does not only talk about herself but also others like her. She mentions the general treatment of Albinos all over the globe and also in literature where they are often portrayed as being odd due to their appearance and hence ends up being the Villains.

Memory's albinism is vividly highlighted through the power of language. Gappah skilfully illustrates her dual existence, first in the township, and later in the suburbs. In the colonial context white individuals were often linked to fortune as seen in term 'Murungu.' However, the stigma tied to albinism casts a shadow over Memory's life, marking her existence with the burden of whiteness. She embodies Murundudunhu, a black Woman not graced with the 'Whiteness of privilege,' but rather burdened by a 'disturbing whiteness' that invites mockery and deception.

In her youthful life, while still in Mufakose, Memory despises herself so much in an extreme detest she even longed to be like other Children with deformities in exchange for their dark skin.

"I felt a sharp and a burning envy of everyone I saw. I sought out obsessively the children with flaws. I would have given anything to be Nhau, who had a slash across his face," (Gappah, 2015. Pg.55) "Whizi was cross – eyed; it was never clear if he was looking at you or not. Never, who was tall as a Man but still played in the street with the children, and who talked out of the corner of his mouth, was given the name Drunken. I would have taken Whizi's eyes, and Lavinia's limbs and added to it Nhau's scar and Drunken's speech, only to have some colour, in my Skin."

Religion did less to change Memory's skin as she had requested in a prayer. Despite her fervent appeals and promises, her skin remained untouched by the divine power she sought. When Rev. Bergen encouraged them to ask anything in prayer, Memory redoubled her efforts by making all kinds of bargains and pledges. She promised to always be good, to work hard and excel in her studies, to refrain from violence towards others, and to never harbor hatred towards her mother. However, despite these heartfelt promises, her skin did not transform as she had hoped.

This experience raises questions about the efficacy of religion in bringing about tangible changes in one's life. Despite Memory's deep faith and sincere prayers, her physical appearance remained unchanged. This leads to a reflection on the nature of prayer and the role of religion in shaping one's destiny. Can prayer truly alter the course of events, or is it merely a way to seek comfort and solace in times of need?

Memory's story also highlights the complexity of human belief and the limitations of religious practices. While she believed in the power of prayer and made earnest efforts to fulfill her promises, the outcome did not align with her expectations. (Jones, 2019) perceived this discrepancy between faith and reality that it raises deeper questions about the relationship between religious beliefs and personal transformation.

Memory's experience with prayer and promises sheds light on the intricate interplay between religion, faith, and personal agency. Despite her best efforts and heartfelt appeals, her skin remained unchanged, challenging her beliefs and prompting her to reconsider the role of religion in her life. This story serves as a poignant reminder of the complexities of religious practices and the mysteries of divine intervention.

Memory's quest for dark skin was driven by a deep desire to fit into societal standards of beauty, but her religious failings and attempts to achieve her goal through various scientific methods ultimately proved unsuccessful. Her journey exemplifies the lengths to which individuals may go in pursuit of altering their appearance, as well as the psychological impact of societal pressures and family dynamics. (Brown, 2018)

Despite being raised in a religious environment that likely emphasized acceptance and self-love as key tenets, her struggle with her skin color revealed deeper insecurities and a desire for external validation. The fact that she resorted to sitting in the sun, using foundation cream, face powder, and even trying beauty soaps like Lux in an attempt to darken her skin highlight the extent to which she was willing to go to achieve her desired appearance.

Unfortunately, Memory's efforts were in vain, as none of the methods she tried were effective in changing her skin color. The reactions she experienced, such as redness, soreness, and blistering from sun exposure, serves as a poignant reminder of the dangers of pursuing unrealistic beauty ideals and the impact it can have on one's physical and emotional well-being.

Moreover, Memory's struggle with her albinism not only affected her personally but also strained the relationship between her parents. While her father took a more liberal approach and sought medical advice to help her, her mother's reliance on beauty products and societal norms exacerbated the situation. The conflicting views within her family further underscored the complexity of navigating societal expectations and individual identity.

Memory's journey to achieve dark skin through religious, scientific, and societal means ultimately ended in disappointment. Her story serves as a cautionary tale about

the dangers of internalizing external beauty standards and the importance of self-acceptance and self-love. It also highlights the impact of family dynamics and societal pressures on individual identity and self-worth. Memory's quest for dark skin may have been futile, but her struggle illuminates larger issues surrounding beauty, identity, and societal expectations that continue to shape individuals' experiences today. (Brown, 2018)

The treatment that Memory received in the hospital was nothing short of inhumane. The nurses, adorned in their white uniforms, treated her with disdain and scolded her as if her condition of albinism was an inconvenience to them. The white caps they wore seemed to hover above their heads, giving them an ethereal appearance, but to Memory, they were a symbol of cleanliness and purity that she felt she lacked.

The nurses' hands were rough and strong as they applied stinging ointments to her broken skin, causing her pain and discomfort. Instead of showing compassion and empathy, they made her feel dirty and unworthy of proper care. This treatment left a lasting impact on Memory, causing her to fear the hospital and its staff.

“I grew to fear the hospital, and when my father said we should go, I threw myself on the floor and grabbed a leg of the sofa and fought him when he tried to pick me up, so that he often just gave up, and nature when it chose, did the healing”(Gappah, 2015. P.102)

The way Memory was handled in the hospital highlights a larger issue of discrimination and mistreatment towards individuals with albinism. According to, (Schilsky, 2017) this marginalized group often faces prejudice and stigma in various settings, including healthcare facilities. It is crucial for healthcare providers to be educated and sensitive to the needs of all patients, regardless of their unique characteristics or conditions. Memory's mother takes a spiritual view concerning

Memory's skin, believing it to be a curse sent by her ancestors rather than an illness. This belief leads her mother to consult diviners in search of a potion or spell to make Memory's condition disappear. This superstition highlights the societal perceptions and treatment of albinos in the novel.

Throughout the book, Gappah delves into the complexities of being an albino in a society that struggles to place them within the categories of black or white. The belief that albinos do not fit into either group creates a sense of otherness and isolation for individuals like Memory. This perspective is explored through the lens of superstitions and misunderstandings that perpetuate harmful stereotypes about albinism.

One of the ways in which this theme is illustrated is through Memory's manipulation of societal perceptions to her advantage. For example, Memory uses the discomfort and uncertainty that people feel around her to scare an inmate in Chikurubi maximum prison simply by staring at her unflinchingly during mealtimes. This scene demonstrates how the societal beliefs about albinos can be both a source of pain and a tool for empowerment for those like Memory.

The portrayal of Memory's mother's beliefs and actions reflects a broader trend of superstitions and misconceptions surrounding albinism in society. The idea that albinism is a curse rather than a medical condition perpetuates harmful myths and stigmatizes individuals with albinism. By consulting diviners and seeking magical solutions to Memory's skin condition, Memory's mother highlights the desperation and ignorance that can arise from societal attitudes towards albinos.

In analyzing the portrayal of albinism in "*The Book of Memory*," it becomes evident that societal perceptions play a significant role in shaping the experiences of

individuals with albinism. The discomfort and ostracism faced by characters like Memory are a reflection of the broader challenges that albinos encounter in society. By shedding light on these issues, Gappah's novel encourages readers to reconsider their attitudes towards albinism and to challenge the harmful stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination.

In conclusion, *"The Book of Memory"* offers valuable insights into the challenges that albinos face in a society that struggles to understand and accept them. Through the character of Memory and her mother's beliefs, the novel highlights the impact of superstitions and misconceptions on individuals with albinism. By exploring these themes with depth and nuance, Gappah prompts readers to reflect on their own perceptions and treatment of individuals with albinism.

4.3 Themes projecting dehumanizing nature of prison life in *Detained A Writer's Prison Diary*

4.3.1 Resistance

The restraining of a person's liberty against their will especially as a tactic to curtail their intellectual capacity, mute their political agency, and limit their interaction with the broader society was a deeply entrenched practice in post-independence Kenya, particularly during the late 1960s through the 1970s. This era, though framed as one of national freedom, ironically gave rise to neo-colonial power structures that aggressively suppressed any dissenting or alternative voices. Dissenters who dared to challenge the ideological and economic status quo, or who questioned the legitimacy of the ruling elite, found themselves marked as enemies of the state.

As noted by Maroukis (2023), Ngugi's prison diary adheres to a common format, unfolding through a series of concise vignettes that capture his encounters with

guards, the rigid daily schedules, the subpar medical care, the bonds formed among inmates, and the desolate separation from the outside world. Yet the narrative's emotional resonance goes beyond mere observations, revealing deep seated feelings of despair and psychological torment that resonate with political prisoners everywhere.

Ngugi's writing vividly conveys the paralyzing anxiety that accompanies the uncertainty of release. Will it happen tomorrow or in fifty years. In addition to his diary, he also managed to complete a novel during his time in confinement, showcasing his resilience and creativity even in the bleakest circumstances.

The strategic use of detention without trial has become a key instrument for the regime, aimed at stifling radical thought and dismantling dissenting perspectives. In this light, Kamiti Maximum Security Prison has evolved beyond a mere facility for confinement; it stands as a potent emblem of state oppression. Within its confines reside some of the nation's most valiant political thinkers and activists, who challenge the status quo and embody the struggle for freedom.

Ngugi's incarceration was symbolic of a larger campaign of ideological suppression. Ngũgĩ's arrest, following the staging of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I Will Marry When I Want), a play co-written with Ngũgĩ wa Mirii and performed by peasants in the Gikuyu language, signalled the regime's anxiety over intellectual mobilization and cultural empowerment from below. His detention underscored a central reality of the time; to think independently and articulate alternative visions of society were to invite state surveillance, harassment, and eventual silencing.

However, Ngũgĩ's imprisonment was not simply the physical confinement of a body, it was an attempt to capture and neutralize a mind. This dual strategy of subjugation is a recurring theme in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. Within this memoir, Ngũgĩ chronicles the workings of a Prison system intent on breaking the spirit of political prisoners through isolation, deprivation, and humiliation.

He was detained under the infamous Public Security Act, which allowed for detention without charge or trial. Legislation that blatantly contradicted the democratic aspirations the postcolonial state purported to uphold. As Chair of the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi and a scholar who had studied at Northwestern University, Ngũgĩ posed a particular threat; he was intellectually credible, nationally influential, and unafraid to speak truth to power.

Macharia (2019) situates Ngũgĩ's experience within Michel Foucault's conceptual framework of the panoptical, a model of surveillance designed to induce internalized discipline in prisoners. Macharia argues that Ngũgĩ subverts this system by refusing to internalize state power. He turns his prison cell into a creative laboratory. His intellectual autonomy remains intact, even when his physical movement is restricted. By secretly keeping a prison diary on scraps of toilet paper and composing an entire novel in his mother tongue, Ngũgĩ transforms imprisonment into an act of literary defiance. His creativity is not stifled; it intensifies under pressure. Resistance thus becomes psychological, artistic, and philosophical.

The targeting of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* by the authorities was no coincidence. Mukutu (2018) underscores that Ngũgĩ's theatrical work challenged the very fabric of postcolonial elitism. By incorporating peasants as performers and using Gikuyu instead of English, Ngũgĩ democratized the stage and reclaimed the voice of the

oppressed. This cultural decolonization posed a profound threat to the ruling class, which derived its power from the colonial structures it had inherited and adapted. Mukutu asserts that such artistic engagement with the marginalized not only revealed entrenched inequalities but sought to dismantle them by affirming local voices and experiences.

The consequences of Ngũgĩ's detention reverberated beyond the prison gates. Kenya's academic institutions once vibrant spaces of debate and dissent fell silent under the weight of fear. Lecturers and students, once vocal critics of authoritarianism, retreated. As the arrest unfolded, some of Ngũgĩ's colleagues went underground or left the country altogether, fearing arrest. The message from the state was unmistakable, those opposing the government would be punished with imprisonment and public disgrace. Yet, as Ngũgĩ reveals in his memoir, such silence was not merely submission, it was part of a larger strategy of survival and latent resistance.

Bolat (2022) elaborates on this by framing African prison literature as a genre of resistance that navigates both isolation and solidarity. According to him, prison becomes a paradoxical space. It isolates the individual from society yet fosters unexpected alliances among prisoners. In Kamiti, Ngũgĩ found solidarity with other political detainees, including Koigi wa Wamwere, Martin Shikuku, and Wasonga Sijeyo. Their shared suffering became a crucible for reaffirming revolutionary principles. They engaged in discussions, encouraged each other, and refused to accept the degradation imposed on them. This communal resistance defied the regime's goal of atomizing dissenters.

Ngũgĩ's act of writing on toilet paper under constant surveillance was not only a form of psychological survival but a revolutionary gesture. As Maroukis (2023) notes, *Detained* is rich with expressions of existential dread, moral courage, and spiritual resolve. It captures not only Ngũgĩ's personal torment but the collective trauma of an entire generation of African thinkers caught between the hope of liberation and the reality of repression. His metaphor of the "stony dragon" the embodiment of the carceral state evokes a brutal, unyielding force that seeks to grind down resistance. Yet the very act of naming this dragon and writing against it is itself an act of defiance.

His resistance was not always dramatic, but it was resolute. Even in small decisions such as refusing to willingly extend his hands to be chained before being escorted to the hospital. Ngũgĩ asserted his agency. "I would at least say 'No!'" he writes, that solitary refusal carries immense symbolic weight. strip from him.

Knighton and Lovesey (2000) provide a broader literary context for interpreting *Detained*. Knighton views the memoir as testimony, bearing witness to state violence while affirming national aspirations for self-determination. Lovesey, meanwhile, positions it as part of a neo-colonial literary tradition, one that seeks to expose neo-colonial betrayal, rekindle revolutionary memory, and challenge systemic injustice through the written word. Their readings underline that Ngũgĩ's prison memoir is not a lament but it is, a call to consciousness.

Gikandi (2000) posits that Ngũgĩ's prison diary functions as a political manifesto, transforming his personal anguish into a powerful act of cultural resistance against the neo-colonial regime. The diary transcends mere personal reflection, evolving into a potent symbol of ideological defiance. Similarly, Ogude (1999) highlights how

Detained portrays the prison as a microcosm of Kenya's post-independence autocracy an institution intent on erasing individual identity. Within this context, Ngũgĩ's writing emerges as an act of rebellion, reclaiming both intellectual and cultural agency.

Sicherman (1991) further supports this view by characterizing the diary as a testament to the psychological and physical torment experienced under the Moi regime, thereby framing resistance as a moral necessity. Patterson (1984) situates *Detained* within a broader global tradition of prison literature, which challenges authoritarianism by humanizing the prisoner and documenting their resilience. This collective narrative not only illuminates the struggles faced but also celebrates the enduring spirit of those who resist oppression.

Mugo (2001) emphasizes Ngũgĩ's work as a bold affirmation of the human spirit and a declaration of intellectual autonomy in the face of state oppression. Meanwhile, Krüger (2011), while focusing on women's narratives, places *Detained* within a wider context of Kenyan resistance literature that confronts the silencing tactics of authoritarian regimes through the power of storytelling and cultural memory. Together, these analyses underscore the significance of resistance in *Detained*, framing it not merely as political discourse but as an essential response to the dehumanizing effects of incarceration.

In conclusion, resistance in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* is not accidental, it is deliberate, layered, and unrelenting. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o conceptualizes resistance as an interwoven tapestry of intellectual refusal, cultural affirmation, and political endurance. By choosing to write in Gikuyu, by turning prison into a site of creativity, by saying "No" even when defeat seemed inevitable, Ngũgĩ affirms the power of the

human spirit to transcend the machinery of oppression. His memoir challenges readers to recognize that true resistance is not only found in protest marches and revolutions but in quiet acts of courage, in the refusal to be silenced, and in the audacity to write against chains.

The themes of albinism in *The Book of Memory* and resistance in *Detained* highlight the dehumanizing effects of prison life from different yet complementary perspectives. Albinism exposes the layered marginalization faced by Memory, even within the prison system, while resistance in Ngũgĩ's narrative becomes a tool for asserting dignity and ideological freedom. Both texts show that prison is not only a site of physical confinement but also one of identity struggle and psychological endurance. Together, these themes emphasize how oppression operates and how individuals find ways to survive and assert their humanity.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This section serves as a critical reflection on the key issues that have surfaced throughout the course of my study encapsulating the essence of the findings and the challenges encountered. It delves into the intricacies of the research process shedding light on the pivotal themes that emerged such as the limitations of existing methodologies, the gaps in current literature, and the unexpected variables that influenced the outcomes. Each issue is meticulously analyzed, providing a clear understanding of how they interconnect and impact the overall research landscape. This synthesis not only highlights the significance of these challenges but also emphasizes the need for a more nuanced approach in future studies, paving the way for deeper insights and more robust conclusions.

In addition, this section also outlines several promising avenues for further research that could enhance our understanding of the subject matter. By identifying specific areas where knowledge is lacking or where new questions have emerged, it encourages scholars and practitioners alike to explore these dimensions more thoroughly. Potential research directions include longitudinal studies to track changes over time, comparative analyses across different contexts and the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives to enrich the discourse. This forward-looking approach not only aims to address the identified gaps but also aspires to foster a collaborative environment where innovative ideas can flourish, ultimately contributing to the advancement of the field.

5.2 Summary of findings

The research underscores the crucial role of literary portrayals in prison narratives, highlighting the importance of delving into the artistic interpretations within these works. It calls for a thorough analysis of the characters' psychological landscapes, as well as an exploration of the overarching themes that reveal the dehumanizing aspects of life behind bars. This examination is particularly pertinent in the context of Petina's *The Book of Memory* and Ngugi's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, where the authors intricately weave their experiences and insights into the often grim realities of incarceration.

In Chapter one, I analyzed early literary works from a diverse array of scholars, establishing a solid foundation for the study of prison literature. Each narrative serves as a poignant reminder of the human condition, revealing the raw emotions and harrowing experiences faced by inmates. As the chapters unfold, readers are invited to explore the evolution of these narratives, which not only document the struggles of those behind bars but also reflect broader societal issues, making this a vital addition to any literary collection.

The book's exploration of the sprouting of prison narratives creates a rich tapestry of voices and experiences each contributing to a wider field of understanding. Despite the varied backgrounds and circumstances of the authors, a common thread emerges, focusing on the tormenting experiences endured by inmates during their time in detention. The vivid descriptions and heartfelt accounts draw readers into the stark realities of prison life challenging them to confront the often-overlooked aspects of justice and humanity. This work is not just an academic study; it is a powerful call to empathy and awareness urging readers to reflect on the implications of incarceration and the resilience of the human spirit.

Chapter two delves into the intricate artistic interpretations derived from the chosen literary works. It meticulously examines the fundamental elements that define these narratives, including the overarching plot, the development of characters, the vivid settings, and the distinctive styles employed by the authors. This exploration is particularly focused on the portrayal of prison life as depicted in Petina Gappah's "The Book of Memory" and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's "Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary," highlighting how these elements intertwine to create a profound commentary on the human experience within the confines of incarceration.

The chapter offers a rich analysis of how the selected texts serve as a canvas for artistic expression, revealing the complexities of life behind bars. By dissecting the essential components of each narrative, it uncovers the ways in which the authors convey the emotional and psychological struggles faced by their characters. Through a careful examination of the plot dynamics, character arcs, and the evocative settings, the chapter illuminates the unique stylistic choices that enhance the reader's understanding of the harsh realities of prison life, ultimately showcasing the power of literature to reflect and critique societal issues.

Chapter three delves into the intricate psychological landscapes of the characters, exploring the profound effects of their enforced confinement. This confinement manifests in two primary forms: the physical imprisonment that occurs when individuals are trapped within the stark confines of prison walls and the more insidious imprisonment of the mind which can arise from various influences, whether they be natural circumstances or deliberate actions that stifle free thought. The protagonist of *The Book of Memory*, Mnemosyne, known simply as Memory, stands

out as a poignant example of someone who endures significant psychological turmoil as a result of the harsh realities of prison life.

In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's "Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary", the narrator, who is also the author, recounts his harrowing experiences in captivity, illustrating the dual nature of his suffering. He grapples with both the physical constraints of his body, confined within prison walls, and the mental shackles that threaten to diminish his spirit and creativity. Despite the oppressive environment he manages to maintain a semblance of resilience, ultimately enduring the trials of imprisonment until his eventual release. This exploration of both physical and mental imprisonment highlights the complex interplay between external circumstances and internal struggles, revealing how confinement can shape and distort the human psyche.

In chapter four the stark realities of prison life are laid bare through the lens of profound thematic exploration. This chapter intricately weaves together the themes of Colorization and Resistance, illuminating the struggles of the protagonist from *The Book of Memory*. Her albinism, a defining trait that renders her skin sensitive and vulnerable to the unforgiving sun, becomes a powerful symbol of her isolation. As she navigates the oppressive environment of incarceration, her unique identity not only sets her apart but also subjects her to relentless societal rejection and systemic abuse. The narrative poignantly captures the brutal consequences of being different in a world that often prioritizes conformity, showcasing the emotional and physical toll it takes on those who dare to stand out.

The theme of Resistance emerges as a vital counterpoint to the dehumanizing forces at play within the prison walls. It is through the protagonist's journey that readers witness the indomitable spirit of an individual who, despite the overwhelming odds,

strives to reclaim her identity and assert her humanity. This chapter serves as a powerful reminder of the resilience found in the face of adversity, as the protagonist learns to navigate the complexities of her existence while challenging the oppressive structures that seek to diminish her. The vivid portrayal of her struggles and triumphs invites readers to reflect on the broader implications of individuality and the fight against systemic injustice, making Chapter Four a compelling exploration of the human spirit's capacity to resist and endure persists even in the face of overwhelming adversity. Through these narratives, the chapter paints a vivid picture of the psychological and physical toll of incarceration, while also celebrating the strength found in resistance and the quest for dignity.

The findings presented in Chapter Two explore the artistic representation of life within prison walls. The study established that both *Detained* and *The Book of Memory* offer rich and evocative portrayals of life in prison. The authors describe prison as more than a site of physical confinement; it becomes a metaphor for state violence, injustice, and existential suffering. Through narrative techniques, symbols, and emotional depth, they expose the brutality, monotony, and psychological toll endured by inmates. These texts serve as counter-narratives that challenge dominant state ideologies and reclaim space for marginalized voices.

Chapter Three's findings focus on the profound psychological effects of imprisonment. In both works, imprisonment leads to psychological trauma, emotional instability, and loss of identity. Characters often experience despair, fear, anxiety, and isolation due to oppressive prison conditions. Solitary confinement is portrayed as especially destructive, leading to disorientation and mental breakdown. Despite the trauma, some individuals resist dehumanization by turning to artistic expression,

introspection, and solidarity. Writing, in particular, emerges as a therapeutic and revolutionary act, serving as a form of reclaiming identity and resisting erasure.

Chapter Four highlights findings on resistance and cognitive freedom. The research discusses the concept of cognitive imprisonment, where internalized fear, doubt, and negativity create mental constraints as powerful as physical confinement. Both authors demonstrate that resistance begins in the mind through thought, language, memory, and creative expression. Ngũgĩ's prison diary and *The Book of Memory*'s introspective narration reflect a journey toward self-liberation, even while physically confined. The act of writing becomes a weapon against oppression, transforming suffering into testimony and silence into voice. The characters who survive and resist most effectively are those who cultivate mental autonomy, self-awareness, and hope.

5.4 Conclusion

In view of these findings, prison literature in African contexts serves as a genre of resistance that documents oppression while affirming human dignity. The dehumanizing nature of incarceration is both systemic through laws, torture, and surveillance and psychological through fear, isolation, and mental breakdown. Resistance takes multiple forms, including intellectual defiance, spiritual strength, communal solidarity, and personal reflection. This study confirms that literature can be a powerful space for counter-hegemonic discourse, enabling imprisoned individuals to challenge their erasure.

This study not only sheds light on the profound themes and emotional depths found in Petina Gappah's, *The Book of Memory* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, but it also offers a fresh perspective on the concept of literariness itself. By meticulously analyzing the narrative techniques and stylistic choices employed by

these authors. The research invites readers to engage with the texts on a deeper level fostering a richer understanding of how personal and political struggles are articulated through the written word. This work is an essential addition to academic discourse, encouraging a re-evaluation of the significance of prison literature in both historical and contemporary contexts, making it a must-read for anyone passionate about the intersection of literature and social justice.

5.5 Recommendations

A comparative study of prison narratives across Africa, Asia, Europe, and America is recommended to broaden the critical understanding of the artistic representation of incarceration. Such an analysis would reveal both the universal and region-specific creative expressions of confinement, while also highlighting how writers employ art to question systems of power and injustice. This comparative lens would expand the scope of literary engagement beyond *The Book of Memory* and *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, illustrating the aesthetic diversity through which authors translate personal and collective experiences of imprisonment into enduring works of art.

In relation to the psychological dimensions of prison life, the application of multiple theoretical frameworks is essential. While this study utilized Marxist and Psychoanalytic theories to interrogate class struggle, repression, and the unconscious effects of imprisonment, other theories such as Postcolonial Theory, Critical Disability Theory, and Feminist Theory could provide further interpretive depth. Postcolonial theory would contextualize prison experiences within structures of imperial power and domination; Critical Disability Theory would offer insights into how conditions such as albinism are represented and stigmatized within carceral and

social spaces; while Feminist Theory would illuminate the intersection of gender, identity, and resistance within oppressive systems.

It is also recommended that literary scholarship on prison narratives move beyond textual interpretation to engage with lived experiences through oral interviews with the inmates. Such integration of creative and testimonial sources would deepen understanding of how imprisonment shapes identity, memory, and voice. This approach would bridge the gap between literary representation and social reality, enabling a more grounded appreciation of how narratives of confinement reflect and reshape the human condition

Prison literature should also be recognized as a distinct and evolving genre that contributes significantly to socio-political and human rights discourse. Its narrative techniques, stylistic innovations, and ideological commitments demand critical attention for their role in shaping public consciousness about justice, equality, and freedom. By situating prison writing within the broader field of world literature, scholars can affirm its centrality in articulating the struggles of the marginalized and the voiceless.

An interdisciplinary approach that integrates literature with psychology, sociology, and cultural studies is equally indispensable. Such collaboration would allow for a holistic examination of the mental, emotional, and social impacts of imprisonment, as well as the cultural stigmas associated with albinism and other forms of difference. This synthesis would not only enrich literary interpretation but also advance the understanding of incarceration as both a personal and societal phenomenon, thereby reinforcing the transformative power of literature in confronting dehumanization and inspiring resistance.

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