

Clashing Colonialism and Postcolonialism in Weep Not Child of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

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Abstract

The paper tries to look into the tendencies representing colonialism and postcolonialism in the novel *Weep Not Child* written by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. The lives of the major characters are taken into consideration so as to understand how colonialism and postcolonialism are interacting with each other and providing the impetus for the novel to progress. The difference between how older generation's mindset is different from the younger generation is also taken into account so as to reach a conclusion. On a careful observation it emerges that the older generation is representing the colonial tendencies more precisely as compared to the younger generation who is looking forward for the liberation and snatching of their rights from the colonizers. Education is also the center of the novel and it is expressed through the character Njoroge who wanted to get education in the university. The desire for getting educated is an excellent example of postcolonialism where the character wants to excel in his life and that could only be possible while getting freedom from the colonizers. The pessimism and optimism in the characters is also depicting the clash between colonialism and postcolonialism.

Keywords: Colonialism, postcolonialism, *Weep Not Child*, older generation vs. younger generation, education and Thiong'o

Introduction

Weep Not Child by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan author, is the first English novel published by an East African, in 1964 while he still studied at Makerere University. The work traces the development of relationship between the colonizers: the British, and the colonized: the Africans where the colonizers have been critically exposed by revealing their regime and how they ruled

the Africans. The most important feature of *Weep Not Child* is that it is a postcolonial novel as it talks about the experiences of those who have been colonized by the British in Africa. It is also worthwhile to mention here that any postcolonial text couldn't be postcolonial if it doesn't talk about what constitutes colonialism or it could be emphasized that there have been an unbreakable relationship between what constitutes colonialism and postcolonialism in literature in particular and in the real world in general. The social background of the novel is that of Mau Mau Uprising/Rebellion (1952-1960) that was a war between the colonists and the colonized where the Freedom Army (KLFA) also participated which was known as Mau Mau. This Mau Mau rebellion happened in the British Kenya colony. The novel narrates the story of Njoroge who wanted to study in the university but he couldn't and his dream shattered into ground due to the violence caused by colonial government crushing the protestors who also participated in violent protests to free themselves. It also reveals the negative aspects of colonialism and imperialism both. The novel also throws some light on how the people think they would get freedom from the colonial rule. Some characters are said to be having charismatic powers and said to believe that they would chance the prevailing circumstances that means the novel also captures optimism to look forward for a positive change to emerge out of the struggle the oppressed people were making to get their due that is their land which has been usurped by the white colonists treacherously.

Looking critically what constitute colonialism and postcolonialism it becomes clear that there is a linkage between both of the concepts existing simultaneously side by side in the novel. Postcolonialism is the study of power relations between diverse groups and the postcolonial literature is the literature written by the people of the former colonies of colonist countries

including the most powerful among them as the British. The postcolonial literature talks about the issues of colonized countries and also the process how they decolonized themselves out of the clutches of colonizing countries. It also addresses the issue how literature perpetuates and challenges cultural imperialism as proposed by Edward Said, a postcolonial critic and professor of literature at Columbia University in his work *Orientalism*. Edward Said while using Foucault's concept of "discourse" said:

"My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse, one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage –and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during post-Enlightenment Period." (Said 3)

Here the focus of the author is to examine what constitute Orientalism before we try to understand what constitute the ulterior motive of the European culture to undermine or subjugate the real aspects of what we call postcolonial.

As said above there are intimate boundaries between colonialism and postcolonialism, it is imperative to understand both the concepts on a comparative level. In colonialism powerful countries like France and Britain invaded most of the countries of the world and made them their colonies and exploited their resources. Colonialism is also associated with imperialism. The most fascinating subject matter of the postcolonial literature is about representing decolonizing struggles. This means colonialism is about colonizing a country and postcolonialism is about decolonizing any country as it captures the experiences involved in the process. This further implies that the colonizers while writing literature they gave a subordinate representation of those who were colonized. They presented the colonized as uncivilized and backward in order to

perpetuate their exploitation and justify them on these grounds. Hence the most important function of the postcolonial literature is to bring forth the actual representation of those who have colonized for centuries. Hence the postcolonial theory is against the colonial discourse which is imposed from outside on the colonized and to the whole world to demean them. In postcolonial literature it is done through counter-discourse where they revealed the limitations of colonial discourses. The postcolonial writers also write the history through their own perspective and they try to reveal the limitations of history which has been already written by the colonial writers. The colonial writers had not presented the colonized people in real terms but rather they presented them in order to subordinate them and so as to perpetuate their exploitation and convince them for enduring their bad conditions in the hands of colonizers. The postcolonial writers were having pride for their country and hence they wanted to talk about their countries and their problems. They feel proud of their cultural identity and they try to express their cultural identity in contrast to how their cultural identity has been represented by colonial writers. The colonial writers represented the culture of colonized people as primitive, backward and inferior to the standards set by the colonial writers. Postcolonial writers also use the technique of meta-narrative where the attention is given in the story how story has been constructed. The colonial writers create unreal stories about the colonized people in order to demean and subjugated them and convince them for such deadly endeavors. The biases in such stories are also revealed by the postcolonial authors. In addition to it, there are certain stereotypes and prejudices which are propagated by the colonial writers in particular or by the European in general against the people who have been colonized and the postcolonial writers also take this initiation of revealing these stereotypes and prejudices against the people who have been colonized and their identities are

under threat by the colonizers. There are numerous pioneers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who wrote *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Harvard University professor, Homi K. Bhabha who wrote *The Location of Culture* and gave the concepts like hybridity, mimicry, difference, third-space and ambivalence and many more who paved the way for the emergence of postcolonial studies.

Colonialism in Weep Not Child

In the very beginning of the novel it is said that the main character of the novel Njoroge gets the opportunity to get admission in the school and he is the first to go to get education in the school. The incident indicates that there was no free space or opportunity for getting educated during the time of colonialism. This depicts that the colonialism was existing in the community and had just been ended. The incident of snatching of Gikuyu land away from the native people by the British is also an indication that colonialism was being practiced intensely at that time and it has been captured nicely in the novel with the help of narration of stories by Ngotho to his wives and sons so as to inform them the strategies involved by the colonists to exploit the natives. The fight which broke out between Ngotho and Jacobo which resulted into riots and which were silenced down easily with the colonial rules and sanctions were raised against Ngotho and the land on which he was working was taken away from him. This is the feature of colonialism where such tactics were used to silence the protesters who were against the colonial government and asking for their rights. The use of police force against the revolutionary activists is again a feature of colonialism where the police inflicted injuries upon the protests who asked for their human rights. The well-planned plot against Ngotho by Mr. Howlands and Jacobo after Ngotho had attacked Jacobo in order to trap Ngotho after taking his land and raising sanctions against him is also an example of colonial atrocity inflicted upon the native person. Simultaneously his wife

and son were also arrested. This intensified the colonial violence against the innocent natives for reducing them into their slaves and in this case Ngunjiri had reacted against them by breaking the rules and law imposed by the colonial regime. The picking up of Njoroge by the police and his subsequent interrogation and merciless torture and manhandling by the police after the murder of Jacobo is an incident of colonial anarchy where even the students weren't spared and subjected to cruel treatment by the authorities. The frustration which resulted because of education that Njoroge couldn't accomplish what he wanted to like studying in the university and also in his love for Muihaki could only happen in colonial settings for there are no opportunities for education and love for those who have been colonized in order to utilize them for the welfare of the colonists. In colonialism it also happens that some of the native people establish links with the colonists and start participating in the process of exploitation of their own people and this result into a clash between the natives by declaring the natives who are in collusion with the colonists as traitors. Jacobo is an excellent example in this novel where he established links with Mr. Howlands and made Ngunjiri work on his land. This could happen only in a colonial setting where most of the people are fighting for getting rid of colonialism whereas a few of them are betraying the cause and standing beside the colonizers for their vested ends. The incidents of murder in the novel are also representing a peculiar feature of a colonial setting.

Postcolonialism in Weep Not Child

The novel is set in the period where the violent activities took place in Kenya in order to get freedom from the British and the very subject is about the decolonizing of Kenya by struggle which is by default the subject matter of postcolonial literature. The prospects of education are centered themes in the novel which is the outcome of the people after getting freedom. The

incident of the barber where he narrates the stories of second war also indicates that the postcolonialism is the centre of the novel. Ngunjiri is very happy that his son, Njoroge would get admission in the school. This implies that before that nobody had gone to school and that could be effect of colonialism. Education here is the symbol of postcolonialism. It is also worthwhile to mention here that Ngunjiri always narrated the stories how the British stole Gikuyu land. The narration of stories also refers to the process involved in decolonization of land. Njoroge while studying gets to know that there is a similarity between Gikuyu struggle and Israelite struggle. This is also another characteristic of postcolonial literature as the postcolonial writers could only see such parallelism between the sufferings of both the countries under colonists. There is also a mention of a great strike to be held at the centre of the country which is symbolic of freedom struggle which is advocating for more rights for the Africans. This is again a feature of postcolonialism in literature. The stage fight between Ngunjiri and Jacobo is also an indication of a fight for the decolonization of native land which resulted into riots which were silenced down easily. The arrest of revolutionary hero, Jomo, whom Njoroge worshiped as hero, is also symbolic of hopelessness: a step towards accomplishing the freedom of the land and it also depicts postcolonialism. The love between Njoroge and Muihaki is an example where postcolonialism becomes important for it is the subject matter which is to be revealed by the postcolonial writers for the feeling of love is important for them and it also reflects the natural tendency of the natives who are fighting for their rights. The manhandling of Njoroge after lifting him up from his school and subsequent interrogation by the police is also a process involved in overthrowing the colonial regime. This comes under the subject matter of

postcolonial literature. The violence clashes resulting into death are also involved in the process of securing freedom for the natives and are dealt with in what constitute postcolonialism.

Conclusion

The Africans are involved in decolonizing and the British and their followers (very few Africans like Jacobo) are perpetuating the colonization which means that colonizing and decolonizing both take places simultaneously in the novel. This means the novel has been written in two parts intimately woven with each other where one depicted colonialism and the other depicted the postcolonialism and these parts couldn't be separated. If separated the novel no longer would remain a work based on colonialism and postcolonialism. Njoroge's aspirations to get educated at the university and his father Ngotho's hopefulness for getting his land back by assuming that Mr. Howlands would return his land after some time. This quest of both son and father represent the idea of postcolonialism and on the other hand their torture by the police where Njoroge was picked up from his school and charged with treason and was subjected to merciless torture and his father Ngotho was also given bad treatment by the police are the instances of colonialism in the novel. The idea of education and the attraction between Njoroge and Mwhaki represented the peaceful settings which the colonized people are looking forward but the frustration in education and subsequent breakup of Njoroge and Mwhaki represented the fate meted to the native residents of who have been subjected to colonization by the colonists. Hence without any doubt it could be concluded that *Weep Not Child* is the fair representation of clash between colonialism and postcolonialism and in this way it is a true example of postcolonial novel.

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