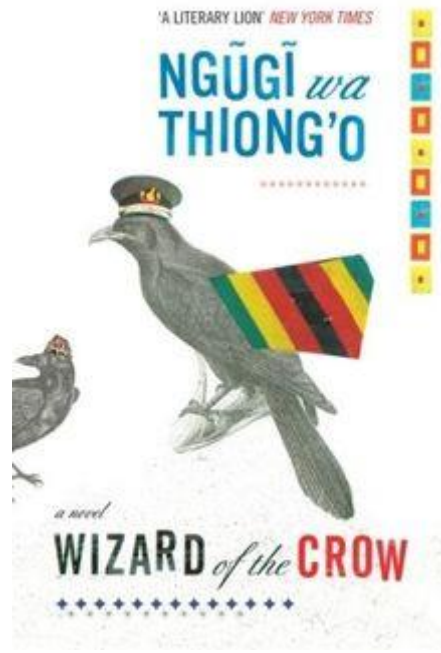


Protests of the Kenyan People against European Colonialism in the Select Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

S. Suganya Karpagam , M.A., Ph.D. Candidate



Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_the_Crow

Abstract

Creative art impersonates itself as a medium in expressing the insights of its designer's visions. Creative art encapsulates Literature as its substantial fragment. Literature as a discourse encompasses all the occurrences of the past, present and sometimes the future. Writers never fail to record the struggle, revolution, resistance, betrayal, triumphs, and all the momentous endeavours of an age using Literature as a medium. Literature aids in providing the society with the reality of the incidences in the life of the people and acts as a voice to the voiceless. In the Third- world nations Literature is employed as a device by the writers to expose the cruel nature of colonial and neo-colonial state. Especially in the African countries, Literature during the colonialism emerged as revolutionary representing the resistive nature of the people towards colonialism and during the neo-colonial period, the writings are full of lost hope, disillusionment and treachery in the newly formed government. Few writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o used Literature to trigger the people against the suppression and inhuman nature of the Europeans over the African people even after the independence in the Neo-Colonial state. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of the prominent East African writers, who had the courage to protest against the suppressors of the Kenyan people through his writings. This paper focuses on the protests of Ngugi wa Thiong'o against the colonial and Neo-colonial government through his novels.

Keywords: Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Literature as a medium, Colonialism, Neo-Colonial State, Suppression and inhuman nature of the Europeans, Protest against the suppressors.

Literature as a Weapon

In the Third- world nations Literature is employed as a device by the writers to expose the cruel nature of colonial and neo-colonial state. Especially in the African countries, Literature during the colonialism emerged as revolutionary representing the resistive nature of the people towards colonialism and during the neo-colonial period, the writings are full of lost hope, disillusionment and treachery in the newly formed government.

Weep Not Child

Ngugi's novels expose the true nature of imperialism that led the mass of people to afflict pain for the few who benefit by exerting the sweat of others. Ngugi on no occasion neglected the sufferings of the proletariat in his writings under imperialism. The colonial government had plundered the entire nation making them dependent on the Western countries economically. The character Ngotho in *Weep Not Child* is framed by Ngugi as a sample of the farmers who lost their land during imperialism and was made to work on their own land. This stance expressed by Ngugi can be studied in the view point of Jim Blaut on Lenin's theory of imperialism. Ngotho's own land was confiscated by the white settler and was made to produce the primary materials for the benefit of the capitalist Mr. Howlands. Ngugi in *Weep Not Child* vividly represented the woeful situation of the people who lost land and were made to work as labourers in their own land during the imperialistic era. The natives were forcefully removed out of their lands. Mau Mau became more popular as they fought for the country's freedom sacrificing their life and comfort, more and more people joined Mau Mau by the utter frustration created by the Europeans who treated the natives as slave animals and plundered all their wealth.

Conditions went from bad to worse. No one could tell when he might be arrested for breaking the curfew. You could not even move across the courtyard at night.... It was said that some European soldiers were catching people at night, and having taken them 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 would be announced as a victory over Mau Mau (WNC 93).

Petals of Blood

In *Petals of Blood* Ngugi explains how the Europeans had used the native leaders as tool to make the people surrender them for economic and security expenses. The local power mongers who cared only for their own profit exported the primary and raw materials to western countries. Charles Hornsby in his work *Kenya: A History Since Independence* has stated that

The government supported agricultural exports in every way, including subsidies for settlers and forced African labour... Between 1942 and 1952, the output of the large farms doubled, driven by mechanisation, high and fixed world prices and bulk export deals.... With the danger and costs of maritime trade high, the country was also forced to create several new import substitution industries (38).

These lines clearly coincide with the narration of Ngugi about the state of Kenya aftermath independence. *Petals of Blood* undoubtedly reveals the woeful state of the people whose wealth has been robbed by the local administrators of the Europeans. Accordingly, imperialism and neo-

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:8 August 2018

S. Suganya Karpagam , M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Protests of the Kenyan People against European Colonialism in the Select Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

colonialism has moved African nations into the situation of entirely dependent on the western countries. Ngugi has sarcastically mentioned this worse state of the nation in his later novels very boldly.

Wizard of the Crow

The Ruler in the novel *Wizard of the Crow* represents the entire force that compellingly pushed the powerful and resourceful country into a pleading state. In the *Wizard of the Crow*, the Ruler's ministers gifted a chart plan for his birthday. The chart plan is named as 'Marching to Heaven', which meant to build staircase to heaven so that their ruler could go to heaven and make a conversation with God every day. The ministers have planned to receive the financial support for the building of Marching to heaven from the World Bank. Ngugi has used this occasion in his novel to imply his real thoughts sarcastically under the cover of his characters. When the World Bank representatives came to Aburiria, the beggars surrounded them begging for money. They were chased off the by the police officers. Later this incident was narrated to Nyawira by her boss Titus Tajirika under whose expression Ngugi voiced his thought ironically as

“These beggars are just too much,” he started telling Nyawira... “I don't know what should be done with them. How dare they stretch out their hands at the very same place where their own government was...” He was going to say, “stretching out its hands” but he did not like the sound of it and checked himself. “. . . busy entertaining very important guests?” (WOC 101).

Boro in *Weep Not, Child* as Symbol of Resistance

In Ngugi's first novel *Weep Not, Child* Ngugi's ideology of influencing the people to resist the subjugation of colonial force is voiced through the character 'Boro'. Ngotho, whose land has been usurped by the white settlers', continued to work in his field as a squatter to the white settler Howlands. Ngotho's son Boro has returned from the World War fighting on the side of the White people with the hope of getting their country back to themselves after the war. However, once the war got over, he became more disillusioned as he lost his brother in the war and he had no job to keep his family at ease. All the fake promises made by the Westerners to make them fight in their war shattered him psychologically. When Ngotho relented the story of the land of Kenyan people been usurped by the white settlers for their own welfare, it instigated Boro. Ngugi articulates his idea of revolutionary thoughts through the voice of Boro as

As he listened to this story, all these things came into his mind with a growing anger. How could these people have let the white man occupy the land without acting? And what was all this superstitious belief in prophecy? ... To his father, he said, 'How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?' (WNC 27).

These lines by Ngugi clearly portray the irate state of the author by the inactiveness of the Kenyan people against the oppression. He in a way questioning Ngotho, questions the entire African country about their lethargic nature against the White people who confiscated the ancestral wealth of Kenya for their own income. This was the first attempt by the African writer to instigate the people against their subjugation and it was the first revolutionary thought instilled by the author to the African people. The African people blindly believed in the prophecy according to which, the white people the blind behaviour of the African people and urges them to act against the oppression of the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:8 August 2018

S. Suganya Karpagam , M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Protests of the Kenyan People against European Colonialism in the Select Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Westerners through the words of Boro. These lines of Ngugi clearly trace the growth of Ngugi as a vigorous revolutionary writer in the following decades.

We, with one voice, must rise

An additional episode that can be quoted from Ngugi's first novel *Weep Not Child* through which the author directs to take up the organized proletariat headed revolution is the strike of the workers demanding to increase the wages. Ngugi firmly encourages the African people to upheave against the repression of the European power. The lines "Today, we, with one voice, must rise and shout: "The time has come. Let my people go! We want back our land! Now!" (WNC 62) energize the African people to renounce the belief of waiting for a saviour to come and rescue them but rather to act daringly against the European power that plunder them unceasingly. As Fanon rightly puts it:

When the peasants' takes a gun in his hands, the old myths grow dim and the prohibitions are one by one forgotten. The rebel's weapon is the proof of his humanity. For in the first days of the revolt you must kill: to shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time: there remain a dead man, and a free man: the survivor, for the first time, feels a national soil under his foot. At this moment the nation does not shrink from him; wherever he goes, wherever he may be, she is; she follows, and is never lost to view, for she is one with his liberty (WOE 19).

Matigari

Matigari, the revolutionary novel of Ngugi is renowned for its sarcastic portrayal of the neo-colonial state of Kenya. *Matigari* illustrates the objective of Ngugi's writing to drive the people to resist against the suppression of the proletariat and peasants. The novel also pictures the wide difference among the people in the neo-colonial Kenya where the proletariat are plundered of their hard work and wealth by the self-regarding capitalist society. Lenin calls for the revolutionary party formed by the proletariat to capture the dictatorship of the proletariat of the state. He believed that the dictatorship of the proletariat could only be achieved by the demolition of the capitalist society through resistance, rebellion and revolution. Ngugi pictures the state of the proletariat under the capitalist run state in the novel *Matigari* as

I have worked with the company for ages, and the words Matigari has just spoken are absolutely true. I have been a servant to those machines all my life. Look at how the machines have sapped me of all strength. What is left to me? Just bones. My skin withered even as I kept assuring myself: A fortune for him who works hard finally comes; a person who endures, finally overcomes. What can I now expect when I retire? Old age without pension (*Matigari* 59).

The proletariats though have never participated in any of the strike in the fear of losing the job, was left to starve with the family after retirement. After that, they would not have the ability to work, as the capitalist have already sucked their complete strength and power; while the capitalists have grown richer and richer by the hard work rendered to them by the proletariat as an exchange for their livelihood. Ngugi argues that to change this stage of the proletariat society, they have to take up the revolution against the capitalist society that lives on the sweat and blood of the working class. The end of the novel *Matigari* suggests the people to adopt the revolutionary struggle involving violence to trounce the capitalist system and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. Matigari's resolution to return to violence at the end of the novel suggests the prime intention of Ngugi to take

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:8 August 2018

S. Suganya Karpagam , M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Protests of the Kenyan People against European Colonialism in the Select Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

up the revolutionary arms to defeat the capitalist system. In the words of Ngugi “One could not defeat the enemy with arms alone, but one could also not defeat the enemy with words alone, One had to have the right words; but these words have to be strengthened by the force of arms” (Matigari 131). These words of Ngugi initiate the people to take up the arms against the suppressive forces to resume their rights over their own production. *Wizard of the Crow*, the latest novel by Ngugi is distinguished as the most popular novel from the African continent is known for its sarcastic representation of the neo-colonial state of Africa. This novel of Ngugi openly dares to expose the brutalities of the neo-colonial government.

To Conclude

Ngugi as a writer had succeeded in portraying the brutalities of the European nations on the third world nations and the protests of the proletariats of the third world nations vividly through his novels being a writer from third world country. To conclude, all the novels of Ngugi, especially the last four novels fiercely depicts the precluded realities of the Third World Nations and the protests of the Kenyan people against the callousness of the European Nations.

ABBREVIATIONS

WNC - Weep Not Child
WOC - Wizard of the Crow
WOE - The Wretched of the Earth

Works Cited

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Penguin Books, 2001.

Hornsby, Charles. “Introduction.” *Kenya: A History Since Independence*, I.B. Tauris, 2011.

Thiong'o, Ngugi wa. *Weep Not, Child*, Penguin Books, 2012.

---. *Matigari*, Heinemann International, 1989.

---. *Devil on the Cross*, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1980.

---. *Wizard of the Crow*, Vintage, 2007.

S. Suganya Karpagam, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Assistant Professor in English
Gobi Arts and Science College
Gobichettipalayam – 638453
suganyasmart4@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:8 August 2018

S. Suganya Karpagam , M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Protests of the Kenyan People against European Colonialism in the Select Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong’o