

Post Colonialism And Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Concern About And Perspectives On Africa's Advancement Towards Ideal Statehood, Identity And Independence: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Three Novels: ' Weep Not, Child', ' Wizard Of The Crow' And ' The River Between'

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Abstract

Numerous factors have been underwritten to the plaguing of African progress, with the key factor being bad leadership that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has rightly named "The Blacknisation of Colonialism". The present paper therefore makes an attempt at examining both internal and external complications that have been at play in the struggle for the soul of postcolonial Africa. Therefore settled for Ngugi wa Thiong'o's works were considered the most suitable as much as resistance literature in Africa. The study focuses on the colonial condition in Kenya during the Emergency and the decolonizing form of education that can stand against without replicating patriarchy and colonial hierarchy. The study shows the exploration of such post-colonial writers as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in terms of the depiction of their cultural identities and of their people's revealing the hybrid culture of the post- colonial Societies and writers. This paper discusses the hybridity, multi-culturality, identity and otherness. This study focuses on three novels: ' *Weep Not, Child*', ' *Wizard of the Crow*' and ' *The River Between*'.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, hybridity, identity, clitoridectomy, hegemony, imperialism, and globalization.

Introduction

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1938-) first novel, '*Weep Not, Child*' (1964) concerns itself with the last decade of the colonial period in Kenya when there was the state of Emergency between 1952- 1959. It reveals the complex situations and discourses which were affected by the colonial onslaught on Kenya. The emergency was a colonial disciplinary measure to curb what was ambiguously known as 'Mau Mau'. Mau Mau was primarily a native peasant uprising of the mid-20th century. The name of the insurgency is a misnomer (Royhermund 1999). Yet, the British and their native associates projected it as a binary to ' modernity' and ' progress' of which they

considered themselves the custodians - the 'burdened white men' in Kipling's words, and the 'black men wearing white masks' in Fanon's.

In *Weep Not, Child*, according to Simon Gikandi, Mau Mau is depicted as neither heroic nor patriotic. It appears to be a matter of concern for the English settlers Mr. Howlands, the Gikuyu loyalists (Jacob) and the rest of the native population-the athomi Njoroge as well as the Agikuyu (Ngotho). In the late 19th century and early 20th centuries, the athomi were somewhat alienated from the rest of the ethnies or Agikuyu, since the former encompassed English education and Christian missionary for their various substantial benefits. Nevertheless, some of the athomi tried to detach themselves from the foreign education since they were crestfallen with the same, Ngugi wa Thiong'o had been an athomi who was disillusioned with the colonial education (Gikandi, 2009).

Like Waiyaki of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965) the protagonist Njoroge assumes himself to be the Messiah of the oppressed Gikuyu, who, one day, would emancipate his people by dint of his learning:

"Only education could make something out of this wreckage. He became more faithful to his studies. He would one day use all his learning to fight the white man, for he would continue the work that his father had started. When these moments caught him, he actually saw himself as a possible saviour of the whole God's country. Just let him get learning. Let that time come...."(Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* 93).

Though *The River Between* therefore opens by demonstrating an unambiguous world of binary antagonisms, as the novel progresses, it displays the same uncertainties as *Weep Not, Child*. Waiyaki seeks to fulfill his father's foresight, however, he isn't sure of what leadership model would be most efficient. Chege, in spite of being able to understand visions of the future (*The River Between*), has not been capable of convincing his people of the threat of white invaders:

Wizard of the Crow centers as an alternative on a diverse representation of the intellectual. Critics like Joseph McLaren have highlighted the originality of *Wizard of the Crow* in terms of globalization critique as a new form of colonialism and international domination of Africa. The dominant conflict in *Wizard of the Crow* is amongst the Ruler's regime and those who be pitted against it and it is presumed explicitly as an expansive struggle. The propagation of rumors, truths, propaganda and gossip that transmits the story forward reflecting the Ruler's wish to position himself as the exclusive voice of the people and his efforts to destroy those he brands as terrorists and those who call themselves the Movement for the people's voice.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o explores continuously the identity and his country through his novels in a way or another. In his novel, *Weep Not, Child* he explores the story of Njoroge who finds himself unable to continue his studies but he is stricken with the bitter reality about the colonizer, he understands that he is living a dream, then he begins to know who really he is, and where he really wants to belong. As a reference that this character who symbolizes and reflects the feelings of post-colonial subjects who constantly look for a western education as a sign of

superiority but then face the reality that they have to come back to their origins to understand and find their real self.

The best illustration on the fact that Ngugi wa Thiong'o through his writings is a kind of rebuilding ties with his tradition and fighting to regain the lost identity could be his novel *The River Between* where he portrays the process of clitoridectomy as crucial in Gikuyu identity. This novel was as a reaction to the Church of Scotland when they wanted their Gikuyu subjects to reject circumcision, and they split into two communities, one that agreed and submerged to the church, and another that rejected this pledge and split with the church, but they didn't give up their Christianity. The first one symbolizes the people who lost their original culture to the colonizer and the second ones are those who stuck to their origins but without rejecting completely the alien culture; they are those who symbolize the new hybrid identity.

The fact of sticking to tradition and at the same time remaining Christian, as Gikandi asserted, was an attempt to reconstruct a 'pure Gikuyu identity' but a one which is framed by a 'modern identity' which is synonymous to a 'colonial identity'. And this could be seen in what Chege told his son Waiyaki in *The River Between*:

“Arise. Heed the prophecy. Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites”. (Ngugi 1965, 20).

As a sign that this colonial education by itself could change the identity of a person and take him far away from his traditions; but Gikuyu people do not want that, they only want to read their enemy but without losing themselves to his traditions and cultures.

This operation of seeking a pure Gikuyu identity was mainly held by the nationalists. These nationalists exemplified in the character of Karinga, they didn't want to restore their original identity, and rather they wanted to create a new Gikuyu subject able to choose which elements of the culture of the colonizer to include in their new identity.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's works show us how his characters are in a constant quest for their identity, and how they manage to reconcile between their multicultural, hybrid personalities and their unique one. His use of the language of myths and prophecies is a sign that he misses his past, furthermore, his divorce from the English language in his novels, although he still uses it every now and then in his Gikuyu novels, is another sign of that nostalgia to his home and his hybrid identity.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is among the writers who think that hybridity is one of the prominent aspects which determine what is an authentic literature. Mac Fenwick pointed out that

“Ngugi create (s) authentic local forms by rejecting iconoclasm of absolute terms and raising to consciousness the very processes of cross cultural exchange that are the genesis of local tradition”. (Smith 2000: 184).

And in Fenwick's words, Ngugi wa Thing'o holds the viewpoint that an authentic novel relies on 'a rising consciousness of the cross-cultural or migrant intellectual could take part in the procedure of 'cross-cultural exchange'. This cross-culturalism is explored in Ngugi's wa Thing'o's novels through what he says through Rev. Jackson:

"Ngai, the Gikuyu God, is the same one God who sent Christ, the son, to come and lead the way from darkness into the light; Jackson would reason out, trying to show that the Christian faith had roots in the very traditions revered by the Gikuyu" (Ngugi 1967: 83).

Here what Ngugi wa Thing'o wants to say is that African people in a way or another became multicultural and hybridized in every aspect of their lives. They not only adopted western ways and replaced them with their own ways, but they also took from the western culture and ascribed it to their own culture. This could be supported by what Ngugi wa Thing'o wrote in 'Decolonizing the Mind'.

This hybrid world began as a cut between what Nicholls calls "western Christianity and Gikuyu traditionalism". The characters that live in that world are thus for him hybrid. He says that this could be illustrated in Ngugi's wa Thing'o's novel *The River Between*, where the title in itself is an anecdote to the notion of 'in-betweenness' in which the river Honia finds itself in the middle of two conflicting identities. Just like Muthoni who is also considered as example of the cultural struggle within Kenyan society and the multiculturalism of the new generation as she claims her desire to be a Christian, a fundamental feature in the white man's identity and culture, but at the same time to follow our Gikuyu traditions and be circumcised:

"Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christian? Circumcision didn't prevent them for being Christians. I too have embraced the white man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated in to womanhood.

"You learn the ways of the ways of the tribe. Yes, the white man's God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills that you and I know". (Ngugi 165, 26).

Nicholls carries on saying that the hybridity of Muthoni could be illustrated later on in the novel when she tells Waiyaki:

"I am still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe. Look, I am a woman and I will grow big and healthy in the tribe". (Nicholls 2010, 45).

There is also the example of the educated elite who finds himself caught between two conflicting identities as represented by Waiyaki who is driven into Gikuyu traditions such as circumcision through his father's teachings and at the same time who is educated in the Siriana Mission School. His education puts in to his head the illusion that he can liberate people from their oppressive traditions through educating them in his turn.

Woode reveals the fact of the in-betweenness of the Kenyan society which finds itself roaming from the side of traditions and origins to the other side of traditions and origins of new ideas and perspectives of the modern world through the position of the elders in *The River Between*, he says,

“The elders are divided. They back Kabonyi's efforts to preserve Gikuyu culture, but also admire Waiyaki's passion for spreading education. Young Gikuyus give Waiyaki their whole hearted support”(Woode, 2000, 23).

However, Ngugi wa Thing’o in this novel seems to hold a position against the hybridization of culture, he wants his people to remain culturally pure, as Woode argues: he doesn't want his people to conflate traditional behaviours with western ways. Woode here points out that Gikuyus are not really concerned with colonisation as they are with hybridization of their people , as a sign to Muthoni and Waiyaki.

Franz Fanon in his book 'The Wretched of the Earth' asserted that the colonizer through his ongoing quest to negate the Other forced the colonized to ask himself a very intriguing question about himself , and that question is:

“Who am I in reality?” (Fanon 2004, 182)

And this could be illustrated in what people ask about the personality of Matigari as who he was. Sundy claims that through this novel Ngugi wa Thing’o wanted to insinuate that Africans have to choose between incarnating the person of Mattagami, or being an "Other" in their own nation. So the world of Matigari is divided into two worlds:

“There are two worlds,” Matigari said to the teacher,

“There is the world of those who accept things as they are, and there is that of those who want to change things. Which world do you belong to?”(Ngugi wa Thing’o 1987, 91).

This split in the African world occurs in the first place because of the hegemony that the colonizer creates towards the colonized; and the ' west' applies on the ' rest'. Then Ngugi wa Thing’o holds, as Gikandi postulated,

A 'utopian desire for a 'non-alienated mode of cognition' (Gikandi 2000, 12).

This concept of Otherness however doesn't apply only in terms of colonizer/colonized, it could exist in the same person. In *The River Between*, this idea could be best illustrated with the Kameno and Makuyu which constitute another for each other. It could be also illustrated, as Woode suggests, in the duel between missionaries and tribesmen. This duality is present within the character of Kabonyi, as a sign that Otherness can exist within one person also as having more than one self. There exists a kind of dualisms strongly connected to the notion of Otherness, for example Kabonyi perceives Waiyaki as a traitor while Waiyaki perceives himself as a modernist who opts for the progress of his own people.

This is to say that hybridity strengthened the feeling of Otherness within a society that supposedly shares the same traditions, the same beliefs and culture. In addition to this sense of Otherness within the same society, Ngugi wa Thiong'o portrays the sense of Otherness between the tribesmen and the westerners. The tribe 'Others' together see the western culture as an 'Other' and this as Woode suggests, could be illustrated in the operation of circumcision that the Gikuyu people can't get rid of, whether they are Christian or not; they are united against Western beliefs. So the white man here is the real other in Kenya.

Waiyaki, the lead character himself in *The River Between*, is observed as a different in the opinion of his people. He is the one who has been educated and cultured in Western institutions similar to Ngugi wa Thiong'o and as Woode asserted,

"The alterity within his identity creates a colonial desire to displace the 'Other', the white man, by using Western education, 'the white man's magic' (*The River Between*) to create a position of privilege for himself in society". (Woode 2001, 36)

A thing that could be reflected on the person of Ngugi wa Thiong'o himself when he wanted to displace the 'Other' (colonial language) using his novel 'White Man's Magic' to regain his status in his society. But as Homi Bhabha, in 'The Location of Culture', stated:

"The question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy - it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image. The demand of identification - that is, to be for another - entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of Otherness" (Bhabha 64).

Zabus says that the very fact of auto-translating his own works into English is a kind of Othering the Other language through writing in the original language as the Centre and translating for the others, or the periphery; like in the case of Matigari. This could be illustrated in *The River Between*, as Gikandi stated,

"When Waiyaki uses the language of a patriot but is portrayed in the novel as going through the process of 'alienation in the language' of the tribe" (Gikandi 2000, 67).

For Gikandi, Waiyaki's sense of displacement from his traditions allows him to make room to a new imagined nation. "Identity is thus sought through alienation and a failed romance", and this could be the case of Ngugi wa Thiong'o himself.

So, one of the aspects that deepen the feeling of Othering is alienation. Ngugi wa Thiong'o wrote in *The River Between*:

Waiyaki did not like to be identified with either side; he was now committed to reconciliation." (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1965, 110).

He was alienated and perceived as another to his people, so, instead of trying to belong to any of the tribes, he preferred to create his own world, a world of "reconciliation" with traditions and bearing of the new identity.

So all that Ngugi wa Thiong'o wanted to convey is the idea that there are no such notions as Otherness, centre/ periphery, dominator/ marginalized and so on and do forth. He wants to say that every one is the centre of his own world and everybody else is another to him. There exists a massive amount of centres in the world. So the centre is not a static notion and it "moves", and as Dipesh Pabari quoted:

"You know, the whole business of living - why is it a problem? Is it not essentially because we think from a particular point of view, from a fixed point of view? We are always thinking from a centre towards the periphery but the periphery is the centre of most of us..... (Jiddu Krishnamurti, the First and the Last Freedom, Wainaina and Kalondo: 2004, 85).

Conclusion

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o documented the social, political, cultural norms, codes, traditions, customs, conventions with a diligent detail and their hemiplegic transformation crossing a phase of history in colonial set and gives it uniqueness and universality. Exploring Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels and other modern dissertations regarding Gikuyu women and land occupancy, the study discovers both progressive and regressive potentials in *Weep Not, Child*. Unlike his later novels, especially *Petals of Blood* (1977) and the Gikuyu novels (1980-2006), this work falls short of developing any strong idiom of resistance to colonialism, for which Ngugi wa Thiong'o is widely known. However, the ways in which *Weep Not, Child* engages with the complexities of post colonialism in Kenya appear to be a testimony to his endeavour in negotiating the vicissitudes of the Kenya's colonial period. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has consistently traced the past of his characters in the novel deliberated back to their origin and moving through the post-colonial and colonial periods to a projected future society to equal opportunities for all Kenyan citizens and all Africans as reflected in *Wizard of the Crow*. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a kind of 'psycho-engineer' or 'psycho-builder' who actively and honestly helps the mass understand their situation better and strive to change it. He not only describes the situation but also prescribes remedies for the situation.

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