Weep Not, Child (1964), Ngugi’s first novel to be published, deals with the characteristic preoccupations of the period – irony, reconciliation, leadership and education – themes that he extended to his second novel, The River Between and much later into Petals of Blood which, of course, deals with these themes from a different perspective. The Companion to African Literature attributes this preoccupation of the novelist with these themes in his formative period as a novelist to “the formative influence of Gikuyu social and cultural tradition, Christianity and Western liberal thought”. Examined from the point of Ngugi’s desire to recreate history for his nation through fiction, Weep Not, Child is set in the backdrop of the tumultuous years of the armed Mau Mau struggle, with the events relating to the introduction of western education and Christianity in Kenya. Seen autobiographically, the novel seems to reflect two important strains that have been formative and decisive in Ngugi’s growth and development as a novelist; the first being the influence of the Mau Mau rebellion upon his family and second, his experience of western (English) education and Christianity.

Ngugi, in his novels, is concerned with the major social, cultural and political problems in Kenya – past and present, and Weep Not, Child deals with that crucial point in Kenya’s freedom struggle when the Africans were divided in their opinion over the issues of Western education and Christianity. Examining the far-reaching impact of Western education on the Kenyans, Harish Narang observes that “western education succeeded in dividing the Kenyan Africans at a crucial point in their history”.

In Weep Not, Child Ngugi uses the form of the Bildungsroman to narrate the story of an idealistic young man, Njoroge, who places firm faith on the liberating power of education but cannot realise his vision when he is caught between his idealistic dreams and the violent reality of colonial exploitation. Through the character and predicament of Njoroge, Ngugi shows how in spite of having personal qualities the dream/vision of an individual may be ruptured by the external forces, and
in the process of narrating the events in the life of the protagonist Ngugi brings to light the dynamics of power-relations in the backdrop of colonial Kenya where power surfaces as an important theme through the conflict of the different forces/factors at play.

Allowing for a Foucauldean interpretation of power as an important theme in *Weep Not, Child*, the analysis can be based on the Foucauldean paradigm of ‘Knowledge as Power’ since in the context of this novel education is viewed as a powerful tool for the liberation of the protagonist’s family and the community as education, western education, contains the knowledge of the white man. But the manner in which Njoroge’s dreams remain unfulfilled and he is left a derelict at the end shows how Ngugi uses the Foucauldean paradigm of ‘Power/Knowledge’ to subvert the colonial ideals of western Euro-Christian education. When the sweet promises of prosperity to be gained through education collide with the bitter facts of reality, idealists like Njoroge have to suffer disappointment and disillusionment. Buried in the rift between contesting powers, their predicament is pitiable as the numbing effects of western education incapacitates Njoroge and his like. Through them Ngugi projects the danger posed by western/English education as a divisive force which can erase, alter, divide and destroy an entire race of people.

Basically a novel in which all aspirations boil down to the occupation of the land, *Weep Not, Child* presents the readers with a tightly-knit network of power where the relations and dynamics (of power) are decided by the inter-action of the common people with the repressive colonial regime and the settlers on the one hand and the resistance provided by the Mau Mau on the other. Amidst such a situation, Ngugi proposes to examine the failure of the power of western education as a liberating force.

In this novel, education is seen as a key that has the power to unlock the formidable doors of European dominance and usher in the golden light of a better tomorrow. It is prized as a ladder by which one can climb into the secret bower of the colonizer where knowledge is preserved because, as people like Njoroge in the novel believe, the power of the white man comes through English education. During his conversation with Mwihaki, when both of them are children and their homes are still
not affected by violence, they talk of how all the land earlier belonged to the black people and how it was later taken away by the whites. Mwihaki had heard her father say that if the black people had education then the white men could not have snatched their land away from them. In her innocence, Mwihaki asks Njoroge:

I wonder why our old folk, the dead old folk, had no learning when the white man came?  

Njoroge’s answer to this question is equally innocent:

There was nobody to teach them English.

Thus, in a simple yet very effective sentence Ngugi succeeds in telling the readers how Njoroge, like many other Kenyans, looked upon English, the language of the colonizer as the key towards the liberation of the nation. It is indeed, an ironic situation, how the black people were yearning for the dominant metaphor for acceptance through a process of willing submission of their own culture, for the English educational system as introduced by the missionaries in Kenya was an assimilative prison in which the ‘native’ was destined to lose his true identity. It was an instrument for initiating a sustained colonization process. According to Mala Pandurang:

Those who reach the apex [of the English education system] are too entangled to escape from the system that has been predetermined. And those who question the agencies that construct their subjectivity have to come to terms with a crisis of identity and purpose. Education becomes an anathema.

In the historical context of Kenya that the novel is set in, those who receive education are looked upon as intellectual Saviours of the land, yet the ironic aspect of the education which they receive is that it is being handed down from British rule. Thus the role of the Messianic Deliverer is put on the shoulders of Njoroge by his father. It is interesting to note how njoroge who had received missionary education himself looked upon the whole idea of accruing power through a knowledge of English with suspicion; and subsequently, Ngugi ends the novel on a note of disillusionment and a
recognition of failure on the part of the protagonist; and the final resolution that he would no longer turn away from responsibility or be a coward. He has realised that liberation will not come through a passive harvesting of education alone but only through active participation in life.

Set in the backdrop of a culture faced by the challenges of transition, the novel presents how the desire of many Kenyans to adapt themselves to the ways of West only helped to isolate themselves from the immediate moment of participation in history. This alienation of the common people from their active participation in the history of colonial struggle is suggested in the cloister-like environment of the Siriana Mission School which appears like a haven to Njoroge, away from the turmoil that was affecting his family, his village and his country as a whole:

The school itself was an abode of peace in a turbulent country. Here it was possible to meet with God, not only in the cool shelter of the chapel, where [Njoroge] spent many hours, but also in the quietness of the library.

This passage makes clear how English education and the atmosphere at the mission school was having its desired effect on the young mind of Njoroge. The use of certain words and phrases like 'peace', 'possible to meet God', 'cool shelter of the chapel', 'the quietness of the library' are in direct contrast to the flaming reality that is represented by 'turbulent country'. Njoroge's desire to 'escape the watchful eyes of misery' is an expression of the escapism from practical involvement that the present moment in history demanded, and his wish to 'organise his thoughts and make definite plan for the future' is another alibi for political non-involvement. Though he does not get the chance to 'organise his thoughts' as his education is cut short by the tragedy that hits his home, it is indeed doubtful how he would have organised his thoughts as it is impossible for him to become actively involved in any sort of action. Christianity and western education at Siriana have succeeded in cutting him from his roots and when his dream of putting knowledge/education to bring an end to the violence and chaos that his family, community and the nation is dashed to pieces, he becomes a drifter. He is left, in the words of the novelist 'an old man of twenty'.

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But it is not the atmosphere at Siriana alone that has such a secluding effect upon the minds of those who stay there; the boarding school where Mwihaki was sent also had a cloister-like environment, shielded from the troubles of the country. When Njoroge asks Mwihaki how boarding school was, she replies:

‘Nice. There you are in a kind of cloister’.
‘And the country?’
‘Bad. Like here.’

Here, too, one finds the cloistered feeling of the boarding house pitched against the turbulent country outside. The lack of understanding of the real situation on the part of Mwihaki and Njoroge and how the turn in events later separate them from each other has been appropriately stated by Ngugi in the last lines of the Eleventh chapter:

They moved together, so as not to be caught by the darkness. A bird cried. And then another. And these two, a boy and a girl went forward each lost in their own world, for a time oblivious of the bigger darkness over the whole land.

But the darkness that has enveloped the world around does catch up with them finally.

Njoroge has, evidently, fallen a victim to the vicious process of cultural erosion through a substitution of values. It is no hidden fact that the English language was introduced by the Europeans into Kenya, rather into Africa herself, with the purpose of attracting the Africans to European thoughts and culture and at the same time to alienate them and make them look down upon their own indigenous cultures as inferior. In other words, the view of the colonizers was to establish a anew standard of values – literary, cultural, moral and religious, so that the colonized masses might be tricked into viewing the whole dirty project of colonization from the European’s camouflaged phrase of ‘the white man’s burden’; thus legitimizing the entire sordid and exploitative tendency of the imperial powers. Viewed in this system of substituting this ‘new’ Euro-Christian values for the original values of the Gikuyus, Christianity and English education had worked as what Ngugi has categorically termed as ‘a cultural bomb’ in his *Homecoming*. Under the mistaken notion that
everything white was a source for power – whether it be English education or Euro-Christian views, the general African mass had come to unconsciously accept things in the oppositional binary constructed by the Europeans. In Weep Not, Child we find the fascination of the characters for English education all the more because they have come to see that those associated with ‘English’, be it a language or the white man himself, enjoy a greater amount of social and financial comfort. They fail to understand that English education aims primarily at turning them into collaborators of the system that thrives by crushing and exploiting them.

But it is not that the poor boy is the lone victim of the ambition to gather the learning of the white man. It is an ambition that has been fostered within him with the supposed responsibility imposed by his family and the community at large. The boy’s eagerness to go to school has been highlighted by the author at the very beginning of the novel:

‘Would you like to go to school?’
‘O, mother!’ Njoroge gasped. He half feared that the woman might withdraw her words.  

The fact that he would be sent to school gives him an exhilarated feeling. He envisions a bright future for himself through education:

The vision of his childhood again opened before him. For a time he contemplated the vision. He lived in it alone. It was just there, for himself; a bright future…Aloud he said, ‘I like school’.

Education is viewed by the members of his family as a key to prosperity, a path out of the miserable conditions of their life. His elder brother Kamau responds to his going to school thus:

‘Don’t you worry about me. Everything will be all right. Get education, I’ll get carpentry. Then we shall, in the future, be able to have a new and better home for the whole family’.
Yes, Njoroge said thoughtfully. ‘That’s what I want. And you know, I think Jacobo is as rich as Mr. Howlands because he got education. And that’s why each takes his children to school because of course they have learnt the value of it’.  

It is interesting to note here how the young Njoroge has already started looking upon education as the path of salvation from a miserable existence even before beginning school. At a later point in the novel, Kamau’s emphasis on education reflects Kenyatta’s view on the subject that education is ‘the light of Kenya’.

Njoroge’s father, Ngotho too responds in a favourable manner to his youngest son’s going to school. In fact, there is a touch of pride in his response as he thinks that by sending Njoroge to school he has arrived on an almost equal pedestal to that of Jacobo.

It can be noted that for both Ngotho and Njoroge, Jacobo symbolises the prosperity that a black man can attain through education. It is ironical that they tend to forget Jacobo’s position in the society as a collaborator. But as if things were not enough, Ngotho entrusts upon the frail shoulders of Njoroge the weight of finding a way out of the conditions they live under:

‘You must learn to escape the conditions under which we live. It is a hard way. It is not much a man can do without a piece of land’.

Ngotho sees Njoroge’s education as a means of salvaging his ancestral piece of land from the clutches of Mr. Howlands:

‘Education is everything’, Ngotho said. Yet he doubted this because he knew deep inside his heart that land was everything. Education was good only because it would lead to the recovery of the lost lands.

Education is valued as a tool for the recovery of the lost lands, but the phrase ‘lost lands’ itself takes on a much wider connotation in the colonial context and in the story.
which Ngotho had told the young people in his *thingira* where he tells tern of the Gikuyu myth of the Creation (p. 23-25). In fact, *Weep Not, Child* deals with the twin motifs of education and land.

However, Njoroge’s mother, Nyokabi looks at his going to school as a means of enhancing her social status:

Nyokabi was proud of having a son in school. It made her soul happy and light-hearted whenever she saw him bending double over a slate or recounting to her what he had seen at school. She felt elated when she ordered her son to go and do some reading or some sums. It was to her the greatest reward she would get for her motherhood if she one day found her son writing letters, doing arithmetic and speaking English. She tried to imagine what the Howlands woman must have felt to have a daughter and a son in school. She wanted to be the same. 19

Ngugi has very aptly represented the motherly affection and pride of Nyokabi over her son’s going to school. It is interesting to note that here too the standard for judging social status is Mrs. Howlands – the colonizer settler’s wife; thus symbolising the sad fact that success is measured in terms of the white people and the things attached to them.

The value attached to education is such that even Jacobo, Ngotho’s hated enemy, tells Njoroge of it when one day Mwihaki takes him to her home:

‘I hope you do well. It is such as you who must work hard and rebuild the country’. 20

These words have a tremendous effect on Njoroge as he is carried to his dream of rebuilding the whole nation with the power of education. 21

It is the dream of that possibility that had been installed in him by his father and others in which he had begun to see himself as a saviour, a redeemer of the
Gikuyu community. He visualised himself as bearing the responsibility of ushering in a dawn of fulfilment and happiness for his people:

Njoroge listened to his father. He instinctively knew that an indefinable demand was being made on him, even though he was young. He knew that for him education would be the fulfilment of a wider and more significant vision – a vision that embraced the demand on him, not only by his father, but also by his mother, his brothers and even the vision.  

But there is another factor behind Ngotho’s imposing such burden upon Njoroge and the latter’s vision that he was ‘destined for something big’. It is the belief in a prophecy made long ago by the great Gikuyu seer, Mugo wa Kibiro, telling of the arrival of the white people on Gikuyuland and the later liberation of the black people from their oppressive rule with the rise of a liberator, a messianic figure, from the tribe. Ngotho believed in this prophecy and had clung to it, working in fields of Mr. Howlands – the same fields that earlier belonged to his ancestors. Under such circumstances, Njoroge begins to see education as a tool to the liberation of not only his family and community, but Kenya as a whole. In the words of Harish Narang, ‘Njoroge represents that section of Kenyan society which had placed its hopes of national independence on acquisition of western education’. However, faith in education and belief in an old prophecy are not the characteristic features of Njoroge’s character only. In The River Between too, Ngugi portrays another character who also has the same faith and belief, and whose catastrophe is also, to some extent, brought about by the same qualities that Njoroge has. However, Waiyaki in The River Between is more active than his predecessor.

But there are complexities in the path of realizing Njoroge’s vision of liberating Kenya through the acquisition of knowledge. Rather, as Ngugi wishes to point out, the vision itself is founded on a vacuum far removed from the practical necessities of Kenyan freedom struggle; for the path to the fortress of the white man’s knowledge is beset with many snares and traps and when one is inside it, there is seldom a way out of it. It is a trap that draws closer and closes itself upon the victim, isolating the person from contact with the immediate reality of the world outside, a point which has already been discussed in some length.
The first to come under attack because of Njoroge’s contact with western education and Christianity is his tribal identity. He stands, as it were, with one foot in Euro-Christian modernism and the other foot in the world of Gikuyu mythologies of ancient seers and prophets. His predicament is that of those Africans choosing to modernise themselves while still remaining attached to their ‘primitive’ culture, and failing when trying to live in both.

The alienation in Njoroge’s case, as in the case of many others who went to the mission schools to get education, which is represented by the Siriana Mission School in the novels of Ngugi, is brought about by bringing religion and education together. The mission schools carried on the dual task of spreading the word of God and converting ‘natives’ into Christians, and imparting education to them. In fact, the indoctrination to Christianity was an inalienable part of European education in the mission-run schools in Kenya. Exposure to Christianity, which is a part of Njoroge’s education in the school subtly works to wean him away from his religion and install in him the belief in the Christian God and the principles of Divine Justice and Mercy. His attachment to the Bible and Biblical narratives is expressed in the following lines:

The Bible was his favourite book. He liked the stories in the Old Testament. He loved and admired David, often identifying himself with this hero. The book of Job attracted him though it often gave rise to a painful stirring in his heart.\(^{25}\)

With his self-identification with David, and his assimilation of the Christian values as stressed in the Bible, he begins to view things with a different vision:

Njoroge came to place faith in the Bible and with his vision of an educated life in the future was blended a belief in the righteousness of God. Equity and Justice were there, in the world. If you did well and remained faithful to your God, the Kingdom of Heaven could be yours.\(^{26}\)

His vision of salvation of his family also gets a different turn as he now combines his new-found belief in a ‘God of love and mercy’ to his earlier belief in education:
His belief in a future for his family and the village rested then not only on a hope for sound education, but also on a belief in a God of love and mercy, who long ago walked on this earth with Gikuyu and Mumbi, or Adam and Eve.  

It is also a sign of a shift of cultural paradigms as far as the story of the Creation is concerned. There is a process of the substitution of characters in the story of Creation as narrated from the Christian and the Gikuyu contexts which is an indication of the substitution of values taking place within Njoroge’s mind because of his contact with Christianity. But the process of alienation in Njoroge’s mind had begun long before he had entered the Siriana Mission compound. Within a few days after he joins school, he feels ashamed of appearing before Mwihaki with the piece of calico over his body. It is an indication of the change in perspective that he has begun to undergo. The complexity of the situation is represented before the readers in poignant terms:  

For a time he was irresolute and hated himself for feeling as he did about the clothes he had on. Before he had started school, in fact even while he made that covenant with this mother, he would never have thought that he would ever be ashamed of the calico, the only dress he had known since birth.  

Regarding the effect of Christianity on Njoroge, it is interesting to note his belief and hope that God would one day speak to him and show him the way to lead his people. Ngotho’s narration of the Gikuyu myth of Creation and the stories of the Bible how God had sent Moses to lead the children of Israel to the Promised Land had ingrained in young Njoroge’s mind the view that God would indeed work through him. And so he waits, at times, and hopes that God might work through him in mysterious ways, as he does on the night before the strike:  

‘Lord, do you think the strike will be a success?’ He wanted an assurance. He wanted a foretaste of the future before it came. In the Old Testament, God spoke to His people. Surely He could do the same thing now. So Njoroge listened, seriously and quietly. He was still listening when he fell asleep.
Of course, there are references to Jomo Kenyatta as the Black Moses in the novel on whom the faith of the black people rests. But when he is arrested and loses the case the black people are almost hopeless.

That the vision of Njoroge is not an individual one but that of an entire community can be understood when the people across the hills contribute towards his going to the High School. It is a wonderful picture of communal harmony that Ngugi presents in the following lines:

Somehow the Gikuyu people always saw their deliverance embodied in education. When the time for Njoroge to leave came near, many people contributed money so that he could go. He was no longer the son of Ngotho but the son of the whole village.  

The above lines tell the reader how education served as a common link between the different actors in the novel – whether they be on the opposite sides of the fence on matters other than education and knowledge., the last sentence shows the common people’s involvement in Njoroge’s education. It speaks of his being owned collectively by the community. It illuminates the relationship of the individual to his community where in African tribes, the individual does not and cannot exist alone. He is an inalienable part of the community and is responsible to the community for his individual actions; s theme which Ngugi develops in greater details in A Grain of Wheat. In Njoroge’s case it is possible to argue that his failure and his impractical vision are part of the failure of the community too and so, the community is also, to a large extent, responsible for what happens to him in the end.

Njoroge’s alienation is the disaster of many young people of his age who drink too intensely from the calabash of the white men’s knowledge, not knowing that Christianity and the so-called ‘white virtues’ mixed in doses with the so-sought elixir of education would ultimately numb them and allure them away from their own roots, because in Weep Not, Child, the propagators of this Euro-Christian mode of education are those who are gravely prejudiced against all other modes of learning, belief and knowledge. The prejudice of the Headmaster of Siriana Mission has been portrayed by Ngugi in the following manner:
Many people believed that harmony in the school came because the headmaster was a strange man who was severe with everyone, black and white alike. But he believed that the best, the really excellent could only come from the white man. He brought up his boys to copy and cherish the white man's civilization as the only hope of mankind and especially of the black races. He was automatically against all black politicians who in any way made people to be discontented with the white man's rule and civilizing mission.  

The headmaster is not just racially and culturally prejudiced, he is also against everyone whoever might be against the process of white colonisation run under the alibi of civilizing the blacks. His plea for everything white as superior and everything black as inferior and degrading is a clear example of the colonial process of identity-construction on the basis of binary opposition built on extreme polarities. Here is a case of not only trying to forcibly substitute one set of value judgement for another but also to negate any possibilities of the existence of a pre-colonial history/past. It is what Ngugi has explained in Decolonising the Mind as: 

The night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battle-field was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom.

Though it cannot be denied that it was the whites who brought English education into Africa (into Kenya in the novel's context), it would be far from the truth to say that prior to the introduction of English education the Gikuyus did not have any mode of instruction of their own. Harish Narang in Politics as Fiction has tried to explain the process of educating a child in the condensed manner which tells of the transfer of knowledge and experience not just from the older generation to the younger, but also from the clan to the individual. Quoting Kenyatta upon the Gikuyu tradition of educating children, Narang writes:

...the child has to pass various stages of age-grouping with a system of education defined for every status in life. The parents take the responsibility of educating their children until they reach the stage of tribal education.
The child is thus introduced in both the family and the clan traditions, thus integrating the individual into the communal life of the Gikuyus. Narang discusses how the father trains the male child in the fields while the responsibility of training the female child rests on the mother. The parents educate their children in the knowledge required for them to grow up into young and responsible members of the family and the community. It may be repeated here that in most African communities, the individual is not just an indispensable part of his family alone but of the tribe as a whole.

Keeping in view the above traditional system for educating children in the Gikuyu culture, Njoroge's drifting into the Euro-Christian process of education is a complete shift in cultural moorings. It is noteworthy how Ngugi represents Christianity as a tool in the hands of the colonizers to motivate the minds of the black people to accept the ideals of their white rulers. In Chapter Eleven, the manner in which teacher Isaka, now a Revivalist preacher, reads in Chapter Twenty Four from the Gospel of St. Matthew is a clear indication of how religion was used by the whites to divert attention of the black people from the struggle of liberation. Particularly important are the lines:

‘And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many’.

The words refer to Jomo Kenyatta in the context of the novel as he has been referred as the ‘Black Moses’ by the Kenyans.

From the perspective of power-relationships in the novel, Njoroge is a prey to two prominent impulses trying to use education as a tool to meet their separate ends. For Njoroge, Ngotho and other members of the family, education is the key to a better and prosperous future; while for the missionaries (and the colonizers) it is the chain with which they can enslave the minds and souls of the people and bring them to the state of willing subjectivity. Yet whichever way we might look at the process of introduction and spread of Christianity and English education in the context of the novel we can see that they do cut the characters from their original culture (though in different novels the characters react indifferent manners and in different degrees).
The great suspicion with which English education and Christianity is viewed in post-colonial writing and perspective arises from this very fact. Indeed, one cannot deny nor undermine the role of the missionaries and the mission in consolidating the rule of the empire. As already mentioned in this Chapter, Ngugi’s view of the sword and the pen of the colonizer working in unison to enslave and exploit the native people stands justified. If in Weep Not, Child Ngugi takes up the theme of how English education serves as an anathema for the black people, in The River Between he deals with the fact how Christianity has functioned as a strong divisive force in dividing the Kenyans at a crucial point in the history of their freedom movement.

The division of the novel into two broad parts with the first part consisting of seven chapters grouped under the broad title ‘The Waning Light’ and the second part after ‘The Interlude’ consisting of another seven chapters grouped under the title ‘Darkness Falls’ seems to have an ominous bearing upon the entire developments in the novel. It seems ironical that the Chapters in which the readers find Njoroge’s initiation into the light of English education should fall under the first part – ‘The Waning Light’, and that his further passage into Siriana High School should be put under the pessimistic broad title ‘Darkness Falls’. It appears that Ngugi was fully conscious of the isolation that English education was playing in the life of the Gikuyus and so he planned the novel with such and ominous structure. It is clear that Ngugi had envisaged the entire developments in Njoroge’s character as a gradual process of ‘colonising the mind’, and at the end too, though Njoroge resolves to take up the responsibility of looking after his mothers, he still fails to realize that it is the education that he has received which has turned him into a misfit. Njoroge’s mind is not decolonized till the end.

Now, Ngugi’s perception of English education and Christianity in the view of Njoroge’s failure brings into operation the contestation between Foucauldian view on power and the paradox of education, particularly the post colonial views on English education against the backdrop of Kenyan freedom struggle. The belief that education brings knowledge and Foucault’s concept of ‘knowledge/power’ becomes the motivating force which compels Ngotho, njoroge and others to put faith on education to carve a glorious future for a liberated Kenya and the attraction towards mission-run
English schools, it is natural that people should come to surrender themselves at the altar of education. And if the desired results had been achieved, then the question of power-dynamics operating within the novel would not have arisen. But things grow complicated and the matrix is formed when different forms of power collide against one another, sometimes operating as counter-powers and at other times hastening the process of colonisation.

The quaint paradox of education lies in that while it enlightens one can also invariably lead to inaction and isolation from the immediate need of the hour. It is a fact that has been represented in the character of Njoroge. But how does education alienate one like Njoroge from his family, his clan and his country when he had avowed to gather and use education for the betterment of his family and his community? The answer lies in the objective with which English education was introduced and propagated in Kenya. This brings us to the post colonial view of Euro-Christian education as a disruptive force.

Allied to these if another strand of the matrix formed by the opposition between the repressive apparatuses employed by the oppressive colonial regime and the resistance offered by the Mau Mau rebels in the context of the novel. The strike of the workers occupies the centre-stage of interest in the first part of the novel along with the smattery of knowledge that Njoroge gathers in his early days is yet another important strand in the dynamics of power-relationships in Weep Not, Child, and which calls for interpretation from both the postcolonial and the Marxist points of view.

In the novel, the repressive colonial power is represented in the figure of Mr. Howlands, and Jacobo, his henchman, is the figure of the collaborator – the traitor-figure. Mr. Howlands, who is the owner of Ngotho’s ancestral lands is the portrayal of the typical European colonizer who looks upon everything as his rightly-woned property but who, ironically, has been away from his homeland for so long that he has lost all contact with it. When he thinks of England, it is just as a figment of memory and not with any sense of longing:
For a long time England remained a country far away. He did not want to go back because of what he remembered. And again:

Each day he became more and more of a family man and, as years went by, seemed even reconciled to that England from which he had run away. He sent both children back for studies. Then European civilization caught up with him again. His son had to go to war. (italics mine)

His attachment to the colonized piece of land is so great that the very thought or mention of him leaving it and going back to England is a taboo. British colonialism seems to be personified in Mr. Howlands. Towards the end of Chapter Three when Ngotho asks Mr. Howlands whether he was going back, the answer made by the latter is a strong proof of how he has come to regard the place as his own home:

‘Kwa nini Bwana. Are you going back to --?’
‘No’, Mr. Howlands said, unnecessarily loudly.
‘...Your home, home...’
‘My home is here!’

In fact, land had been that pillar of sustenance for Mr. Howlands after his son’s death in the war that he had developed an inexplicable, almost a reverential and a possessive feeling towards it. His interest in life is renewed by land again in the moment of his crisis:

Mr. Howlands lost all faith – even the few shreds that had begun to return. He would again have destroyed himself, but again his god, land, came to the rescue. He turned all his efforts and energy into it. He seemed to worship the soil... His one pleasure was in contemplating and planning the land to which he had now given all his life.

The land had come to symbolise for him a means of escape from everything else and to maintain his control over it he was ready to go to any extent:
It was no good calling on the name of God for he, Howlands, did not believe in God. There was only one god for him – and that was the farm he had created, the land he had tamed. And who were these Mau Mau who were now claiming that land, his god? Ha, ha! He could have laughed at the whole ludicrous idea, but for the fact that they had forced him into the life he had tried to avoid. He had been called upon to take a temporary appointment as a District Officer. He had agreed. But only because this meant defending his god. If Mau Mau claimed the only thing he believed in, they would see! Did they want to drive him back to England, the forgotten land? They were mistaken.

So, it is fitting that he should die for the same land. Another aspect of Mr. Howlands’ attachment to his farm is his way of referring to it as a woman whom he has ‘conquered’. On the fateful night of his death, Ngugi describes the feelings of this man as he sits in his sitting room sipping beer:

A bottle of beer stood empty at a corner with a half-full glass in front. Mr. Howlands had defiantly returned and stuck to his home in the dying farm. For the farm was the woman whom he had wooed and conquered. He had to keep an eye on her lest she should be possessed by someone else.

He clings to the possessiveness of the land when Boro shoots him down. In fact, possession of land is seen as a symbolic expression of power in the novel. The occupation and retention of land by Mr. Howlands is a symbol of colonial/settler authority over Gikuyuland. And within the Gikuyus too, possession of land is a determining factor of a person’s social standing as those who own land are looked upon as being more privileged over those who might be wealthier but landless. In such a context, loss of land affects one’s social standing in the community.

A man given to so much to exercising his authority, Mr. Howlands is however not one who presents the lie of ‘the white man’s burden’ to validate his possession over the land. The thinks of the blacks, Ngotho included, as savages but does not try in any case to civilize them. His attachment is exclusively to the land and it is quite
interesting to note how he hates the very sight of Jacobo, his black collaborator. More than once Ngugi displays the hatred that is within Mr. Howlands for Jacobo:

There was a knock at the door. Jacobo, gun in hand, came in. He removed his hat and folded it respectfully. There was a big grin which Howlands hated.\(^2\)

The same feeling for Jacobo is revealed by Howlands when later Ngugi writes that the ‘desire to kick the Chief was uppermost in his mind’.\(^3\)

But whether Mr. Howlands likes the sight of Jacobo or not, the latter is one without whose aid he could never had the satisfaction of reducing others to complete submission. He always felt a gratifying pleasure when he saw that the blacks were destroying one another (Chapter Twelve). It is through Jacobo that Mr. Howlands finally ‘comes to grips’ with Ngotho.\(^4\) Jacobo’s rise to power had been sharp after the strike of the workers. Before the strike he was the only black permitted to grow pyrenthum in his fields. As a rich businessman he had been called to the meeting to dissuade the workers from going on the strike. But Ngotho’s actions on the day of the strike and the fact that Jacobo himself was a black man speaking on behalf of the white settlers had messed everything up. People would have torn him to pieces if the police had not intervened. However, after the strike he was made the Chief of the homeguards. In Weep Not, Child, colonial power is openly and extensively exercised extensively through its collaborators.

Applying the idea of the Panopticon that Foucault uses, Jacobo turns out to be an integral part of the entire power-structure who, though himself under surveillance, serves as an important node for the transmission of power in the entire dynamics of power-relationships that operates in the novel. And seen from the view of the anti-colonial struggle in Kenya, Jacobo represents that section of black sheep among the Gikuyus who helped the colonizers to control and exploit their own black brethren. He stands for that section of the black community who turned traitors and collaborators – for whom both the Mau Mau and Ngugi had great distaste. No doubt, the Mau Mau fighters targeted such informers and collaborators during the course of their affirmative action against the whites.
Thus, in the context of the novel, the counter-power is represented by Boro and the other forest-fighters, the sympathy that these ‘boys’ got from the common people can be felt in Chapter Nine when Njoroge, Karanja and the other school boys turn their admiring eyes towards a tall but weak boy who tells them that he would ‘like to fight in the forest’.45

When examined from the Althusserian point of view, it is felt that in Weep Not, Child British presence is felt in terms of both the Repressive State Apparatuses and the Repressive State Apparatuses.

It is the clash between the dominant power of the whites and the counter-power represented by the rebels that decides the course of the plot in the second part of the novel. Boro had fought on the side of the British in World War II and lost a brother. 46 This had led him to examine events in a more critical manner as he felt the loss of his brother in the war as a waste brought in by the selfish greed of the white men. His hatred for the white colonizers is such that he sometimes rebukes his father for working in his own lands now owned by Mr. Howlands. Boro cannot understand the deep attachment of Ngotho to the ancestral land. Like Mr. Howlands, Ngotho is also devoted to the land but for a different reason:

They went from place to place, a white man a black man. Now and then they would stop her and there, examine a luxuriant green tea plant, or pull out a weed. Both men admired this shamba. For Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this land. He owed it to the dead, the living and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over this shamba.47 (italics mine)

So, after the failure of the strike when Ngotho and his family have to move to Nganga’s plot of land leaving their ancestral plot, Ngotho finds it very hard to endure this severing of all communion with his land:

Perhaps he had blundered in going on the strike. For he had now lost every contact with his ancestral land. The communion with the spirits who had gone before him had given him vitality. 48
But more than this, he feels the accusation of his son unbearable. When Boro asks him to take the Mau Mau oath, he refuses to do so not because he was against the oath but because he felt it undignified to be administered oath by his son. This refusal strains the relation between the father and the son, yet, in another moment of impulse Ngotho goes and claims the murder of Jacobo as being committed by him in order to save his son. But his action of sacrificing himself in place of his son does not succeed. He, along with all the other members of his family are tortured by Mr. Howlands and the security guards. Njoroge’s education is spoilt and the home is broken. Ngotho is released only to die within a few days. On the very night following the death of Ngotho, Boro enters the house of Mr. Howlands and shoots him. The tragic cycle has run a full course with the exploiters and the exploited meeting their end. But for Njoroge, the young man who had laid so much faith on the power of education, matters do not end here.

While lying on his death bed, Ngotho had continued to maintain his belief in the power of education. In his last ramblings he tells Njoroge:

‘I am glad you are acquiring learning. Get all of it. They dare not touch you...’

How mistaken the old man had been about his faith in the power of Euro-Christian education and even as he dies, he carries the same elusive faith with him into his grave. He fails to see that the white man’s education, when it comes to apply to the black folks, does not really help to decolonise them. The power of knowledge that comes through education serves only the ways of the white colonizer in oppressed Kenya. Ngotho’s belief that the oppressive colonial machinery will not dare to touch his youngest son as he is absorbed in the process of acquiring knowledge at Siriana High School does not match the reality of the situation as Ngotho is arrested from the school on the suspicion of being a Mau Mau and most inhumanly tortured in spite of the fact that there is no substantial charge against him. The torture that Njoroge is subjected to in the Fifteenth Chapter is a gory picture of inhumanity, yet it was a reality during that period in Kenya’s history when the Governmental forces and the Mau Mau were completely out and against one another. It was the repressive policy adopted by the settler government more than the Squatter movement which drove more and more people to the forests.
But the experiences at the homeguard post notorious as the House of Pain, the death of his father and the shattering of his family do not lead Njoroge to grasp the reality of the situation immediately in all its grimness. More than anything else, it is the shattering of his dream that pains him the most though he should have known the futility of his dream better at this particular point of time. Even while lying in the cold cell in the House of Pain, he was pre-occupied with the thought of his being out of school:

All he knew was that his father and his only brother were in trouble and he himself was not at school.

But even when his mind became clear the old fear came back and haunted him. His family was about to break and he was powerless to arrest the fall.\textsuperscript{50}

Though he has realised his incapacity to arrest the catastrophe that has befallen his family, he cannot bring himself to find any solution out of this predicament or engage himself actively to a cause. Rather, he always seeks ways out to escape from the troubles. His escapism can be first felt when he proposes to Mwihaki to run away with him to Uganda and start life anew.\textsuperscript{51}

But Mwihaki continues to reject his proposal of running away and it is interesting to contrast at this point how earlier in the novel when they had been children it had been Mwihaki who had suggested the idea of running away.\textsuperscript{52} During that Njoroge had taken that suggestion to be an obstacle in the path of the realization of his vision. It is a reversal of the gender roles that Ngugi presents in the twists and turns in the Njoroge – Mwihaki relationship. It is significant to note that Njoroge cannot take up the masculine role of the saviour – either for the community or for Mwihaki, who had always looked upon him for support and hope.

In the earlier phase Njoroge was fired by his belief in education and his vision of removing the darkness that had befallen his family and his country. But the Njoroge whom one encounters after he has experienced the repressive side of colonial rule is a much different man; a man who visualizes himself as ‘an old man of
twenty'. Under the weight of his shattered dreams, he looks for ways and means for escape. So, when Mwihaki refuses his suggestion of going away with him to Uganda, he ineffectually tries to commit suicide, forgetting the last words of responsibility that his father had bestowed upon him – the task of looking after his mothers.

Njoroge, who is a man of contemplation rather than action fails to take away his life for more than one reasons. First, he contemplates too much and it takes away the heat of the resolve and second, when his mother calls him back to go with her he is reminded of his duty towards the women in the house. And as he runs home and opens the door of his house for his two mothers, one feels that he has finally come to understand his responsibility towards them but is still left in doubt whether he has been able to come out of the fracturing of vision of rebuilding the fortune of his family and his nation through education. In other words, one cannot be sure that his mind has been decolonised. Of course, whatever education he has received has been put to no use, and this is precisely what Ngugi planned to do in this novel. Ngugi questions the credibility that Africans had come to place on western education. He wished to tell readers that pinning too much faith upon an imported education would not provide any feasible solution to their problems, nor did he mean the opposite of it – that violence was the only way out of their grim predicament.

In this connection, it is important to point out how Boro – the anti-thesis of Njoroge in terms of vision – is drawn into the armed resistance and how once involved it his ideology undergoes a change:

Boro had always told himself that the real reason for his fight was a desire to fight for freedom. But this fervour had soon worn off. His mission became a mission of revenge. This was the only thing that could now give him fire and boldness. If he killed a single white man, he was exacting a vengeance for a brother killed.

For Boro, circumstances have now reached that point where killing is an act of survival. He tells his lieutenant:
‘To kill. Unless you kill, you’ll be killed. So you go on killing and destroying. It’s a law of nature. The white man too fights and kills with gas, bombs, and everything’.55

It is clear that the patriotic fervour which earlier fired Boro’s action has died away now and what he is left with is only a mad desire for revenge. When Boro finally kills Mr. Howlands to avenge the death of his father, he has settled the score with the settler and he feels a sense of fulfilment and exultation.

According to Harish Narang, the shift of perspective in Boro’s character is an indication of the novelist’s ‘initial reaction to the violent phase of the movement, the so-called Mau Mau’.56 Such reaction, what I feel seems to germinate from Ngugi’s own experiences during the days of the Mau Mau struggle, such as the death of his step-brother and the imprisonment of his mother.

An important aspect of the Mau Mau struggle against colonial state-sponsored terrorism is the paradoxical nature of the conflicting forces. The paradox lies in the fact that while the Mau Mau activities legitimize the presence of the colonial forces in Kenya, the Mau Mau movement was launched to take cautionary steps against colonial atrocities. Thus, in an unconscious manner, both the colonial forces and the Mau Mau add to the spiralling of power-generation process – each serving as an inalienable node in this vicious cycle of violence; thus supporting Foucault’s view of the spiralling of power by the forces involved in the struggle over power.

It has become clear that the power that Njoroge had visualized as coming to him through education does not come. Given the type of power-dynamics that the novel presents in colonial Kenya, Ngugi seems bent on proving his point that only education, the white man’s education, cannot provide any solution to the contemporary state of affairs. The colonial power-structure does not allow Njoroge to realise his goals through education, or we may even argue that education without political involvement is not considered by the author as providing any solution out of colonial rule. Rather, he wanted to project that individuals who laid too much faith on the power of western education or knowledge were far-removed from the basic facts of reality – a theme which he develops further in his second novel – The River.
Between. In doing so, Ngugi is giving voice to the colonized peoples for promoting their language and cultural ideals and rejecting the enforced ideals of western civilization; views which he himself practised in his life and career. Though in this novel Ngugi does not betray any trace of strong faith on the violent nature of the Mau Mau revolt too, in his sixth novel, Matigari, he makes the protagonist say that “Justice for the oppressed comes from a sharpened spear”. The Foucauldean paradigm of ‘Knowledge as Power’ gets nullified in the conflict between colonial and anti-colonial forces.

In terms of narration and details, Ngugi takes the theme of the rise and fall of an educated young man, rather an educated young visionary, to greater heights in his next novel – The River Between, where he positions the protagonist from the periphery to the centre in terms of the relations and distribution of power.

Gender issues also crop up in Weep Not, Child because of the manner in which Ngugi portrays the two wives of Ngotho and the young Mwihaki. One important point to be noted is that it is Nyokabi who takes the initiative to send Njoroge to school; and again it is she who finally brings Njoroge home from the hill where he had been contemplating suicide. If at the beginning of the novel it had been Nyokabi who adds wings to the dream of receiving education for the child Njoroge, it is she who at the end tries to soothe him and he decides to take up the responsibility laid upon him by his father. Seen so far, Nyokabi appears as a character who represents the empowered Gikuyu female – especially in her role as a mother. But when a closer examination of her role, and that of other female characters in the novel is made, some other points can be observed regarding Ngugi’s portrayal of his female characters.

Critics like Elleke Boehmer have praised Ngugi’s portrayal of women characters while at the same time being critical of the faults they have found in it. According to Elleke Boehmer, while Ngugi has broken new grounds in introducing substantial female characters in his novels, he has portrayed them as being the dominated sex in the patriarchal Gikuyu (in general African) community. He has been criticised for delineating his women within the parameters prescribed by the patriarchal norms of the Gikuyus. Boehmer goes so far as to point out that even when
female characters like Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat* or Wanja in *Petals of Blood* decide a great portion of the novel’s development in terms of narrative and plot, they are not treated as equal counterparts in the male-dominated society. They are supposed to contribute towards the cause – whether it be the family or the liberation of the nation, without expecting equal returns at the end.

When the portrayal of Nyeri and Nyokabi in *Weep Not, Child* is examined in the light of the above observations, one notices a queer mixture of patriarchal dominance and liberal elevation on their characters. As already explained, Nyokabi plays a very important role in terms of Njoroge’s education. More than Nyeri it is Nyokabi who moves around actively in the novel. In Chapter Six Ngotho beats her up when she tries to dissuade him from joining the strike out of fear that it might drive them jobless and homeless. The reason why Ngotho beats her is that he would not accept directions from a woman – ‘Don’t woman me!’ – is his ultimate response to her words (p. 53). Still she persists and Ngotho slaps her on the face and would have slapped her again if Njoroge had not intervened. Even Njoroge thinks of Mwihakias a silly girl as she cries before him as they meet after a long time when Mwihaki once returns from her boarding school:

She burst into tears. Njoroge was horrified to see the tears of a big girl. All girls were like this, he thought.58

However, the quarrel between Ngotho and Nyokabi mentioned above has another significance. It is for the first time that domestic ill-feeling is seen in Ngotho’s household otherwise known for being a peaceful home. It is an indication of how external factors have begun to disturb the poise and peace of Ngotho’s home.

But it would be gross misinterpretation to conclude that Ngugi portrays only the Gikuyu women as moving within the parameters defined by patriarchy. Even Mrs. Howlands is portrayed as confined to the household while her husband is engrossed in the control and management of the farmhouse. Ngugi is, to say, portraying his female characters in keeping with the reality of their social position – whether they belong to the class of the colonized or the colonizer.
The Marxist point of view is also strong in the novel. The strike of the workers, though a failure, is an indication of another thread in the power-dynamics of the novel. Interpreted from the Marxist point of view, it represents the universal conflict between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’. But when the parameter of the grievance of the workers is extended to a wider arena, it moves into the realm of the conflict between the coloniser and the colonised. Ngotho himself who is a worker in the farmland of Mr. Howlands, the colonial settler, is a representative of the proletariat.

Even the land seems to bear testimony to the difference between the rich and the poor, the coloniser and the colonised. When Ngugi describes the landscape of Kipanga village in the Chapter One, he draws the reader’s attention to the visible difference between the land owned by the white settlers and the black people:

You could tell the land of Black People because it was red, rough and sickly, while the land of the white settlers was green and was not lacerated into small strips.\(^{59}\)

And Ngotho, as one, is working on the same lands as a ‘hand’ which was earlier owned by his ancestors. Yet, as a true farmer (and it might be noted here that the Gikuyus are primarily agriculturists) he feels pleasure while walking through cultivated fields:

At times he was thankful to Murungu for no apparent reason as he went through these cultivated fields all alone while the whole country had a stillness.\(^{60}\)

But it is not that only the white settlers are rich at the expense of the common black people. There are some blacks like Jacobo who also enjoy land, wealth and power through their alliance with the whites. Curiously, in the early chapters of the novel, even Nganga, the carpenter under whom Kamau is apprenticed voices his indignation against the way he is treated by the former. When Njoroge asks Kamau why Nganga treats him thus even when both are black, Kamau’s answer is:
‘Blackness is not all that makes a man’, … ‘There are some people, be they black or white, who don’t want others to rise above them. They want to be the source of all knowledge and share it piecemeal to others less endowed…It is the same with rich people. A rich man does not want others to get rich because he wants to be the only man with wealth’.⁶¹

Though in the context of Nganga, this observation of Kamau proves quite wrong as the carpenter allows them to build huts on his land after Mr. Howlands drives Ngotho from his farm following the events at the strike, the bitterness of Kamau and his observation on the relationship between the rich and the poor, irrespective of colour, stands true in the wider Kenyan context.

What I personally feel to be more important here is Ngugi’s employment of a Marxist stance at a minor level, a position which he adopts strongly in his later novels, particularly in Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross and Matigari; and given the way Franz Fanon, Jomo Kenyatta and Karl Marx have influenced African authors, it is not surprising that Ngugi should also subscribe to the Marxist view. Weep Not, Child and The River Between are the only two novels of Ngugi that are set completely during the early days of colonialism in Kenya. With the later novels, he takes the historical background further into the early days of independence in Kenya. As an early novel, Weep Not, Child contains the germ of many of the themes and preoccupations that he was to develop later in his novels – particularly the theme of European intervention, his slow leaning towards Marxism and the need for a workers’ and peasants’ revolt to set things right in the country.

Notes:


4 *Weep Not, Child*, p. 37.


6 *Weep Not, Child*, p. 108.

7 *Weep Not, Child*, p. 108.

8 *Weep Not, Child*, p. 129.

9 *Weep Not, Child*, p. 87.

10 *Weep Not, Child*, 96.


12 *Weep Not, Child*, p. 3.

13 *Weep Not, Child*, p.3.

14 *Weep Not, Child*, p. 4.

15 *Weep Not, Child*, p. 36.


33. Quoted in Narang from the 1979 ed. of *Facing Mount Kenya*.

34. *Politics as Fiction: The Novels of Ngugi wa Thion’o*, p. 42-43.


38. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 32.


42. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 78.


44. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 97.

45. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 73.

46. In this novel personal loss seems to align itself with the nationalist cause.

47. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 31.


50. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 120.


52. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 95.


55. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 102.

56. *Politics as Fiction: The Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, p. 64.


58. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 94.


60. *Weep Not, Child*, p. 28.