

**Reflections on the Colonial Violence in Kateb Yacine's
Nedjma (1956) and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O' *A Grain of Wheat*
(1967)**

**La violence coloniale dans *Nedjma* (1956) de Kateb Yacine et A
Grain of Wheat (1967) de Ngugi Wa Thiong'o**

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Abstract: While many previous studies on Kateb Yacine and Ngugi Wa Thiong' O's literary works were undertaken separately, the present paper seeks to shed light on the neglected aspect of analyzing their two selected novels comparatively. By taking advantage of Greenblatt's New historicist approach, which favors anchoring the text in its context, the attempt will be to unveil the ways both authors, who wrote while events were still unfolding, use their fictions to depict the colonial violence and its several ramifications on the Kenyan and Algerian peoples. The analysis finds connection among these two authors' converges as they learnt the language of the colonizer and take it back to their own community thus making themselves translators of their people's grievances during the colonial period. Their visions and discourses on the use of violence by the British and French colonizers can be compared in many ways. Upon closer examination of the two fictions, the study is based on the New Historicist approach, with reference to Stephen Greenblatt's theoretical concepts of "textuality of history" and "historicity of the text" to compare how Kateb and Ngugi paint the colonial oppression in fiction. By borrowing these two notions, we intend reading these two literary narratives within a comparative and new historicist framework; a close attention will be paid to the similarity of the colonial experience of violence displayed in the two texts rather than differences such as the geographical distant locations in which they occur. The argument is that the political situations Kateb and Ngugi reflect on, the ways they insert historical facts in their fictions which

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is characterized by revolution and literary innovations makes the comparative analysis of the two texts worth to be investigated.

Keywords: Colonial violence; Political Repression; Cultural obliteration; Rise of nationalist consciousness; Guerrilla warfare.

Résumé : Cet article propose une relecture et une étude comparative de deux récits écrits par deux auteurs africains mondialement reconnus. Il s'agit de *Nedjma* (1956) de Kateb Yacine et de *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) de Ngugi Wa Thiong'O. Alors que de nombreuses études consacrées aux œuvres littéraires de ces deux écrivains ont été entreprise séparément, le présent article fait la lumière sur un aspect négligé par la critique à savoir leurs réflexions sur la violence coloniale. Par le biais de la nouvelle approche historiciste de Stephen Greenblatt, qui privilégie l'ancrage du texte dans son contexte, nous avons examiné les différentes façons dont les deux auteurs utilisent leurs fictions pour dépeindre cette violence coloniale multiforme et ses multiples ramifications sur les peuples kenyan et algérien. L'analyse est basée sur des affinités littéraires résultats d'une expérience coloniale commune avec la violence et l'oppression qu'elle a engendrée. L'analyse révèle que les deux romans peuvent être comparés de plusieurs façons.

Mots clés : Violence coloniale ; Répression politique; Effacement culturel; Montée de la conscience nationaliste; Guérilla.

Introduction: The prime focus of present paper is concerned with the analysis of Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* (1956) and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O's third novel, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) within the context in which they were produced. The two novels were written during the turbulent period of colonial transformation in Africa in the 1950s and the 1960s. The two narratives reflect in many ways the colonial violence, which happened in a time when many African movements, fighting for independence, emerged in some African colonies. As products of that unstable political period, the question to be addressed is how the two authors' novels reveal and depict the realities of British and French domination and express the deepest aspirations of their authors for freedom and independence. The hypothesis is built on the fact that our analysis of Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* and Kateb's *Nedjma* can produce comprehensive results, unless we try to place these works of fiction in their historical contexts. In other words, our examination of the novels brings to the fore the necessity to link them to their historical

circumstances in which they were produced as Karima Lazali notes: “History doesn’t speak for itself. It speaks through subjects who, ideally, debate with historians and politicians over its interpretation” (Lazali, 2021: 30). For the author, literature is only fruitful and necessary, but nothing comes closer to the texture of subjectivity than the literary text. Hence, we shall trace back from the beginning the British colonization of Kenya and the French conquest of Algeria. It is worth noting, however, that it is not our concern to analyze the history of Kenya or that of Algeria. Rather, our purpose is to select some historical facts, referred to or focused upon by the two authors in the two selected novels. By comparison of the events, described by Ngugi and Kateb in their respective novels, we shall attempt to show the similarities between the two struggles by drawing some parallels between the British and French motives, the causes of their presence in Kenya and Algeria and the way in which the two settler colonies coped with colonialism. We may put more emphasis on some historical events such as the Mau Mau rebellion and the 8 May 1945 uprising and the causes that propelled these revolts. Our insistence on these rebellions is justified by their relevance, their importance, and their respective impacts on the two writers.

However, assuming that we are concerned with the Kenyan and Algerian communality of the colonial experiences as reflected in the two texts, our chief purpose will be, then, to seek for analogies rather than differences between the two struggles. Emphasis will be placed, thus, on the Kenyan and Algerian’s common history of resistance against foreign intrusion, their long and continuous fight for national independence and freedom from oppression is displayed in the two novels. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to claim that these revolts are identical and deny the differences that may exist between them. In other words, it will be a mistake to affirm that Kenya’s history and Algeria’s are somehow homologous. Definitely not. The Algerian revolt involved a large amount of participation, co-operation and co-ordination among people, which is not the case for Kenya where the revolt was partial. The French colonialism and its dramatic historical

consequences events, as Karima Lazali points out, were scandalous in their scale, their cruelty, and their persistence. They left an indelible mark on Algerian history (Lazali, 2021: 17).

1- The Land Expropriation, Exploitation, and Political Repression in the two Novels

The Kenyans' colonial experience of land confiscation can be compared to the extensive expropriation of the Algerians of their fertile lands. As colonies of settlement, the colonial regimes naturally seized the "tribal" lands. Consequently, the effects of land alienation on the two societies were long, deep and enduring. In *A Grain of Wheat*, the history of the British colonization of Kenya forms the cornerstone of the narrative. At the very beginning of Chapter one, Ngugi embraces the whole contemporary history of his country and traces the history of the movement for freedom. He starts from "the arrival of the white men with guns". He particularly refers to the early days of Waiyaki, the protest of "Harry Thuku, and the birth of the party". Ngugi mentions the "detention camps" and "the Emergency Period" too. To grasp fully these events and have an adequate understanding of the content of the novel's narrative, we need to go back to the first British settlements and colonization of Kenya which started during the last decades of the nineteenth century, when European countries especially Britain and Germany, began to colonize an area of the British East Africa now called Kenya. Yet, before dealing with the British colonisation, we think it worthwhile to note that, long before the British presence in Kenya, the country had been a coveted by foreign powers, in order to lay hand on its fertile lands, its ivory and its wild animals. The Bantu people, the Arabs, the Portuguese, and the British conquered Kenya. Foreign western intruders started their intrusion as explorers, peaceful traders, and missionaries and finally became colonisers at the end of the 19th century. That period marked the beginning of most of Kenya's contemporary political, social and cultural troubles; all of them were linked to the land expropriation (Davidson.1978: 87).

The conquest had its roots in the Berlin Congress of 1884/1885 when the European powers partitioned Africa in zones of interest under their political control. The British expansion in Kenya began with the conquest of 1887. The British Imperial East African Company, a trading organization under government control, rented the land from the sultan of Zanzibar, who ruled over the area. A year later, Great Britain obtained a concession for all the country, which became a British Protectorate. In 1896, the Land Acquisition Act, allowed the colonial administration to acquire lands for a railway line. Meanwhile, Europeans, living a ‘fin-de-siècle’ economic and social crisis realized that the sparsely populated land promised political and economic opportunities. The British government issued a Land Ordinance Act in 1902, allowing the white settlers to acquire lands in Kenya by expropriating the “natives” off their lands (Maloba.1998:10). In 1915, another Ordinance Act increased the power of the colonial governor who was given total authority to: “grant, lease or otherwise alienate, on his Majesty’s behalf, any Crown lands for any purpose and on any terms as he may think fit”. The Ordinance not only stopped the expansion of the natives by reducing their lands, but also forced them to live in reserves after establishing boundaries in the Gikuyu Highlands. The problem of expropriation and the British policy of land confiscation and the deprivation of the Kikuyu of their land holdings was the major cause of violence and rebellion (Ibid. 26).

In 1920, Kenya became a colony state. The British settlement increased prominently and the white settlers were given all the economic and political tools to dominate the local populations. Basil Davidson elucidates the foreign settlers’ power as follows:

In colonies where white settlement was comparatively large and long established as in Kenya and in Algeria, the white minorities, although numerically small, had been encouraged by their “motherlands”, France and Britain to regard themselves as residuary legatees of imperial power (Davidson. 1994: 178).

Davidson also indicates that by 1915, white settlers occupied about 4.5 million acres of excellent Kikuyu lands and they focused their attention on the central part of the Rift Valley, taking the lands of the Kikuyu that they legitimated by the fact of not having the rightful ownership over the land (Davidson. 1978: 118). In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi describes the Kikuyu as an organized society and claims that its radical disruption was caused mainly by the intrusion of foreign political and cultural forces through land confiscation. Kihika, one of the main characters, voices the extensive expropriation of the Kikuyu peasants as follows:

Whether the land was stolen from Gikuyu, Ubabi or Nandi, it does not belong to the white men [...] The white man owns hundreds and hundreds of acres of land. What about the black men who squat there, who sweat dry on the farms to grow coffee, tea, sisal, wheat and yet only get ten shilling a month (P.85).

The importance of land for the Kenyans can be explained by the fact that the economy of the “natives”, before the coming of Europeans, was based on few things. They had no system of currency. So, wealth was measured in terms of land, sheep, goats and cattle, as Ngugi states in his novel, *Weep Not Child* (1965): “A man with tattered clothes but has at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money” (Ngugi.1965: 19). Besides the material benefits, the land has a spiritual importance for the Kikuyu. It is the soul of all the tribe. Its members work it according to the tribal norms, following its social organization based on help. But the white man changed the order in his attempt to “Civilize” the “natives”. The confiscation of land, the introduction of currency, and the concept of taxation resulted in the destruction of the traditional customs and the social order of the tribe. This issue is widely discussed in a book by the prominent political leader and president of independent Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, frequently mentioned in *A Grain of Wheat*.

Kenyatta's anthropological book *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), describes the importance of land and the deep attachment of the Gikuyu

to it. The second chapter of the book, entitled “Land tenure”, evidences the twofold importance of land as a “mother” who feeds her people by being a source of material goods and a link that binds the Gikuyu to their ancestors. The natives regard the land as the foundation rock on which their tribal economy stands and is the only effective mode of production that they have. The result is that there is a great desire in the heart of every Gikuyu man to own a piece of land on which he can build his home, and from which he and his family can get the means of livelihood. The Gikuyu people depend entirely on the land which supplies them with the material needs of life and through which spiritual and moral contentment is achieved. Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe are buried. The connection of land with the ancestors was made physical, according to the Gikuyu tradition, in the shedding of blood during the rituals of circumcision undergone in the adolescence (Kenyatta.1938: 22, 54).

In A Grain of Wheat, Ngugi mentions the “conscription of labor into the white men’s lands” and “taxation” (P. 61,218). The two practices are related to the economic system, which prevailed during the colonial period. Once the British colonial authorities had expropriated many Gikuyu families off their lands, they attempted to force them into a situation where they would have nothing to sell but their labor. The landless farmers were forced to do hard work on the whites’ farms at low wages. It was a manner adopted by the settlers to achieve complete domination over the “natives”. The politics adopted by the colonial government during the labor crisis following the end of the First World War was harsh and heightened the sufferings of the Kenyan populations. The colonial government imposed taxes, called Poll and Hut taxes, which had to be paid in cash by Kenyan farmers from their works on the whites’ plantations (P.62). Through tax system, the colonial authorities secured a monopoly of cheap labor or even forced labor. Because of the wartime deficits, the colonial government doubled Hut and Poll taxes and tried to impose the ‘Kipande’, referred to in *A Grain of Wheat* as “a pass-book” (P.146). ‘Kipande’ was an

employment card with the holder's fingerprints that the 'natives' had to carry constantly outside the reserves. The white settlers justified the measure, as a means to keep the track of their workers and cutting down crime. (Maloba.1998: 46).

In much the same way as in Kenya, Algeria was a subject to many invasions and conquests. In *Nedjma*, Kateb refers to the series of conquests and the long and enduring struggles of the Algerian people against the successive foreign intruders. For instance, Rachid, one of the protagonists of the novel, says: "Tandis que se succèdent les colonisateurs, les prétendants sans titre et sans amour...." (P.175). Kateb uses the memories of his characters, mainly, Lakhdar, Rachid and Mustapha to show that Algeria was an ideal target for many invaders. He went back to the earliest times of the glorious and heroic deeds of "les guerriers Numides" and the struggle of Jugurtha, a prominent Berber leader who had fought relentlessly the Roman oppressors (P.102). The violence of the French conquest of Algeria is voiced by Si Mokhtar, one of the protagonists through his narration of the story of Keblout. The tribe was oppressed because of its involvement in the rebellion, and its members challenged French power by refusing to abandon their lands. Si Mokhtar describes the way in which the tribe was harried by the French conquerors (P.126). The French conquest began in 1830, when the French troops landed on the shores of Algiers and took hold of the capital. Once the French soldiers had satisfied their rage of plunder, they began to secure their gains by penetrating further into the interior. In 1834, Algeria became a French 'department' and was declared as an integral part of France and a territory for settlement (R.Oliver.1967: 128). By the beginning of the twentieth century, Algeria had already been ruled for many years as a French territory and the French colons, living in Algeria, preserved their civic rights. For example, they elected their own 'députés' to the National Assembly in Paris and exercised a steady pressure on French politics. As a French 'department', Algeria's political authority was placed under a Governor General, a high ranking-officer, invested with civil and military jurisdiction responsible to the Minister of War. The

French policy that prevailed at that time was known as “le régime du sabre” whose purpose was to reduce the local populations to economic, social and political inferiority (Lacheraf. 1978: 48).

In the second section of his novel, Kateb alludes to the violence following the large-scale confiscation of cultivated lands, which followed the crushing of many local resistances in Algeria. For instance, Rachid’s and Mourad’s fathers had been victims of land confiscation.(P.72) The process of land expropriation is widely discussed in Roland Oliver and J.D Fage’s book, *A short History of Africa* where the two authors state:

In 1840, General Bugeaud embarked on a policy of relentless expelling Algerian tribes and replacing them by European colonists. But, even this drastic policy could not provide a final answer to the problem facing the French, because it was clearly impracticable to push all the Algerian tribes into the Sahara (Oliver. 1967: 128).

Land alienation was restricted mainly to the fertile plains of the Tell, which receive regular quantities of rain. As a reaction to land confiscation, many rebellions rose against the French occupation. In *Nedjma*, Kateb praises the ‘échec plein de gloire’ of the revolt organised by Abdelkader and regards him as a hero, “L’homme de plume et d’épée, seul chef capable d’unifier les tribus pour s’élever au stade de la nation”(P.96). The author mentions also the outcomes of the “tribal revolts”, and Bugeaud’s ruthless reprisals in expropriating a great number of Algerian families off their lands in favor of the foreign settlements (P. 72).The confiscation of land became extensive after the crushing of the local revolt in Kabylia led by El Mokrani in 1871. The French colonialists confiscated 500,000 acres of “tribal” land, reducing the local populations to misery and hopelessness and placing the region under what was known as “le Régime d’exception”. The bad situation that prevailed at that time was worsened by a disastrous drought, which had struck Algeria in 1866, ensuring several years of starvation, famine and pestilence (Lacheraf. 1978:18).

At the political level, in nearly a similar way as in Kenya, an extensive civil power was granted to the colonial government. The latter began “une mise en valeur” of the colonized areas by investment and gradual establishment of an economic infrastructure especially in the matter of road building. The deprivation and denial of any political power to the ‘indigenes’ were the main reasons that gave birth to protest. In this context, Mohamed Harbi asserts that Algerians became mere users of land, or tenants who may be displaced at will for the benefit of the French settler:

Avant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les colons ont accaparé les terres les plus riches et plus productives (65 pour cent de la production agricole). Le capitalisme français, qui contrôle les banques, le commerce et l’industrie, a le monopole du marché algérien. L’encadrement du pays est presque exclusivement européen (Harbi. 1980: 7).

As the occupation continued, the French colonial State had not only a total domination of the Algerian economy, but sought also to assimilate the Algerian population by spreading the French language and forbidding the teaching of Arabic. The fact is denounced in *Nedjma* through Rachid’s father, a teacher of Arabic “suspendu à plusieurs reprises, puis révoqué pour n’avoir pas tenu compte des sanctions” (P.147). The statement explains clearly the colonial effort of assimilation, as Mohamed Harbi explains, is due to the various ways the colonial State used to undermine the “native” culture and to promote its own. Harbi sums up the French attempt to assimilate the Algerian population as follows:

La séparation de la religion et de l’Etat est appliquée au christianisme et au judaïsme, mais non à l’islam dont les muftis, imams, etc, sont nommés et révoqués par l’administration coloniale et non pas soumis au contrôle des fidèles (...). La langue arabe, persécutée, a été déclarée en 1939 langue étrangère au pays (Harbi. 1998: 91).

Unlike the British, the French colonial government was obsessed by a desire to inculcate and impose, even in a compulsory way, their language, traditions and culture to the Algerian populations. In this respect, Harbi writes: «l’Etat colonial exerce une emprise totale sur les activités culturelles et religieuses de la communauté algérienne pour déraciner, par la francisation, la culture arabe et l’islam». (Harbi.1980: 9). The quote illustrates the colonial project of erasing the Algerian cultural identity by imposing the French one.

2 - The Outcomes of Violence and Rise of Nationalism in Kenya and Algeria

The reading of Kateb’s *Nedjma* and Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat* reveal that initially, the Algerian and the Kenyan nationalists were implicated in organized political activities, but not in the struggle for independence. In both countries, nationalism began with some western educated leaders who used new concepts such as political representation, reforms, self- determination and self- government. Some of them used also new organizations that transcended traditional society. The goals and the objectives of the new elite were to achieve independence within the framework of the colonies created by colonial powers. Moreover, the claims of the Algerian and the Kenyan politicians were not to overthrow the colonial regimes, but rather to require more extensive participation in decision-making and administration.

With regard to Kenya, political considerations began to usurp the place of prominence formerly occupied by economic problems after the First World War. Hence, important political developments were taking place. The protest came first from people who suffered most from land grabbing. The “natives” who had participated in the First World War carried on the discontent. These people were aware that colonialism could be defeated through organized activities. To represent the tribes’ grievances, some political organizations started in the 1920s and the 1930s. A class of young Africans educated in colonial schools, as was the case in many African colonies, generally led the

protest. This generation was promoted into the colonial and missionary institutions, but only to a certain point. They were given a chance to get an education in the British and missionary institutions but they were excluded from political or economic participation. Consequently, they started to organize themselves in associations which opposed land alienation, compulsory labor, tax increases and wage cuts. (Maloba.1998: 46).

One of the first figures of nationalism in Kenya, cited repeatedly in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, was Harry Thuku, a clerk in Government service who founded the Young Kikuyu Association in 1921. The members of Thuku organization demanded mainly African representation in the Legislative Council. They based their protest on some important issues, such as the Kipande card, the doubling of Hut and Poll taxes and the reduction of wages paid by settlers, mainly after the First World War (Ngugi.pp.12, 66,218). But, as soon as Thuku tried to expand his organization to other parts of Kenya, he was sacked from his job, arrested and deported to the remote northern frontier district (in the coast of Mombasa) in 1922. The British detained the leader, hoping that the organization would thereby collapse. But the arrest of Thuku did not prevent other political groups to spread widely among the Kikuyu who saw the arrest of their leader as a direct attack against their economic and political interests. To show their discontent, they organized a general strike in Nairobi. The police fired upon the demonstrators and the strike ended with the massacre of some demonstrators. But repression did not stop the protest. Resistance continued against the low wages and the prohibition of coffee production by Africans (Cf. Davidson. 1978: 159).

In 1925 the Young Kikuyu Association was renamed as the Kikuyu Central Association, which really got a boost from the female circumcision controversy in 1928. The conflict between the missionaries and the "natives" started when the Christian Missions in Kenya tried to ban the custom of female circumcision as part of their "civilizing mission", while the Kikuyu considered it as a ceremony followed by singing and dancing rituals. They saw it as a happy event

where all the tribe took part. The disagreement between the two conflicting parts sharpened in 1929 and increased the resentment against European missionary control. The “natives” saw that there was no need and no use at all for the “modernity” and the destructive policy of the colonial authorities. For the Kikuyu, the aim of the mission was “to uproot the Africans”, by destroying the entity on which the tribe was built. The abolition of the surgical element in the custom meant to the Gikuyu the denial of the whole traditional ritual. The initiation of boys as well as girls, in Kenyan society, is looked upon as a deciding factor in giving a girl or a boy the status of womanhood or manhood. (Cf. Kenyatta.1938: 128). In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi also refers to the birth of the Kenyan Kikuyu Independent Schools (P.18), which Kenyatta and many teachers founded after they had left the mission. The Kenyan teachers established their own schools and freed them from the influence of the Church. Kenyatta, as a leader of these Independent School Associations, was fully involved in the growing political movement. He led the Kikuyu against the Christian Mission’s campaign to prohibit female circumcision and came to prominence as a secretary of the Kikuyu Central Association, the principal representative of the Kikuyu at that time. The organization formulated the people’s demands on cultural self-determination and claimed equal economic rights from the colonial authorities. They launched their own *newspaper Muigwithania*,² edited by Kenyatta, and set up their own independent schools too (Kenyatta. P. 263).

In 1929, Jomo Kenyatta was sent by the KCA members to London in order to lobby the British politicians, especially the Labor Party, who might sympathize with the Kikuyu claims regarding the land. The event is referred to in *A Grain of Wheat* (P.218). The politicians could also help to counter the pressure and influence, which the white settlers tended to exercise on the Kenyan government. When Harry Thuku was released from detention in 1931, he formed a moderate party, which quarrelled bitterly with the Kikuyu Central Association. The Kikuyu nationalists, therefore, were unable to present a unified front against the foreign ruler and settlers. The divergences among the nationalists suited

naturally the British affairs (Maloba.PP.48- 49). Between the two World Wars, the colonial authorities set up an administration, prone to violence in order to put down the nationalist resistance. At that time, Peter Koinange, the son of a prominent family returned from the U.S.A in 1939 and led the nationalist movement. He established the Kenya Teacher's Training College with other teachers. Peter Koinange and some other nationalist played a major role in building independent movements and nationalist ideas (Olney.1973: 102).

In Algeria, the beginning of political awareness, as Kateb writes in *Nedjma*, began in the 1920s by people who had gained access to French education, known as 'the educated few'. Algerian nationalism had its origins in the period following the First World War. The protest came primarily from the Algerian working class in France. The Algerian immigrants started to show their anger against the everyday racism expressed by French. The nationalist movement included a small and influential group of Algerians who earned their living in the industrialized French sectors. Among the group, we can find those who had served in the French army during the First World War. The Algerian nationalists were prepared to consider permanent union with France, provided the rights of Frenchmen were extended to intellectual elements of Algeria. Such was the case with the organized "Young Algerians" led by Emir Khaled, the grandson of Abdelkader, the leader of tribal insurrections, captured and exiled in 1847 (Harbi. 1998:108).

As late as the 1930s, all Algerian nationalist groups were prepared to accept gradual reformist tactics, eschewing illegal actions. Their main concerns were to ban the unequal taxation, broaden the franchise, build more schools and protect the Algerians' property. The nationalists sought for equality and asked the government for equal labour rights and the abolition of travel restrictions to France (Harbi.1980:11). However, the first nationalists to call for independence were the North African Star (Etoile Nord Africaine) members. Their claims were more proletarian and radical in orientation since they preached nationalism without nuance. The movement took an organizational form among the Algerian workers in France in 1926 under the leadership of Messali

Hadj and was widely supported in Algeria as well. The Communist Party militants, who advocated the freedom of the press and schooling in Arabic, also joined the movement. In 1937, Messali turned from the Communist ideology to nationalist outlook and returned to Algeria to organize the urban and peasant masses. In the same year, he founded the Algerian People's Party (PPA). (Ibid. P.13). Like Kenya, Algeria suffered from similar political restrictions and oppression because the French colonial authorities refused any reform issued by integrationist or nationalist organisations. They dissolved the North African Star, in 1929 and arrested its leader, Messali Hadj. But his arrest did not stop the continuation of the nationalist movement. The PPA gained widespread support until it was banned in 1939 (Ibid.PP.19-21).

In *Nedjma*, Kateb refers also to 1942; the year corresponds to the date of Nedjma's marriage with Kamal (P.67). With regard to Algerian nationalism, the date matched the alliance of some assimilationist Muslim leaders and Ferhat Abbas, to the French side. The nationalists were ready to join the Allies, during the Second World War, in freeing their homelands, but demanded the right to call a conference of Muslim representatives to develop political, economic and social institutions for the Algerians "within an essentially French framework". In the same year, Ferhat Abbas shifted from his assimilation tendency and full integration with France to self-determination. He drafted the Algerian Manifesto in 1943 to be presented to the Allies and to the French authorities. The political organization called for an agrarian reform, the recognition of Arabic as an official language on equal terms with French, the recognition of civil liberties and the liberation of political prisoners of all parties. As a response, the French administration instituted a reform in 1944, granting full citizenship to 60,000 people, among whom, military officers, decorated veterans, university graduates, government officials and holders of the Légion d'Honneur (Harbi.1980.PP. 26- 27).

3 – Violence, Resettlements and the Emergence of Guerrilla Warfare

The large number of Kenyan former service men, who had fought for Britain, came back from Asia. They brought with them new political thoughts, the knowledge of nationalism as well as the skills of the guerrilla warfare. Ngugi alludes, in *A Grain of Wheat*, to the thousands of Kenyan returning detainees and fighters from military fronts who found that their lands were forfeited and redistributed to the loyalists (P.83). Deprived of their holdings, the former soldiers directed their efforts to the recovery of their land by forming associations such as the Kikuyu Provincial Association, the Kikuyu Land Board Association or Kenya Central Association. Whatever differences the Kikuyu had, the land issue was the one on which all of them agreed. The organized groups worked, prepared petitions, undertook court cases and lobbied not only on the government but several commissions from Britain inquiring the land issue. Their efforts were, however, fruitless (Cf. Maloba. P.40).

In addition to the discontented former service men, the growing poverty led to the rise of new workers' unions who struggled for political rights in rural areas. The squatters were increasingly frustrated as the white settlers occupied most of their fertile land. Thus, the growing poverty, the political and economic exclusion led to anger and despair on the part of the poor who joined the urban proletariat in Nairobi and the radical wing of the unions there. The marginalized groups saw violence as the only path to get their independence. They first organized general strikes in Mombassa in 1947 and in Nairobi in 1950, as Ngugi points out in *A Grain of Wheat* (P.180). The demonstrations were followed by a ruthless repression and the recourse to counter-violence was inevitable. Apart from the economic problems, one of the main formative elements in shaping the rebellion was that Kenyans were not allowed to organize politically. Because of the increasing agitation, all forms of protest were outlawed in Kenya. The KCA was suppressed and part of it went underground. The colonial government suppressed the KCA newspaper, and harassed the

association by restricting greatly its activities and raiding its offices in search for evidence of subversive activity by the police. In 1952, the KCA was banned and its leaders jailed (Cf.Davidson.1978: 263). The lack of any peaceful solution made it certain to Kenyans that an armed force maintained the colonial rule. Consequently, they were convinced that the only way to dislodge it was through armed resistance. Hence, in the 1950s, Kenya lived in a climate of tension, and many ingredients favored the formation of the revolution and the outburst of what was known as the Mau Mau rebellion.(Ibid. 264). The Mau Mau revolt, as Ngugi writes in *A Grain of Wheat*, began in the 1950s and found its roots in the Gikuyu tribes, which were mostly hurt by land confiscation. It was an uprising of peasants against colonial domination, its policies, and its agents. The peasants began to “take the oath”, leaving their homes and families in the direction of the forest, raiding and killing British settlers, mutilating their cattle and burning their farms. The acts were intended to instill fear into the settlers so that they would leave the country, and the Gikuyu regain their lost lands. The Mau Mau survived as a secret society and became a fighting force, as its members were able to get supplies and help from many sources (Ibid.85). From the beginning of the revolt, the British refused to see any legitimate reasons for the uprising. The Mau Mau fighters were called bloodthirsty savages and all means were used to demean the movement. The settlers and the colonial government, for instance, portrayed the rebellion as: “The welling up of the old unreconstructed Africa, which had not yet received sufficient colonial enlightenment and discipline, the insurgents proved that colonialism still had a job to do” (Slaughter. 1991: 3).

Algeria experienced almost the same turmoil during the same period. The main historical event which forms the central theme on which Kateb’ *Nedjma* is based is undoubtedly the uprising of May 1945, which occurred nearly a decade before the beginning of the Algerian Revolution. The author refers to the event repeatedly and gives a vivid picture of the rebellion. Kateb moves the narrative back in time and presents the events of 8 May 1945, making *Nedjma* a highly political novel that goes well beyond a mere evocation of adolescent

experiences. Politics is much part of the texture of Mustapha's adolescence world. To explain fully the social and political unrest, which prevailed in Algerian society from 1944 to 1945, Redouane Aïnat Tabet provides an analysis of the different crises experienced by the different layers of the Algerian society. In his book entitled *Le 8 Mai 45 en Algérie* (1987), the author explains that the situation was fuelled in part by a poor wheat harvest, shortages of manufactured goods and severe unemployment rate. At the political level, the Algerian nationalist claims, even for civic and political equality, were suppressed and repressed. The crisis penetrated every aspect of life and the signs of an approaching storm were all too apparent. (A.Tabet.1987: 29). On May 8th, a large demonstration was organized by the Algerian nationalists. The demonstration was allowed to be held in Sétif in the same day, but on condition that the nationalist flags or placards were not displayed, but the demonstrators ignored the warning. Therefore, gunfire resulted in the death of a policeman and many demonstrators, and a full-scale riot followed. The army and the police responded immediately by conducting a prolonged and systematic raking over the suspected centers of dissidence using military airplanes, to repress the civil populations. During the week following the uprising, the French authorities continued the use of violence to squash the revolt and stop the emergent independence movement by issuing a series of repressive and harsh measures. The party of Les Amis du Manifeste et de la Liberté (AML) was outlawed and 5,460 Algerians were arrested, including Ferhat Abbas, who deplored the use of violence from the two sides (Ibid. 85 - 86). In the aftermath of the Sétif unrest, Algerian nationalism witnessed many quarrels for leadership and efforts to unite all the political trends came to failure. Ferhat Abbas who gained the support of Messali Hadj in forming the Friends of the Manifesto and Liberty (AML) failed and the alliance of the Muslim leaders did not last long. In 1946, F. Abbas, who in 1934, had doubted the existence of Algerian fatherland wrote: "The Algerian personality, the Algerian fatherland which I couldn't find in 1934, I find them today". He founded the Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto, (UDMA), abandoning the alliance with the (AML) and called for a free secular and republican

Algeria, federated with France (Cf.S.N.Boudiaf and M. L. Maougal.2004: 152). At the same period, Messali Hadj formed the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties, MTLD, committed to unequivocal independence and opposed Abbas's proposal of federation. The supporters of the party attempted to promote Messali's concept of independence contrarily to the advocates of moderate autonomy. The nationalist efforts to combine their forces were a failure (Harbi. 1980: 31). The disunion of the Algerian nationalists is represented in Kateb's *Nedjma* by the separation of the four characters at the end of the novel. Mildred Mortimer and Jean Dejeux have drawn a parallel between the leaders' disagreement and the characters' dispersion (Cf. Mortimer.1990: 87).

Kateb's *Nedjma*, which ends before the beginning of the Algerian Liberation War but its author gives prominence to collective action rather than to leadership and individual heroism: « plus de discours, plus de leader, de vieux fusils hoquetaient » (P.52). The fact can be linked to that period when the Algerian nationalists rejected any mere reform of existing structures and institutions because they were convinced that these reforms could yield national unity and change. This conviction gave birth to a radical organization and to relentless struggle for independence. Members of the PPA, an outlawed party that continued to operate clandestinely, formed the radical group who created secret political cells throughout Algeria and paramilitary groups in Kabylia and the Constantine region. The emergence of the advocates of revolution began their work as a secret organization (OS) in 1947. They were obliged to do military operations since political protest through legal channels was banned. The situation was fuelled by the rigged elections of 1948 for an Algerian Assembly that made it clear that the peaceful solution to Algerians' problems was not possible. (Harbi.1998: 69).

Although the Algerian war started officially in 1954, the nationalists' attacks had started earlier. In 1950, the French police discovered that the robbery of the Oran post office had been the act of

the Secret Organization (OS), led by Ben Bella. The group, whose opposition to the French colonization became increasingly radical, began to prepare the revolution. It was known as the Revolutionary Committee of Unity and Action (CRUA). Nine nationalist leaders, known as the 'Historical Chiefs', namely; Hocine Ait Ahmed, Mohamed Boudiaf, Belkacem Krim, Rabah Bitat, Larbi Ben Mhidi, Mourad Didouche, Moustapha Ben Boulaid, Mohamed Khider and Ahmed Ben Bella, led the organisation. In 1954, the Secret Organisation became the National Liberation Front (FLN) and assumed the responsibility for political direction of the Revolution that rested on the National Liberation Army (ALN), a military branch, which conducted the war for independence (Ibid.71,72).

No matter what the similarities between the Mau Mau revolt and the Algerian revolution, the former cannot be put on a pair with the latter for some reasons. The Algerian Liberation War was one of the bitterest and longest anti-colonial wars ever waged in Africa. It was characterised by the stubbornness of the French to retain the country and the determination of the Algerian people to achieve liberty. On the contrary, in Kenya, the war started in 1952 and finished in 1957. It did not last a long time and did not involve as much participation as in Algeria. The fiercest opposition to the colonial authorities in Kenya was limited to the Kikuyu tribes. Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore maintain:

In East Africa, discontent with European rule still assumed mainly tribal form. The history of nationalism in Kenya, for example, is largely the history of Kikuyu dissatisfaction and resistance. The number of the Kikuyu was increasing rapidly. Their natural path of expansion out of the forests around Mount Kenya was blocked by the European settlers. Many became squatters and farm laborers on European estates, while others left the land and joined the growing number of the unemployed in Nairobi (Oliver, Atmore. 1967:169).

We do not mean, however, that the two wars for independence are totally different. The struggle in Kenya bears some resemblance to that of Algeria in many aspects. First of all, freedom fighters in both Kenya and Algeria used nearly the same tactics and had the same objectives. Both adopted guerrilla warfare based on surprise attacks, sabotage, derailment of trains and many other acts of violence. The guerrillas were known for their use of unorthodox military tactics to fight on small scale, using sudden raids and limited actions against military forces. Within a short time, the acts quickly spread to urban centers where the fighters used sudden attacks against the French and British interests. In both countries, the two colonial governments reacted ruthlessly to quieting the insurgencies. As a response to the growing protest and the rising violence, the colonial forces destroyed the main urban cells of the Algerian Liberation Army (ALN). It was followed by intensive bombardments, massacres of the civil populations and the burning of villages. In 1955, the majority in the French National Assembly voted a State of Emergency in Algeria. The French State was compelled to mobilize 400,000 troops to repress the mounting violence. The French colonial government's reaction was characterized by massive dispossession, imprisonment, torture and execution of hostages (Harbi.126).

In its attempts to crush the insurgency and to separate the fighters from their network supplies, the French army was given power to establish 'a regrouping policy' or 'settlement camps' that can be paralleled to 'villagisation' in Kenya. Villages were surrounded by barbed wires under searchlights where the villagers were compelled to respect the curfew. Anyone suspected of collaboration with the rebels was directly sent to detention camp, which spread over the two countries. In addition, the use of torture and brutal interrogation methods to get information from detainees were common coin in Kenya and in Algeria. A description of some of the practices used is provided in *Nedjma* through Lakhdar's arrest. (PP.55-56). In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi describes the torture of Kihika by the Special Branch to get some information about the other Mau Mau fighters (P.17). In Algeria, the

anxieties engendered by the French defeat in Indochina led the French soldiers to wage a campaign of repression against the FLN and its collaborators. The French soldiers had suffered a deep humiliation at Dien Bien Phu and were determined to get revenge on the "Viets" in Algeria. They established a system of repression, which included concentration camps like the famous "Ferme Ameziane" in Constantine where over a hundred thousand of Algerians, died and disappeared. In the same farm, the use of torture enabled the French soldiers to gather information about the plans of the war. But, the cruel oppression and repression stiffened the Algerian resistance and reinforced the yearning for independence and increased popular support of the FLN (Vidal-Naquet.1982: 119-120).

Unlike the Mau Mau, the F.L.N succeeded in building and maintaining mass participation. By 1956, even the most formerly assimilationist leader Ferhat Abbas adhered to the F.L.N. The organization was led by intellectuals and educated men such as Abane Ramdane, Khider Mohamed or Ben Mhidi Larbi. For the Algerian nationalist leaders, the element of spontaneity was reduced and a great deal of effort was directed to organization and education, i.e. the politicization of the peasants. Though censorship was set in place on a large scale, the nationalists were able to convey their encouragement through clandestine newspapers such as *El Moudjahid* or the magazine entitled *El Djeich*. The FLN succeeded to maintain its power and to convince people through an information network glorifying the struggle of the nationalists and inciting them to continue their mission to the end. In one of the articles, we can read: « Le fellah est devenu lieutenant ou capitaine, il a l'intellectuel sous ses ordres, il y a un nouveau visage dans l'unité nationale qui se forge dans la lutte» (Mandouze. 1962: 92). The F.L.N organisation proved its efficiency in 1956 when the representatives of various insurgent groups met at the Soummam Congress to form the national council of the Algerian Revolution (CNRA). The Soummam meeting organized the revolution and created military ranks and six administrative districts. The ALN intended to co-ordinate the revolutionary activities of numerous small-armed groups

that developed during the previous two years. The military department of the executive coordinating committee of the CNRA controlled the ALN. In 1958, a provisional government was established in Tunis. The guerrilla warfare at home was followed by diplomatic activity abroad, mainly in the United Nations Organization. After the Evian negotiations, Algeria gained its independence in 1962. (Cf. Harbi.1998: 173, 175).

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of the context in which Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* and Kateb's *Nedjma* were written leads us to reach some conclusions. First, by putting emphasis on the main historical events referred to in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Nedjma*, we have noticed that both writers reflect on the British and French violence by giving a great importance to the past and trace the nationalist movements for independence from their very beginnings to the outburst of the revolts. Second, we have established the way in which the Kenyan and the Algerian peoples had lost their lands, and how they had been subjected to compulsory work for the British and French settlers against low wages. We have shown also how the situation of the 'natives', in both countries, worsened during and after the First World War because of the various restrictive measures and taxes imposed by the dominant colonial powers. In the two countries, the unbearable conditions had been the formative circumstances that gave birth to protests; the emergence of nationalist's ideas, and the outburst of rebellions. The analysis of the two narratives reveals that the colonial violence led to the rise of the Algerian and the Kenyan political awareness, which went through comparable steps; assimilation, rise of nationalism, and war for liberation. The Algerian and the Kenyan nationalists followed nearly the same path, hoped for similar victories and had to pay, to a certain extent, the same price for independence.

The relationship between Kateb's *Nedjma* and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* to the colonial violence can be explained by the argument that one of the social functions of the intellectual (writer) is to "set the

masses in motion”; the idea that a writer plays an important role in his society as “the voice of vision” in his own time as his writing extend not only into social realms, but also into the domain of engagement. The two novels were written at crucial moments and the dilemmas of their historical meanings are the centre around which narratives revolve. The former drew his novel’s contents from the Mau Mau Rebellion, 1952-1956, the latter from 8 May Uprising which led to the Algerian War for independence. The two writers’ works are bound up by representing the two revolts as pivotal struggles in glorifying the memories of its participants as they want to be actors who assume important roles in the tragedy their countries experienced. For them, the conditions and heroic values of earlier age cannot only be operative, but also serve as “a guide” for future actions in the real life. To conclude then, we may say that the two selected novel, to borrow the French historian, Benjamin Stora’s words, in their ways of arresting time and encompassing space, they can be regarded not only irreplaceable tools of contextualization, but also as sources creating meaning out of the opacity of the colonial war and its afterlives. It is difficult for historians do their work without having read them.

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