NGUGI'S THREE EARLY NOVELS ARE IN A WAY A TRIBUTE TO THE FIRMNESS AND TOLERANCE AND MORAL COURAGE OF KENYAN TO FACE SUFFERING AND HARDSHIP AND EVEN TO RISK HIMSELF IN THE PURSUIT OF FREEDOM. NGUGI PRESENTS IN HIS NOVELS THAT PROTEST AND CONFLICT AND IF NECESSARY MASS REVOLUTION, ARE ESSENTIAL AND INEVITABLE FOR AFRICANS TO ACHIEVE ABSOLUTE FREEDOM. THE VIOLENT CONFLICT IN THE NOVELS RESULTS FROM THE CLASH OF INTERESTS OF CONTENDING GROUPS, BUT NOT FROM CLASH OVER SPIRITUAL VALUES SUCH AS PRIDE OF RACE OR CULTURE, EXCEPT WHEN THESE VALUES GET INVOLVED IN DETERMINING ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE PEOPLE OR TO ESTABLISH RACIAL SUPERIORITY. A THREAT TO THE TRADITIONAL CULTURAL VALUES AND THEIR ENCHROACHMENT NATURALLY TRIGERS VIOLENCE IN DEFENCE. (IN WEEP NOT, CHILD, NGOTHO, A TYPICAL AFRICAN, FOR WHOM LAND IS NOT ONLY THE MEANS OF ECONOMIC SURVIVAL BUT ALSO A LINKAGE BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, HAS HIS GROUSE AGAINST THE EUROPEAN SETTLER FARMER EPITOMIZED BY MR. HOWLANDS, WHO CONTENTS THAT UNUTILIZED LAND IS UNOWNED LAND AND THE USER OF THE LAND IS THE LEGITIMATE OWNER.) IN A GRAIN OF WHEAT, MR. THOMPSON, A EUROPEAN COLONIST WHO THINKS COLONIALISM IS A GRAND IDEA AND A GREAT CIVILISING FORCE, HAS NOT ONLY DENIGRATED THE NATIVE VALUES BUT ALSO HURT THE FEELINGS OF THE BLACKS AND THUS FORCED THEM TO REvolt AGAINST ALIEN RULE AND RELIGION.
The mainspring of Ngugi’s fiction is the colonial experience of the Kenyans and the focus is on the conflict between the white colonial masters and the black natives. Fictionalizing this complex web of colonial encounter Ngugi offers to his readers a critique of colonialism. Focusing its unpleasant aspects he also ensures readers engagement with the individuals by exploring the complexity of their psyche in the colonial situation. The early novels of Ngugi present the blacks fighting the colonial oppression individually and as a group. Ngugi himself has admitted that “the Kenya emergency or the Mau Mau War in Kenya is a very important factor in the creation of the present individuals in Kenya”¹.

The seers of the tribe that have predicted the arrival of strangers, have also foretold that the most effective way of fighting them is by mastering his ways through whiteman’s education. “Mugo often said you could not cut the butterflies with a panga. You could not spear them until you learnt and knew their ways and movement.”²

In Weep Not, Child Njoroge struggles to educate himself to fight the whiteman and lead his community but he becomes unsuccessful in the end, and is filled with anguish.

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and despondency when he witnesses the sporadic violence affecting the fortunes of his family and the community.

Waiyaki in *The River Between* is spurred by the words of his father "Arise Heed to the prophecy. Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the whiteman. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites," but in his struggle finds external forces beyond his control driving him to his tragic end. Ngugi presents in *A Grain of Wheat* whiteman's version of the colonial encounter through Thompson who tries to realise his dream of altering 'the social and cultural environment of Africa', for whom it is but a part of his larger dream of expanding the British empire. But the hollowness of his idealism, bringing change in his attitude towards Africans and their tradition, earns him scant regard.

The usurpation of land by the white colonists rendering the natives into landless labourers, is strongly opposed by the Kenyans who have developed emotional and sentimental attachment with the land. (In *Weep Not, Child* when the blacks attack the whites, their major demand is: "We want back our land! Now." In *A Grain of Wheat* also Kihika exhorts them to fight the whites: "This soil belongs


to Kenyan people. Nobody has the right to sell or buy it. It is our mother and we her children are all equal before her."³

Further, the laws imposed by the whites after usurpation, and to retain control over the land, is another reason for the African outcry and to revolt against foreign rule. In the simple logic of Njeri in Weep Not, Child, is Ngugi's inquiry and condemnation of the laws depriving Africans of their right to land: "The white man makes a law or a rule. Through that rule or law... he takes away the land and then imposes many laws on the people concerning that land and many other things... Now a man rises and opposes that law... He is tried under those alien rulers."⁶

The Christian church, another colonial institution, and the preaching of the gospel denouncing African rituals and customs, dividing people and sowing seeds of discord within the society, has an important role to play in establishing the rule of the whiteman and control over the natives. In Weep Not, Child one of the oppressed says: ".. the land had been taken away through the Bible and sword... For this he blamed the foolish generosity of

their forefathers who pitied the stranger and welcomed him with open arms to their fold."

Ngugi has recorded the similar situation in *A Grain of Wheat*: "... the white man came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic witness that the whiteman was a messenger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with sugar; his humility was touching." But later behind the laughing face of the whiteman "was a long line of other red strongers who carried, not the Bible, but the sword."

Similar reference is made in *The River Between*:

"These followers of Joshua the leader of the christian converts would bring so many divisions to the land that the tribe would die. "

The creation of division and discord among people in the tribe has been the source of conflict and enhanced their awareness to fight the whiteman for their general cause. But Ngugi presents in his novels a different perception of the new faith and its preaching, not

contending with the tribal lore. When Njoroge believes in the Bible, he understands equity, justice and righteousness: "If you did well and remained faithfull to God, the kingdom of Heaven would be yours. A good man would get a reward from God; a bad man would harvest bad fruits. The tribal stories told him by his mother had strengthened his belief in the virtue of toil and perseverance". But Njoroge sees no contradiction between the essence of whiteman's religion and the native lore. In The River Between, Muthoni, the daughter of Joshua, expresses a similar view to her sister: "I say I am a Christian and my father and mother have followed the new faith. I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe." Muthoni unlike her father finds no conflict between the two and further she encourages Waiyaki to strive for the union of the christians and the non-christians of the same tribe. Jomo Kenyatta in the novel is regarded as the black Moses. The fenets of the 'new' religion preaching the nobility of sacrifice inspired the people to seek their promised land of freedom, Kihika who opposes revivalism in A Grain of Wheat, invokes the image of Christ as an incarnation of supreme sacrifice to inspire his people; "Everybody who takes the Oath of unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ. Christ then is not one person.


All those who take up the cross of liberating Kenya are the true Christs for us Kenyan people."\(^13\).

Ngugi has strongly condemned in unequivocal terms the cruelty and inhuman treatment of the blacks by the whites. The novels have the recurring image of indiscriminate killing of black men and women in the jungles without sufficient reason or proof against them. For Boro’s and Kzmau’s connections with the Mau Mau, all the other members of Njoroge’s family are arrested or tortured.

Narrating the history of the freedom movement in Kenya, Ngugi devotes a large part of A Brain Wheat to focus the details of barbarity of the whiteman and his administration. But Ngugi has not made whites one-dimensional stereotypes, though he has sympathised with the blacks. In his novels, Ngugi gives us a dispassionate version of the colonial encounter dramatizing ordinary and extraordinary human wishes, desires, ambitions and frustrations in both the whites and the blacks.

In The River Between, Ngugi’s human interest surfaces, as the black-white strife recedes into background. Waiyaki becomes prominent, growing into a sensitive, intelligent and brave man fired by a vision of unity between the ridges through the symbolic act of marrying Joshua’s

daughter Nyambura. In him the public dream of the unity of
the tribe conflicts with his private dream of loving and
caring for Nyambura. The unsuccessful struggle of Waiyaki
and his tragic fate only resonate the disturbing political
reality.

In A Grain of Wheat Ngugi has harmoniously
intertwined the colonial situation giving an account of the
rise of political insurgency in Kenya, with his human
interest drawing elaborately the lives of a group of people
- Mugo, Bikonyo, Karanja, Kihika etc. Though Ngugi has
firmly denounced the atrocities of whites against the
blacks, he does not hesitate to present the interesting
accounts of the black psyche under compelling circumstances.

Waiyaki in The River Between, has failed to
achieve even his minor goal of revolution, unity between the
ridges, because of his lack of foresight, insight and
imagination, improper perception of things around him. His
commendable good will and enthusiasm get prejudiced by his
want of self-confidence and conviction and by his inability
to control his own destiny, resulting in the triumph of evil
over weakness. Muthoni and Nyambura are in their own way
Ngugi's revolutionary characters having stood up to defend
the ideals they believe in within their small sphere of
influence, and die seeking the fullness of life. Both
achieve nobility, where Waiyaki is disgraced.
Ngotho in *Weep Not, Child* represents the past generations of the Agikuyu that believe in and cherish the myth that their land was given by Murungu, their God, to their first-ancestors. In *The Rives Between*, Chege narrates of the myth to Waiyaki, his son, which Ngotho passes on to his children in *Weep Not, Child*. Even when they are warned by the seer that their land would be grabbed by 'a people with clothes like butterflies', (T.R.B. p.22; W.N.C. p.29; A.G.W. p.13) they do not act to avert the tragedy. They even banished the seer from the land. Also after the coming of the white man and taking away their land, the people do not put up a fight and wait hopefully that "... a son shall arise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people".  

Ngotho could not see the necessity of human intervention in fulfilling the prophecy. His tendency to reconcile to the present forced circumstances is assailed by the younger generation. He becomes conscious of his weakness when he is a mere onlooker without protest when his son and wife are arrested and taken away by the police.

Njoroge, like Waiyaki, lacking in wisdom and foresight, but thinking himself as the Messiah, identifying himself with David of the Old Testament, hopes to save and lead his people acquiring adequate knowledge through


education. But he fails for being incapable of revolutionary action. And when he thinks he has equipped himself through education to fight injustice, it is too late to change anything in his society and he becomes irrelevant like his father Ngotho, and Mwiuki The River Between to the prevailing condition. Jacobo in Weep Not, Child represents negative action, thwarting, the efforts of the Mau Mau and the people to achieve freedom and regain ownership of their land, and thus betraying his own people.

Of Ngugi's characters, Thompson, "the symbol of whiteman's power unmovable like a rock...." a colonial administrator incarnating colonialism receives greatest mockery and rebuff, of Ngugi, by being ludicrous and becoming a victim of his own arrogance. Mugo, the protagonist of A Grain of Wheat represents a section of Africans that try to sabotage the freedom struggle. He is reluctant to participate and be involved in community affaires, and he is unconcerned with his social melieu, his past and present. Ngugi in the fate of Mugo has dramatised the folly and futility of life of people unconcerned about the fate and wellbeing of the community. An elder of the village comments on Mugo's reluctance to lead Uhuru celebrations in his village, warning of his alienation:

"I know how you feel... you want to be left alone. Remember this, however: it is not easy for any man in a community to be left-alone, especially a man in your position". 

Ngugi's characters play their decisive roles, to bring awareness in Kenyans as to achieve true political freedom and social status. His novels are but critiques of colonialism and legacy of colonialism dealing with the themes like conflict of cultures, struggle for freedom if necessary by revolution against white domination and regain the ownership of their land. He presents a naturalistic setting in his early novels by subtly "exploring and unravelling the complexity of their minds, in the face of the colonial situation". 

Eventhough he himself is involved in the encounter, Ngugi as a detached observer comments dispassionately on the attitude, nature and behaviour of both the whites and the blacks as well. He is of the opinion that the Kenyan writer "must be wholly involved in the problems of Kenya; at the same time he mustn't allow the involvement in that particular social situation to impinge


on his judgement or on his creative activities... writing I take to be a kind of confession where the writer is almost confessing his own private reactions to various problems.... the feeling of shame here, the feeling of inadequacy there, the love-hatred, the human problem, the human relationship in its proper perspective".  

Ngugi depicting the human condition in the given political situation, in fictional terms presents a balanced view of the colonial situation and the sufferings and challenges of Kenyans. The main thrust in his early novels is political independence to Kenya, without which all other ideals for Ngugi become meaningless. To achieve political freedom he feels that people must become involved in various kinds of protests and acts of violence if necessary to fight the alien forces like socio-political and economic institutions, new education and new religion affecting the native tradition and heritage. "Violent conflict results from the clash of interests of opposing groups, not just over such spiritual values as pride of race or culture, but notably when such values involve concepts of racial superiority and determine people's economic status in society."  

The threat to traditional cultural values by the European culture generated conflicts—racial, physical, spiritual, and cultural in the society during the imperial rule. Ngugi has revealed his disillusionment about the success of the struggle for real freedom in the preface, written in 1968, to his early play *The Black Hermit* (1962). He says: "I thought then (emphasis mine) that tribalism was the biggest problem besetting the new African countries. I, along with my fellow undergraduates, had much faith in the post-colonial governments. We thought they had genuinely wanted to involve the masses in the work of reconstruction. After all, weren't the leaders themselves the sons and daughters of peasants and workers. All the people had to do was cooperate. All we had to do was expose and root out the cantankerous effects of tribalism, racialism and religious factions".  

The striking difference between professional historian and a creative writer is that the historian primarily reports, reviews, interprets, analyses history in the context of present day conditions, whereas a creative writer tries to reconstruct the past to bring out the deeper meanings of historical events. He creates something new out of the past incidents. Ngugi's writings too are no mere

records of past events. He tries to give deeper meaning to the historical events.

To discuss the theme of Protest and Conflict in Ngugi's early novels, a look at some of his short-stories is illuminating. It provides us the essential elements for the formation of Ngugi's theory of history and its association with the subject of culture-conflict and civil unrest. One of the major features of this process is the repeated occurrence of characters, plot and incidents. In *A Grain of Wheat* Gikonyo faces the marital dilemma as of Kamau, in *The Return*. In *The Return* Kmau's wife goes with another man, with the assumption that Kamau is dead in the detention. When Kamau returns from detention he comes to known about his wife's, association with another man. Thinking that his suffering in detention and his life have no meaning, he attempts to commit suicide. But later he gives a new beginning to his life. The character of Joshua in *The River Between* is already figured in *The Village Priest*. Village Makuyu suffers from severe drought. Joshua, who is a converted Christian offers his prayers to God that his rival’s efforts to bring rain should not succeed. But contrary to his wishes the rain falls, after the village magic-maker and rain maker sacrifice a ram at the foot of Mugono Tree, the totem of the Agikuyu. After failing in his efforts he offers his apology to the deity, but it is too late.
The River Between, the first written novel of Ngugi records the events and incidents of the earliest period of Afro-European contact in Kenya. The Gikuyus believe in "the myth of the origin of the villages. Physical gallantry still holds glamour, knowledge of tribal secrets is still treasured as a mark of noble birth; the ritual purity of the tribe is still something to hanker after". But Siriana Mission School refuses to accept children who do not renounce their traditional ways. The issue of circumcision triggers the conflict between the two ridges. Muthoni, sister of Nyambura runs away from Makuyu in order to be circumcised, as she wanted to become a real woman, as she says, "I want to become a real girl, a real woman knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges". Muthoni's father Joshua a Christian leader is a staunch opposer of circumcision, representing the people on Makuyu ridge. Kameno is considered the traditional seat of Bikuyu and Mumbi, of the legendary ancestors of the tribe. The inhabitants of Kameno decide to preserve purity and integrity of Kameno in the face of the threatened encroachment by the whiteman and his new religion.


Christianity. Chege, father of waiyaki a traditionalist, a descendant from a long line of distinguished Bikuyu seers, who reveals the spiritual history of Kameno to Waiyaki, and who is also an embodiment of Kameno ideology, sends Waiyaki, his son, to Siriana Mission School, only to defeat Joshua with his own weapon.

"Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man." 23

But he also warns Waiyaki about the fancies of the whiteman and wants Waiyaki to be loyal to his tribe. He says:

"But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites." 24

If circumcision means the attainment of complete manhood or womanhood to Chege, it is an unforgivable sin to Joshua which has created disharmony between the ridges, and the gap becomes widened with the death of Muthoni after circumcision.

Ngugi does not approve of the religious fanaticism of Joshua, who took to Christianity, and his criticism of the native religion and customs which he considers inferior.

24. Ibid, p. 32.
Waiyaki assuming the ambitious role of leadership succeeds in stopping fighting between Kamau and Kinuthia without lifting a finger, but has eventually failed in realizing his public dream of uniting the people of the two ridges.

Most of the characters in the novel suffer from a kind of psychic inadequacy, whether it is cynicism, wickedness or naivety, Joshua is cynical of his own religion and so he takes to christianity. His daughter Muthoni cynical of her father's adopted religion and so she runs away to Kameno in order to be circumcised. Kabonyi out of jealousy for Waiyaki's popularity has embraced Christianity. Waiyaki symbolises naivety, unable to take right decision at a right time, and fails to convince the people of the ridges.

Joshua religious activities are essentially in human. He is interested in pleasing the new authority and becoming an effective instrument for nourishing and promoting his vested interests and personal antagonisms. He sees in Waiyaki's progress and popularity a threat to the conditions of ignorance, idiocy and poverty in which he thinks his brand of evangelism works the best:

"What worried Joshua was not just that many people had returned to the cursed things of the tribe like circumcision.. The rise of Waiyaki as
a young, intelligent leader of the tribe was the menace. Now that many schools had been built through the efforts of Waiyaki, more of his flock might go to join Waiyaki's flock out of sheer necessity." 25.

To counter the threat from Waiyaki Joshua intensifies the age old hostility between the neighbouring villages. Ultimately, his evangelical mission degenerates into insane diabolism, devoid of reason and of all human feeling.

Ngugi has shown in the novel that it is not uneducated masses alone, but people like Kabonyi with great oratory and mob rhetoric intentionally wreck the revolution and sabotage it for their selfish ends. Ngugi has also shown through the naivety and improper vision and insight of Waiyaki, that mere good intentions are not enough for the success of revolution but positive thinking and active participation with great vision to lead it. He quotes the famous words of Sekou Toure, President of Guinea as quoted by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

"To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolution song. You must

fashion the revolution with the people, the songs will come by themselves and of themselves. In order to achieve real action. You must yourself become a living part of Africa and their thought. You must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely poured forth for the freeing, the progress and happiness of Africa. There in no place outside that fight for the artists or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of suffering humanity."\textsuperscript{26}. 

For Ngugi, 'even people like Waiyaki imperil the revolution : their commendable good will and enthusiasm is prejudiced by their want of self-confidence and conviction, and by their inability to control their own destinies'.\textsuperscript{27}.

Weep Not, Child too reiterates the need for collective action by the entire community against colonial oppression and to get back the native land from the whites. Ngotho, father of Njoroge, symbolises protest right from the beginning till the end of the novel. "The protest is against the colonial situation which has allowed the land to be stolen while in the process a whole way of living and being has been undermined."\textsuperscript{27}.

\textsuperscript{26} Frantz Fanon - \textit{The Wretched of the earth}, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1961.

Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat* is considered the most ambitious and successful novel because of the subtlety in characterisation, its diction and its narrative technique. It is supposed to be based on Conrad's *Lord Jim*. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi presents experience through a series of impressive digressions, casual anecdotes which are not in chronological order. Ngugi has employed cinematic techniques such as “flash backs within flash backs, reflector within reflector, point of view within point of view, cross-chronological juxtaposition of events and impressions.”

The novel opens a day before Kenya’s independence and closes after four days. The title of the novel *A Grain of Wheat* is taken from the book of Corinthians, which indicates that continuous struggle, with suffering and death if the situation demands, is needed to achieve even meagre favour. Mugo, Gikonyo, Karanja, Mumbi and other characters endure suffering, shame and guilt. Unlike in the other two novels, the focus here is on the five characters Mugo, Gikonyo, Karanja, Mumbi and Thompson, the white man, Kihika and Mugo are the two opposite poles. If Kihika is for sacrifice, struggle and shedding of blood to achieve independence, Mugo is totally unconcerned with all these struggles and sacrifice, confining himself to his hut and

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fields. For "Mugo was deeply afflicted and confused, because all his life he had avoided conflicts: at home, or at school, he rarely joined the company of other boys for fear of being involved in brawls that might ruin his chances of a better future."29 And further,

"His attempt decisively to deny history only initiates a cycle of events which draw him to the core of conflict which he has all along fought to evade, for the betrayal of Kihika attracts to Mugo's village the greatest concentration of the enemy's forces"30

".....Mugo realizes on the very eve of Uhuru, that if he is really to be 'free' from the burden of guilt, he must confess. His own conflict will be resolved, his true relationship to the others be defined. Under the magic influence of Mumbi he is gradually led to confession, which for him, real 'Uhuru'."31

And finally goaded by his conscience he confesses his treachery and is ready to face any consequences.

Ngugi's presentation of Gikonyo's romance with Mumbi and his internal conflict are of highest order. "While Gikonyo is in prison his wife comes to mean for him the essence of utmost worldly goodness."

His longing for Mumbi is so deep that he goes to the extent of betraying his own nation by confessing to the whites. But his dream is shattered when he finds Mumbi, with another man's child in her lap.

But 'Uhuru' seems to be the panacea for all the conflicts that every character has been suffering, and even to redefine his relationship with Mumbi. For Gikonyo the great final race during the Uhuru is a race between himself and a friend-turned-foe Karanja who betrayed the friendship by seducing Mumbi.

Thus Ngugi has successfully presented the conflicts—conflict of cultures, conflict for material prosperity, internal conflicts—of the characters in the characters the course of 'Uhuru', Ngugi, through cultural conflict expressed prominently in the violent clash over legitimate ownership and effective control over the land in

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his three novels, appears to have demonstrated his theory of
does not make sense
history and studied culture's ethics of human conduct.
The success of just revolution, as depicted by Ngugi, is but a
process of history, and depends on how people unite to fight
injustices collectively and try to create a better life for
themselves.