



Pre-Independence Kenya in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Trilogy: A Postcolonial Reading of *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between* and *A Grain of Wheat*

Alphonse Dorien Makosso

Enseignant chercheur, Maître de conférences, à l'École Normale Supérieure, (Université Marien Ngouabi), Brazzaville, (Republic of Congo)

ABSTRACT

Published Online: June 07, 2024

Colonization is one of the most topical issues in the African Literature of the sixties. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o like many other African intellectuals, restores and exalts the African past not only for the enlightenment of the Africans' detractors (the settlers) but, above all, for the education of his own people (the Kikuyu). His trilogy made of *Weep not*, *Child*, *The River Between* and *A Grain of Wheat* is surely appropriate space in which pre-independence Kenya are depicted. As a hierophant of his times, Ngũgĩ shows, how the Kikuyu community, taken as the microcosm of any other people under a colonial power, collapsed with its exposure to the West and cracked with the pressure of an alien force embodied by the British settlers. They lost the precious values that held them together: family life, human dignity but above all, their ancestral land. Ngũgĩ, as a writer in a new nation, appeals this dehumanized people to an awareness in order to understand the real meaning of 'uhuru' (independence) and the sacrifices made to achieve it. Yet, he suggests them some necessary strategies for reaching this goal.

KEYWORDS:

Land alienation , state of emergency , root of contention , struggle for freedom, trilogy

INTRODUCTION

African literature of the sixties is said to be committed in so far as it aims at denouncing and sorting out all the calamities that Africa has inherited from its encounter with the western world. The main idea backing up this conception is that "*Modern African Literature has come a long way to imprint its relevance on the literary history of Africa- as a literary mode of expressing the worldview of Africans. It has developed out of historical experiences and is always characterized by realism and factualness.*" (A. D. Makosso, 2022:119). This social centrality and best, the connectiveness to the African past is, according to F. Abiola, Irele (2009:2) what defines the specific trajectory of the African novel: It is now customary to place the origins of the African novel firmly within the colonial experience – to consider its emergence as a direct consequence of the encounter with Europe, with the historical implications and the social and cultural factors that have conditioned the emergence and

evolution of the novel as a literary genre on the continent. Hence, one of the main qualities one expects from a given work of art is its fidelity to the aspirations, history and culture of the community the writer belongs to. In this connection, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, an East African writer, is a good illustration of an artist or intellectual who, aware of his identity as a member of a community (the Kikuyu tribe), tries to recreate and exalt the Kenyan past for the enlightenment of his tribesmen. In fact, Ngũgĩ dramatizes what the Kenyans have experienced during the Mau-Mau rebellion for the sake of showing them "*where the rain began beat them(...) and where it dried them*". (Chinua Achebe: 1973:8). Analysing Ngũgĩ's writings, Simona Klimkova (2019:110) accordingly asserts their historical and social centrality:

Ngũgĩ's fiction is deeply rooted in the historical experience of Kenya. To a certain extent, his novels document the historical, political, social and economic events in his homeland almost chronologically, covering the period of colonial domination, the struggle for independence, post-independence disillusionment as well as the neo-colonial phase of corruption, economic dependency and globalization. Klimkova's position finds credence in professor James Ogude's pronouncement in a critical study he dedicated to this Kenyan most prolific intellectual activist, novelist,

Corresponding Author: Alphonse Dorien Makosso

**Cite this Article: Alphonse Dorien Makosso (2024). Pre-Independence Kenya in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Trilogy: A Postcolonial Reading of Weep Not, Child, The River Between and A Grain of Wheat. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies, 4(6), 484-492*

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playwright, and essayist (1999:2):

Ngũgĩ’s fiction, therefore, does not aim to be historically mimetic. Ngũgĩ posits narrative here as an agent of history because it provides the space for challenging our notions of national identities, uses of history, and ways in which they are deployed in power contestation in modern Kenya and Africa in general.

As a matter of fact, his trilogy made of *Weep not, Child, The River Between* and *A Grain of Wheat* used as templates for this current study are nothing but the fruit of Ngũgĩ’s own experience gained in the land of Kenya before its ‘Uhuru’¹ in 1960. These three novels are not the results of a pure contingency devoid of all reality but they are, according to Lewis Nkosi, “a prolonged meditation on the theme of national struggle, the courage, the sacrifices and the loyalties it requires” (Lewis Nkosi: 1983, p. 188). The Africanity of Ngũgĩ’s novels lies in the fact that narrator identifies himself with the plot and his voice speaks for the oppressed, relating without exaggeration their fear and aspirations as Ngũgĩ confesses himself in a letter he wrote in November 1966 at Leeds:

Although set in contemporary Kenya, all the characters in my books are fictitious. Names like that of Jomo Kenyatta, Waiyaki are unavoidably mentioned as parts of the history and institutions of our country. But the situations and the problems are real-sometimes too painfully real for the peasants who fought the British yet who see all they fought for being put aside. (*A Grain of Wheat*, Epigraph.)

By the way, how Ngũgĩ depicts pre-independence Kenya in the three novels just mentioned is the main concern of this paper. It therefore aims to read Ngũgĩ’s pre-independence novels against the backdrop of historical and social realities that informed their origin.

This study is conducted through the prism of Postcolonial theory as a reading technique the novels under consideration since it helps investigate the experience of societies, including Kenya, which experienced conquest and domination by British imperial power. Theorizing on post-colonialism as a literary approach to African fiction, C. Bressler (2003:199) argues:

Post-colonialism is an approach to literary analysis that particularly concerns itself with Literature written in formally colonized countries. It usually excludes Literature that represents either British or American viewpoints and concentrates on writings from colonized or formally colonized countries in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South America and other places that were once dominated.

A position in tandem with O. J. Agofure who even furthers that contemporary African Literature can be approached from the context of postcolonial studies because of Africa’s huge colonial past. For he maintains fiction should be treated as a

social and historical testimony or documentation, as he better puts it:

Post-colonial theory always intermingles the past with the present and how it is directed towards the active transformations of the present out of the clutches of the past. What needs to be kept in mind is that trying to grasp the contemporary and social impact of colonial history entails tracing the profound transformations and dissemination colonialism has undergone in a supposedly decolonized world. (2016:240)

Since “*Postcolonial critics tend to read and Postcolonial novels in a short of documentary fashion, mainly for, which has been necessarily located in the historical, political and social context the representation of the peripheral experience of colonized societies*” (Simona Klimkova, 2019:8), let us consider the two angles in which Ngũgĩ brings about the unbelievable atmosphere prevailing in the land of Kenya at that period.

1- Aspects of the Kikuyu Exposure to the West

The expression ‘*exposure to the west*’ is generally referred as to point out what Africa and its inhabitants inherited from colonisation and all its drawbacks. In fact, Ngũgĩ deals with colonisation as the most harmful and destructive system that has killed Africa in the sense that the intrusion of the white man first as a missionary and later as an administrator, has not only engendered violence and exploitation in all their forms, but above all, it has distorted the African cultural values. Indeed, in his first novel, Ngũgĩ feels pity for his people, especially the peasants who have been deprived of their ancestral land as a result of their encounter with the British empire and have, later devoted their lives to a common interest so as to recover the alienated land.

Furthermore, in *Weep not, Child*, Ngũgĩ dramatizes the Mau-Mau emergency as it affects a once proud and stable family, Ngotho’s household pictured as the microcosm of the Kenyan society which cracks with the encroachment of an outside force of disintegration.

Prior to considering some aspects of cultural distortion and family disintegration, it would be worth looking at some of the major aspects of land alienation and colonial exploitation in pre-independence Kenya.

I.1- Colonial Exploitation in Kenya: The Land Issue

A peruse of Ngũgĩ’s novels reveals that land is the root of contention between the British settlers who consider it just as a source of their material welfare, and the natives to whom “*land is not only held to be of much greater importance than money or cattle; it clearly has spiritual associations*” (Palmer Eustace: 1973, p.1.) In fact, among the Kikuyu, two dimensions are to be associated with the notion of land. First of all, land is considered as the “mother of the tribe” in the

¹ ‘Uhuru’ Kikuyu term for independence.

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sense that not only does it provide people with their crops, but it helps them provide their cattle breeding with pasture. In his anthropological work devoted to Kenya, *Facing Mount Kenya*, Jomo Kenyatta (1960: 22) stresses the importance the Kikuyu attach to land in the following terms:

In studying the Kikuyu tribal organization it is necessary to take into consideration land tenure as the most important factor in the social, political, religious, and economic life of the tribe. As agriculturists, the Kikuyu people depend entirely on the land. It supplies them with the material needs of life, through which spiritual and mental contentment is achieved. Indeed, land is of a paramount importance so that every Kikuyu must own a piece of it to farm in order to provide his family with material resources. Consequently, it is land that determines the individual's social status as Jomo Kenyatta keeps on writing:

The land being the foundation rock on which the Kikuyu tribal economic stands, and the only effective mode of production that the people have, the result is that there is a great desire in the heart of every Kikuyu 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. A man or a woman who cannot say to his friends, 'come and eat, drink and enjoy the fruit of my labour', is not considered as a worthy member of the tribe. A group family with land to cultivate is considered as a self-supporting economic unit. (p. 54)

As stated earlier, Ngũgĩ deals with this aspect in *Weep not, Child* with a special regard to Nganga, the village carpenter who is considered rich simply because he is a land owner as the narrator puts it:

Nganga was rich. He had land. Any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth, was better off than the man with money. Nganga could afford three wives, although he was younger than Ngotho. He had not been to the first or indeed the second war. (p. 22)

However, the Kikuyu consider land as something more than a commercial asset for not only does it help people get means of livelihood but also it has a metaphysical dimension. In this respect, it is a spiritual link which brings into contact the living and the dead, as Jomo Kenyatta (p. 22) writes:

Communication with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through the contact with soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried. The Kikuyu consider the earth as the 'mother' of the tribe for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about nine moons. But it is the soil that feeds the child through lifetime; and again, after death it is the soil that nurses the spirits of the dead for, eternity. Thus, the earth is the most sacred thing above all dwell in or on it. Among the Kikuyu the soil is especially honoured, and an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth (koirugo).

In the light of this assertion, one realizes why Ngotho is very

attached to his ancestral land just like a baby grab at its mother's bosom. In fact, it is in order to perpetuate communication with his ancestors that he keeps on working for his settler's profit. Let it be reminded in passing that Ngotho like his tribesmen, is a *Muhoi* whose low wages cannot help even to meet all the needs of his family. A 'Muhoi' is the Kikuyu term for a dispossessed farmer forced by the British Imperial Land act to be a squatter on the estate of a well-do-land owner.

Certainly, all this superstition about the ancestral land can openly be understood through the Kikuyu myth of creation which claims that land is a divine gift, a part of covenant between 'Ngai' or 'Murungu', the creator and provider of everything, and the Kikuyu through *Gikuyu* and *Mumbi*, their legendary ancestors, (mythical forbears of Kenya; considered as the East African counterparts of the biblical Adam and Eve). In *Weep not, Child*, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o alludes the Kikuyu myth of creation through Ngotho's inspired story that he tells to his children in his 'Thingira' ie Kikuyu local term for the chief of the family's hut where he usually holds important meetings:

Now you know that at the beginning of things there was only one man (Gikuyu) and one woman (Mumbi). [...] And the creator who is also called Murungu took Gikuyu and Mumbi from his holy mountain. He took them to the country of ridges near Siriana and there stood them on a big ridge before he finally took them to the Murukuwe Wa Gathanga about which you have heard so much. But he had shown them all the land-yes, children, 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 to rule and till in serenity scarifying only to me, your God, under my sacred tree...." (*Weep not, Child*, pp. 27-28)

Yet, the myth informs that *Gikuyu* and *Mumbi* did not buy the land but it was given to them and their posterity from the hands of *Murungu*, the creator himself. This implies that the land does not just become the inalienable right of Kenyans but there is a kind of religious bond between Kenyans and their land. Any attempt to dispossess Kenyans of such a land means an attempt to take away their lives from them. It clearly appears that a man without land is rootless since he has no contact with the spirits of his ancestors. This may be accounts for Ngotho's serious concern after Kenyatta loses the Kapenguria case for, from then, his hope of getting his ancestors' land back is dashed as the narrator reveals:

And yet he felt the loss of the land even more keenly than Boro, for to him it was a spiritual loss. When a man was severed from the land of his ancestors where would he sacrifice to the Creator? How could he come into contact with the founder of the tribe, Gikuyu and Mumbi? (*Weep not, Child*, p. 91)

If Ngotho cannot get his ancestors' land back and be next to the graves of his ancestors, he has also been disconnected

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from his creator. Hence, his trepidation about the “*ancient rites, the spirits of the ancestors.*” (*Weep not, Child*, p.74)

In *The River Between*, the random and wholesale alienation of Kikuyu land rendering them landless, is articulated by an elder at a Kiama meeting when he mentions, “*our land is gone slowly, taken from us, while we and our young men sit like women, watching*” (*The River Between*, p. 28).

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngũgĩ alludes to the alienation of the Kikuyu tribal land, epitomizing the natives’ lingering desire to see the whites leaving Kenya to its rightful owners. This accounts for Kihika’s bitterness and anger at the party meeting held at Rung’ei Market when he addresses the masses:

We went to their church. Mubia in a white robe opened the bible. He said: “let us pray”. We knelt down. Mubia said: “let us shut our eyes”. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. We opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in heaven where no mouth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth. (*A Grain of Wheat*, p. 22)

One easily infers that Wambuku’s love with Kihika fails to be consummated because Kihika’s dream is the reoccupation of the land grabbed from black people. Wambuku gets so frustrated that she

Saw it as a demon pulling him away from her. If only she understood it, if only she came face to face with the demon, then she would know how to fight with her woman’s strength. Had the demon not assumed the rival woman to her? (*A Grain of Wheat*, p. 85)

In effect, Wambuku’s interpretation that Kihika is demon possessed shows the agony of seeing black people’s land taken away from them and the intensity of the liberation myth in Kihika. Hence, when Wambuku accuses him of being ever thinking about politics, the following conversation ensues:

“It is not politics, Wambuku,” he said, “it is life. Is he a man who lets another take away his land and freedom? Has a slave life?” ...

“You have got land, Kihika. Mbungua’s land is also yours. In any case, the land in the Rift Valley did not belong to our tribe?”

“My father’s ten acres? That is not the important thing. Kenya belongs to the black people. Can’t you see that Cain was wrong? I am my brother’s keeper. In any case, whether the land was stolen from Gikuyu, Urabi or Nandi, it does not belong to the white man. And even if it did, shouldn’t everybody have a share in the common shamba, our Kenya? Take your white man, anywhere, in the settled area. He 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 shillings a month?” (*A Grain of Wheat*, p.85)

Kihika’s argument finds credence in E.W. Brown’s (online) precise observation:

Linked with the loss of land was the loss of economic independence. When a man could not farm his own land, he would have to serve someone else; either farming their land or working in the British settlements. This amounted to little more than serfdom, for there was a clear double standard. The Kenyan natives would only get one fifth the compensation the settlers got (on the average) for the same amount of work. Under such hardships, it was only a matter of time before the natives revolted.

All things considered, land means life to the point that its confiscation by the British settlers has prejudiced the Kikuyu’s tribal life. As a result, the community’s welfare and the once stable society collapsed. Doing so, the British put, according to Chinua Achebe’s expression, “a knife on the things that held them (the kikuyu) together and they have fallen apart” (Chinua Achebe: 1954, p.152). When things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky. In this connection, Jomo Kenyatta (op. cit., p. 317) dramatizes the loss of the kikuyu land as follows:

When the European comes to the kikuyu country and robs the people from their land, he is taking not only their livelihood, but the material symbols that hold the family and the tribe together. In so doing, he gives one blow which cuts away the foundation from the whole kikuyu life, social, moral, and economy.

Let us now have a glance at how African cultural values have been negatively affected by colonialism.

I.2- Colonial Violence and Family Disintegration

The intrusion of the white man along with a new administration has undoubtedly been a source of sufferings for the kikuyu in the sense that the colonizers made them endure many acts of extreme brutality. As a witness, Ngũgĩ provides us with a set of illustrations in *Weep not, Child*, where he pictures Ngotho’s household as the first target of violent persecutions and arbitrary arrests. Ngotho’s downfall starts with the failure of the workers’ meeting for better living conditions. In fact, initially called in order to claim for livable wages, the strike becomes a nationalist demand for freedom and a restoration of peasants’ land; and then turns into a duel between Ngotho and Jacobo, the representative of business and the colonial system:

To Ngotho, Jacobo crystallized into a concrete betrayal of the people ... the physical personification of the long years of waiting, suffering. Jacobo was a traitor. Ngotho rose. He was now near Jacobo ... then all of a sudden, as if led by Ngotho, the crowd rose and rushed towards Jacobo. (*Weep not, Child*, p. 66)

This is the first rent in the feeling of oneness that mostly distinguished Ngotho’s homestead from many other polygamous families. From then on, Ngotho along with some members of his family, is exposed to a certain number of humiliations ranging from jail, torture and starvation to

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violent death. As a matter of fact, Ngotho’s first wife Njeri and his son Kori, are arrested and kept in custody at home by guards under the pretext that they had broken the curfew. Ngotho is the tortured by a home guard just after the failure of the worker’s strike as evidenced in the following passage: A police man struck at his face with a baton and drew blood. But he did not stop. He was not really aware of blood. He felt it only as something warm. Frantically he ran until he was in the clear, en stumbled forward and felt losing consciousness. That was where people from the village found him, the hero of the hour, and took him home. (*Weep not, Child*, p.117)

This terrible scene takes place under the helpless regard of Ngotho who has been denuded off his manhood since he no longer satisfies his household’s needs. Ngũgĩ evidences Ngotho’s impotence in the following terms:

His voice was unsteady, he felt like crying but the humiliation and pain he felt had a stunning effect. Was he a man any longer, he who had watched his wife and son taken away? [...] What was a man’s life if he could be reduced to this? And Njoroge thought: Could this be the father he had secretly adored and feared? The world had turned upside down. (*Weep not, Child*, p. 91)

This passage shows that Ngotho who is the embodiment of all the Africans, is diminished if simply castrated. He is finally treated as a coward by his own son Boro. He looks like “a defeated man, a man who cursed himself for being a man with a lost manhood” (*Weep not, Child*, p.91). Ngotho’s castration is dramatized by Palmer Eustace (1972:94) in such a pathetic way that even the reader’s sympathy is irresistibly drawn by Ngotho’s powerlessness:

Ngotho is further humiliated by the arrest of his wife and his son Kori when he proves completely incapable of saving them. Finally, Ngotho is castrated and literally loses his manhood. The castration is a symbolic culmination of the gradual loss of his manly self-assurance and dignity.

From the forgoing, one figures out that the Kikuyu represented in *Weep not, Child* by Ngotho’s family, lived in climate of permanent fear. Not only were they forbidden to walk at night, but they could not also be in group. They did not have a shelter either. For British settlers have also victimized many of the Kikuyu tribesmen. In this connection, the execution of six men of Kipanga including the barber of the village and Nganga the carpenter is worth mentioning as further illustration of the colonial violence and cruelty. Furthermore, Ngũgĩ evidences that many of the black people are taken to the forest and shot dead in cold blood by homeguards:

Fires were put out early for that any light would attract the attention of those who might be lurking outside. It was said that some European soldiers were catching people at night; having taken to the forest would release them and ask them to find their way back home. But when their backs were turned, they would be shot dead in cold blood. The next day this should be announced as a victory over Mau-Mau. (*Weep*

not, Child, p.95)

In the same wave, in his third novel, epitomizes the atrocities perpetuated by the colonial administration on the Kikuyu. He evidences how the natives experienced terrible tortures and starvation in detention camps such as Mahani and Rira detention camps these cells, detainees were ill-treated as dramatized through Mugo’s testimony:

Nothing, except I saw men crawl on the ground, you know, like cripples because their hands and feet were chained with iron. All the time they spoke in subdued voice like children. Once bottlenecks were hammered into people’s backsides, and that last was at Rira. (*A Grain of Wheat*, p.184)

This pathetic scene leads us to assert that in the days preceding the Uhuru celebrations, the living conditions of the Kikuyu got worst in so far as death practically became a natural and normal situation among the black people.

A Grain of Wheat also dramatizes hardships and cruelties since the ruthless British administrators just guided by economic motives, ill-treat the natives who they consider as nonentities. These natives suffer from racial discrimination in their search for jobs. Indeed, the author helps us figure out what humiliations and hardships the kikuyu undergo in order earn their living pittance through the character of Gitogo, pictured as an unlucky man committed to menial jobs as Ngũgĩ himself writes.

Gitogo worked in eating houses, meat shops, often lifting and carrying heavy loads avoided by others. (*A Grain of Wheat*, p. 4)

This portrait of Gitogo clearly epitomizes a crucial and this noxious atmosphere prevailing in pre-independence Kenya as depicted in Ngũgĩ’s novels, especially in the first published. Indeed, resentment against the British presence is now at menacing pitch and noticeable through Kiarie’s appeal to strike:

All the black people will stop working, all the business in the country will come to a stand till because all the country depends on our sweat. The government and the settlers will call us back. But we shall say no, no. Give us money first. Our sweat and blood are not so cheap. We too, are human beings. We cannot live with fifteen shillings a month. (*Weep not, Child*, 58)

Assuredly, these poor living conditions the kikuyu are victims of in their own country result from a certain social scaling made up of Whites on the top; the Indians in the middle and the Blacks at the bottom. In accordance with this social hierarchy, all the very important jobs are reserved for the Whites and the Indians while the odd ones are given to black people looked down as animals.

With all this social depiction made of violence and racial discrimination, one comes to realize how the Kikuyu misery and humiliation reached a menacing pitch. This accounts for the Kikuyu sudden setback in the sense that they will no longer wait for the fulfilment of *Mugo Wa Kibiro’s*

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*prophecy*²; but they will finally resort to an immediate violent action in order to retrieve their alienated land as it is going to be scrutinized in the following section of our paper.

2- Aspects of the Kikuyu Struggle for Freedom

The Kenyan struggle for freedom reaches its climax with *A Grain of Wheat* wherein Ngũgĩ is almost haunted by the ideal of liberation. In fact, his first three published novels brilliantly deal with the Kikuyu tremendous freedom fight. This struggle includes the recovery of the stolen land and all the platform set up to drive it back.

2.1- Recovery of the Tribal Land

Political freedom in Kenya became somehow synonymous with the repossession of the land, and this struggle is central to Ngũgĩ’s novels. Here, land is considered in its three dimensions: Land as a divine gift, land as a spiritual link between the living and the dead, and land as the provider of crops.

In the light of these considerations, the Kikuyu begin to resent the white man’s presence on their land. They take at the basis of their arguments the fact that *Ngai* granted a piece of land to every people in the world so that they don’t understand the overwhelming presence of British on their homeland as Ngũgĩ puts it in the following passage:

Black people have their own land in the country of Black people; White men have their land in their own country. Why should there be White men in the country of Blacks ? Are there Black people in England? Worst and most tragic of all are that White people despise and annihilate our customs. (*Weep not, Child*, pp. 64-65)

With all this in mind, Kiarie, one of the leaders of the party who came from Nairobi made no secret of his discontent about the land alienation during the meeting the farmers held for better conditions of living. This meeting aimed at telling the White man to leave the Kikuyu land as Kiarie clearly declares it in a very persuasive way:

We have gathered here to tell the British. Today, we, in one voice, must rise and shout “time has come, let my people go ! We want back our land, now.” (*Weep not, Child*, p.65)

As a reminder, the Kenyan struggle for the land repossession begins with Harry Thuku, that mythical creator of the Kikuyu Association Union (K.A.U), a party ruled later by Jomo Kenyatta. Let us assert that the Kikuyu almost turned mad with the alienation of their ancestral land so that they longed to drive it back all means as it will be seen in the final part of this paper.

2.2- Strategies for the Recovery of the Land

To struggle against the colonizer and drive away his confederates, the Kikuyu set up a platform made of nationalism, education and self-sacrifice. How will the

Kikuyu use each of these tools?

Broadly speaking, ‘nationalism’ carries connotation of a feeling of pride in one’s nation or country. It implies then the desire to achieve political independence, especially by a country under foreign control or by a people with a separate identity and culture but no State of their own. Therefore, nationalism may be understood as consciousness, on the part of individuals or groups, of membership in a nation, or of a desire to forward the strength, liberty or prosperity of a nation. As aspect that Simona Klimkova (2019:195) stresses as epistemological break in Ngũgĩ’s career.

While his early texts advocate the role of education and cultural syncretism, *A Grain of Wheat* begins to stress the motif of resistance, which is, in this case, embodied by Mau Mau movement. Ngũgĩ’s deliberate choice of glorious moments of bravery and determination seeks to provide images of resilience that are part and parcel of national history and thus instigate unity and collective effort aimed at the achievement of a particular goal.

As a matter of fact, in *A Grain of Wheat*, the most striking illustration of nationalism is to be seen through Kihika whose patriotism prompts him to accept even the supreme sacrifice as he states it:

What is greater than the love for one’s country? The love that I have for Kenya keeps me endure everything. (*A Grain of Wheat*, p. 82)

In fact, Ngũgĩ assimilates Kihika with the great Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi in so far as he lays a great emphasis on the couple nationalism-patriotism, and urges his compatriots to practise what he calls ‘the cult of patriotism’ as it appears through the following passage:

Le culte du patriotisme nous apprend aujourd’hui que l’individu doit mourir pour la famille, la famille pour le village, le village pour le district, le district pour la province et celle-ci pour le pays(...) en vertu de l’amour que je me fais du nationalisme, j’admets que mon pays puisse devenir libre pour être à même de mourir si ce sacrifice devrait permettre à l’humanité de vivre. (Mahatma Gandhi, see in *A l’écoute du monde classe de 3è*, collection André David, Edicef, p. 12.)

Another tool on which the Kikuyu rely is education that they consider to be the light of Kenya, the key to a better future. In fact, the Kikuyu long for education, which is, according to them, nothing but the white man’s secret magic, or the main tool that enabled him to colonize the Black people and deprive them of the richest parts of their land. Furthermore, the Kikuyu, mainly those of the young generation, are convinced that if their elders had been educated enough, they would not have let the tribal land be alienated so easily as Njoroge explains to his classmates:

Y-e-e-s, I’ve heard father say so. He said that if people had had education, the White man would not have taken all the

would go back the way he would come.

² ‘Mugo Wa Kibiro’: A Kikuyu seer who prophesied that the white man would come in the Kikuyu land, and, at last, he

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land. I wonder why our folk, dead folk, had no learning when the white man came. (*Weep not, Child*, p. 42)

In effect, the protagonist of Ngũgĩ's first published novel dreams of becoming educated like Jomo Kenyatta, the black messiah for he thinks that the instruction is something positive not only for their family but for all the country. It is what comes out from the following conversation between Njoroge and his elder brother Kamau:

- "After a fruitless search for antelopes, he asked, "Why don't you really start school?"

- "you are always asking this." Kamau laughed. But Njoroge remained serious. He always thought that schooling was the very best that a boy could have. It was the end of all living. And he wanted everyone to go school. [...]

- "your learning is for all of us. Father says the same thing. He is anxious that you go on, so you might bring light to our home. Education is the light of Kenya. That's what Jomo says." (*Weep not, Child*, p. 43)

In *Weep not, Child*, Njoroge's enthusiasm for education becomes the preoccupation of all the community of Kipanga so that each family contributes financially to help him when he is about to go to Siriana missionary school because they expect him to be the 'black messiah', the one who, through his learning, will lead the tribe to fight the forces of alienation so as to get back the stolen land as Ngũgĩ puts it:

He (Njoroge) would help them (Kikuyu) to the end. With the little knowledge that he had, he would upright the tribe. Yes, give it the White man's learning and his tools as that, in the end, the tribe would be strong enough, wise enough to chase the settlers and missionaries. (*Weep not, Child*, p. 101)

In *The River Between*, Ngũgĩ shows how the people of Kameno, the strong home of the tribe, exhibit the same thirst for education which they regard not only as wealth and luxury but, above all, as a weapon that Black people will, one day, use to drive the oppressor away. In this respect, Chege, although one of the holders of the 'Kiama'⁴, urges his son, Waiyaki to attend the missionary school:

Go to the missionary place. Learn all the wisdom and all secret of the White man but do not follow his vices. Be true to your tribe and the ancient rites. (*The River Between*, p.68)

In *A Grain of Wheat*, education is symbolized by Kariuki, Mumbi and Kihika's junior brother. Indeed, Kariuki is expected to be the hope for a better future in the village of Thabai because of his brilliant success at school as his sister, Mumbi confesses.

Kariuki was doing well at school. I paid his school-fees. In him, we hope for the future. there is nothing like education. (*A Grain of Wheat*, p. 128)

To end with education, let us stress that the Kikuyu's passionate attachment to the ideal of education is to be associated with the land issue. Its importance can be accepted

as such only when it is used as a tool to drive the invaders out of the Kenyan territory, otherwise it is dumping.

As can be seen education is furthermore of a paramount importance to the in the sense that it is somehow the key to land recovery as the Nguni makes his son Njoroge notice it as a conclusion of the conversation just above mentioned:

"Education is everything", Nguni said. Yet he doubted this because he knew deep inside his heart that land was everything. Education was good only because it would lead to the recovery of the lost lands. You must learn to escape the conditions under which we live. It is a hard way. It is not much that a man can do without a piece of land. (*Weep not, Child*, pp.43-44)

Two other strategies which deserve to be associated with the Kikuyu struggle for Independence are unity and sacrifice.

Beyond the plurality of its meaning, 'sacrifice', in the Kenyan context, is to be understood in its religious connotation. As a reminder, the recovery of the Kikuyu tribal land is a matter of sacrifices. As such, it requires courageous men, ready to accept even death so that their blood may cleanse the land and let the nation survive. Ngũgĩ alludes to Waiyaki's blood that would be shed for Kenya's welfare:

Waiyaki had been arrested and taken to the coast, bound hand and feet. Later, so it is said, Waiyaki was buried alive at Kibuezi with his head facing into the centre of the earth (...) 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 a political party whose main strength thereafter sprung from a bond with the soil. (*A Grain of Wheat*, pp. 12-13)

According to Ngũgĩ, the burning situation of Kenya implies martyrdom. He thinks that, just as a grain of wheat has to die in order to bear fruits, so will the sacrifice for Kenya, give birth to a party that will eventually struggle for independence. This sacrifice, as we see it, must be all of a nation in turmoil.

However, Ngũgĩ thinks that the Kikuyu struggle for freedom also requires the unity of the whole community. He wants everybody to participate in the sacrifice, and the Kikuyu to be unanimous for the common interest if there is any hope of freedom.

As a matter of fact, Kihika, the hero of *A Grain of Wheat*, is convinced that it is only by getting together that sheeps overcome cold and heat. Yet, he advocates that unity, that poor men's power, is an indomitable tool, stronger than bombs as it clearly appears through a conversation he has with Karanja:

Christ failed because he carried his cross alone. He was not helped by the Jews It is a question of unity. The example of the Indians is there before our noses. British were there for years. They ate India's wealth. They drank India's blood. They

where burning issues are discussed.

⁴ 'Kiama' Kikuyu local word used to term the assembly of all the ancients of the tribe. A traditional institution

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never listen to the political talk-talk of a few men. What happened, then came this man, Gandhi. Gandhi knows his Whiteman well. He goes round and organizes the Indian masses into a weapon stronger than the bomb Blood flowed like water in that country. The bomb could not kill blood, red blood of people crying to be free. (*A Grain of Wheat*, p. 102) As can be seen, unity, in the Kenyan context, was then of a paramount importance in the struggle to drive their oppressors out of the tribal lands. This sacrificial dimension was already stressed in his first drafted novel wherein it is said that the many victories of the Gikuyu tribe's great heroes over the Massai and other tribes were due to the unity of the hills. Since they recognize to ensue from the same forbears, Gikuyu and Mumbi, what the people of Kameno and Makuyu had to do was just to unite, to get together for chasing the Whiteman out instead of taking revenge upon Joshua. Ngũgĩ appeals the people to unity for a realm divided against itself cannot efficiently resist against its aggressors as Waiyaki better puts it:

- "We are all children of Mumbi and we must fight together in one political movement or else we perish and the Whiteman will always be on our back. Can a house divided against itself stand?"

- "No-o-o" They roared in unison. Then we must stand together. We must end the ancient rivalry." (*The River Between*, p.171)

In the light of this quotation, one realizes that all the strategies mentioned earlier, even though they are efficient, must be crown by action. In fact, when the people are ready to accept sacrifices after having received enough education, they should be willing to engage themselves in courageous actions. As a matter of fact, Ngũgĩ provides us with eloquent illustrations of murders committed by freedom fighters. Among those criminal actions, we can list the slaughter of the Mahee camp, the murder of Robson, the district officer to quote only the most striking.

In the same connection, the murder of Mr Howlands by Boro in *Weep not, Child*, deserves also to be quoted as evidence of the bloodshed that precedes the Kenya's uhuru: The door opened, Mr Howlands had not bolted the door... A pistol was aimed at his head.

"You move, you're dead".

Mr Howlands looked like a caged animal.

"Put up your hands!"

"I killed Jacobo, he betrayed black people. Together you killed many sons of the land. You raped our women. And finally, you killed my father".

"Have you anything to say in your defence?"

"Nothing".

"Nothing. Now you say nothing. But when you took our

ancestral land!"

"This is my land".

"Your land! then you white dog, you'll die on your land".

Mr Howlands thought him mad... he tried to cling to life with all his might. But before he could reach Boro, the gun went off. The White man's trunk stood defiant for a few seconds. Then it fell down. (*Weep not, Child*, p. 45)

Through this passage, one can figure out the terrible atmosphere that prevailed in Kenya during the Mau-Mau war. In fact, with the Mau-Mau movement and the state of emergency, violence could not be avoided; it became somehow compulsory in the Kenya's context as Ngũgĩ (1972:28-29) justifies its use:

Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal, and diminishes man. To gloat in the latter form of violence, as Ian Henderson does in his *The Hunt for Dedan Kimathi*, is revolting. In Kenya, then, we were confronted with two forms of violence. The British perpetrated violence on the African people for fifty years. In 1952, once the political leaders were arrested and detained, the colonial regime intensified its acts of indiscriminate terrorism, thereby forcing many peasants and workers to take to the forests. For about four years, these people, with little experience of guerrilla warfare, without help from any outside powers, organized themselves and courageously resisted the British military forces... the disorganized end of Mau Mau.

Far from making an apology of violence, what can be kept from this quotation is that violence is unacceptable only if it is used in protecting oppression and exploitation. With this in mind, in order make their struggle more and more manifest, masses of peasants and workers planned to go on strike, while other activists however resorted to bloodsheds to finish off their detractors. Indeed, when some readers may consider Boro's action of shooting Mr Howlands in *Weep not, Child* as mere savagery or sadism. Ngũgĩ, however, does not seem to see it as such. He perceives these actions as a one the political strategies he lays to successfully overturn and end these imperialist "*Watchdogs/Devils / Bedbugs/ogres or scorpions*"² so as to change the social-political landscape.

CONCLUSION

The gist of this research paper has been to show how Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o has striven to depict pre-independence Kenya in his trilogy. Drawing from the Postcolonial criticism, this study has mainly centred on how the Kikuyu community, taken as the microcosm of pre-independence Africa, collapsed with its exposure to the West. For, it cracked with the pressure of an alien force embodied by the British settlers.

control the country through a system of brutal political patronage revolving around the plundering of public funds.

²- Expressions profusely used by Ngũgĩ for all African leaders and their sycophants who immersed in a dictatorship that controls all aspects of the lives of the people. Those who

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The Kikuyu, like any other people under a colonial power, lost the precious values that held the tribe together: family life, human dignity but above all, their ancestral land. However, we have also been concerned with the precious and significant period of the Kenyan quest for identity and self-fulfilment. In this respect, a perusal of the novels under consideration has highlighted how, Ngũgĩ, as a writer in a new nation, appeals to his people’s political awareness and suggests some necessary strategies for reaching this goal. This platform dedicated to the recovery of the alienated land and for the progress of Africa goes from education, unity and sacrifice crown by actions. As a final assessment, Ngũgĩ’s *Weep not, Child, The River Between* and *A Grain of Wheat* position literature as a form of political and historical critique if not an inducement of political change. Hence, they may be appreciated as products of the social and political forces at work while being produced.

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