

## **Impression of Expansionism: An Insight of Mugo and Kihakain NgugiWaThiongo's A Grain of Wheat**

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### **Abstract**

The study aims at exploring the impact of colonialism by NgugiWaThiongo in his novel, A Grain of wheat. Kenya is led by the representatives of former colonial masters affecting the country's growth and development. After the prolonged struggle of the armed resistance, the Mau Mau revolt, Kenya achieved its independence on December 12, 1963. The post independent Kenya witnessed the continuation of the social practices of colonialism inflicted upon by the black bourgeoisie in power. The age of independence also witnessed the rising of social class and class contradictions. Ngugi realised that the post independent Kenya is full of corruption and disillusionment caused by the political leaders.

Ngugi's first novel captures his resentment towards the impact of colonialism in the post Independent Kenya. Set in the transitional period of Kenya from its colonised state to a decolonised nation, the novel talks about the intrusion of a new form of imperialism that act either directly or indirectly replacing colonialism with neo colonialism. A Grain of Wheat, sightsees how despite the promise of freedom, Uhuru to be achieved at last by the people of Thabai village after their long anti-colonial struggle, the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya, the situation of joyousness is diluted with suspicion, betrayal, anxiety and guilt portrayed mainly through the major characters Mugo, Karanja, Mumbi and Gikonyo.

Ngugi illustrates the impact of colonialism in Kenya by searching into the mind of Mugo, Karanja, Gikonyo and Mumbi . The novel centers on the most important events in the history of Kenya, the events of the Mau Mau,. During the years of the rebellion over thirty thousand African men, women and children were imprisoned and tortured in British concentration camps, many losing their homes and land . Though defeated, Mau Mau had broken the British rule in Kenya and independence became a reality for Kenya.

Ngugi in this novel takes up the last four days before the independence to recollect nature of the struggle and its consequences. The characters in A Grain of Wheat relive the days

of the past, those days of oppression and agony, and their hard harsh days in different camps.

Ngugi before the writing of *A Grain of Wheat* has brought forth the result of destruction done to Kenya during the State of Emergency from 1952 to 1963. He states in his *Weep not Child* that,

The terrible thing about the Mau Mau war was the destruction of family life, distrust of personal relationships; you find a friend betraying a friend, a father suspicious of his son, a brother doubling the sincerity of a brother (121).

Gikonyo, the carpenter who after his term in seven detention camps for six years during the freedom struggle meets the MP to obtain a loan for his business and is neglected by the officials in not providing him with a loan. Feeling dejected, he complains,

But now, whom do we see riding in long cars and changing them daily as if motor cars were clothes? It is those who did not take part in the movement [...] at political meetings you hear them shout: Uhuru, Uhuru, we fought for. Fought where? (60).

The plot is seen as a detective story where there is a search for the individual who has betrayed a Mau Mau leader, Kihika. Critic G.D Killam mentions,

In *A Grain of Wheat* Ngugi takes us into the minds of his characters, sensibilities resonant with ambiguities and contradictions, and causes us to feel what they feel, to share in a significant measure their hopes and fears and pain. Not their joy, however. There is little joy in the novel and what there is produces ironic results (54).

The four main characters Mugo, Gikonyo, Mumbi and Karanja and their lives are revolved around by their remembrance of Kihika, a famous freedom fighter and a heroic victim. Kihika is the brother of Mumbi and the boyhood friend of Mugo. Kihika is betrayed to the imperialist power by one of the villagers leading to his execution. The execution of Kihika is the result of the colonial execution against the Gikuyu community. His comrades, General R and Lieutenant Koinandu who have survived the struggle come to the Thabai village to identify the betrayer and to put him to trial at the Uhuru celebrations.

Ngugi has illustrated the character Kihika as an original Mau Mau revolutionary. He is the man of spirit who has sacrificed himself to the cause of his country. Kihika, a freedom fighter flees into the forest to join the Mau Mau. He represents the interests of the peasants who win to recover the land lost from the highlands of Central Kenya. He unceasingly finds support for the independence of his people within the contradictions inherent in the Bible. Ironically Kihika's inspiration to direct the revolution comes from the lessons of the Old Testament in The Bible. As GovindNarain Sharma mentions:

[ ... ] he is the young hero who sees the vision of an independent Kenya, [he] is moved by the story of Moses and the children of Israel, and like the great prophet, he hopes to lead his people to the promised land. His eloquence makes people aware of their servitude, and inspires them to plunge into the struggle for freedom; it is his martyrdom which

waters the 'tree of freedom' and keeps the struggle live by infusing new life into the party, which finally leads to freedom (168).

Through Kihika's character and by quoting the Biblical verses underlined in Kihika's copy of The Bible, a parallel between Kihika and Christ is often assumed. Both are betrayed by someone they trusted. In fact, Mugo imagines him to be a Judas before reporting to the Whites. Both sacrifices their lives for the salvation of their people. Ngugi mockingly says in one of his interviews that the white rulers are so obsessed with their fear of Mau Mau terrorists that, if Christ is to be born again, they certainly would have crucified him as Mau Mau terrorist. Kihika is moved by the story of Moses and the children of Israel and like the great prophet Moses hopes to lead his people to the Promised Land, that is, a free Kenya.

By making an imaginative use of Christian myth, Ngugi tries to give his new interpretation of Christianity in Africa. Kihika who never leaves his copy of The Bible behind can never be called a messenger of complete love. Instead, he considers violent aggressiveness more suitable for his fight against the imperialist power. Ngugi strongly believed that violence, for a just reason can always be supported. Here Ngugi is much nearer, ideologically, to Frantz Fanon who comments, "Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organised and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the mass to understand social truths and gives the key to them" (16). Ngugi is not only justifying Mau Mau but also at the same time tries to dispel the myths created by the imperialists about the unjustified use of violence.

Mugo, the central character in the novel projects the moral polarity to Kihika in the novel. In betraying Kihika, the true Mau Mau revolutionary, Mugo becomes both a traitor and a victim of betrayal. He becomes a national traitor betraying a revolutionary leader and a victim of betrayal as a result of his refusal to recognise himself as a native of the village. He isolates himself psychologically and socially and turns to be an introvert not ready to participate in any revolution or social activity. When Kihika comes seeking refuge, the fear of getting identified with rebels changes his mind.

To preserve his peace of mind, Mugo decides to betray Kihika and reveals his secretly planned meeting. He feels deep gratitude for the imperialist power as the burden was lifted from his heart but his relief was short – lived and false Mugo is taken to the detention camp. During his suffering in the detention camp, he realises the true nature of the white man. In fact, he attempts to save a woman from being brutally beaten up in a counter.

Mugo is arrested and released after Kihika's arrest and execution. Mugo gets back to his state of solitude but now it is the solitude of psychological alienation and the suffering of pain that emerges out of his deep sense of guilt.

Mugo is considered the hermit by the people of Thabai. "The man Mugo is a true hermit" (121). His betrayal of Kihika is partly induced by his jealousy. Partly by, the sufferings of his childhood. Here Ngugi shows the psychological effects of colonialism that made the inmates be indifferent to social responsibility and commitments to reach and attain one's

own selfish motives. Mugo's betrayal thus indicates the possibility of a vast betrayal as the result of social indifference which would lead to neo colonialism.

Mugo becomes a hero after his suffering in the imprisonment camp as a colonial victim. They consider him with the legendary hero of the Mau Mau freedom struggle, Kihika. People admired his courage and hailed him by saying that Mugo is another Kihika. They wish to honour him at the Uhuru celebration for having undergone hardships and sufferings during his detention patiently. They want him to deliver a speech on Uhuru day to honour Kihika and the other revolutionaries who suffered or died fighting for the national cause. Kihika is believed never to betray the oath which in fact he has never taken. Mugo, considered as the most benevolent person has been asked to deliver a speech on the Uhuru day.

Without being aware of the inner turmoil that Mugo undergoes, the people insist him to deliver a speech. The more he tries to avoid people the more they insisted him to lead them on the occasion of the celebration. They send Mumbi, Kihika's sister and Gikonyo's wife to convince him to speak for them on Uhuru day. By a strange conjunction of events, Mugo finds himself trusted by the entire community and particularly by Mumbi and her husband Gikonyo. Mugo's meeting with Mumbi creates one of the dramatic events that ultimately leads him to his public confession at the end.

Unfortunately, the celebration of the Uhuru is held at the same place where Kihika was hanged to death. The people expect Mugo to prosecute Karanja as they believe that Karanja has betrayed Kihika. Mugo, who is prepared for the speech, goes to the place and confesses: "You asked for Judas [...] You asked for the man who led Kihika to this tree, here. That man stands before you, now. Kihika came to me by night. He put his life into my hands, and I sold it to the white man. And this thing has eaten into my life all these years" (223).

Thus through Mugo, Ngugi portrays the psychological impacts of colonialism that has led the people of the community to be indifferent to the social responsibilities in a society by replacing colonialism with neo colonialism. Ngugi mentions in his *Detained, A Writer's Prison Diary* the significance of Mugo's suffering and fate:

In the novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, I tried through Mugo who carried the burden of mistaken revolutionary heroism, to hint at the possibilities of a New Kenyatta. But that was in 1965 – 66 and nothing was clear then about the extent to which Kenyatta had negated his past, nor the sheer magnitude of the suffering it would cause to our society today (83).

Mugo's unendurable sense of guilt and his public confession at the Uhuru gathering makes him an anti – hero where his heroism lies in admitting one's own guilt and weaknesses and offers a positive hope for the future of Kenya.

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