CHAPTER - 1

THE EARLY PHASE OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O

Art is thus the collective dream of humanity, the expression of a deep-seated feeling that our lives are not what they ought to be, and a passionate if unconscious striving for something different.

—Alan Woods.

(www.marxist.com/Art_Literature/Marxism_and_art.htm)
CHAPTER - 1

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Ngugi wa Thiong'o was born (James Ngugi) on 5th June 1938, north of Nairobi, Kenya. His father was a peasant and British Imperial Land Act of 1915 forced him to work as ahoi or landless tenant farmer. This reflects the confrontation between the rightful owners of land and the producers again and again in the writings of Ngugi. The White came as tenants; gradually they became the owners of the land. This created a strong resistance from the patriotic Kenyans. One of Africa's most accomplished and prominent novelists, the birthplace of Ngugi was known as white Highlands, part of the British-ruled Kenyan colony. He has been in exile. At present he is distinguished Professor of English & Comparative Literature and Director of International Center for Writing & Translation at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of various novels such as Weep Not, Child (1964), The River between (1965), A Grain of Wheat (1967), Petals of Blood (1977), Devil on the Cross (1982), Matigari (1986), and Wizard of the Crow (2006). He has also authored a number of non-fictional works, namely, Home Coming, Writers in Politics, Decolonizing the Mind, Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary, and Moving the Center etc. He is also a playwright and short story writer including children's stories. He is known world over as a bilingual, committed writer and original thinker.

The present chapter deals with Ngugi's two early novels. Weep Not, Child and The River Between. Ngugi relates the story of a community that falls apart under the pressure of colonial forces in Weep Not, Child. He deals with the recent past, more specifically of 1950s and the rise of Mau Mau in Kenya. He is primarily concerned with the life of his community that crumbles under the pressures and pulls of colonialism, alien religion and western education. Even in
the crumbling society there is a fighting for superiority among the natives. This can be examined in Weep Not, Child. Its protagonist, Njoroge, attaches so much importance to education that when he is denied this he tries to commit suicide because he believes that he has lost his identity.

The River Between written first with the original title The Black Messiah focuses on the conflict between the tribal-tradition and the Christianity over the issue of female circumcision is set in the late 1920s. These two novels have established Ngugi’s sensitivity to the crisis engendered by colonialism and to the conflict cropped up there such as the brutality which the Kenyans experienced in their revolt against the British rule.

Ngugi says, in Decolonizing the Mind: The present predicament of Africa are often not a matter of personal choice, they arise from a historical situation—Imperialism and its comprador alliances in Africa can never, never develop the continent’. (Ngugi 1984: xii)

He opposes the writers who used to produce literature in European languages African literature. In his opinion whatever written in ones another tongue would never become native literature. He records his protest against this tendency by saying that ‘the literature it produced in European languages was given the identity of African literature as if there had never been literature in African languages’ (Ngugi 1984: 22).

Despite this the African languages survived, because these languages were very much protected by peasants, urban working class and singers. People in singing songs, indigenous composition in their languages, used the native languages. Ngugi himself started writing in his mother tongue Gikuyu 1977.
This (The pre-colonial African) world was reflected in the literature it produced with its mixture of animal characters of half man- half beast and of human beings all intermingling and interacting in a co-existence of mutual suspicion, hostility and cunning but also occasional moments of co-operation.

(Ngugi 1984 : 65).3

In pre-colonial days Africa was filled with orature (oral literature). The peasants used to compose songs and art, which united the whole of Africa.

*Weep Not, Child, The River Between,* and *A Grain of Wheat* reflects the same 'mood touch, and time'. They raise similar questions and problems.

The Kenyan colonial struggle centered round the demand for the lost land. It is said that when the colonialists arrived in Africa, the tribal structure was already in a state of disintegration due to the evolution of a new economic outlook and historical scenario in Africa. Gradually, European settlers robbed people of their land and the products of their sweat, the missionary robbed people of their religious soul. Subsequently, the missionaries started setting up independent African churches. They were instrumental in this upheaval in Kenyan history. It is commonly believed by non-Africans that the Africans are a product of *the heart of darkness*, an incarnation of several racially defined pathological limitations. Africans are the symbol of long-term victimization of denigration and exploitation. Earlier, African writers seriously thought of writing about the racial and colour discriminations during 'slave trade' and colonialism. Slavery was supported by a doctrine of racial inferiority. It is not proper to argue that the African people came to know literature only after colonization because literature existed with man on this earth as the spirit of human civilization since times immemorial. Oral literature that is the foundation of modern African literature is as old as man in Africa. The traditional artist in
Africa was the mouthpiece of his community who articulated his people's hopes and aspirations, success and failure as well as their visions.

Regarding the change of title—*The Black Messiah* to *The River Between*—Ngugi says in an interview with Dennis Duerden:

*The River Between*, the novel itself there is physically a river between two hills that house two communities which keep quarrelling but I maintain, you know, that the river between can be a factor which brings people together as well as being a factor of separation. It can both unite and separate.

(Duerden et al 1978 : 125).

French speaking African writers dominated pre-colonial Africa. Implied meaning is that the very cross culture was established at that time itself. *The River Between* mainly deals with female circumcision controversy that reached its climax in 1929 and led to the growth of Gikuyu Independent Schools.

Again like the *River Between*, *Weep Not Child* offers both a subtle portrayal of particular human dilemmas and conflicts and a dramatic social commentary. Ngugi handles his characters with great compassion and understanding as individuals who are suffering intensely, assailed by contrary forces beyond their control or indeed comprehension.

(Cook & Okenimkpe: 1983 p.49)

The first novel that he wrote in 1960 was published as his second novel titled, *The River Between*. It portrays two communities, which live on two ridges that face one another. They quarrel over one thing or another. The river serves as the boundary between the two communities. Ngugi observes:

In the situation of the novel, the river may be viewed as a phenomenon which divides the two communities. But surely an other way of looking at the river is as a way of uniting the two communities. After all they both depend on the same river water vital for life. When we think of borders, we think of divisions. But if a border marks the outer edge of one region, it also marks the beginning of
the next region. As the marker of an end, it also functions as the marker of a beginning without the end of one region, there can be no beginning of another. Depending on our starting point, the border is both the beginning and outer edge. Each space is beyond the boundary of the other, the border in between serves as both the inner and outer of the other. It is thus at once a boundary and a shared space.

(Sinha:2004: P68)

In the same lecture, Ngugi comments on the two communities’ inability to comprehend the meaning. To understand the meaning better, they need to be educated, through proper teaching by the teachers. So the two communities will find their identities and change. He says that ‘the river’s function as a link depends on its constant renewal and change. A river which becomes stagnant is, in fact, no longer a river.’

For Ngugi, English in Africa is a ‘cultural bomb’ that works as a process of erasing memories of pre-colonial cultures and history and a way of insulting the dominance of new insidious forms of colonialism. Writing in Gikuyu, then, is Ngugi’s way not only of harkening back to Gikuyu traditions, but also that of acknowledging and communicating their present.

As a novelist, Ngugi made his debunk with Weep Not, Child, which he started to write when he was at school in England. It was a novel in English to be published by an East African author. The story entails the plight of the African people. Interestingly, the west and its adherants continue largely to ignore traditional oral literatures and western literatures in African languages.

Ngugi has been the champion of writing in African languages as an extension of the historical culture between the national and foreign. The most prominent theme in Ngugi’s early work was the conflict
between the individual and the community. *The River Between* has the Mau Mau Rebellion as its background. The story is set in the late 1920s and 1930s and it depicts an unhappy love affair in a rural community divided between Christian converts and non-Christians. *Weep Not, Child* tells the story of a young Kenyan receiving western education at a time when his village is destroyed during the rebellion. *The River Between* explores the long lasting destructive effects of Christian missionary activities in Africa. Ngugi evokes the personal impact of colonial conquest. He writes of his own experiences as a boy and of what it meant to live in a colonial situation. His description of socio-economic inequalities is an illuminating one. The question of relationship between literature and society has never been answered, especially in the African context. But Shyam S. Agrawalla, an Indian critic of African literature, argues: ‘All African writing is at once a literary piece, a social protest and medium of political re-assertion. Fiction as a form of art in Africa is thus functional and enterprising, aesthetic and didactic’. (Agrawalla:2000 p.blurb)

Ngugi argues that colonization was not simply a process of physical force. While ‘the bullet was the means of physical subjugation, language was the means of the spiritual subjugation’. Ngugi began writing various books and articles in English newspapers such as *The Sunday Post, The Daily Nation* and *The Sunday Nation*.

Ngugi strongly believes that the native/mother tongue is the best means for creative writing. He admits that he made a wrong choice in writing English at his early days. He says in his *decolonizing the Mind*:

> African literature can only be written in African languages, that is, the languages of the African peasantry and working class, the major alliance of classes in each of our nationalities and the agency for the coming inevitable revolutionary break with neo-colonialism.

*Weep Not, Child* is a story about a young boy, Njoroge, as he grows up amidst the Mau Mau war and the conflict between the African natives and the British colonial rulers. The book is about the hopes and dreams of a young boy being affected by the outside world and the consequence of such affectation.

Autobiographical elements are common phenomena in Ngugi novels. The various life situations and the protagonists of the novels are co-incidentally similar. This is because he was born before the beginning of World War II, in 1938 and his education was a mixture of Christianity and tradition. His family was involved in the Mau Mau resistance to the colonists, and this experience features prominently in most of his writings. After the completion of his education in 1963, eventually he became a professor at Nairobi University. Through the early novels *Weep Not, Child, The River Between*, and *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi reconstructs the story of Kenyan freedom movement. The narrative of traditional and historical background of him prompts readers to take a fresh look at colonialism and freedom struggle. Ngugi writings examine where things had gone wrong in capturing the hope of freedom and disillusionment was capturing the youths of his motherland.

Ngugi takes a new direction which as different from Soyinka and Achebe. The latter two choose to write in English with more self-conscious oriented. Ngugi opens his account as a writer with protest and conflict. Lingaraja Gandhi in his article, *Literature as a Weapon for Change* observes:

> Though calling Ngugi an imperialist may be shifting, understanding his works aspirations. It is also possible to view his works as Marxist or feminist, as they portray gender and social equality. Ngugi though, would like to gloss over such minor confines.

(Gandhi:2005: P3)°

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The River Between depicts the internal conflict between the two native communities and between the mind and soul of man. The novel also depicts a constant dilemma in the behaviors of the community itself. The problem of 'choice of native culture and English culture' has become a permanent phenomenon in the world today.

The novel The River Between portrays the antagonism between two native villages, one at fighting to keep up desalinization and another at the crossroad. The novel does not seem to reflect too much of conflict between colonizer and colonized but the internal and plural ambitions of native people themselves. The novel's opening situates the narrative's broader conflicts within a Kenyan landscape that has yet to experience the effects of British colonialism.

This can be substantiated by the following paragraphs from the novel will substantiate the same clearly:

The two ridges lay side by side. One Kameno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. Behind Kameno and Makuyu were many more valleys and ridges, lying without any discernible plan. They were like many sleeping lions, which never woke. They just slept, the big deep sleep of their Creator. A river flowed through the valley of life... The river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring-back-like. Honia river never dried: it seemed to possess a strong will to lie, scorning droughts and weather changes.

(Ngugi: TRB p1)

When you stood in the valley, the two ridges ceased to be sleeping lions united by their common source of life. They became antagonists. You could tell this, not by anything tangible but by the way they faced each other, like two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region.

(ibid)

The deeply rooted conflict between the Kameno and Mukuyu ridges is really one of religious antagonism. The Kameno ridge, home of the novel’s protagonist Waiyaki, symbolizes a continuation of
indigenous cultural traditions such as polytheism and circumcision. The Makuyu ridge had already succumbed to the exigencies of Christianity and British educational systems Waiyaki, perhaps occupying a liminal position between the two ridges, is forced to negotiate between the contending loyalties and allegiances between his conviction in the values of British education and his clandestine relationship with Nyambura, the beautiful daughter of the region's foremost Christian minister.

'Honia was the soul of Kameno and Makuyu. It joined them. And men, cattle, wild beasts and trees, were all united by this life stream.' (TRB:1)

The beginning of the novel gives the impression that, the source; the life of the two tribals 'depends' on the river Honia. The novelist calls 'sleeping lions united by their common source of life.' the promising life of the two tribes is also found in the words of Murungu's. Murungu had told them: 'This land I give to you, O man and woman. It is yours to rule and till. You and your posterity (TRB:2) For Kenyans land is not just asset or property, but spiritual superiority. Murungu predicts 'Murungu in fact all over the Gikuyu country. And he still spoke aloud his message and cried.' There shall come a people with clothes like butterflies. These were the white men.' (TRB:3) Mugo "The great seer; Wachior, the glorious worrier; Kamiri; the powerful imagination.' (TRB:3) Waiyaki is the only son of Chege. For the sake of his son, Waiyaki's father never tried for a second son. Waiyaki has had an attractive personality. Everyone knows his brevity and strong power.

He had a well-built, athletic boy. His hair was tough and dry with kinks that finished in a clear outline on the forehead. Just above the left eye was a slightly curved scar. He had got it from a wild goat. The goat had run after one of the herdboys. Seeing this, Waiyaki had taken a stick and run after the goat shouting. The goat turned on him and jabbed him its horns, tearing the flesh to the bone. His
father arrived in time to save him. That was a long while ago. The wound had healed, leaving him a hero among the boys although he had run after the goat for sheer fun and enjoyment of the scene. That however, was not the sole reason why the other boys, young and old, promptly followed him.

The British started settling themselves near the ridges, “They are there, beyond the ridges, putting up many houses and some taking the land.” (TRB: 7) Waiyaki has had working knowledge of his ancestors. Waiyaki had heard about these two generation of the tribe and he was proud of them (TRB: 10) In Waiyaki’s view the land is beautiful, ‘and young and fertile.’

Mugo forecast the arrival of exploiter and he warned his people against the colonizer. Because, he saw many butterflies, of many colours, flying about the land, disrupting the peace and the ordered life of the country. Then he cried aloud and said: ‘There shall come a people with clothes like butterflies.’ (TRB:9)

The novel depicts Kenyan life situations before Europeans arrived and some incidents after their arrival. The father of Waiyaki wanted him to go to Christian schools and learn all the knowledge and she should come back to serve his people. He wishes:

Arise Head the prophecy. Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites. (TRB:20)

The novel describes the value of the river ‘Honja’ and every aspect of the novel revolves round this sacred river, for it has medicinal power, which is understood to be:

The importance of Honja could never be overestimated cattle; goats and people drew their water from there. Perhaps that was why it was called ‘cure’ and the valley, the valley of life; that is what it was a valley of life. (TRB:23)
Another most significant issue on which the whole novel is built is circumcision. The natives consider it as their tradition, their way of life whereas the newly arrived Europeans consider it otherwise.

Even the new converts are in dilemma. Muthoni is one such character. She is the daughter of Joshua, a converted Christian. Her problem is why she can't get circumcised like her parents, who are natives of Kenya and have been circumcised. But now they are making objection. Muthoni thinks:

For Nyambura had learnt and knows that circumcision was sinful. It was a pagant rite from which she and her sister had been saved. A daughter of God should never let even a thought of circumcision come to her mind. Girls of their age would be initiated this reason. Had her father, Joshua, not been a man of God, he, no doubt, would have presented them both as candidates.

(TRB: 23)

The opposing attitude of the two sisters is apt in the sense that represents two cultures. Muthoni wants to be circumcised, as a converted Christian, who represents the old tradition. But Nyambura is almost opposite, at least in fearing her parents now. Their conversation makes it clear that their father does not agree to circumcision.

Nyambura could visualize Joshua's fury if he heard of this, "Besides, she continued, you are a Christian, you and I are now wise in the ways of the white people. Father has been teaching us what he learnt at Siriana. And you know, the missionaries do not like the circumcision of girls. Father has been saying so. Besides, Jesus told us it was wrong and sinful. I know. But I want to be circumcised.

(TRB: 25)

Muthoni's reasons for her circumcision raise questions of basic credentials of Christianity and its antagonism towards another religion or custom. She revolts: "Look, please, I—I want to be a woman, I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges' (TRB: 26) Muthoni decides to go to her aunt at Kameno to get circumcised. Before leaving she makes a powerful argument.
Education gives this questioning power to her. She questions vociferously: 'Why! Are we fools? She shook Nyambura ......she now stood and looked away from Nyambura (TRB: 26) Muthoni's questioning spirit and assertion reminds the reader of Shakespeare's women characters such as Portia, and Lady Macbeth.

Ngugi tries to show the clash between the pre-colonial Kenya or tribal life and the men of church, in recognizing better culture, education, inferiority and superiority. Ngugi's complaint is that the arrival of European settlers smashed the 'paradise' of Kenya. This has made the Kenyans ever dependent on the 'colonizers'.

Miriamu is the innocent wife of Joshua. Chege and others blame Joshua for making many divisions in the tribe.

The followers of Joshua would bring so many divisions to the land that the tribe would perish. 'Aren't these Christians now preaching against all that which was good and beautiful in the tribe? Circumcision was the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised' (TRB:37). The tribe had a good faith in Waiyaki: 'Waiyaki would never betray the tribe'. but the tribe wished, 'It is good to be wise in the affairs of the white men.'

Chege hoped 'A savior shall come from the hills. Good. Waiyaki was the last in the line of that great seer who had prophesied of a black messiah from the hills. The boy was doing well at Siriana' (TRB: 38)

The tribal rite of circumcision was mandatory for the tribals to live like man and woman in the tribe. As Chege says 'he wanted' to see Waiyaki become a man before he himself died'. (TRB: 39) Muthoni's is a split personality, a broken psyche with a pitiable wish. She says, 'I wanted to be a woman made beautiful in the tribe; a husband for my bed; children to play around the earth' (TRB: 44)
Muthoni's dreams are shattered, her circumcised wounds were never healed up, and she dies with her unfinished goal. The life was not kind to her. Muthoni was now dead. Even her death has not created any emotional response from her parents because, for them, Muthoni had sold herself to the devil after circumcision. Joshua's argument on his daughter's death is horrible. He argues that she met with tragic death because she violated Christianity and she has been cursed here on the earth and he wants to see it is a lesson for others. Anybody rebels against Jesus will face the same punishment. 'The death of Muthoni for ever confirmed the barbarity of Gikuyu customs' (TRB: 55).

The death of Muthoni creates stories in which she becomes a legend. This has made the two tribes confront each other. 'Waiyake saw greater splits coming.' Now the question in every mind is 'Had the missionaries come to widen the split between Makuyu and Kameno?' (TRB:59) At this juncture, Waiyaki also faces identity crisis 'where was his place in all this? He feels a stranger, a stranger to his land.' Waiyaki has made up his mind to open a school 'to preserve the purity of our tribal customs and our way of life should be formed now and he believes that education is a value. Apart from this, he is a man of 'strong emotional moods.'

Marioshoni is the proposed name of Waiyakai's school and it becomes famous. He becomes the Head master of the school. He is superstitious. Even after many years circumcision seriously 'Circumcision.... soul's wish' (TRB: 68), Waiyaki gets confused.

Over the reason of construction of lavatories, Kabonyi and Waiyaki started quarrelling. Everyone is constantly watching Waiyaki, and he feels proud of himself. He wants to expand his school by appointing more teachers from Nairobi. Constant struggle between
old faith and the new make him worried. He teaches how “The children
could speak a foreign language, could actually read and write” (TRB:92)
On the character of Waiyaki, the novelist’s point of view is remarkable.
He says that:

‘He had a word for everyone and a smile for all. He pleased many
but not everybody. At such moments jealousy and ill will are bound to
work’ (92 TRB ) But for Waiyaki ‘Education was life’ He has built
many schools to educate the tribes. The significant feature of Waiyaki
is that, he himself loved some Christian teaching. The element of love
and sacrifice agreed his own temperament.’ He strongly believed that
Education was the light of the country. ‘He had never shown much
interest in women.’ but in the service to the tribe’.(101) But he has
shown interest in Nyambura, the second daughter of Joshua. Nyambura
lives with doubts—whether to go to Waiyaki leaving Christianity as
her sister did. The people of the tribe worried about his interest in
marrying Nyambura, because; he is the symbol of purity for the tribe.

They say, ‘your name will be your ruin’(112) Waiyaki understands
that education is a weapon for missionaries. ‘To Waiyaki the white
man’s education was an instrument enlightenment and advance if
only it could be used well.’ (TRB:119). The charges against Waiyaki
reflect Ngugi’s way of advocating his ideology. it seems he speaks
through the voice of Kabonyi on Waiyaki:

I have not finished. That is the first thing you have done to the tribe.
It is not a small thing. Then you were not a teacher, a person to
whom we entrusted our children. But since you rose into the position
in which you are, you have deliberately worked against the tribe.
How many times have you been in Joshua’s church? How many?
No, wait, you have also been to Siriana. How many times? We know
of two. You never told anybody that you were to get teachers? Do
you? you’ll have to tell us of any secret dealings between you. Joshua
and Siriana. Will you sell us to the white man? You see how restless
and impatient our people are. They cry for a leader to save them
from slavery. And you, you, who ought to have led them.

(TRB: 126)
As he plans to marry the daughter of Joshua, people start suspecting his integrity and they think that he betrays the tribe. They have the opinion that Nyambura has corrupted him. Now the war between Waiyaki and the tribe starts because of his decision to go with Nyambura. The novelist exposes a crucial thing: Nyambura's love with Waiyaki versus her obedience to her father. She has to betray one of the two. She rebels against her father, and goes away with Waiyaki.

The dilemma of Waiyaki from the beginning is clear. He says 'not all the ways of the white men were bad. Even his religion was not essentially bad. (TRB:141) Waiyaki wants to marry an uncircumcised girl. He believes in 'education, unity, and political freedom.' Waiyaki goes in the darkness. The people do not want to talk of his life or want to see him. The novel ending with the reference of the land and the river again shows that nature does not behave like human beings. The land was now silent. The two ridges lay, Makyu and Kameno.'

The foregoing analysis of the novel proves the following assumptions:

a) How instinctive nature of the man is responsible for his downfall or otherwise for instance Waiyaki had the dual in nature and even at the end also he keeps two worlds at a time. Even Muthoni also keeps two dreamy worlds at a time. Nyambura is completely filled with contradictory thinking. Joshua is also because being a born tribal man, how can he become a complete Christian?

b) The conflict between the tribal way of life and the missionaries' way of life. The father of Waiyaki's Chege, basic assumption is wrong. He wished his son should get education, i.e., Christian education and serve his people. It does not happen.
c) The failure of the protagonist in taking a ‘committed’ step in solving the problem creates unnecessary tension, sorrow and disappointment. More than that the dreams of the people about Waiyaki are shattered. They are forced to suspect everyone, who wants to become a leader. It creates a sort of ‘unfaithfulness’ among the tribals.

d) Whatever Christians do is good and whatever natives do is wrong. If Joshua, a ‘circumcised man can become a priest/Christian, why can’t Muthoni being a Christian become circumcised?

e) The creation of the old and the new world fails completely. People never live as they lived in the past because of what T. S. Eliot says ‘lemon squeezers’.

f) The question remains unanswered: whether native Kenyans are ‘united or perished’.

The novel *Weep Not, Child* begins with a literary epigraph from the poem *On the Beach at Night* by Walt Whitman. Ngugi selects the poem to carry out the meaning that there are children all over the world weeping for one or the other reasons. But in Africa, their weeping is beyond the or rhyme or reason of a sensitive poet.

*Weep Not, Child,*
*Weep not, my darling*
*With these kisses let me remove your tears,*
*The ravening clouds shall not be long victorious*
*They shall not long possess the sky’.*

Walt Whitman: Ngugi: 1964:1985 p1)

‘The ravening clouds’ in the context of the novel signifies the colonial system of imperialism. “Education for better future” should be the right slogan. But it retreats how the golden slogan has been mocked because of the protagonist’s involvement in Mau Mau movement.
Its primary concern is to thrust on the value of education. The white knows the value of education. 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.' (WNC: 6)

For Kenyans 'land' is more important than anything else because they consider it not in terms of monetary value. It has a spiritual value for them.

Naganga was the village carpenter. Kamau was apprenticed to him. Ngotho had to pay a huge fattened he-goat and a hundred and fifty Shillings on top. Nanga was rich. He had land. Any man who had land was considered. If a man had plenty of money, many motor-cars, but not land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had it at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money.

(WNC: 19)

The characters of the rich men show that they do not allow others to be rich. 'A rich man does not want others to get rich because he wants to be the only man with wealth'. (WNC: 21)

The white rulers very systematically exploited the native people land by occupying the land and distorting the native Kenyan culture.

Once in the country of the ridges where the hills and ridges lie together like lions, a man rose people thought that he was the man who had been sent to drive away the white man. But he was killed by wicked people because he said people should stand together. I've waited for the prophecy. It may not be fulfilled in many life time...but O, Murungu. I wish it could.

(WNC: 25)

The question most often asked is: 'How can you continue working for man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?' (WNC: 27)

Is it the novelist making ironical statement on the Europeans, when he says, 'Europeans cannot be friends with black people. They are so high.' (and another statement which is very
assertive) 'All this land belongs to black people' (WNC:37) More than once the reader is bothered with this statement 'Education is everything. Land is everything. Education is the light of Kenya.' (WNC:38)

The dream of Ngotho for education is commendable. He knows that education would be the fulfillment of a wider and more significant vision a vision that embraced the demand made on him, not only by his father, but also by his mother, his brothers and even the village. He saw himself destined for something big, and this made his heart glow. (39) But Njoroge's view on education is crystal clear. He says: 'Education for him, as for many boys of his generations, held the key to the future'. (WNC:48)

At the outset the Bible was the symbol of love, humanity, motherhood, brotherhood so on and so forth but in reality it was quite opposite. The white rulers used this great religious text to mind wash the natives of Kenya by advocating that accepting the theme of Bible is only way to get salvation and come out of pathetic living condition.

The Bible paved the way for the sword. For this he blames, the foolish generosity of their forefathers who pitied the stranger and welcomed him with open arms into their fold. (WNC:57)

Jacobo, the richest man all around, has been brought to pacify the people, but he is a traitor. He is an enemy of the black people. He does not want others to be as rich as he is. (WNC:59) The Kenyans are lacking in knowledge which 'It shows that we black people will never be united. There must always be a traitor in our mind' (WNC:60). 'Black people had no land because of colour-bar and they could not eat in hotel because of colour-bar. Colour bar was everywhere. Rich Africans could also practise colour bar on the poorer Africans.' (WNC:64) Experiencing all these horrible situations in Kenya Njoroge left the school, to serve the nation, through Mau Mau struggle. The rest of the
action in the novel moves on the wheel of the Mau Mau freedom struggle’ in the forest.

Now Mau Mau is not bad. The Mau Mau boys are fighting against the white settlers. Is it bad to fight for one’s land? Tell me that. (WNC: 72) Ngugi, in an interview to Dennis Duerden: emphasizes the causes of Mau Mau insurgency:

I think the terrible thing about the Mau Mau war was the destruction of family life, the destruction of personal relationships. You found a friend betraying a friend, father suspicious of the son, a brother doubting the sincerity or the good intentions of a brother, and above all these things the terrible fear under which all these people lived.

(Duerden: 1964 p121)

The alien rule made the protagonist to suffer at all levels. Self-introspection takes place as to why the settlers win the struggles and why the white elite defeats Kenyans quite often. Ngugi finds the reasons:

All white people stick together. But we black people are very divided. And because they stick together, they’ve imprisoned Jomo, the only hope we had. Now they’ll make us slaves. They took us to their wars and they killed all that was of value to us (WNC:75)

The white settlers used the policy of divide and rule. ‘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”. (WNC:102)

He says: “But he believed that the best, the really excellent could only come from the white man’s civilization is the only hope of mankind and especially of the black races. (WNC:115) ‘for the farm was the woman who he had wooed and conquered. He had to keep an eye on her lest she should be possessed by someone else’ (WNC:127).
Njoroge's loss of faith is clearly indicated when he talks to Mwihaki
"I have now lost all -my education, my faith and my family. It's only
now that I do realize how much you had meant to me and how you
took an interest in my progress." (WNC:131)

David Cook & Okenimkpe in their book: Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An
Exploration of his Writings:1983: comment:

'Weep Not, Child is a novel of challenge. Most immediately it
challenges Kenyan youth to identify the powerfully positive elements
in their retreat from a complex situation into pity-self or despair. It
is not Njoroge alone who needs to accept the responsibility of building
on the sacrifices and achievements of the Boros, of the Nyokabis
and Njeris, and even -for what can be learnt form their sturdy
determination to survive-of the Ngothos. Such commitment could
enable the new generation to find ways of realigning the drive and
direction of society (which is in danger of losing its way) through
concerted policies and action.

(Cook & Okenimkpe: 1983 p49)12

In fact, Njoroge has been left with no option. So he becomes a
pessimist and frustrated. Hopelessness haunts him heavily. He
surrenders himself to the power of love with Nyambura. 'For Njoroge
had now lost faith in all the things he had earlier believed in, like
wealth, power, education’ religion. Even love, his last hope, had fled
from him'. (WNC:134)

Eustace Palmer in his book: An Introduction to the African Novel:
London: Heinemann: 1972, Identifies the weaknesses of the novel
Weep Not, Child in a different way:

The main weakness of Weep Not, Child is the choice of Njoroge as the central
consciousness. Not because Njoroge is too passive and ineffective to be at
the center of the novel’s events, but because a young, inexperienced boy is
not the best vehicle to demonstrate that an obsession with education as a
panacea is escapist. It is in the nature of young boys to dream, and have
illusions about the future, and one can hardly expect them to understand
the complexity of national affairs. The same tendency in an adult here would
have been much more convincing.

(Palmer:1972 p10)13
In view Eustance Palmer's opinion about the hero, it is true that he is too young to comprehend the complexities of the Mau Mau struggle. He is a symbol of desperate attempt in life. At the end he sees, his mother bringing light—she becomes a torchbearer. He sees the light she was carrying and he falteringly goes towards it.

Harish Narang: observes:

However, with the coming of Christianity a process of disintegration of the various set-ups began because acceptance of Christianity meant an outright rejection of the values and rituals which had held them together. The missionaries therefore, started condemning various aspects of different African cultures—their dances their songs, their images of gods and their rituals—as 'primitive', barbaric and 'savage' and supplanting them their own which they considered to be superior.


While discussing the novel *The River Between*, Eustace Palmer also argues:

'It is here that Ngugi launches his general theme of the disintegration of indigenous society and the collapse of its morale as a result of the gradual encroachment of the white man.' (Palmer: 1972 p13)

He also says in the same book that Muthoni's death alerts the missionaries to the need for more vigilance, and their school at Siriana bars entry to all whose parents does not renounce the rite of circumcision (p18)

David Cook & Michael Okenimkpe, argues that “*The River Between* centers on the struggle to free men's minds from the constraints of colonialism in preparation for the assertion of national integrity and individual human identity.” (69)

Their views on *Weep Not, Child* portrays Kenya during the Mau Mau period stumbling towards group consciousness and group responsibility in spite of vicious counter currents at time of great confusion and uncertainty. (p69)
Both *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*, deal with 'a subtle portrayal of particular human dilemmas and conflicts.' Ngugi has remade Kenyan history, by including the freedom struggle as the theme of his powerful writings. He uses politics too in his writings. As Harish Narang, a prominent Indian critic of African literature, quoted the words of Ms. Kesteloot, who opines that: ‘African writers have produced original works only when they become politically committed’. *(Narang : 1995 p26)*

The aims of African writers—including novelists—are, therefore, overtly political and there are three principal reasons for which they write. First to bring out the rich cultural heritage of Africa and to debunk the colonial propaganda that Africa had no culture, no history, no past and that Europeans had intervened in Africa to 'civilize' it. Critics have called this phenomenon as 'Prospero syndrome.' The second aim of these writers is, to step up the struggle for their cultural liberation. The writers supported their respective national liberation movement. The third, the writers had to fight against draconian law, which had insulted African people and writers.

Muthoni, however, fails to get convinced by any reason for considering female circumcision as something 'wrong and sinful' particularly because of her own devout Christian faith. She retorts:

> Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes, the white man's God does not quite satisfy me. I want. I need something more. My life and your life here, in the hills, that you and I know.

*(WNC:26)*

Muthoni's death becomes another reason for growing antagonism between the two communities. Muthoni’s father considers her death to be God’s wrath on her and he wants it to be ‘a warning to those who
rebels against their parents and the laws of God. Chege, Waiyaki’s father, considers it to be a punishment to Joshua a warning to all to stick to the ways of the tribe to the ancient wisdom of the land, to its ritual and song.’

Thus, Muthoni’s death further deepens the antagonism between Kameno and Makuyu. For Livingstone, the head of the Mission at Siriana, it was a God sent opportunity to root out the evil of female circumcision from among the Gikuyu.

And Waiyaki ‘saw a tribe great with many educated sons and daughters, all living together, tilling the land of their ancestors in perpetual serenity, pursing their rituals and beautiful customs and all of them acknowledging their debt to him’ (TRB: 100:101).

No argument convinces the gathering and the novel ends with both Waiyaki and Nyambura being placed in the hands of the Kiama for appropriate punishment. The novel deals with the disintegration of a traditional Kenyan society. The society is haunted with ‘rigid’ obscurantist, traditional people governed by sacred oaths of the clan, people who refuse to move towards modernization. The ordinary Kenyans are caught between two worlds—neither can they choose traditional society nor the European people with superior technology.

Samuel Omo Asein & Albert Olu Ashaolu observe:

\[\text{Nagotho has assisted in the development of road and railway systems which become an additional means of dispossession and exploitation. The process has continued into the present, its agents the new-colonialists whose block faces have assumed white psyche.} \]

\[(\text{Asein \& Ashaolu: 1986 p198})^7\]
The characters like Waiyaki and Muthoni are the victims of this ambivalent attitude of the Kenyans. They do not possess an identity, which leads them to frustration. Waiyaki’s intention to love and lead life with an uncircumcised Nyambura is an example. Waiyaki’s obsession is that education is panacea for all the ills. This was Ngugi’s ideology when he was young. This kind of ambivalent attitude of Waiyaki symbolizes the Kenyan youth with ‘English Education’ the so-called ‘new magic power.’ Waiyaki’s procrastination goes in opposite direction at the end of the novel. He makes self-criticism: ‘Oh, there are so many things I did not know. I had not seen that the new awareness wanted expression at a political level. Education for an oppressed people is not all’ (TRB: 160- emphasis added)

Ngugi portrays Waiyaki as a man of contradictions and he has been very successful. His involvement in trying to keep Christianity away from traditional society is being captured by colonial rule and he becomes isolated. This is not only the fate of Waiyaki but also all the young men of Kenya who want to keep Christianity at arms length. Ngugi does not make Waiyaki’s attitude apologetic to the Kenyans. For him Christianity is not a ‘negative light’ as was believed by the writer in his youth. He knows that for him education would be the fulfillment of a wider and more significant vision a vision that embraced the demand on him, not only his father, but also by his mother, his brothers and even the vision. ‘He saw himself destined for something big, and this made his heart glow”. (WNC: 39)

Thus Njoroge represents the section of Kenyan society that had placed its hopes of national independence on acquisition of western education. However, in the meantime, Njoroge is becoming a victim of the Western values which, are cutting him off from his native roots.
Ngugi beautifully illustrates this through the incident where Njoroge study with Mwihaki the daughter of Jacobo who was in the same class. Ngugi presents an interesting situation where the young people under colonialism received their education from two distinct sources formal missionary schools and traditional Gikuyu means.

Critics have identified the parallels between Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, as both the novelists show disintegration of the Africans. In *Things Fall Apart* one can see the utter disintegration of the African Ibos of Umofia. This is because of the contact with the British system of education and way of life. The community system breaks down because of too much exposure to the western type of life and education.

However, critics find Ngugi's novel different in form and force from Achebe's in many ways. Harish Narang identifies the differences. It has been suggested that the real reason for this ironic treatment is Ngugi's own sense of guilt for himself for having opted for education at a time when most boys of his age were helping the Mau Mau movement. Again, Waiyaki and Njoroge, like Ngugi himself at one time, also seem to be having too much faith in Christianity and the goodness of man as preached by the missionaries as part of the British education system.

Ngugi shows some ambivalent attitude of Christianity through the character of Howlands but he comes down really heavily on the African collaborators like Jacobo, thereby indicting a section of Africans for the perpetuation of colonialism in Kenya. The balanced view continues in his third novel, *A Grain of Wheat*. Commenting on Ngugi's writings: Cook & Okenimkpe observe:
These egalitarian concerns were soon to attract Ngugi to the ideas of the Algerian revolutionary and philosopher, Frantz Fanon, and through Fanon to the Marxist tenants of his social theory. These developments were subsequently to steer Ngugi's thinking away from its earlier idealistic humanist moralist to its later militancy.

(Cook & Okenimkpe: 1983:24p)

Ngugi, unlike Achebe, does not go into vivid details of the tribal life and its custom which many earlier African novelists considered essential for the understanding of the western audience and which made their novels look more ethnographic texts than works of fiction. Instead, Ngugi plunges straight away into contemporary Kenyan history, filling in the most essential details of Gikuyu past through myths and stories. Again, Ngugi deliberately choose the theme of education, which is very controversial. These ideas of Ngugi are the outcome of his participation in multicultural activities and multi language education. This sort of background of a writer creates split personality or skeptical about the good and bad in the society.

Through the characters of Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child* and Waiyaki in *The River Between*, Ngugi examines critically the wisdom of Africans in pinning their hopes on a western system of education as a means to fighting a western colonialism. The analysis of the two novels, *The River Between and Weep Not, Child*, can be summed up in the words of Harish Narang: *Politics and Fiction*: 1995: 'Ngugi's treatment of both Waiyaki and Njoroge, the protagonists, is full of irony'. (Harish Narang: 1995:p68)
END NOTES

2. Ibid: p22.


