

The Dilemma of Ambivalence in Ngugi's pre-independence Works: The River Between, Weep not, Child and a Grain of Wheat

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Abstract :

The purpose of this article is to explore the state of indecision both aesthetically and as regards the philosophical frame of reference in Ngugi's early works *The River Between*, *Weep Not Child* and *A Grain of Wheat*. A biographical reading of these works would be of great help. Also, literary readings carried out by critics such as Patrick Williams, David Cook, Simon Gikandi and others would be used to shed light on this theme. It turns out that the author's life and his early works are closely intertwined and that partly the bewilderment and the state of indecision felt throughout Ngugi's early works is due to the fact that he narrated his works through his eyes as a child. Yet, on considering the Gikuyu community's traditions and the specificity of the British colonial enterprise, we soon realise that the dilemma also is due to the complexity of the issue in question.

Key Words: indecision ; colonialism ; post-colonial ; Ngugi ; *The River Between* ; *Weep Not Child* ; *A Grain of Wheat* ; Betrayal ; African Bourgeoisie

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Introduction:

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's, like many African authors, has represented at some point in his writing career the division, indecision and the ambivalence the 'African self' has experienced after the long-lasting colonial experience. Indeed, this picture is captured in his early novels where we witness the two world views (western modernity and the Gikuyu tradition) clashing at one time and trying to unite at another, which results in protagonists who are caught in between or at a loss. There is an attempt here to show how Ngugi, given his education, the cultural and the historical circumstances surrounding the production of his early novels, was unable as yet to decide about the aesthetic form of his first works. I am using the author's biography, literary criticism and postcolonial theory of literature to shed light upon what seems to be a dilemma in early Ngugi's works *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child* and *A Grain of Wheat*.

The protagonists in the early works of Ngugi are seen to be trying unsuccessfully to squabble between two worlds: the world of modernity and the world of tradition. The ambivalent stance these characters take is due especially to the fact that they consider themselves as saviours of their society, as guides who should be followed. They think, perhaps like Ngugi does, that the western education they received could now be reconciled to the old paradigm of knowledge in which the elders are seen as people endowed with some deep insight. This ambivalence could have arisen from the fact that the writer himself is in a state of indecision, for he is not as yet provided with an ideological or a philosophical frame of reference which he could use to delve deep and fathom what went wrong and what's going on. Indeed, in *A Grain of Wheat*, his third novel, Ngugi is said to have been introduced to Fanon's African Marxism, as it were, which is demonstrated in a change in his style and analyses of 'reality.' This change reaches its peak in his fourth and fifth novel *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*.

It is worth noting, however, that Ngugi chose to relate in his early works the history of Kenya as witnessed by him. Therefore, we find him tackling the land problem, which began in the colonial time, in *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*; decolonization, the Mau Mau struggle and an anticipation of post-independence era

in *A Grain of Wheat*; and the betrayal of nationalism and freedom fighters, the loss of an ideal past and the new materialistic values that replaced it in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*. Ngugi's works are shaped by his early education and the circumstances of their production. In effect, literary theory and criticism has tended since the 1970s to move away from reading literary works against the biography of the author. This has helped much in the "liberation for the study of literature." Nonetheless, as Patrick Williams argues in *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, there are certain authors whose lives-even if they are not in a straight line transcribed into their works-are so thoroughly related to the circumstances of production and, sometimes, even to its form "that any attempt to ignore the facts of biography would be foolish" (Williams, 1999, p. 02).

There are three overarching cultural institutions under whose pressures Ngugi began his writing career. There was first the Protestant Church, the mission schools and the Gikuyu independent schools. These institutions, each on its part, "held promises of emancipation from the bonds of class and ethnicity", yet they also resulted in "unexpected dilemmas." For instance, Protestantism was linked to the bourgeois mode of life. For one was not Christian merely because he embraced a certain belief; rather, being Christian was related to how far one was able to lead a modern way of life which constituted of a "new monetary economy, mode of dress, set of cultural values, and even architecture." (Gikandi, 2000, p. 39). However, if Christianity was the connecting point to modernity this has the implication of "a self-willed *dédoublement* from a set of cultural values" that are at the basis of one's traditional community's identity, which the Gikuyu were not willing to do. Ngugi thus was born into a community that had the eagerness to enter modernity, but one that had serious doubts as to the wisdom of the total "negation of its newly collective identity". Therefore, one of the major themes in Ngugi's early works is this desire to be modern and the pull of what seems to be an obstinate past. Education and the hunger to acquire it is another major theme in these writings. This interest in education can be found explanation to in two factors: Ngugi's biography and the 'culture of colonialism': Gikuyu joined Christian-based educational institutions "in the belief that it was only through a mission education that conversion could be rationalized and effected." The connection between Christian conversion and colonial education-which was held to be the way to modernity-was so strong that Gikuyu Christians were called *athomi* which means the people of the book (Gikandi, 2000, pp. 39-40). The protagonists in Ngugi's early works were aware of. This anxiety was responsible for the foundation of Gikuyu independent schools in the 1930s which were built as on a highly challenging philosophical basis: that one could be educated in colonial schools and still be able to retain his affiliation to the Gikuyu traditional culture. *The River Between* shows that the very idea of community is at odds with the individualism on which modern identity is based. That's why Ngugi's early works *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child* could be incorporated in what Raymond Williams called the border country

“between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and an experience of change” (Gikandi, 2000, p. 40).

The conflict between the love of land that was of paramount importance to the Gikuyu-and love of change that is matched to the context of his early works; that is, the raise of nationalism and the ‘advent of decolonization’ could be traced even in Ngugi’s later works. There is a difference of tackling the theme though in terms of the writer’s vision that is much clearer in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*. This is because Ngugi then had at last found the ideological frame for his artistic works which were meant essentially to enable society to see what lies behind their malaise in post-independent era; besides, they were meant to provide solutions in the shape of artistic representations of how things should be. Nonetheless, Ngugi’s early works were characterised by being ambivalent and confused which was manifested in the protagonists: Waiyaki in *The River Between*, Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child* and Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*. There was always this conflict between modernity and tradition in which the individual is caught and has to decide his loyalty to one or the other. It is the attempt of combining the two that generates the protagonist’s feeling of being lost. For they learn sooner or later that it is unfeasible (at least at this juncture as far as Ngugi’s early writings are concerned) to be modern without the loss of one’s cultural identity. This make them feel completely paralysed especially due to the fact that they think of themselves as the saviours whose community has been waiting for to lead to its salvation.

Ngugi’s love of place and his experience of change produce a certain aesthetic form: his love of place makes the physical and cultural Gikuyu landscape (with its accompanying conflicts of identity) central in his early works. However, the writer’s desire to “capture this disappearing landscape in writing is often in conflict with his inherited notion about” what constitute good writing. For in order for the writer to capture the Gikuyu identity as defined by nationalism in 1930s he must make his characters affiliated with Gikuyu traditions and rituals such as circumcision, and at the same time involved in modern elements such as education and the cash economy. But communal affiliation was very much at odds with writing a modern novel whose prerequisite is the existence of an individual who rejects communality.

Ngugi had been taught at Makerere University that what makes good writing is to depict the individual troublesome relation to his immediate environment. Hence, Ngugi’s early works are a reflection of this divergence; meaning, the writer’s desire to be affiliated through his works to the Gikuyu imagined community, to use Benedict Anderson’s extrapolation, and “the impossibility of representing this desire in modernist form.” (Gikandi, 2000, pp. 41-42).

While Simon Gikandi focuses on the three cultural institutional powers (the Protestant Church, mission schools and Gikuyu independent schools) that formed

Ngugi's literary career, Patrick Williams sheds light upon land expropriation, which, as he argues, resulted in the disintegration of traditional community and the offence on the traditional family unit, as a crucial historical fact that informed and occupied a great part of Ngugi's colonial and even post-colonial works. The expropriation of 'indigenous' people's lands by Europeans was part and parcel of the colonial enterprise. One of the areas mostly known for extensive theft of lands was 'White Highlands'. Ngugi was born there in the village of Kamiriithu. The British land grabbing turned Kenyans into what came to be known as *ahoi*, "landless tenet farmers working for others or renting their lands (Williams, 1999, p. 02). Ngugi's father was one of the *ahoi*. This was a deliberate British policy to make the Kenyan farmers part of a greater economic control as long as they worked for a wage or became part of the cash economy instead of living off their product or the barter system. The effect was disastrous on Kenyans especially the Gikuyu, particularly given the spiritual dimension imparted to lands. The Gikuyu believe in the myth that God gave land to their ancestors Mumbi and Gikuyu, which Ngugi narrates in *Weep Not, Child*:

. . . At the foot of Kerinyaga, a tree and grew up . . . a holy tree . . . This was Makuyu, God's tree. Now, you know that at the beginning of things there was only one man (Gikuyu) and one woman (Mumbi). It was under this Mukuyu that he first put them . . . And the Creator who is also called Murungu took Gikuyu and Mumbi from his holy mountains. . . God showed Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land and told them,

'This land I hand over to you. O man and woman. It's yours rule and till in serenity sacrificing
Only to me, your God, under my sacred tree. . . ' (Ngugi, 1969, pp. 23-24).

In Facing Mount Kenya Kenyatta explains how the British perverted the real meaning land meant to the Gikuyu. The land was an individual's property and honour but he would rejoice in allowing the community to benefit from it. But the British claimed that "the land was under communal or tribal ownership, and as such the land must be *mali ya serikali*, which means Government property." Labouring under this coined term, the British Government began to expropriate land from its rightful possessors (Williams, 1999, p. 03).

As referred to above, Ngugi's love of place and experience of change generated a state of vacillation as regards the aesthetic shape of his writings. This was manifested in the protagonist's inability to find a way that harbours both modernity and tradition. For instance, Waiyaki in *The River Between* finds himself completely lost in midst of his attempt to unite the two factions that are in conflict though

belonging to the same tribe. The struggle between the two sides was symbolised by a geographical rift of the community into two edges, separated by the Honia River, which “faced each other like two rivals each ready to come to blows in a life or death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region.” (Ngugi, 1965, p. 01). Kameno, which represented the traditionalists, was the ridge to which the protagonist belonged and Makuyu, which stood for the Christians or modernity, was the opposite ridge. Ngugi endows Waiyaki with two jurisdictions in order to allow him to be the prospect unifying leader of his people, one was related to traditional religion and the other was Christian education. Chege, Waiyak’s father, learnt about a prophecy that there will emerge a saviour among the Gikuyu to rescue them from the invaders. He wished he would be that saviour. But his people’s rejection of him made him conclude that he would not be the one, so he kept the hope that his son, Waiyaki, would be the fulfillment of the prophecy:

‘Now listen. . . my son. . . carefully, for this is the ancient prophecy. . . I could not do more. When the white man came and fixed himself in Siriana, I warned all the people. But they laughed at me. Maybe I was hasty. Perhaps I was not the one. Mugo often said you could not cut the butterflies with a panga. You could not spear them until you learnt and knew their ways and movement. Then you could trap, you could fight back. Before he died, he whispered to his son the prophecy, the ancient prophecy: ‘salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people!’ (Ngugi, 1965, p. 20).

Aware of the fact that the British could not be fought with a ‘panga’ or be speared, Chege sends his child to learn the white man’s ‘ways’, which indicates education. However, when he does so, Waiyaki finds himself in a dilemma, which way to choose the Christian (which implies as we made it earlier modernity), mode of life characterised by the rejection of basic traditional rituals such as circumcision, or the traditional way of life which is at odds with modernity. Circumcision was important to Gikuyu in a sense that it was the marking ceremony of groups age, it was the symbol of initiation of male into manhood and the female into womanhood. More importantly, “the connection to land was made physically through the shedding of blood in the rituals of circumcision and clitoridectomy undergone in adolescence” (Williams, 1999, p. 02).

Waiyaki is aware of the importance of these rituals, yet he is hesitant in refusing radically the claim made by the Christians that these rituals were ‘cruel’, hence his

wish that there should have been a deep study of his people's customs so if change was to happen it must take a step-by-step process during which new values, that should perhaps be in tune to Gikuyu traditions, could take the place of the old ones, provided that they would have the same effect:

Circumcision of women was not important as a physical operation. It was what it did inside a person. It could not be stopped overnight. Patience and, above all, education, were needed. If the white man's religion made you abandon a custom and then did not give you something else of equal, you became lost" (Ngugi, 1965, p. 142).

Likewise Waiyaki is not ready to totally repudiate the Christian faith for he knew that

not all the ways of the white man were bad. Even his religion was not essentially bad. Some truth shone through it. But the religion, the faith, needed washing, cleaning away all dirt, leaving only the eternal. And that eternal that was the truth had to be reconciled to the traditions of the people. A people's traditions could not be swept away overnight. That way lay disintegration. Such a tribe would have no roots, for a people's roots were in their traditions going back to the past, the very beginning, Gikuyu and Mumbi (Ngugi, 1965, p. 141).

In his endeavour to unite the two ridges, Waiyaki falls in love with Nyambura, Joshua's daughter, which is taken by his opponents, Kaboni and Kamau, as an act of betrayal and denounce him to the tribe as a result. He is asked, consequently, to stand before the Kiami and defend himself against the accusation:

And how could he tell them now that he had not betrayed them, that this was not what he meant by unity; that he was not in league with Jishua? How could he tell them that he meant to serve the hills; that he meant to lead them into a political movement that would shake the whole country, that would tell the white man 'Go' (Ngugi, 1965, p. 151).

Nonetheless, neither his being a teacher in the white man's ways, nor prophecy seem to have served him in his efforts to unite the traditionalists and the Christians. Thus he stays uncertain of whether he is the alleged saviour of his people:

They called him a saviour. His own father had talked of a Messiah to come. Whom was the Messiah coming to save? From what? And where would He lead the people? Although Waiyaki did not stop to get clear answers to those questions, he increasingly saw himself as the one who would lead the tribe to the light (Ngugi, 1965, p. 101).

In the end, we are left uncertain as to what would become of Waiyaki and Nyambura after they were "in the hands of the Kiama, who would decide what to do". The protagonist's mind is also left "full of many thoughts and doubts that came and went" (Ngugi, 1965, p. 152).

Weep Not, Child (1964) was Ngugi's first published novel, although *The River Between* was written before it. David Cook in his *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of his Writings* argues that the setting of *Weep Not, Child* could be "fifteen years or so after the final incidents of *The River Between*."; that is, "towards the end of 1945 and spans some ten years from the time Njoroge is about to join Kamea Primary School for the first time to the traumatic months after he has become a first-year drop-out from Siriana." (Okenimkpe, 1983, p. 48). The events of the story are, as GD Killam argues in *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, told from the standpoint of Njoroge, the youngest son of Ngotho who, driven by the emergency period and its accompanying rough circumstances, besides having been denied the education through which he wanted to fulfill himself and to help his family, attempts to commit suicide. (Killam, 1980, p. 36).

The central points in the novel are: alienation of people from their lands; the use of education to the regaining of these lands. Ngotho, Njoroge's father, believes in a prophecy that says that there will come a time when the white people will go back from where they came and as a result lands will return to their rightful owners:

Then came the war/It was the first the first big war. I was then young, a mere boy, although circumcised. All of us were taken by the force. We made roads and cleared the forest to make it possible for the warring white men to move more quickly. The war ended. . . We came home worn out but very ready for whatever the British might give us as a reward. . . But N'go! The land was gone. My father . . . died a Muhoi on this land.' (Ngugi, 1969, p. 25).

Boro and Kori, Njorgo's brothers have fought in the war too. They witnessed the death of their brother Mwangi for a cause that was not his. Boro wonders why his people are waiting for a prophecy to be fulfilled instead of fighting to retrieve their lands:

How could these people have let the white man occupy the land without acting? and what was all this superstitious belief in a prophecy? In a whisper that sounded like a shout, he said, "To hell with prophecy." Yes, this was nothing more than a whisper. To his father, he said, "How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?" (Ngugi, 1969, p. 26).

But Ngotho goes on working for Hawlands. His sons Boro and Kori go to work in Nairobi, simultaneously became involved in the independence movement. In an important scene in the novel Ngotho learns that the prophecy will not be fulfilled, for Hawlands considers Kenya as his land:

Ngotho's heart jumped. He too was thinking of his children. Would the prophecy be fulfilled soon?
'Kwa nini Bwana. Are you going back to-? 'No,' Mr
 Hawlands
 said, unnecessarily loudly.
'... Your home, home. ...'
'My home is here! Ngotho was puzzled. Would these people never go? But had not the old Gikuyu seer said that they would eventually return the way they had come? And Mr Hawlands was thinking, would Stephen really do? He was not like the other one. He felt the hurt and the pain of loss. (Ngugi, 1969, p. 32).

I argued earlier that the discussion of Ngugi's early novels is significant in a sense that we will witness a huge shift both of style and the manner he treats and analyses the real implications and roots of the struggle and the relationship between coloniser-colonised in his later works. It appears as if Ngugi in these novels is rendering life from his standpoint as a child who saw things but could not find answers to many questions these things evoked. In this respect he says:

One did get the impressions. You are so young. You see your uncles being killed. British soldiers come to collect your uncles. You see some of your friends being taken from their homes. These things stay with you. You see an old man you respected being emasculated as a condition of war. These

things leave you with the impression though you take these things for granted and just go on. (Killam, 1980, p. 51).

The novelist thus in writing his early works was drawing on his personal experience and what it felt like being in war as a child:

In *Weep Not, Child* I just wanted to capture as much as possible the atmosphere of the situation, what it felt like to actually live in the small village at this time. So I wasn't trying that was very deep, but I was trying to capture what it felt like to live in a civil war. So that even if I didn't use my experience in many of the episodes, there are things which I have seen or heard or felt at the time. (Killam, 1980, p. 51).

Like Waiyaki in *The River Between* Njoroge sees himself as a saviour of his people. This would of course come through the use of the white man's wisdom through education:

Only education could make something out of this wreckage. He became more faithful to his studies. He would one day use all his learning to fight the white man. . . When these moments caught him, actually saw himself as a possible saviour of the whole God's country. (Ngugi, 1969, p. 82).

But his dream is destroyed when police officers come to take Njoroge away from school to his village. Ngotho has been castrated and the officers threaten Njoroge with same mutilation. When the novel draws to an end Njoroge tries to commit suicide. Only his mother prevents him.

Many critics consider *A Grain of Wheat*, the author's third novel, as a big shift in his style and analysis. As we made it earlier Ngugi is thought to have been introduced to Marx through his readings of Fanon concomitantly with his writing *A Grain of Wheat*. The central theme in this novel is the struggle of the Mau Mau movement, its betrayal, the emergency period and the effect it left on individual's lives. The general mood in the novel is that of anxiety and worry as to the anticipated state of post-independence Africa.

Ngugi gives great significance to revealing the "psychological complexities of individual states of mind"; the moral choices that the character has to make and the underlying causes and consequences of his/her action. All this is put into effect in

his craft of *A Grain of Wheat* where (influenced by Conrad) he seems to have found the right techniques to deliver it. (Killam, 1980, p. 53). In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi is interested also in his character's social aspect which is depicted against the background of the Mau Mau struggle. The story is centered around the lives of five characters Kihika, Mugu, Mumbi, Gikonyo and Karanja. Kihika is a freedom fighter who believes in sacrifice as the only way to gain independence. He visits one day Mugu and asks him to take the oath, whereupon the latter shows no sign of disagreement, yet he betrays Kihika later by telling the British about his place. Gikonyo and Karanja are rivals over Mumbi's love. When she chooses Gikonyo Karanja decides to avenge himself against him, which he does by seducing Mumbi in a moment of utter ecstasy in anticipation for her husband's release from detention. This resulted in the impregnation of Mumbi by Karanja and giving birth to a child.

The novel's structure is a complex one. The plot of the story is interwoven with tales about Kenyan historical figures who sacrificed themselves for the cause of liberation: Waiyaki, Harry Thuku and Jomo Kenyatta. In doing so Ngugi seems to be confirming that the resistance of occupation is rooted in history ever since the white man had intruded into the Kenyan lands. Besides, it started very small with some individuals giving themselves as a sacrifice for the liberation of their people:

Then nobody noticed it; but looking back we can see that Waiyaki's blood contained within it a seed, a grain, which gave birth to the political party whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil. (Ngugi, 1967, p. 13).

Ngugi's emphasis on history is an attempt to teach Kenyans that the struggle started right from the time the white man treaded on their lands. Besides, Ngugi as he noted in the preface of his play *The Trial of David Kimathi* felt the lack of books of history written by Kenyans to show the early struggle of such figures that were part and parcel of the Kenyan society. Even if there were any writings they would follow the same line of thought of Europeans' writings on Kenya, that if there was any resistance it was only some bright spots scattered here and there and that the majority of 'natives' succumbed to the occupation and cooperated with it:

There was no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic resistance of Kenyan people . . . a resistance movement whose history goes back to the 15th and the 16th centuries when Kenyans and other East African people first took up arms against European

colonial power. . . Our histories, our political scientists, and even some of our literary figures, were too busy . . . trying to document the colonial myths which had it that Kenyan people traditionally wandered aimlessly from place to place engaging in purposeless warfare; that the people really accommodated themselves to the British forces of occupation (Ngugi, 1976, p. vi).

The Mau Mau war was also central in *Weep Not Child*; however, in *A Grain of Wheat* we are made to know more about the implications of the struggle and especially the psychological impact it leaves in the characters. We no longer see the events recounted from a child's point of view as it's the case in *Weep No, Child*. Rather the central points are "represented by adults who are capable not only of feeling deeply (Njoroge could do that) but of giving expression to their feelings and of scrutinizing them." (Killam, 1980, p. 55).

One of the essential themes in the novel is betrayal and the complex psychological impact this leaves in the betrayed and betrayer. The central character in this sense is Mugo who betrays Kihika and is seen ironically as having a 'badge of courage'. It is his being considered as a hero while knowing inside that he is (not only a false hero) but a traitor that deepens his torment and sense of guilt. It is worth mentioning that at the time of Kenya's fight for independence, Ngugi was fifteen and youngsters at his age joined this fight. Ngugi, however, could not fight because he was studying. Thus, it can be said that Ngugi is trying somehow to mitigate his sense of guilt that Mugo stands for Ngugi, although it is considered by some critics as a ridiculous sense of guilt since Ngugi was still a teenager.

Hence, the novelist skill makes us sympathise with Mugo although we know as readers that he is a traitor and a murderer by proxy. This is intensified through giving us information about his childhood, the harsh treatment of his aunt to him, the utter poverty he lived in, especially his serenity seeking, seclusion and intention to hurt no one.

Why should Kihika drag me into a struggle and problems I have not created? Why? He is not satisfied with butchering men and women and children. He must call on me to bathe in the blood . . . have I stolen anything from anybody? No Have I ever shat inside a neighbour's courtyard? No. Have I killed anybody? No. How then can Kihika to whom I have done no harm do this to me? (Ngugi, 1967, pp. 220-221).

This very skill makes us sympathise with Mumbi who betrays Kigonyo. For we are made to know that Karanja tried to use his position in the British army to tantalize Mumbi into giving in to his advances, yet Mumbi resists and is tricked only when he tells her about the release of her husband. Karanja then takes advantage of this moment of extreme euphoria Mumbi feels and traps her into bed.

There is another kind of betrayal in the novel which is neither that of Mugo to Kihika, nor is it that of Mumbi to Gikonyo. This is the betrayal of freedom fighters and *Uhuru* by people who did not take part in the struggle in a sense that it is those who did not fight who are going to “taste the fruits of independence.” “But now who do you see riding in long cars and changing them daily as if motor cars were clothes?”, Gikonyo says to Mugo (the wrong person) (Ngugi, 1967, p. 68). The novelist could already be referring to Fanon’s analysis of the psychology of the colonised. For him the African bourgeoisie are mere imitators of the former coloniser’s ways, actions and style of life. This is due to the fact that they never actually hated the colonisers; they rather were jealous of the mode of life they led. Still, they’re not justified historically, for they in truth never fought for independence.

The novel ends with Mugo’s prospective trial by his people for betrayal. This scene reminds us of Waiyaki’s end when he is waiting for the Kiama’s judgment. Margaret Jay Hey numbers other forms of betrayal in the novel. Karanja betrays his friends (Kihika, Gikonyo) when he chooses to be the British collaborator, but he himself feels betrayed after Thompson returns to England without even informing him. Gikonyo betrays the Mau Mau movement when he confesses the oath in order to gain his release from detention. Margaret Jean Hay argues in her *African Novels in the Class Room* that even Kihika has some shortcomings or “human failings”, as she makes it, in a sense that he ignored his family, friends and lovers when he committed himself wholly to the struggle (Hay, 2000, p. 193).

However, I rather choose to say that Ngugi sketched this character in this manner to stress the point that sacrifice is not as easy as it might seem. For one has to leave ‘the loved ones’ be they friends, family members and lovers for the sake of a greater cause—the liberation of his country. Thus, for me, he is the only one among the main characters who did not betray in any sense, neither his ‘loved ones’, nor his people at large. He has been loyal to his cause and people until his death, which contributed in grabbing independence from the British government. Still, Ngugi seems to be criticizing the method employed by the Mau Mau fighters to make people take the oath because of its violent content and because the Mau Mau fighters intimidate those who refuse to take it. This can have an adverse effect in that they may win a hesitant member not deeply convinced of the cause like Gikonyo, or simply not willing to take part in the struggle: this is the case of Mugo who ends up being a traitor to the cause of his nation.

In *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child* Ngugi tackled themes that constituted reality for him as a child who could not fathom the implications of the Mau Mau struggle and the divisions within his society. This is shown through the bewilderment of Waiyaki and Njoroge who think of themselves as saviours of their society, yet they could not give a clear vision as to what is the solution to the present predicaments Kenyans suffered from. They could not, for instance, provide a persuading method to reconcile what is traditional with what is modern; they could not explain as well what it meant to be colonised and what it meant to be a coloniser and the relationship between them. Because of their immaturity these characters are seen to have failed to materialise their dreams for Waiyaki and Njoroge both described reality faithfully as they witnessed it and were aware of their roles in society, yet they never provided a way out.

Nonetheless, we have to admit that Waiyaki and Njoroge tried to combine elements of the Christian faith with elements of their religion. Waiyaki as we mentioned earlier made it that not all the white man's ways are bad and that Christianity needed to be cleaned (adapted to traditional Kenyan society). His attempt to make a reconciliation between tradition and modernity showed itself also in his efforts to unify people living on the two ridges divided by the river Honia. In *Weep Not, Child* Njoroge likewise made parallels between Gikuyu ancestors Mumbi and Gikuyu and Adam and Eve in the Christian faith:

His belief in a family and the village rested then not only on the hope for sound education but also on the belief in a God of love and mercy, who long ago walked on this earth with Gikuyu and Mumbi, or Adam and Eve. It did not much make difference that he had come to identify Gikuyu with Adam and Mumbi with Eve. To this God, all men and women were united by one strong bond of brotherhood. And with all this, there was growing up in his heart a feeling that the Gikuyu people, whose land had been taken by white men, were no other than the children of Israel he read in the Bible. (Ngugi, 1969, p. 49).

However, these attempts failed in a sense that the protagonists are shown not to be sure of what they wanted and how they could achieve it. Waiyaki is held to be a traitor in the end and is about to be trailed. Njoroge was on the verge of committing suicide after he has lost his education, his job and his family is scattered. In the end the reader is left perplexed and confused as to what has the protagonists been able to achieve after their juvenile attempts to explain what is wrong with their society. We must not ignore, however, that the historical context (colonialism) especially as seen from a child's point of view explains this perplexity and confusion.

However, in *A Grain of Wheat* the story is told from the point of view of an educated adult who has found a frame of thought which enabled him to explain what happened. This was Ngugi's introduction to the ideas of Frantz Fanon and

Marxism. However, although Ngugi clarified to some extent the implications of Mau Mau struggle in terms of psychological effects this left in Kenyans. It differs from earlier novels also in demonstrating the paramount importance art could be used in representing or rewriting, as it were, one's history from an African point of view, which would contribute to society's consciousness raising. The narrative voice in *A Grain of Wheat* is engaged in recording reality and analysing its roots in history. In doing so he is like Baako and Solo in Armah's *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?*. The narrative voice in *A Grain of Wheat* makes us, as readers, anticipate what would happen in the future; meaning, what would characterise post-independence Kenya would be the betrayal of *Uhuru* and the militants by those who did not take part in the struggle in a sense that they would unwarrantedly taste the fruits of independence and marginalise those who should dutifully be rewarded. The narrative voice does not, however, provide a vision as to what is the way out.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the novelist's early writings were meant to show that he depicted reality as he experienced it, saw it or heard of, which left in him a deep impression that prompted him to try and put it in an artistic mould. This is, as Walter Benjamin argues, the characteristic of the storyteller which differentiates him from the conventional novelist: "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience- his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (Gikandi, 1987, p. 50). Although the early works of Ngugi had not arisen to the depth and beauty that he obviously could realise in his later works, they helped us as readers to get to know what constitutes pleasure and pain as regards both the Gikuyu community at large and Ngugi wa Thiong'o as an author.

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