



Unfolding decolonization in weep not child

Nasir Ahmed¹, Mikesh Rai²

¹ Assistant Teacher, Department of English, Adhikari Krishnakanta High School, Darjeeling, West Bengal, India

² M.A., Department of English, Delhi University, Delhi, India

Abstract

The novel weep not child portrays the period of emergency, the most traumatized situation. The novel is connected with political movement. It talks of apartheid movement. The novelist doesn't glorify his culture. He conveys the message that the brutality and unplanned tactics will not help in decolonizing the land.

Keywords: portrayal of emergency period, traumatized condition

Introduction

The novel "Weep Not Child" by Ngugi Wa Thiong'O mostly centres on Njoroge, his growing up in the period of emergency, a tumult period in the history of Black Literature. Njoroge represents new class of people in Gikuyu community who has the advantage of education and is optimistic about his future, but turns hopeless and frustrated like other people. The novel talks about the struggle between the colonized and colonizer. The movement tries to throw away not only physical but also mental colonization. This novel shows the first step to freedom. Although the text ends with a different note, the collapse of Mau Mau movement but it hints at a more resolute determination to free their nation. So Ngugi centering upon Njoroge has beautifully worked on all the aspects of the theme of decolonization.

According to Said's essay "Yeats and Decolonisation" imperialism did not begin in 1870s with the scramble for Africa, but much earlier than that, when Colonisers begin to settle on the pretext of spreading Christianity and 'civilizing the brute'. Authority of the white men over the non-white was as if 'inscribed by right'. Said here talks about two political movements that has been taken place during the nationalist revival the first being national anti-imperialism and the second being liberalist anti-imperialist resistance'. (Said - 1990) [10].

The Novel belongs to both the political movement. As reading the text gives the feeling of distancing the colonized individual from the colonizers, there is a need to recover the land from the outsider. We can see this when Njoroge is tending Mr. Howland's land because he knows by right it belongs to him and believes that someday he is going to get it back, his ancestral land. The novel also tries to bring together all the African but this does not happen in the novel, as we see black people are divided among themselves.

In the novel the white settlers have arrived to propagate Christianity and take possession of the most fertile lands, the former owner of the land were reduced to the state of squatters on settler's farm. Thus "the conflict is not one of culture as Ime Ikkideh points out, although culture may be involved: it is

more a fight for political independence. And political independence is bound up with repossession of the land. All agree upon this aim, but not on how it is to be achieved. The elders would be content to await the fulfilment of the prophecy of a saviour; Njoroge, another adolescent hero, is avid for education and stand for those who see the key to the future in acquiring the white man's magic. The younger, more militant men like Njoroge's brother Boro, demand more immediate action. Boro represents the generation that fought, uncomprehendingly, for the whither man in Second World War and whose realisation of the sordid side of western civilization proved to be a traumatic experience. For them resistance to dispossession takes the form of the oath of allegiance in Mau Mau guerrilla fighting group... Mau Mau Emergency, and which brings jeopardy to many young boy's hopes and ambitions of better life through education." (Downing - 1981) "Any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land he would never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money" (pp.19).

This is Gikuyu traditional point of view about wealth. Ngugi consciously explain it to bring in conflict between Njoroge and Mr. Howland, unlike many European colonists he share this Gikuyu view point and puts land on top priority, a transcendent possession. This results in struggle for dominance during 1952-1960 Emergency period. Thus this explains why loss of possession of land aroused resentment which eventually leads to a great conflict. "Colour bar was everywhere. Rich Africans could also practice colour bar on the poor African." (pp. 64).

It talks mainly of apartheid movement. Colour bar plays a big role not only in Black and White people but also among rich and poor people which creates difference between people. Thus it becomes difficult to improve their life. Novel talks not only about colonization by foreigner but colonisation within its own society. (<http://www.gradesaver.com/weep-not-child-study-quotes>).

According to Fanon 'Decolonisation is always a violent

phenomenon' and in the work of Ngugi this viewpoint of needless and equally necessary violence is prominent along with historical, cultural and economical issues which does not make him a one-dimensional writer (<http://shigekuni.wordpress.com/2010/10/09/ngugi-wa-thiongo-weep-not-child/>).

In the novel, the first initiation of decolonization takes place with the peaceful strike caused by segregation the apartheid movement and demand for equal wages but the peaceful strike converted into a riot when Njoroge enraged by Jacobo attacks him thus following confusion. Although the strike failed it was the first form of rebellion put up by the mob against the Britishers.

In the novel, the struggle might have failed but this failure will make the people more resolute to fight against the Britisher. As in the case of Njoroge, the hopeless youth, left alone by his two mother Nyokabi and Njeri decides to escape but he could not as his mother calls him back this can be seen as if the mother Africa is calling the hopeless youth to free her from the bondage of slavery and exploitation, as his mothers will be alone to fend for themselves in the darkness of Africa where she will be lost without her son. Njoroge who was optimized about his future ends up being frustrated hopeless, a victim as he is seen as saviour of him community.

Njoroge is the embodiment of youth who want to get educated and hope for a bright future. Ngugi talks about education because education in his time was as important as Christianity and Christian culture (<http://shigekuni.wordpress.com/2010/10/09/ngugi-wa-thiongo-weep-not-child/>).

We see Njoroge is interested to learn English, a colonial language but the novel or the world surrounding him shows the very limitation that can be seen around his believe in God and learning as at last he gets away the illusion and becomes hopeless, and thus experiences the cruelty of political changes in his youth.

A parallel can be drawn to Gordiner's "My Son's Story" where slowly each member of the family be it Sonny, Aila, Baby and last Will, who chose to become a writer so does Boro, Kamau, Kori and Mwangi (who died in the Second World War), and their father Ngotho (who tries to protect his son) slowly joins the rebellion in their own way. In the end, we see the broken family left with only Nyokabi, Njeri and Njoroge, Boro becomes Mau Mau leader, Kamau is imprisoned for lifetime and Ngotho dies saving his son. The family is left with only three characters. Njoroge's hopelessness can also be seen as a sigh of disillusionment with British rule which may lead him to join the movement, as he ultimately realizes that in British rule, he will not be and cannot be optimistic.

'Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery; it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve, an unjust, oppressive, social order is criminal and diminishes man' (Brown, Sep, 1981) ^[5]. Such statement of Ngugi reminds one of Fanon's ideas of violence. As a movement is the result of long years of suppression and frustration in the part of African whose demand for constitution and land reform were constantly being refused by the colonial government. As Oginga Odinga writes 'Kenya nationalism turned violent because for thirty years it was treated as seditious and denied all legitimate outlet.' (Brown, Sep. 1981) ^[5].

Emergency is declared by the white, the locals were no more enjoying any kind of gathering and the fire inside the hut were put off at the evening so that they do not become the target of the whites during the emergency. Six people were killed in the wood by the Britishers. 'Brutality and malpractices by the police have occurred on a scale which constitutes a threat to public confidence in the forces of law and order' (Brown, Sep. 1981) ^[5].

The Mau Mau rebellion was military rebellion that took place in Kenya between 1952-1960 with Kikuyu dominated groups called Mau Mau. The frustration and disillusionment of British rule lead to their uprising. However this nationalistic approach was not wholly supported in the novel, there is lot of flaws in the movement Ngugi 'tries hard to balance the brutality of the home guards with the violence of Mau Mau including Boro, Njoroge's own brother.' (Brown, Sep.1981) ^[5]. The term 'balance' can be seen effected by inconclusive dialogue of Njoroge's school fellows:

"The home guards with the white masters. They are as bad as Mau Mau"

"No. Mau Mau are not bad. The freedom boys are fighting against white settlers. Is it bad to fight for one's land? Tell me that."

"But they cut black men's throats,"

"Those killed are traitors! Black white settler." (pp 72).

Njoroge is confused whether Mau Mau was in his side or theirs. "I thought Mau Mau was on the side of Black people" when he hear about Mau Mau's threats to close the school.

Boro leader of Mau Mau movement, believes in 'nothing but revenge' as he has lost many things. He wants to fight only 'to kill, unless you kill, you'll be killed. So you go on killing and destroying. It's a law of nature.' (pp-102). The sentence reveals the ethical concept of Mau Mau, it deprives any kind of morality.

David Maughan Brown sees the 'Mau Mau' in the light and darkness symbolism shown to describe Boro's coming and going in the house at the end of the novel. Boro, while coming in, 'his hair was long and unkempt... Boro went nearer, falteringly as if he would turn away from the light'. '... He ram quickly out from the light into the night' (Brown, sep 1981) ^[5]. All this now is used to symbolize his family life - disintegrated one, once a family of harmony and joy. His movement to darkness seems as if the movement was not to bring a bright future but a dark and gloomy one.

Disrespectful to the elder is Mau Mau's characteristic trait. In the village it is only the elder who lend any kind of conversation and youth were only listeners and that is not the case when from the big city Kori and Boro brings other people who started dominating the conversation. Ngotho was forced by Boro to take Mau Mau oath but he refuse knowing the full implication of the oath which means he would lose his standing as father. (Brown, Sep 1981) ^[5].

Boro can only plead his father as he realized what harm his guerrilla tactics has brought about as he is the one to kill Jacobo not Ngotho. He 'looked like a child' when he realized what errors lies on his movement, but at last he goes out to the

darkness not because of his heroic ambition but simply because he fears being caught and tortured.

Ngugi totally debunks the idea of 'white superiority' according to which white is superior to non-white. Their hegemony over them is taken to be natural to civilize, educate and tame the brutes. 'Why should the white man have fought? Aaa! You could never tell what those people would do in spite of the fact that they with poison, fire and big bombs that destroyed the land. They had even called people to help them in killing one another. It was puzzle '(pp-6). Thus the white people who call themselves the civilizer of the world are themselves below the level of the brute. The civilizer themselves need to be civilized.

The conflict can be seen in many levels - white versus non-white, social, economic and political conflicts. The book is more of a political kind, portraying in as far the political conflicts. The conflict of white and non-white is evident in the fight between Mau Mau and the Britishers. Social conflicts can be seen in the divide between the black society itself-change from the pagan religion to Christianity. Ngugi who is himself a Christian enforces his native name Ngugi Wa Thiaongo over Christian name James Ngugi.

Fanon say "decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature which results from and is nourished by the situations in the colonies. Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together - that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler - was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannon. The settler and native are old acquaintances. In fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing 'them' well. As it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and it is he who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say his property, to the colonial system." (Fanon, 1967) ^[9]. In fact it is the very essence of colonial history and thus fits well in Ngugi's 'Weep Not Child' Both the colonial and colonized are complimentary to each other - one cannot be known without the other. In the novel, both are opposed to each other not only by looks but by their very nature. Brutality of superior race leads to demanding equality and thus need to freedom which makes them a human being, free from slavery unlike animals. Thus creating of 'new man' - a man not having supernatural power but the 'thing' becomes man when it frees itself. Violence is the main component of decolonization. It is violence from one's hand which in turn creates violence on the other. Thus it is the violence of the white people which triggered violence of the black people. Both Ngotho and Njoroge was beaten brutally even when they were innocent: Ngotho was left half dead and later died. Boro, in order to take revenge kills Mr. Howland. Thus violence creates another layer of violence without any solution. Mau Mau may be a freedom fighter but because of their rashness and unplanned design fails to achieve their goals. Every inhuman treatment right from the Hola camp to brutal torturing to get confession from the blacks are related realistically.

Talking about the irony which gives strength to the novel is that the author and the reader are on the side of education represented by Njoroge, who is shattered by the uncontrollable changes. The irony is the existence of white is duly responsible for both the violent self destruction within the

traditional society and their departing of western education.

Thus to conclude, Ngugi does not romanticize his community, like a historian he does present his community in all the shades of life, whether bright or grey. He does not glorify his culture and does not step back from showing the brutality of Mau Mau movement. In a way he balances the brutality of both African and Britisher. Thus he wants to convey the message that the brutality and unplanned tactics will not help in decolonizing the land. A more planned and thoughtful approach is needed. Thus unlike Achebe and like V.S. Naipaul, he does not glorify his past and thus he is able to give a complete picture and perfect picture of Africa.

References

1. Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi : Weep Not, Child (Heinemann).
2. Hirpapa JD. Thematic Concern in Ngugi Wa Thiong'O's Fiction, 2013
3. Mackay, Mercedes. The Royal African Society(Oct., 1964)
4. Knipp, Thomas R, Brown. David Maughan: Letters to the Editor Autumn, 1987.
5. Brown, David Maughan. MauMau and violence in Ngugi's novels, 1981).
6. Larson, Charles R. The Search of the Past:East and Central African writing, 1968.
7. Dowling, Angela. Language and Theme in the novels of James Ngugi(Ngugi Wa Thiang'O), 1981.
8. Carling MM. Politics and the Artist, 1965.
9. Fanon, Frantz. The Wretched of the world, 1967.
10. Said, Edward W. Yeats and Decolonisation, 1990.
11. Museveni, Yoweri T. Fanon's theory on Violence: Its Verification, 1981.
12. <http://shigekuni.wordpress.com/2010/10/09/ngugi-wa-thiongo-weep-not-child/>
13. <http://www.gradesaver.com/weep-not-child/study-guide/quotes>.