



THE COLONIZER'S DOMINANCE IN NGUGI'S *WEEP NOT, CHILD*

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ABSTRACT

Weep Not, Child is Ngugi's first published novel. This novel dramatizes the events of the Mau Mau emergency in Kenya in the nineteen fifties. Ngugi focuses on the family affairs of Ngotho. Ngugi, further, discusses the weaknesses of the Africans themselves and of the Europeans. The novel discloses the involvement of Ngotho's family in the crisis and suffers the violence it provokes. Ngotho has two wives, Njeri and Nyokabi. He has three sons, Boro, Kori and Kamau by Njeri and one son, Njoroge by Nyokabi. Ngugi explores three separate but related themes: first, the appropriateness of a young Kenyan getting a western education, secondly, the influence of Christianity in the Kenyan context and thirdly, the reasons and prosecution of the independence struggle.

INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, political freedom is associated with repossession of the land. For Kenyans, land is more important than money or cattle, it has spiritual connotation. The land is given to the Gikuyu people at the time of the creation of the earth.

Gikuyu and Mumbai are the East African counterparts of the biblical Adam and Eve. The land is the source of life to the Gikuyu people because it provides food and gives spiritual satisfaction. Jomo Kenyatta expresses the Gikuyu belief:

"Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried. The Gikuyu consider the earth as the 'mother' of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her

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burden for about eight or nine moons while the child is in her womb, and then for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child through a lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirit of the dead for eternity” (Kenyatta 1979:21).

The Europeans grabbed the land of the people, it means the end of their survival. Because the land is the material symbol for the Africans which unites the family and the members of the tribe. It is very clear that the Africans emphasize the importance of their land.

Weep Not, Child is a perfect example to Kenyatta’s comment. Ngotho works on land, once the ancestral land of his forefathers, now owned by Howlands. And he lives on land, once his land, owned by Jacobo. Ngotho believes the prophecy of Mugo we Kibiro, the Gikuyu sage that the land will be returned to its rightful owners:

The members of the older generation believe in the prophecy who anticipate that a leader will bring freedom for their people and they wait for any longer time to achieve it. But the younger generation demand immediate action. Ngotho’s son Boro, is the representative of this group. He is a man of rebellious nature. Boro and Kori have been to war for the British. They lose brother, Mwangi, Njoroge’s older brother who dies for an alien cause on foreign soil. Their fighting experiences in Egypt, Jerusalem and Burma are appreciative. They also witness that the people belonging to other countries are also encountering the same problems as in Africa. They learn the ways from others how to repossess the land taken from its hereditary owners by imperial conquest. Boro, Kori and Kamau are ever willing to fight for the land. If they remain as silent spectators, they won’t get the land back. Boro gets angry on his father, who simply believes in the prophecy.

Ngotho’s act of waiting for the fulfillment of the prophecy seems to Boro as an absurd thing. Ngotho continues to work on the land for Howlands. Boro and Kori go to Nairobi to participate in the struggle for independence. Howlands has come to Kenya after the First World War. Ngugi describes him as a Kenya settler:

“He was a product of the First World War. After years of security at home, he had been suddenly called to arms and he had gone to the war with the fire of youth that imagines war a glory. But after four years of blood and terrible destruction, like many other young men he was utterly disillusioned by the ‘peace’. He had to escape. East Africa was a good place. Here was big trace of wild country to conquer.” (Thiango 1969:33).



Ngugi points out obviously that the problem of Africans is with their lack of unity. For example, Jacobo, a Kenyan landowner, betrays his own people and becomes Mr. Howland's chief informer to gain his prosperity. The Kenyan folk suffer due to their personal weaknesses. The characters of Ngotho and Njoroge are better examples for this comment. The flaw in Ngotho's character is his personal weakness. In the village, he is very popular and venerated by his folk, but he is not action oriented man. He is a traditionalist who hangs about for the fulfillment of the prophecy whereas his son, Boro is contradictory to his father's tendency of traditionalism. Boro attacks on the prophecy and accuses his father's inaction. Indecisiveness is the root cause for inaction. This weakness of his lands throws him into unnumbered complexities and problems.

During the strike Ngotho leads the crowd and motivates them to attack Jacobo, irrespective of the dire consequences ahead. But the strike is not successful which is the root cause for the downfall of Ngotho. Now, he is without his job and his house. His son, Boro blames his irrational action for the failure of the strike and its consequences. He is unable to save his wife Njeri and his son Kori when they are arrested. At last, Ngotho is castrated and literally loses his manhood. It is nothing but the loss of his manly self-assurance and dignity. Even though, Ngotho is ready to accept the murder of Jacobo in order to save his son, thinking that Kamau is the murderer. It is indeed a great sacrifice, giving one's life to another. Finally, Boro visits his father on deathbed.

On the other side of the story, Njoroge grows from boyhood to adolescence. About Njoroge's life and vision Eustace Palmer (1976:4) points out him:

“as a visionary and dreamer living in a world of illusions, and seeking every possible opportunity to escape from tough reality into phantasies about a bright and better future.”

Njoroge is deeply interested in the field of education which creates a vision. At school he proves his intelligence and progresses well in his studies when compared to others. He also develops friendship with Mwihaki, the daughter of Jacobo. Njoroge devises a plan to make his mission successful to solve the problems of the country:

Njoroge approaches the missionaries and endorses their teaching. To quote Killam G.D. (1980:43).

“Njorge accepts the teaching of the missionaries and his callow mind elaborates a dream compounded of education and Christian teaching, exploiting the analogy between the two religion forces he is submitted to.”

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He has utmost faith in sound education and God, who is merciful and loveable. He reposes confidence in their God, who can unite all the men and women by one resilient bond of brotherhood:

But there is an impasse in his dream. Mwhiki finds the weaknesses in his dream. She knows that he has faith in his dreams but it is not enough. Mwhiki's disillusionment is connected to Njoroge's faith. But Njoroge's faith is in his belief. Njoroge proposes Mwhiki to fly to Uganda. But she is aware of the reality and tells him about their duty and responsibility.

Ngugi reminds Njoroge of his mission and duty for his country men who are leading a gloomy picture of life. Ngugi seems to have given priority to the duty of Njoroge who has to shoulder to responsibility to liberate his country men from the colonizers. In spite of all odds, Njoroge appears optimistic without a tinge of frustration and disillusionment, as he waits for the new day.

But at last, his final hope is also vanished; Ngugi describes:

For Njoroge had now lost faith in all the things he had earlier believed in, like wealth, power, education, religion. Even love, his last hope, had fled from him. (152).

Finally, he attempts to hang himself. But even his courage fails him in doing so: Ikiideh (1969:3-10) observes:

"this last sentence, which is also the last sentence of the novel, has been taken as an indication of Njoroge's long-delayed growth into maturity and consequent acceptance of responsibility."

Njoroge realizes to know that his failure to commit suicide is itself an act of cowardice. When Boro asks him decimating the Africans, Howlands surprises to say if Africans have any rights whatsoever.

In *Weep Not, Child* Howlands is a perfect symbol of colonialists. It illustrates obviously the desire of colonialists to deprive Africans of their rights and manhood. Boro's actions are constant with his beliefs. He does not undergo any emotions when he kills Howlands. He thinks it is his duty only to kill him. Ngugi describes the policy of Howlands in the emergency as "to set these people fighting amongst themselves instead of fighting with the witemen (88). It is the divide-and-rule policy of colonialists against the colonials.

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Ngugi was not aware of all the implications of the struggle because he was a child during the emergency period. In order to succeed in his intention, Ngugi attempts to combine the personal experience with the existing situation besides imaginative work. Ngugi's character, Njoroge though plays an important role in the novel but not successful in his attempts as he lays courageous nature and experience.

Ngugi's concern for the Africans freedom and the recovery of their last heritage is blatantly reflected in the novel. Ngugi clearly expounds that how much the Africans are craving for their freedom from the clutches of whitemen.

Boro's intention to fight for the freedom of his people can be justified. Because the Africans were exploited by the whitemen in all spheres of their life. The whitemen grabbed their lands, robbed their wealth, hindered their prosperity, raped their women, butchered the freedom fighters, forcible changed their values, customs, traditions and culture and compelled them to emulate missionaries system of education. If one takes all these brutal activities of whitemen into consideration, Boro's actions can be justified and perhaps, Ngugi's motivation for freedom fight can be defended. Even the Chief Jacobo's death in the hands of blacks is a welcome move. They have discharged their sense of duty. Ngugi delighted their characters in such a way that they are very much aware of their social responsibilities, obligatory duties, moral commitments and their beliefs and acted accordingly as the episodes one after the other as proceed in the novel. Ngugi's opinions on the morality of the preaching of the Christian missionaries which he thought certainly side tracks African from his existing situation. Divide and rule is the policy innate in the arteries and veins of whitemen which is shown by Ngugi in one of the events of the novel wherein he motivates the blacks to fight among themselves instead of fighting with whitemen regarding the missionary education.

Ngugi's hostility towards colonialism is evidenced in many actions and events of the novel. His earnest empathy for the oppressed, down trodden and exploited blacks ever exists in his heart. Ngugi's efforts for the unity among the blacks, his eagerness for the freedom and recovery of their land reverberated in the novel besides the text is a source of inspiration for the blacks to achieve their goal.

In *Weep Not, Child* the characters are surrounded by political and social events. *Weep No, Child*, for all its formal and material success, still remains a young man's novel.



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