

## Historicising Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child* from Kenya's Colonial Perspective



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### Abstract

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's "*Weep not Child*" explored the lived experiences of Kenyans during the colonial period in the nineteenth and part of twentieth centuries particularly in the political, economic, social, religious and cultural spheres of life. The dynamics of these lenses had great impact on Kenyans and their country as they interacted with Europeans and Indians in particular. Many secondary sources were useful for reconstructing life in Kenya during the colonial period. The text itself was a rich source. As a British Protectorate in 1895 and a colony in 1920, the trappings of a settler community were evident in discrimination against Kenyans in education, economic and social life, politics, social life and culture. Subjugation, oppression and some instruments of colonial rule among others, were challenged especially by the Mau Mau and through embarking on strike and so on. Violence is well laced in the discourse and did not meet the expectations of some major characters such as Ngotho, Boro, Njoroge, Jacobo and Mr. Howlands. Decolonization and nationalism through liberation struggles are justified by Thiong'o. The negative effect, however, makes the process questionable.

**Keywords:** *Historicising, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Weep not Child, Colonialism, Mau-Mau*

### Introduction

Literature in its various forms namely drama, poetry and prose has relevance to historical reconstructions that have proved it a veritable tool for historians in their quest to understand people, societies, events and culture. Through literature, it is possible to learn about specific periods in history and events that changed the world. This is the thrust of this discourse that explains how Ngugi Wa Thiong'o explored the lived experiences of his characters to present the narrative of colonial period in Kenya.

History shapes literature through the political, economic, social, religious and cultural context in which it is written. These lenses would be explored in their dynamics, effects and impact on the people and their country, Kenya. Literature to a large extent serves as a mirror of the society from which the historian acquires knowledge of the people, activities, inter-group relations and so on that illuminate the past of human beings. However, the author plays a major role in his or her architecture of the narrative. The theme, plot, characters, organization of events, situating activities, incidents and so on in time perspective are critical to an understanding of the work. It is plausible that there are exaggerations and other forms of embellishments that are used to project the narrative. This feature is not a problem to the historian because of many other sources available for his/her reconstruction of the past.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the colonization of most African countries by various European countries. For Kenya, the granting of a Charter in 1888 to the British East African Company by Britain commenced the process which led to its colonization. The British government later took over the administration of the colony when the company became bankrupt. Kenya became, a British protectorate in 1895 and colony in 1920.

### **Kenya in the Colonial Era**

Ngugi wa Thiong'o all through the book employs dialogue to reveal concealed human thoughts and deliver messages. In Chapter One for example, Njoroge's desire to acquire education was a vision he contemplated about and lived in it alone. In his dialogue with his mother, Nyokabi who offered him the opportunity to go to school, he revealed his thought of having a bright future through education as he said 'I like school', "O, mother, you are an angel of God, you are, you are, (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 3). Njoroge wondered how Nyokabi divined his wish and undivulged dream. Excitedly, he informed Kamau, one of his siblings about this offer as soon as he returned from work/apprenticeship that evening and exclaimed "I am, oh, so glad" (qtd in wa Thiong'o, 4).

The introduction of formal western education is one of the legacies of interaction between Africans and Europeans. Firstly, Christian missionaries established the schools then later the colonial government and communities. Njoroge (Ngotho's son) attended Kamae Primary School and studied up to Standard IV from where he proceeded to Kamahou Intermediate School (Thiong'o, 100) and then to secondary school, Siriana Secondary school. From his dialogue with Stephen, Mr. Howland's son, Njoroge's primary school was revealed (Thiong'o, 110). Siriana secondary school was one of the earliest schools established in the colony of Kenya, well known and had expanded as a result of the efforts of the missionary body that established it (Thiong'o, 108). Njoroge's performance at the K.A.P.E. examination set him in the lead of Mwihaki (Jacobo's daughter) who performed poorly. Njoroge was the only boy in all his area who would go to High School while Mwihaki had to go to a Teacher Training School (Thiong'o, 109). The practice of admitting and training students who performed poorly in national examinations negatively affected the quality of teacher out-put for teaching in the schools. According to Gabriel, "low entry requirement for teacher preparation is very worrisome and unwholesome" (14). "Teachers are the main determinants of the quality of any education system and builders of tomorrow upon which any education system depends" (2).

Ngotho was psychologically elated and fulfilled that his son Njoroge would start school as he admired his uniform. The thought that Njoroge would start learning made him feel almost equal to Jacobo. For Njoroge, "his heart had felt like bursting with happiness and gratitude when he had known that he, like Mwihaki, the daughter of Jacobo, would start learning how to read and write" (Thiong'o, 12). This level of education, primary school education was seemingly a status bridge for Njoroge. Mwihaki's father Jacobo belonged to a high socio-economic status while Njoroge's father Ngotho was a Muhoi to Jacobo on whose land he lived. Ngotho was a squatter, of low socio-economic status. Nyokabi, Njoroge's mother frowned at her son's lateness from school because he had spent time playing with Mwihaki. She pointedly said she did

not want her son to associate with a family of the rich because it would not be healthy for him (Thiong'o, 15). It is plausible that this association would make him no longer appreciate the sacrifice his family has made for him to acquire western education. Again, he might become dissatisfied with his background and develop inferiority complex that can negatively affect his performance and relationship with other pupils. *Weep Not, Child* follows the pursuit of Njoroge to obtain an education so that he can provide a better life for his family" (Willms 1).

The theme of education, its value, significance and priority is further revealed by Nyokabi. She believed that her greatest reward of motherhood would be that Njoroge's ability to write letters, do arithmetic and speak English. She wanted to be like Mr. Howland's wife who had a daughter and a son in school and like Juliana (Jacobo's wife) whose daughter was a teacher and a son who would travel overseas for further education. She believed that Juliana must have felt proud as a result of her children's achievements (16). Nyokabi concluded,

That was something. That was real life. It did not matter if anyone died poor provided he or she could one day say. Look, I've a son as good and as well-educated as any of you can find in the land (Thiong'o, 16).

No wonder Nyokabi was proud and light-hearted whenever she saw Njoroge bending double over a slate or recounting to her what he had seen at school. Then she would order her son to go and do some reading or some sums. She regretted that she did not have money to send her married daughters to school because of her social circumstance. "All would then have a schooling that would at least enable them speak English" (Thiong'o, 16).

In his discussion with Kamau, Njoroge "stated that schooling was the end of all living" (Thiong'o 38). For this reason he wanted everyone to go to school. This value of education was strengthened by Jomo in his sensitization of the citizenry and his campaign for Kenya's independence. Kamau insisted on his training as a carpenter so that through the trade he would assist Njoroge to complete his education. Kamau explained that their father, Ngotho was anxious for Njoroge to complete his education so that he might bring light to their home as Jomo always stated that "Education is the Light of Kenya" (Thiong'o, 38). Light in this regard would provide direction on how to deal with the European settlers, emancipate indigenous Kenyan's, eliminate poverty, end colour bar and all other forms of discrimination such as carrying identity cards that limited their movement, in fact, total freedom. This became more impactful when he recalled Jacobo's appreciation of his performance in school and the charge; "I hope you do well. It is such as you who must work hard and rebuild the country" (Thiong'o, 92). The implication is that colonialism must end and the country rebuilt by Kenya's indigenes who would end all forms of discriminations and oppression perpetrated by the British colonial government.

Beyond his family, the news of Njoroge's success in the K.A.P.E. national examination that qualified him for admission into High School spread all around the community. The Gikuyu people who in spite of the difficult times and conflict between

the colonial administration and the Mau Mau group retained a genuine interest in education. They always saw their deliverance as embodied in education, consequently, they contributed money to assist Njoroge attend a High School (Siriana Secondary School). The value of education by the Gikuyu is established by this action and by African tradition, Njoroge was not only Ngotho's son, but the son of the land, Gikuyu community (Thiong'o, 105). Here is an exploration of communal essence, care and responsibility by Ngugi wa Thiongo in contrast to individualism of the British as practiced by the settlers and British colonial administrators.

Valuable as school (formal) education is and a dependable prong for achieving Njoroge's and his community's dreams, a possible saviour of the whole God's country as his Christian faith built him. Unfortunately, the search for the perpetrator of Jacobo's death leveraged the end of education for Njoroge as well as his and those of his community's dreams. Martens explains Thiongo's 'Darkness Falls' for Njoroge in these words:

he deceived himself, as his dreams for a better future have not materialized and he has lost his family and education. Hoping to find comfort in his relationship with Mwihaki, he proposes to leave for Uganda together. When she rejects him all hope is lost (6)

An analysis of this quotation or Martens interpretation of the turn of events for Njoroge cannot be actually captured as self-deception. Jomo had also acquired western education with which he mobilized and fought for the independence of his country with many educated elites and in the long run independence was achieved with Jomo Kenyatta as Prime Minister on June 1, 1963. Kenya formally achieved its independence from Britain on December 12, 1963 (University of Central Arkansas 2). Njoroge's ill fated education was because the British colonial authority in a settler colony could stop Njoroge's education with fiat unlike Jomo who studied in Britain. Again, in contrast, Mwihaki's education and that of Stephen who belonged to a high social class were not interrupted. In this regard, the circumstances were beyond his control and cannot be said that he deceived himself. Also it would have been foolhardy for Mwihaki to have eloped with Njoroge given that Njoroge's brother Boro killed Jacobo, Mwihaki's father. Psychologically, the memory of that incident would regularly impinge on their intimate relationship that would have been at risk of ending in divorce.

Stephen attended the Hill School, a famous secondary school for European boys, having previously attended a primary school also for Europeans in Nairobi (Thiong'o, 109). Stephen upon completion would further his studies in England as a result of his mother's insistence (Thiong'o, 111).

Njoroge's thoughts and expressions about education epitomizes the community's values as regards education. The theme of education in the book is well articulated, reflecting the needs of a colonial administration even though schools were scarce (Thiong'o, 69). Colonial government needed messengers, clerks, middle level administrators among others. In many African nations such as Nigeria, missionary rivalry

contributed to the wide spread of schools in the urban, semi urban and rural areas. As Thiongo wrote.

Schools were scarce and very widely spaced. Independent and Kikuyu Karing'a schools, which had been built by the people after a break with the missions had been closed by the government and this made the situation worse (69).

An idea that runs through the book and an expression of their value for education is that acquisition of education makes an individual wealthy. It is this association that made Kamau comment that "Jacobobo is as rich as Mr. Howlands because he got education. And that's why each takes his children to school because of course they have learnt the value of it" (4).

The origin of Gikuyu land was revealed by Ngotho who told his children stories. At the beginning of things Gikuyu, a man and Mumbi, a woman were put under God's tree called Mukuya. The creator, Murungu took Gikuyu and Mumbi from his holy mountain to the country of ridges near Siriana and there they stood on a big ridge before they were finally taken to Mukuruwe wa Gathanga. Having shown Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land, the creator told them, "This land I handover to you. O man and woman. It's yours to rule and till in serenity sacrificing only to me, your God, under my sacred tree..." (Thiongo, 24). However, this narrative changed, following the colonization of Kenya by Britain in 1894.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in chapter one, introduced the settler population in Kikuyu, Kenya. Kikuyu land with many valleys and small plains has four valleys where the Black people live around the first two valleys with red land that is rough and sickly. The other two valleys separated the land of the Black people from the land of the White people, White settlers which was green and was not lacerated into small strips (7).

Settler colonies as a global historical phenomenon are located in many parts of the world. Argentina, Chile and Uruguay in South America developed from settler colonies. In North America, the settler colonies saw themselves as communities of European settlers because several attempts to include the indigenous population were vehemently resisted, rejected and quickly failed. Europeans in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century established settler colonies in the Pacific region, in Australia, New Zealand and New Caledonia. Siberia was also a settler colony with a moving settlement frontier up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from which the modern state now extended its administrative power to the Pacific coast (Marx 2).

In Africa the Cape colony in South Africa was the only settler colony where settlers permanently remained in the minority despite the expansion of the colony. Algeria was conquered by the French in 1830 and had settlers from France, Spain, Malta and Italy from about 1848. While South Africa and Algeria had the largest numbers of settlers, Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), Kenya, Mozambique, Angola and Namibia (then German South-West Africa) had settler colonies (Marx 3) too.

Kenya (a part of the British East Africa Protectorate) became a British colony on July 23, 1920. Kenya Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Japan vividly described colonial administration and policies in Kenya as Thiongo through his fiction, *Weep not*

*Child* describes, creates avenues for discussion of issues in the society as real events and their importance are highlighted.

It reported that the British authorities forcibly took land, introduced forced labour and passed legislation that ensured natives became subjects of the British settlers. This was in order to subdue the colony (3). From Kamau and Njoroge's discussion about education, England, the home/country of Mr. Howlands is revealed (4). Why did he leave the home of learning, which John, Jacobo's son having finished all the learning in Kenya has to go far away England or Burma for more learning? (Thiong'o, 4-5). This unresolved issue perplexed them as they find it difficult to understand the white man. Colonialism entrenches discrimination which is typical of settler colonies. For example, there was only one road that ran right across the land. It was long, broad and tarred to its end in Nairobi, the big city and to the sea port (Thiong'o, 5).

Italian prisoners according to the narrative constructed this road. Definitely, they provided cheap labour a fact of colonialism (Thiong'o 5). Njoroge and other children engaged in child labour (cheap labour) picking pyrethrum flowers for Jacobo. This form of labour seems to have been well established or institutionalized as Njoroge stated that many children who usually worked for Jacobo were invited for a party on Christmas Day by Jacobo's wife, Juliana (18). Kamau was apprenticed to Nganga the village carpenter, Kori worked in Green Hotel, an African tea shop (Njoroge's siblings) while Ngotho their father had worked in an Indian's shop and later in Mr. Howland's farm (Shamba) as a Shamba boy. He had also previously worked in the tea plantations, cleaned Howlands big house and carried firewood (Ngugi, 29). These were the low level jobs that a majority of Africans engaged in during the colonial period. As explained by the Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Japan, there were three categories of Native Kenyan labourers, namely, squatter, contract or casual (3). Squatters had by the end of the First World War become well established on European farms, and plantations in Kenya. Kikuyu squatters outnumbered other agricultural workers on settler plantations. The British in a bid to consolidate power in Kenya adopted various strategies to subjugate and oppress the indigenous people. For example, in 1902 they introduced the hut tax, that is, a certain amount to be paid to the government for each hut a family owned. For this reason, native/indigenous Kenyans had to engage in wage labour in order to earn wages for such taxes. All those who failed to pay the hut tax were made to pay a fine which often were not paid. Consequently, such persons had to engage in forced labour, a source of cheap labour for British settlers. Poll tax was introduced by British settlers as the demand for labour increased and every citizen in the country had to pay it.

Additional coercive measure was that the indigenous people had to work for sixty days a year for the government except they were already employed by British settlers. Thus, native reservations were created and often situated far from major roads and rail and the soil in this area was not conducive for farming. From 1918 onwards, a series of Resident Native Labourers Ordinances were targeted at squatters. They curtailed squatters' rights and subordinated native Kenyan farming to that of settlers. For example, the 1939 Ordinance finally eliminated squatters' remaining tenancy rights, and permitted settlers to demand 270 days labour from any squatters on their land. Squatters' condition

further deteriorated rapidly after the World War II but the squatters fiercely resisted (Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Japan 3).

Land ownership and landrights is another major theme in *Weep Not Child* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. While land was owned by British settlers, the indigenes rarely owned land except in their reserved areas where land was not fertile and not yielding good crops. Settler colonies, a distinct type of colonialism that replaces indigenous populations with settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty. This concept clearly explains British colonial rule in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia among others did not have this experience as British colonial territories. Settler colonialism is distinguished from other forms of colonialism such as classical or metropole colonialism, and neo-colonialism by some key features. Unlike colonial agents such as traders, soldiers or governors, settler colonizers permanently occupy and assert sovereignty over indigenous lands. Settler colonial invasion is a structure because settlers persist in the ongoing elimination of indigenous populations, and the assertion of state sovereignty and juridical control over their lands. Despite post-coloniality, settlers continue being colonial masters when political allegiance to the founding metropole is severed.

Other types of colonialism aim at maintaining colonial structures and imbalances in power between the coloniser and the colonised but a settler colony seeks its own end, being selfish. It trends towards entrenching a supreme and unchallenged settler state and people. Additionally, its major thrust is to eliminate the challenges posed to settler sovereignty by indigenous peoples' claims to land as such indigenous peoples must be eliminated. With settlers asserting false narratives and structures they can then claim indigenous peoples' land.

The value of land to the Gikuyu is expressed in the description of Nganga, the village carpenter. 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 as 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 (Thiong'o, 19). Given this perception it was appropriate to imagine why and how British settlers gradually dispossessed the Gikuyu of their ancestral land. Njoroge, therefore, exclaimed as Thiongo wrote 'where did the land go? (25)' This was in response to Ngotho's narration on the origin of Gikuyu land. Ngotho too had on several occasions wondered how they lost their land. He asked:

What happened, O Murungu, to the land which you gave to us? Where, O Greater, went our promised land? At times I've wanted to cry or harm my body to drive away the curse that removed us from the ancestral lands. I ask, "Have you left your children naked, O Murungu?" (Thiong'o, 25).

Global Social Theory further explains that settler colonial societies share the perception of terra nullius which implies that lands owned by indigenous peoples are empty or unused as such settlers carve them up into discrete packets of private property(3). This assertion partly explains the loss of Gikuyu land to the British colonial masters. Again, Ngotho explained a predetermined order of events in this regard. Mugo wa Kibiro had prophesied and warned long ago about the coming of the white man from the country of

ridges, far away from Kenya. It was therefore not surprising that the white man came and took the land, although not the whole of the land, the first time (Thiong'o, 25). Indeed, it was a gradual process from British East African Company to a colony and then a Protectorate to the full colonization of the entire territory of Kenya. This colonial experience of Kenya is part what the text underscores. Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses the spiritual dimension to link Gikuyu traditional beliefs and explanation of the occurrence of some phenomena to events in the present and the future. This approach facilitates an understanding and the appreciation of their culture. It also ensures the maintenance of Gikuyu brotherhood that is shared in the culture. The Gikuyu seer of old, Mugo wa Kibiro also prophesied that the white man would eventually go, leaving their ancestral land but the actual date for this departure which could be interpreted that Kenya would regain its independence, was not indicated. For this reason Ngotho's father, many others and Ngotho himself waited indefinitely and died as Muhoi on their ancestral land without owning any parcel (Thiong'o, 25).

Mr. Howlands' life and soul were in his Shamba (farm) which he valued more than every other thing. However, Ngotho was endeared to him because he could manage the labourers and tend the farm to his satisfaction. Mr. Howlands fought during the First World War (WWI) but relocated to Kenya in East Africa, four years after the WWI. A typical Kenya settler, he was always engrossed with his land that was his 'god' and wished he would have someone to whom he could leave the shamba. Indeed, contemplating and planning the land to which he had now given all his life according to Thiongo was his one pleasure (31). For Mr. Howlands, Kenya was now his home, not England anymore. Settlers invest their identity and material belonging in properties such as land as is revealed in the dialogue between Ngotho and Mr. Howlands (Thiong'o, 32). Through dialogue and repetition Ngugi wa Thiong'o emphasizes the significance of land to the native Kenyans as well as reveals the bitter feelings of the dispossessed natives which partly contributed to agitations, hatred and strategic plans to overthrow the colonial administration and send settlers back to their country.

Mr. Howlands' and Jacobo's farms originally belonged to Ngotho's ancestors. This realization by Boro (Ngotho's son) who had come home after the Second World War (WWII) not being employed and never had access to own land gingered his animosity against the British colonial masters. As Thiong'o presented this issue, the feeling of aggression for conflict by the natives is understood from Ngotho's story:

Boro thought of his father who had fought in the war only to be dispossessed. He too had gone to war, against Hitler. When the war came to an end, Boro had come home ... only to find that for him, there was to be no employment. There was no land on which to settle, even if he had been able to do so (26).

Filled with anger, Boro wondered why the older generation of his father allowed the British to occupy their land without resistance and he also condemned their superstitious belief in Mugo wa Kibiro's prophecy as he shouted at this father 'To hell with the prophecy' and walked out without an answer to the question on how Ngotho worked for a man who had taken his land (27).

From the discourse, acquisition of land and political power were central to the motives of British colonialism. Recognizing Sir Fredrick G. Lugard as the high Priest and agent of British imperialism in East Africa, Ndege stated that Lugard had no doubts regarding the motives of British colonialism: economic benefits for British metropolitan and local investors(4). In Kenya, these included a number of merchant houses and thousands of European settlers (qtd in Swainson, 1980; Ochieng and Maxon, 2000). Whether Africans in Kenya reaped incidental benefits from British colonialism did not actually bother Lugard. For example, settlers represented by Mr. Howlands owned plantations on which they planted cash crops such as tea, coffee, pyrethrum flowers among others. These were mainly primary products on which the colonial economy largely depended. These primary products were exported overseas for use in European industries at prices determined by the Europeans and finished products and other commodities were imported at prices they fixed. Pyrethrum flowers were used to produce insecticides for killing mosquitoes, flies, fleas, moths, and so on. Europeans built big hotels particularly in Nairobi and openly practiced discrimination (colour bar) against Africans (Thiong'o, 64).

British colonial economic policy in Kenya according to Ndege included land alienation for European settlers, taxation of Africans, engaging Africans in forced labour, development of settler dominated agricultural production and peasant commodity production, export production, rail and road transport and communication, education and health (5). Nairobi assisted the settlers with rail and road networks to facilitate their commerce and exportation of commodities overseas, they enjoyed subsidies on freight charges, agricultural and veterinary services, as well as credit and loan facilities (Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Japan, 4). Geographical and structural disarticulation featured in colonial and postcolonial economies of Africa as Ake notes (qtd in Ndege 6). The first, enclave development is the concentration of development activities in few urban areas, such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, Eldoret and Naivasha in Kenya. Structural disarticulation occurs when there is a limited range of activities. For Kenya, agriculture and a very limited range of secondary industries are the activities. For example, Kipanga town had one shoe factory. This was not one of the big towns (Thiong'o, 7). Kenya's economy was not diversified but relied on few primary commodities (cash crops) such as coffee, tea, pyrethrum flowers for foreign exchange. Certainly, these products would be sold at the world's fluctuating prices largely determined at the metropole and by settlers. Wright, clearly explains this phenomenon in his analysis of Walter Rodney's classic, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Rodney's two main mechanisms of underdevelopment: exploitation through trade and exploitation through investment, largely contributed to Africa's albeit Kenya's underdevelopment.

In relation to trade the [big capitalist countries effectively establish prices of minerals and agricultural products and subject these prices to frequent reductions thus, harming Africa's economy (depriving it of revenue). They also set the prices of the manufactured products they produce, which of course are higher than those of the former category] (qtd in Wright I).

Imperialism which Rodney identified and explained as investment by the Europeans manifested in their ownership of land and mines (and banks, factories) and so on. These investments were sources of revenue outflow from Africa to the foreign owners, and this further contributed to the underdevelopment of Kenya and other African countries that had similar lived experience.

Indians formed a large population of Kenya in this colonial period. There were few Arabs too. There were many Indian shops and some of them were very rich. Their shops were well stocked with imported commodities. Their shops were patronized by White settlers, their wives and children. While the Indians were polite and well receptive of White settlers, Africans who also patronized their shops were not accorded warm reception (Thiong'o, 7 and 8). African shops were built in two rows and they faced one another on one side of the town, Kipanga. Their shops were not well stocked and their commodities were costlier (Thiong'o, 7 and 8). Most Africans were not rich and engaged in menial jobs such as shop attendants employed by Indian traders and were not well paid and treated. Some young indigenous men loitered around the shops and Indian bazaar waiting for any errand that might generate a day's meal for them. In fact some worked the whole day for a pound of meat (Thiong'o, 8 and 9). There was class distinction, Juliana, Jacobo's wife never liked her children to associate with children from primitive homes (Thiong'o, 19). Yet these children who were invited to her house on Christmas day usually worked (child labour) for her husband Jacobo in his pyrethrum plantation. Jacobo was one of the few rich Africans who had for many years been the only African permitted to grow pyrethrum. Mr. Howlands secured the permission for him but he stood in the similar permits being given to other people (Thiongo, 40). However, white farmers who planted it also did not want many Africans to secure permission to grow any cash crop as "this would lower the standards and quality of production" (Thiong'o, 40). Indeed, Kenyan employees were very often poorly treated by their European employers and as some settlers argued, native Kenyans "were as children and should be treated as such" (Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Japan, 4). Kiarie's address to the people during the strike against the white men and Serikali (the Government) (Thiong'o, 50) revealed their displeasure, hurt and resentment. "The Government and the settlers had to be shown that black people were not cowards and slaves" (Thiong'o, 50).

With his eloquence, Kiarie recounted the following as reasons for the strike and need for redress:

- dispossession of land from the people of Kenya by European settlers and colonial government;
- conscription of Kenyans to fight for Europeans (the British) during the First and Second World Wars;
- resettlement of war veterans (British soldiers) on Kenyan land;
- provision of forced labour for settlers by Kenyans;
- payment of heavy taxes by Kenyans (men and women) to colonial government;
- shooting of Kenyans who demanded their rights;
- loss of lives of Kenyans who fought for the British in the Second World War and for the preservation of the British Empire; and

- demand for better pay/salaries (Thiong'o, 57-58)

The strike that was meant to be total and peaceful turned out a fiasco. Mr. Howlands warned his staff not to embark on strike because anyone who did so would lose his job. Mr. Jacobo who was in sympathy with the settlers and colonial government urged the people to go back to work. He was protected by European police men and was believed to wield a lot of influence over the people (Kenyans), being a very rich man too. However, the people labeled Jacobo a traitor based on their interpretation of his action. Ngotho, a prime character in the text charged towards Jacobo as he addressed the people on peaceful strike and the European police fired canisters of tear gas from their guns and also fired into the crowd. Two men fell and the panic-stricken crowd scattered (Thiong'o, 59). A policeman struck Ngotho's face with his baton. Ngotho bled, stumbled and fell but was found by people from his village and was taken home. The attempted strike underscored punitive sanctions against Kenyan workers such as, settlers flogging their servants and workers. In fact "flogging was the magisterial punishment-of-choice for native Kenyan convicts and most colonial magistrates were not concerned by the illegal practice of settler – administered flogging. The principle of punitive sanctions against workers was not removed from the Kenyan labour statutes from the 1920s until the 1950s (Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Japan, 4).

### **More of Kenyans Resentment and Government's Response**

Strikes according to Suret-Canale, were one of the ways of protesting against colonial domination and its effects. Any form of exploitation, he explained, such as forced labour, intolerable working conditions among others can give rise to strikes (44). Strikes were often mistaken for rebellions and were rapidly and violently suppressed as in the case of Kenya by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

The activities of Freedom Boys of the Forest (*Ihii cia mutitu*) were another dimension of resistance to colonial rule (Thiong'o, 68). These Boys were also known as the Mau Mau as Ngugi wa Thiong'o reveals through his usual method, dialogue. "The Freedom Boys are fighting against white settlers" (Thiong'o 72). The Mau Mau militants adopted the guerilla war tactics from September 26, 1952 to January 12, 1960 to resist colonial rule.

Dedan Kimathi Waciuri was the leader of the Mau Mau who also wanted political representation in Kenya. On October 3, 1952 a British woman (civilian) was stabbed to death near her home in Thika by the Mau Mau. Chief Waruhiu of the Kikuyu ethnic group and a very strong supporter of the British presence in Kenya was shot dead in broad daylight in his car on October 7, 1952 (University of Central Arkansas 2). Describing the incident which was preceded by a dialogue, the man who owned a wireless radio informed the disillusioned government official and others that the big chief who was given large land acreage by the Governor in order to make him support the settlers and British colonists (thereby betraying the Kenyans) was in his car while some other men traveling with him were in another car. They were trailed by two men all the way from Nairobi to the country side where the two men drove ahead of them and stopped the

Chief's car. Who's the chief?" "I am". "Then take that and that. And that too". They shot him dead and drove away\_ 'In daylight?'

'In daylight. The man on the wireless said so'.

'This generation'

'Very daring. They have learned the trick from the white man' (Thiong'o, 63).

The British government therefore declared a state-of-emergency in Kenya on 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1952. Chief Nderi of the Kikuyu ethnic group and two policemen were again killed by the Mau Mau militants on October 22, 1952. Several persons were killed between 1952 and 1957 by the Mau Mau. The British interned about 78,000 Mau Mau militants in their detention camps during this period of conflict. Mau Mau militants were offered amnesty by the British government on January 18, 1955 but this offer was withdrawn on June 10, 1955 and six Mau Mau militants were executed on June 29, 1956. Dedan Kimathi Waciuri, the Mau Mau leader was arrested by the British police on October 21, 1956; sentenced to death and executed on February 18, 1957. Some 14,000 individuals, including 12, 000 rebels, 1,800 civilians and 200 government soldiers were killed during the Mau Mau resistance. The British government lifted the state-of-emergency on January 12, 1960. This detailed account by the University of Central Arkansa (2) sheds deep light on British and Kenyan relations for the control of affairs in Kenya during the colonial period.

Jacobo was made a chief during this emergency period. He always was accompanied by one or two policemen with guns to protect him from the Mau Mau militants as he moved from one hut to the other, checking and patrolling. Here, Thiongo explores British adoption and implementation of indirect rule whereby persons who were not qualified as chiefs were appointed to that status. This was also British tactics of divide-and-rule in order to break the ranks and win support of the indigenous people. Often times, this backfired but in the end, Jacobo was killed by a Mau Mau militant, Boro, Ngotho's son. Boro also killed Mr. Howlands who had temporarily been appointed a District Officer in the hierarchy of colonial officers at the local units. In support of this observation Boro states '... All white people stick together. But we black people are very divided'. (Thiong'o, 75). "Mr. Howlands despised Jacobo because he was a savage (a term he use to describe black men and Mau Mau). But he would use him". (Thiong'o, 77). This statement was a general perception of Africans under colonial rule. Indeed, the tactic of divide-and-rule was entrenched by Europeans in their colonies. Howlands continued, "The very ability to set these people fighting amongst themselves instead of fighting with the whitemen" gave him an amused satisfaction (Thiong'o, 77).

Ngotho and Mr. Howlands died on the same day though in different circumstances. A remarkable aspect of this incidence is Ngugi's explication of anticolonial nationalism in which he acknowledges that violence can be justified in some contexts of liberation struggle. Boro killed Mr. Howlands (antagonism of oppressive colonial rule) a symbol of colonialism. Ngotho, who worked for Mr. Howlands was dehumanized and suffered until he died. Boro, a freedom fighter in the liberation struggle for Africans shot at and killed Mr. Howlands.

In this quest for catharsis Njoroge's education in the High School had ended and he worked as a sales boy in an Indian shop but was fired. Depression set in as the hopeless

situation made him contemplate and unsuccessfully attempted suicide. However, this dilemma which many Kenyans experienced was not an adequate response to colonialism or antagonism of colonialism. Thiongo strongly opines that liberation struggle by violence and nationalism should be beyond mimicking of colonialism. The totality of Njoroge's experience in his upbringing, education, family life and strife questions the benefits of violent resistance, given its detrimental effects.

### Conclusion

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Weep not Child* vividly describes the binary opposition between the forces of oppression and resistance that is fundamental to colonialism. His anti-imperialist consciousness favours revolutionary violence for liberation. Thus, liberation and decolonization should engender transformation, consolidation and reimagining at the individual and collective (collective consciousness) levels. These are necessary because the colonial economy and education influenced the structures established and provided the historical forces that fundamentally influenced Kenya's colonial and eventually, post-colonial society.

Development activities were concentrated in a few urban areas such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Eldoret among others. This geographical disarticulation reflected the areas in which the Europeans (settlers), Indians and Africans lived. Similarly, structural disarticulation, the development of a limited range of activities was obvious and a challenge to Kenyans. These were mainly agriculture and agribusiness and a limited range of secondary industries that favoured European settlers and Indians. Structural disarticulation bequeathed Kenyans narrow base that made it lack auto-dynamism that made its external linkage dependent on fluctuations at the global level. The well elucidated impact of the First and Second World Wars on Kenyans provided a strong psychological leverage for the mobilization of Kenyans for decolonization. The colonial legacy (both positive and negative) continue to challenge Kenyans and other Africans towards total emancipation and true nationalism.

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