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## Land and Education: Alienation and Liberation Myths in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's Novels

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### Abstract:

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is distinguished writer of Africa. He writes many books and influenced readers all around the world with his writing. There is influence and description of Kenyan culture and tradition in most of his novels. His fiction concentrates on the changes occurred in Africa with European invasion. Through this research paper researcher wants to throw light on the oral tradition of Africa. The researcher further tries to show how African fictionists try their best to present their culture to the world. They tried to show the rich culture of Africa before colonialism. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's fiction deals with the political freedom of the nation. Ngugi has dealt with the themes of education, the individual and community. Ngugi is concerned with historical, cultural and political issues. The effect of British land grabbing is seen in Ngugi's novels.

**Keywords:** Superstitions, Customs, Traditions, Myths, Colonialism.

### Introduction

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a post- colonial Kenyan writer. He is an eminent writer of East Africa. He is the author of number of critical essays, plays and novels. He has written initially in English language, later he adopted Gikuyu language. He has given strong political tone to his writings. As a writer, he worked to make people of Kenya free from the legacy of colonialism. He has received so much of criticism for his writings and he was harassed and jailed. After the torture given by government, he left the country almost for 20 years.

Ngugi was only twenty-eight years old when he published his first novel. *Weep Not, Child* was Ngugi's first novel and he started his career as a writer with this novel. Writing has always been Ngugi's way of reconnecting himself to the Kenyan landscape. Ngugi's writing is the mirror of two major influences: The traditional Africa and the colonial experience and its effects on African culture. He gave emphasis that indigenous languages of the nation should be used by African contemporary writers. Ngugi argued that African culture and African literature had been revived only after getting freedom until colonial languages will be in use. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has published six novels and several plays. Along with this he has also published volumes of literary, political, and cultural criticism. He has a worldwide reputation, through translation into French, German, Russian, Japanese, and other languages.

## Myths

Myths, for instance, are near-fantasy stories of ancient origin belonging mostly to oral tradition; they express ideas and events believed to be truthful but without apparent proof. In this way, myths assume great importance in the annals of a history, for they comprise these unquestionable beliefs that are fundamental in the explication of such a society's culture and world view. Abamuka in "New Essays on African Philosophy" says that:

Myth tells of the super-human experiences of the community; myth exposes the fact that man's misfortunes on earth as well as his hardships are attributed to the divine commands and moral codes of the deities as appoint in his life. (45) In Myth, one would find stories of origin, explanatory stories and didactics stories especially in Africa.

Hence, Myths are invaluable devices of writer because he may not need to do much effort in arguing on the issues because they are already distilled in audience mind; especially they are of the same nationality. This confusion arises frequently because many a reader may not realize how one dovetails into the other. It may, therefore, be pertinent here to clearly distinguish between them so as to enhance their identification in Ngugi's writings.

The literature of Africa is fed by three great rivers: the invisible, the visible, and the oral—or myth, reality, and the oral tradition. Ngugi's fiction benefits from oral conventions of his way of life. He utilizes fantasies, legends and old stories. Ngugi investigates devices of oral

conventions for the purpose of the conservation and projection of socio-cultural heritage and to show virtues. In an interview in London on 8<sup>th</sup> August he has accepted that his earlier novels *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child*, and even *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, were especially inside a specific custom of the English tale the nineteenth century English epic. Given the substances of Africa or the Third World of the twentieth century, pragmatist custom isn't sufficient in portraying truth regularly enough more interesting than fiction. He found the custom constraining as far as reality. He further said that there was an opportunity in African oral traditions, which gets rid of limitations of existence, and even structure, as in an oral story can take a sensational structure. In an oral story creatures can converse with trees, trees can converse with individuals and there is a more liberated connection between state creature life, vegetation and human life. There is additionally a more noteworthy cooperation between the otherworldly and material. Each one of those things occurs in an African narration.

### **The Gikyu Myth and Factors behind the Kenyan Liberation Myth**

The Gikyu myth is based on the belief that Kenya is a country for Kenyans. They hold all the rights to the land. They believe that they have to retain their identity without interference by other nationalities. The Gikyu myth is most perennial myth in Ngugi's novels. The Gikuyu myth is the myth of the creation of the world. It is further said that different land is given to different people. It was first related in writing by Jomo Kenyatta in his book entitled *Facing Mount Kenya*. There is a description of the belief of the Gikuyu. According to this belief, the beginning of things the man Gikuyu, the founder of the tribes was called by the divider of the universe Mogai when population started increasing on earth. He was given as his share the land and all the things that the Lord of nature bestowed on mankind for survival.

After the Mogai had shown the Gikuyu the Panorama of the wonderful land he had been given he commanded him to descend and establish his homestead on the selected area he named Mukuruwe wa Gathanga ... (Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* 3).

The use of this myth in Ngugi's novels shows his inclination towards the history of his country. Thus, it is a means through which he celebrates his people's belief in the land as a divine patrimonial inheritance. Hence, the land is given considered as mother and it must not be

conceded to any invader. When, the white man comes to Kenya and initially asked land for cultivation but later became masters. The myth of land in the novels censures the action. It also reassures the people to fight for the full ownership of their land. Ngugi describes this myth in *Weep Not, Child*:

Yes, 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 sacrificing only to me, your God, under my  
sacred tree” (*Weep Not, Child* 24).

In *The River Between*, Waiyaki is led by his father to the Sacred Grove, where Gikuyu and Mumbi were brought after their creation on Kerinyaga, “the mountain of He-who-shines in holiness.” (*The River Between* 17)

Land is of utmost importance in the novel. The power of one’s attachment to the land is expressed in the novel by the Mau Mau. The Myth of God, Murungu, giving the first man and woman, Gikuyu and Mumbi, ownership of the land for their descendants for all eternity is presented in both *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*. Kiarie, one of the speakers from Nairobi, recounted history. And told people how the land had been taken away, through the Bible and the sword. (*Weep Not, Child* 61).

Land alienation was the major reason for liberation myth in Kenya. People think that the land is given by God to them and they have its custody. It is also mentioned in various Mau Mau songs. These songs show that the Kenyan’s claims for their lost land. When the Europeans were encouraged to come and farm in Kenya. The land was made available to them. But these Europeans were later interested not only in the waste land given to them but also in cultivated land. Kenyan’s were alienated from their land. Land occupies such a value in Africa. It is a symbol of dignity and pride. In *Weep Not, Child* Naroje also shows the importance of land for a person. Ngotho, to Nganga, the villages carpenter:

Nganga was rich. He had land.... If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted rich. (*Weep Not Child* 19)

The loss of land is considered as spiritual loss for them. They consider land as mother earth. They also bury their ancestors in their own land. If they do not get their lands they feel themselves disconnected with god and their ancestors. As in *Weep Not, Child* when Kenyatta lost Kapengira case, Ngotho's all hopes of getting his ancestors land dashed. He considered it a spiritual loss. He thought he had been disconnected from his creator and his ancestors.

In *The River Between* the land alienation of Kikuyu land was described in Kiama meeting by one of the elder of village, he mentioned that how their land had gone slowly, taken from them, while they, the young men sit like women, only watched them grabbing their lands (*The River Between* 128). Chege, tells his son Waiyaki, of the ancient myth that before Agu, Murungu brought man and woman and showed them land and gave them the country. As a result of the way in which the white man continues to deprive the people of their land, and so denigrate the culture of the blacks, the elders in Ngugi's novels appear compelled to hand down this myth to the children in order to perpetuate the inherent belief. The employment of this myth in Ngugi's novels is symbolic not only in the author's desire to present an authentic history of his people, but also in his covert attempt to act like the elders noted above thereby rouse Kenyans to a consciousness of their deprivations. Without being overt, therefore, this device is used to assert the Kenyan's divine ownership over the Kenyan lands as well as keep Kenya's history alive in the minds of the Kenyan public. It would appear that Ngugi finds this extremely necessary in order to combat the spate of distortions inherent in a situation where the coloniser is the sole historian. For instance, in *Weep Not, Child*, after Ngotho has finished narrating the myth of divine patrimony of the land to the children (*Weep Not, Child* 24). As for Boro, his anger can neither be contained nor appeased. He cannot fatten why the black man could have allowed his land to be taken while he sticks to a superstitious belief in a prophecy. In *Grain of Wheat* also shows that Wambuku's love relationship fails with kihika because kihika's dream shattered by not reoccupying the land grabbed from Africans.

### **The Myth of Education as a Liberating Tool**

*The River Between* depicts tribal protagonist Waiyaki's efforts for the spread of education through his movement 'Marioshoni'. It also portrays a clash between the two ideologies of the tribal way of living life and the life preached by the missionaries. It is unexpected how Chege considers that Waiyaki ought to go to Siriana School to gain proficiency with the methods for the

white man so that he could lead his kin to battle imperialism as Chege vouchsafes. The novel depicts a clash between the two ideologies of the tribal way of living and the life preached by the missionaries.

Chege was the leader of the traditionalists. He was descended from Mugo Wa Kibiro. He has warned his kinsmen about the arrival of the Europeans. But he has failed in prompting them to action and ignored by people. Chege knows of the age-old prophecy which says that a savior will come among the people to rescue them from the invaders. He had hoped in his youth that he might be the savior. His rejection by his people shows him this is not to be and so he places his hopes for fulfillment of the prophecy in his son, Waiyaki:

Now, listen my son. ... Before Mugo died, he whispered to his son the prophecy, the ancient prophecy.... You go there. I tell you again, learn all the wisdom of white man.

(TRB 20)

Charge took waiyanki to sacred groves. He was seeking to prepare Waiyaki for the prophesied role of savior. He sends the boy to Siriana School to acquire white man's education. Charge also thought that Waiyaki will gain an understanding of the white man's ways combat them in a better way. Ironically, Chege fails to see that education. He does in fact lead one away from familiar ideas and concepts to new and different ones. Unfortunately, he sows the seeds of his son's alienation and ultimate destruction.

In *Weep Not, Child*, education is seen as a powerful tool. Education is considered as a key to unlock the formidable doors of European dominance and a ray of hope for better tomorrow. Naroje believes that the power of the white man comes through English education. During his conversation with Mwihaki, when both of them are children and their homes are still not affected by violence, they talk of how all the land earlier belonged to the black people and how it was later taken away by the whites. Mwihaki had heard her father say that if the black people had education then the white men could not have snatched their land away from them. In her innocence, Mwihaki asks Njoroge:

I wonder why our old folk, the dead old folk, had no learning when the white man came.

(WNC 37)

Njoroge's answer to this question is equally innocent:

There was nobody to teach them English. (WNC 37)

Ngugi succeeds in telling the readers in very simple and effective language through Njoroge, like many other Kenyans, looked upon English, the language of the colonizer as the key towards the liberation of the nation. It is indeed, an ironic situation, how the black people were yearning for the dominant metaphor for acceptance through a process of willing submission of their own culture, for the English educational system as introduced by the missionaries in Kenya was an assimilative prison in which the ‘native’ was destined to lose his true identity. It was an instrument for initiating a sustained colonization process. The first chapter focuses on Njoroge and the theme of education.

The education theme was introduced first in this novel. Later it is connected with land theme. Njoroge’s father Ngotho considers western education is important. He thought that this education will help them to recover their lost lands and feels proud sending his son to school. In *Weep Not, Child* the fascination of the characters for English education was more. They have come to see that those associated with ‘English’, enjoy a greater amount of social and financial comfort. They enjoy everything everywhere, whether it a language or the white man himself. They fail to understand that English education aims primarily at turning them into collaborators of the system that thrives by crushing and exploiting them. This was the main reason for their failure.

## **Conclusion**

Ngugi Wa Thongo’s novels depicts that there was harmony in African culture. But these things get disturbed with the arrival of whites. Land and nature play significant role in African culture. Britishers tried to bring change in African society with their education system. They themselves became the owners of land and made Africans their slaves and forced them to work under them. Ngugi delivered readers from simplistic understanding of the forces of colonialism in Africa to a complicated imagining of Africa before, during, and after colonialism. Ngugi shows the realities of Kenya, the divisions in communities, land alienation, the never ending connotations of colonial rule.

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