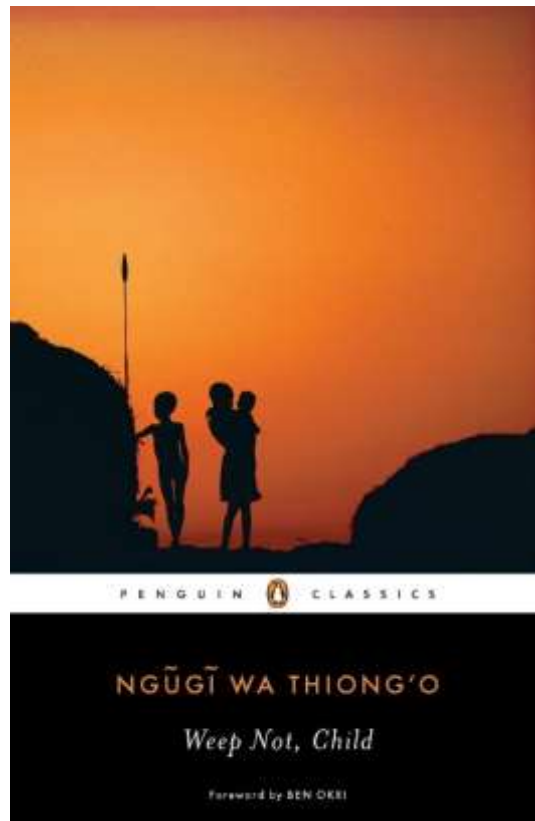


**Negritude and the Ubiquity of Western Imperialism in
Ngugi's *Weep Not Child***

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Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Weep-Child-Penguin-African-Writers/dp/0143106694>

Abstract

Ngugi WATHiong'o is a prolific writer, poet, critic, essayist, columnist and a playwright. He is a proficient speaker and a confident political writer. He is known for his profundity and his unflinching ability to delineate the current scenario of the Kenyan society. This paper attempts to epitomize the concept of Negritude, and the imperialistic atrocities in the pre-independent Kenya. Ngugi enlivens the importance of Negritude among his characters in his novel *Weep Not, Child*.

Introduction

Negritude is a literary and philosophical movement that reaffirms traditional African culture and traces its origins to the former French colonies of Africa and the Caribbean. Negritude writers, and poets focus estrangement from the traditional African culture and they fought against European imperialism. They gave importance to the traditional black culture and identity to bring back the African culture. The writers emphasize that the African culture implicates natural beauty and humanism among the people, whereas the western civilization failing short to generate moral values and natural bliss.

The negritude movement was brought about by Aime' Cesaire, Leon-Gontran Damas and Leopald Sedar Senghor. They published the journal *Leitudiant noir* , which gave birth to the Negritude movement. This term Negritude itself was not coined until 1939, after the poem written by Aime Cesaire *Return to my native land*. Negritude concepts are widely spread after World War II by the publication of anthologies *de la nouvelle poesie negre at malgache de langue francaise* which is a poem written by Senghor in 1948. Negritude developed the attitude of resistance and denial towards colonialism. There were protests and revolts against the colonial system.

Negritude Literature

Negritude literature was initiated strictly to improvise on the slavery issue and resistant to the colonial system. Regor C Bernard, in his poem *Negre* utters:

An immense fire which my continuous suffering
And your sneers
And your humanity,
And your scorn
And your disdain
Have lighted in the depths of my heart
Will swallow you all. (81-87)

The disgruntlement of the Africans towards the colonial system is explicated through this poem. Imperialism is an inevitable historical evil in the history of the world. It may easily be compared to a dangerous cobra killing the victims not only with its fangs, but also by its very sight and breath. It is of common knowledge that many countries in the world are victimized by the grand evil of imperialism. Countries like India, Africa, West-Indies, Canada and Australia suffered variously due to British and European imperialism.

Mau-Mau and Negritude

Mau-Mau is a revolutionary movement. Negritude is one among the characteristics of Mau-Mau. The ancestral black people were proud of being black. The fury of Africans made them to struggle for their independence. Mau-Mau revolt is a form of the indirect defensive mechanism of Kenyan peasants. Negritude brings back the beauty of nature and the traditional African society. Negritude refurbishes self confidence among the African people. The literary themes of Negritude try to help the people from the oppression to independence. The Africans are alienated in their own country. Negritude and its consciousness provoke the rebellious nature among the native people. They fought back racism and servitude and boldly preferred their independence.

Ngugi WA Thiong'o

Ngugi WA Thiong'o influenced by the style of Aime Cesaire adopts the negritude concept in his novels. He accepts Negritude and he is proud to be an African, by giving impportunity to the black celebration of tradition, culture and history. African literature and the African writers play a very important role in cultural resistance against the European encroachment in Africa. During the pre-independent Kenya, the tribal people gathered stories, fables and folktales which are conveyed orally. But after independence, the Kenyan people were educated and they started to write in a written form. The literature of Negritude fortifies the concept that, "Negroes are backward and simple." (126). But, Fanon sees that Negritude is an important factor for finding a meaning in a rancorous world, even though it does not provide an equivalent substructure for black Identity.

Weep not, Child

Ngugi is a well known for his novel *Weep not, Child* who visualizes the landless peasants struggle against the white settlers in pre-colonial Kenya. He highlights the lands of the Black people and the white people. Land is incarcerated and it is an ancestral deity. Land conveys the message of an individual's freedom, habitation and the spirit of a black person. The land belonged to Africans were not fertile, whereas the land of the white people was more fertile and green which is summed up:

In a country of ridges, such as Ksikuyu land, there are many valleys and small plains. Even the big road went through a valley on the opposite side. Where the two met they had as it were, embraced and widened themselves into a plain. The plain, more or less rectangular in shape, had four valleys leading into or out of it at the corners. The first two valleys went into the country of the black people. The other two divided the land of the black people from the land of the white people. This meant that there were four ridges that stood and watched one another. Two of the ridges on the opposite sides of the long sides of the plain were broad and near one another. The other two were narrow and had pointed ends. You could tell the land of the Black people because it was green and was not lacerated into small strips. (7)

Jacobo and Ngotho

Jacobo owns the land on which Ngotho lived. Ngotho is a muhoi which means the people who rent the land on which they live and farm. Njoroge's mother and father have got an idea to educate Njoroge and they learned to defeat the white man's rule. They were scared and disheartened by their elder's son death in the war. Ngugi indirectly and sarcastically brings a note to the reader that by sacrificing the black men to the European wars was a foolish act. The result of elder's son participation in the war brings ill fate to the whole family. The family members should be ahoi, a submissive squatter for the rest of their lives in their own land. Njoroge's father and mother worked as anahoi under the white settler Howlands.

According to the tribal culture, if a man had plenty of money, but no land, then he is not considered to be rich. Kamau works at Nganga's home, where he had been treated very badly.

Kamau is a black person, and Njoroge wonders about his ill treatment towards his brother. Rachael says in the analysis of Fanon's *Black Skin and White Mask* that the black people immensely desires to be white, which lead them to be as bad as the white people during colonial times. "I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into white world... Then I will quite simply try to make myself white: that is, I will quite simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human."(16)

Mumbi and Gikuyu

Ngugi explicitly generates the traditional story of Mumbi and Gikuyu who were the ancestors of Africa. God uncovered the significance of land to Gikuyu and Mumbi 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... (24)

White Rule and Struggle for Justice for the Black People

The white people interject and renounced the black people to plant cash crops like Pyrethrum. It is a flower that grows in Kenya and it is used to put together medicines and insecticides. They believe that the low standard Black people would defame the production of pyrethrum flowers. Boro with few people initiates the procession to Nairobi soon after the First World War. They demanded to release the leader Jomo Kenyatta who had been arrested. Few people were shot dead. The old people supported the strike and they believed that the younger generation should come for the retrieval and they should evacuate the white man out of the nation. Boro and Kamau brought the youngsters from the city to educate the elderly people about the strike for the increase of the salary.

Mr. Howlands warned the public who participated in a strike that they would be dismissed or removed from the job. He gave up his job for Ngotho and the villagers started the strike with vigour and courage. Jacobo pacifies the strike which promotes the clash between Ngotho and Jacobo. Jacobo is a traitor. Thus Ngugi insinuates that individual betrayals are prototypical for the whole nation by the powerful. Ngugi fervently indicates the traitors of the nation through the character Jacobo.

Jacobo was attacked by Ngotho. Ngotho is beaten up severely by the policemen. The crowd was enchanted by the brave act of Ngotho. Ngugi implicit Ngotho as a brave character and he is considered to be the father of the resistance of the black people.

Boro is concerned about the justice for the black people and to recover the abducted lands. Howlands orders Jacobo to put Ngotho in detention camps. The attitude of Howlands is the reflection of the British colonialism, which unfold and illustrate the truth explained very beautifully by Ngugi in the following lines: "Mr. Howlands despised Jacobo because he was a savage. But, he would use him. The very ability to set these people fighting among themselves instead of fighting with the white men gave him an amused satisfaction" (86).

Ngugi deals with the emergency act 1952-1960. During this Emergency act, there were two main forces developed. KAU and the Mau-Mau is a secret movement which is completely different from the KAU. They secretly took oath and they promote violence to accomplish their goals. The innocence of KAU is covered up and the atrocious Mau-Mau rises, ultimately the darkness falls in Kenya.

Evil Tricks, Internal Division, Community Suffering

The character Howlands is cunning and clever to instigate fight between the native black people. Jacobo is the best example of this evil play. The injustice of the government plays an evil trick on the family of Ngotho, arrested them for curfew and tax. Ngotho believed that the Education alone will help to get back his land and bring happiness to his family members.

Njoroge's family members ask him to quit his education because of the atrocities of the Mau-Mau. But, Kamau emboldens his brother Njoroge with his strengthening and true words to face his challenges. "You'll be foolish to leave school. The letter may not be genuine. Besides do you really think you'll be safer at home? I tell you there's no safety anywhere. There is no hiding in this naked land" (92). The relationship between brothers demonstrates their love, bravery and sacrifice for each other.

Even though Mwihaki and Njoroge are from the different worlds, they are united by love and friendship, so that they can fight back the British colonialism. The darkness of the world does not affect them. They play as best examples for the future generations to be united and to be independent in thoughts and actions.

Boro turn out to be rigorous to avenge his brother's death. He does not believe in freedom who becomes violent and he feels pleasure in killing people. He warned Howlands and he plans to murder the chief Jacobo.

Value of Education

Ngotho expects his son Njorogeto discern the great vision of education. His knowledge could save his native people and family. "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" (40). Njoroge takes up this great responsibility to educate himself. He cultivates the habit of reading. He reads the Bible, which prepared him as a good and morally valued person in the clan.

Njoroge feels proud and powerful because of his education. "Njoroge had now a feeling of pride and power, for at last his way seemed clear. The land needed him, and God had given him an opening so that he might come back and save his family and the whole country" (116). Ngugi instilled courage and hope in the heart of a little boy Njoroge. He gives hope to the future generations.

You and I can only put faith in hope. Just stop for a moment, Mwihaki, and imagine. If you knew that all your days life will always be like this with blood flowing daily and men dying in the forest, while others daily cry for mercy; if you

knew even for one moment that this would go on forever, then life would be meaningless unless bloodshed and death were a meaning. Surely this darkness and terror will not go on forever. Surely there will be a sunny day, a warm sweet day after all this tribulation, when we can breathe the warmth and purity of God...(117)

Ngotho sacrifices himself in order to save his sons, from the trap of the Howlands. He has been castrated. Boro attacks Howlands. Ngotho has been portrayed as a major symbol for leadership, love and sacrifice. Ngotho truly believes in Njoroge, and that his Education will bring peace and happiness in the family as well as in the society. The reunion happens between Ngotho and his son Boro. He finally understands his father's true love towards him.

Ngugi himself speaks as Boro and his sayings, are facts and it points out the reality during colonialism. "He betrayed black people together; you, killed many sons of the land. You raped our women. And finally, you killed my father" (139). Boro is violent and he raises his voice to shun the dominating voice of the Howlands. The concept of Negritude is pertinent to this quote that the land which belongs to blacks is for blacks. Boro and Kamau are arrested and put to trial for killing the Howlands and Jacobo. Njoroge looks after his family. He is tired of living his life. Njoroge longs for his childhood days thinking how peaceful he was at school. Ngugi accomplishes quelling the trauma and mental disturbances of the family, and the children during colonialism.

Boro and Njoroge

The characters of Boro and Njoroge are completely different from each other. Boro is revengeful, violent and courageous. Njoroge is humble, forbearing and weak. He is boastful about his Education which gives him confidence, will power and hope. The political circumstances and its turmoil have overtaken the power of education. Since, it was the age of colonial retribution; he could not save his family and country through his education. He loses his hope and feels disillusioned with his life. The pursuit of success abruptly ends in failure. Even though he lost his life through the means of love, religion and Education, he strives hard to cultivate hope in his mind that may bring fruitful things in his family and in the country.

Disoriented Siblings

The estrangement of Njoroge's family, disillusioned and disoriented siblings are expressed radically by Ngugi in *Weep, not child*. Njoroge has become more responsible saying that, "Yes. But we have a duty. Our duty to other people is our biggest responsibility as grown men and women" (144). It beseeches the maturity and responsibility of the youngsters towards the nation.

Ngugi inculcates the national pride and generosity in the younger generation, especially in the character of Njoroge. Characters like Boro continue with the resistance, face the challenges as a result of losing his father and brother. Njoroge fed up with his hopeless life decides to hang himself. He remembers his father's words and at once he feels guilty and ashamed of his cowardice.

Thus, Ngugi adroitly reveals the Manichean world of conflict between the white settlers and the black people. He entwines the divergence between the white landowner Howlands and Ngotho, and the conflict between Ngotho and Jacobo, a rich black landowner. Boro is peaceful after the double murder of Howlands and Jacobo. Ngotho's family is a symbol of threat and violence. It depicts the whole society which is shattered and feels insecure towards the changing and the unstable world.

Conclusion

Edward Said pinpoints that there are different phases of colonial consciousness in the post-colonial literature. Ngugi's *Weep not, Child* can be referred to the stage of 'oppositional' or 'confrontational' phase, which illustrates the main threat of imperialist power towards the native in the pre-colonial era. Abiola Irele remarks the thematic analysis of Negritude as:

The literature of negritude is dominated by the collective consciousness of the black writer as a member of a minority group which is subordinated to another and more powerful group within the total political and social order. The literary preoccupations of the movement revolve around this central problem, the Negro predicament of having been forced by historical circumstances into a state of dependence upon the west, considered the master society and the dominating culture. The literary themes of negritude can be seen as a counter-movement away from this state: they constitute a symbolic progression from subordination to independence, from alienation, through revolt, to self-affirmation.(291)

The literary themes of negritude are symbolically represented through the characters of Boro and Njoroge. Boro shows progression from subjection to revolt against the injustice of Howlands. Similarly, Njoroge's education escalates him from hopelessness to self-actualization.

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