

BREAKING THE GUILTY SILENCE: AN ALLEGORY OF EMPOWERMENT IN NGŪGĪ WA THIONG'O'S A GRAIN OF WHEAT

Kouadio Lambert N'GUESSAN

Littérature et Civilisation Africaines des Pays Anglophones
Université Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire)

lamkwadio78@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper deals with Africans' response to the evil of colonialism or foreign rule in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's post-colonial novel *A Grain of Wheat*. It reveals that revolutionary ideals marked a sharp break with the past, the bleak colonial period, spearheaded by the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya's empowerment through the prism of historical and political allegory. Fundamentally, the analysis of Ngũgĩ's narrative is based on African nationalist resistance to British imperialism and oppressive violence through analepsis or flashbacks. The aim the current study is to harpoon characters' victimisation, frustration and revolution exteriorised by demagogic language mixed with heroism and sacrifice in order to recover the land torn away by the colonial administration.

Key words: Allegory, Empowerment, Kenya, Nationalist, Post-colonial, Revolution, Sacrifice

Rompre le silence coupable : une allégorie de l'autonomisation dans *A Grain Of Wheat* de Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o

Résumé : Le présent article traite de la réponse des Africains au mal du colonialisme ou de la domination étrangère dans le roman postcolonial de Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o *A Grain of Wheat*. Il révèle que les idéaux révolutionnaires ont marqué une rupture nette avec le passé, la sombre période coloniale, menée par la lutte des Mau Mau pour l'autonomisation du Kenya sous le prisme de l'allégorie historique et politique. Fondamentalement, l'analyse du récit de

Ngũgĩ est basée sur la résistance nationaliste africaine à l'impérialisme britannique et à la violence oppressive à travers des analepses ou des flashbacks. Le but de la présente étude est de saisir les rétorsions, la frustration et la révolution des personnages extériorisées par un langage démagogique mêlé d'héroïsme et de sacrifice afin de récupérer les terres arrachées par l'administration coloniale.

Mots-clés: Allégorie, Autonomisation, Kenya, Nationaliste, Post-colonial, Révolution, Sacrifice

Introduction

With *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes colonial realities and their impact on the economy by calling on figures who have played an important role in Kenyan history such as Jomo Kenyatta and Harry Thuku. Set in the wake of the Mau Mau rebellion¹ and on the cusp of Kenya's eventual independence from Britain, Ngũgĩ echoes stories from history and expounds characters' sacrifice, betrayal and guilt. The author explores, from a more humanistic than political perspective, the feelings and amorous intrigues of heroes and traitors during the war of liberation.

Written just four years after Kenya's independence, Ngũgĩ is concerned about Kenya's hope for a better future, free from corruption, with the idea that independence will not be betrayed and violence would be possible. With *A Grain of Wheat*, the movement towards self-discovery is always simultaneously a move away from individualism

¹ The Mau Mau rebellion, also known as the Mau Mau uprising, Mau Mau revolt or Kenya Emergency, was a war in the British Kenya Colony between the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, also known as the Mau Mau, and the British authorities.

and social isolation towards an active consciousness of social responsibility and solidarity with the oppressed. At the heart of Ngũgĩ's postcolonial fiction, Kenya's struggle against colonialism ascribed to the Gikũyũ² who fought British oppression to achieve political and economic empowerment. This uneven allegorical depiction argues that in the conflict between colonisers and colonised, the Kenyans and their quest for freedom morally outweighs the British mission to "moralise" what they see as a lesser country. An allegory is a simple story that represents a larger point about society or human nature, whose different characters may represent real-life figures. It may have meaning on two or more levels that the reader can understand only through an interpretive process without ever explicitly stating connection between real-life people and events.

Dealing with the Kenya Liberation Movement generally contains two main camps of characters. First, the colonial administrators represented by John Thompson, then the peasants living in Thabai and represented by Kihika. To what extent *A Grain of Wheat* makes consistent reference to Kenya's independence resulting from political and economic pressures? How does Ngũgĩ epitomise betrayal and guilt and use symbols to convey a hidden moral or political message not explicitly set forth in his historical-political narrative? The study therefore consists in analysing how protagonists witness violence driven by pervasive and unavoidable conflict within Kenyan community, especially in times of great historical struggle. Then, the discussion will interrogate characters' commitment as a vehicle for Ngũgĩ's ideological choice and political vision. Ultimately, I will argue that Kenyan postcolonial nationhood construction

² *Gikũyũ* also Kikuyu / Agikũyũ are a Bantu ethnic group native to Central Kenya.

required noble sacrifice for redemption after breaking free of the colonial yoke.

1. Witnessing Violence: a Pervasive and Unavoidable Conflict

From the Mau Mau Emergency, Ngũgĩ addressed the full onslaught of colonial stereotype and racist iconography being brought to bear on a thing that did not exist, in order to conceptualise it in terms that did not apply, and to meet it with a brutality as overwhelmingly disproportionate as it was misdirected. In response to Mau Mau's destabilisation of the coloniser's relationship to colonial space, the British military introduced strategies which aimed at the complete *reordering* of African space. Confessions were believed to 'cure' the prisoner's pathological political sympathies and were extracted using inducements, brainwashing, propaganda, hard labour and, if all else failed, beatings and torture. Significantly, the treatment of prisoners in the camps by their guards and superintendents was as depraved as anything the settlers had claimed in regard to Mau Mau atrocities. R. Edgerton (1989, p. 160) reveals that:

Electric shock was widely used, and so was the fire. Women were choked and held under water; gun barrels, beer bottles, and even knives were thrust into their vaginas. Men had beer bottles thrust into their rectums, were dragged behind Land Rovers, whipped, burned and bayoneted. Their fingers were chopped off, and sometimes their testicles were crushed with pliers.

R. Edgerton tries to echo one of the unconscious ironies of *A Grain of Wheat* in Kenyan national identity vision, which relies upon the same confessional logic as that of the colonial torture chamber in the detention camps. The colonial caricatures of the insurgency could only be emplotted on the landscape by imposing the most horrific brutality upon the

Kenyan population. If the colonial government sought to produce a spatial taxonomy of Mau Mau, then the borders between the artificial categories it imposed had to be policed with brute force, with civilians bearing the brunt of military whim. In other words, the landscape had to be *inscribed* with the violence of the coloniser's narrative of self-legitimation.

Indeed, the aim pursued by w. T. Ngũgĩ's recital (1975, p.32) is to expose the "conflict between the Kenyan people and the missionary churches, the subsequent setting up of African independent churches, and the religious aspects of the Mau Mau liberation movement were direct results of the cultural conflict initiated by the missionary holy zeal". In fact, Kihika's 'crucifixion' by hanging is suggestive of a Christ-like dimension and accords with Ngũgĩ's later thinking about the role of the Church in post-Independence Kenya. w. T. Ngũgĩ (1975, p.34) argues that "One could say that if Christ had lived in Kenya in 1952, or in South Africa or Rhodesia today, he would have been crucified as a Maui Mau terrorist or Communist". Undoubtedly, w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986:75) concedes that Kihika's first revolutionary inclinations are demonstrated in a theological dispute with Teacher Muniu on the grounds that '[the] Bible does not talk about circumcising women' and that it therefore does not specifically condemn Gikũyũ initiation ceremonies. However, Ngũgĩ's representation of Mau Mau in *A Grain of Wheat* is not necessarily ideologically aligned with colonial narratives of the Mau Mau insurgency's origins in the breakaway African churches and Christian sects. w. T. Ngũgĩ (1975: 34) describes the Church's complicity with imperialism, but qualifies his arguments in this way "I want to stress that I am talking of the Church as a corporate body, an institution, and not of the individual holders of the faith". This qualification points to a residual sympathy towards Christianity and individualism, and perhaps accounts of the

crisis between Christian nationalism, Gĩkũyũ traditionalism and socialism in in Ngũgĩ's fictional narrative.

A Grain of Wheat is a crisis novel, whose residual sympathies with English liberalism lead it to exaggerate Mau Mau violence in the name of a flawed ideology of aesthetic balance. In other words, by trying to tell both sides of the story, *A Grain of Wheat* equivocates in its account of Kenyan history. In seeking to make the narrative a balanced historical fiction, Ngũgĩ unbalances historiographies authenticity, which is self-reflexive and based on historical events. Even after the writer knows the facts, he continues to search for sense and meaning. As a historical novelist, Ngũgĩ exposes the inner lives of Gĩkũyũ across time and place, and illuminates history's untold stories, allowing the reader to experience a more complex truth. John Thompson is the character symbolising British civilisation in all its glory. He is therefore the perfect model in his physical, intellectual and moral aspect: he is British by "stock", he studied in British universities and acquired all the moral values of this civilised world to the point of making it his "religion". Through the portrait of the character, w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, p.53) allows the reader to deconstruct the civilising ideology ethnocentrism that causes his illumination:

After the war he returned to his interrupted studies in Oxford. It was there, whilst reading history, that he found himself interested in the development of the British Empire. At first this was a historian's interest without personal involvement. But, drifting into the poems of Rudyard Kipling, he experienced a swift flicker, a flame awakened. He saw himself as a man with destiny, a man poised for great things in the future. He studied the work and life of Lord Lugard.

The narrator accounts for a model John Thompson imbibed by studying a great figure of colonial literature

through his convictions, his writings, and his actions, Lord Lugard³. The novelist not only chooses to insert this historical figure as a model, but also to deconstruct white settlers' hegemony, which marked the history of Kenyan colonial administration. Thus, Ngũgĩ purposely portrays John Thompson while omitting to mention his racist affiliation because the character could never recognise it, at the risk of appearing "insane" in his own eyes owing to his cultural values and to those of Kenyans, in so far as British values advocate equality between human beings and openness to cultures from elsewhere. As for John Thompson, his tension is felt when he expresses reluctance to reveal his mental disorder to Dr. Lynd. This therefore adds to the tension caused by the handover. While he is at his desk, Thompson sees Doctor Lynd's Bull Mastiff moving dangerously towards a group of Africans employed in the colonial administration. Karanja, a former member of the Mau Mau revolution for the liberation of Kenya, committed to the colonial cause, is part of this group of Africans. When Dr Lynd's dog attacks Karanja, Thompson inwardly wrestles with a paralysing unconscious sadism, which would really have liked to see the dog draw Karanja's blood. Indeed, John Thompson is described as a character fascinated by the sight of blood. This psychological trait suggests that the latter suffers from a mental pathology. As the dog chooses to assault Karanja among the group of natives, Thompson remains captivated by the violence looming on the horizon. Thompson's strange reaction [to the reader] when the attack was about to happen as w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, p. 42) describes:

³ Lord Frederick John Dealtry Lugard was a former military man who spent four decisive years in East Africa (1888 - 1892) during which he established the first British East Africa Company station in Kikuyu land.

Thompson tensed up: something was going to happen. He knew it and waited unable to suppress that cold excitement. Suddenly, the dog started barking as it bounded across the compound towards the group of Africans. A few of them screamed and scattered into different directions. One man could not run on time. The dog went for him. The man tried to edge his way out, but the dog fixed him to the wall. Suddenly he stooped, picked up a stone, and raised it in the air. The dog was now only a few feet away. Thompson waited for the thing he feared to happen. Just at the moment, Dr Lynd appeared on the scene and, as the dog was about to jump at the man, shouted something. Thompson's breath came back first in a long-drawn wave, then in low quick waves, relieved and vaguely disappointed that nothing had happened.

The description which shows the fascination of Thompson's gaze and his excitement as he predicts the scene of violence of which Karanja would be the victim, proves sufficiently that he suffers from sadism. In this connection, E. Palmer (1972, pp.44-45) maintains that:

"Although Thompson is not presented in as much detail as the Africans, Ngũgĩ tells the reader as much as he needs to know him fully, partly through an analysis of his inner thoughts and struggles. The reader is intended to feel no contempt for Thompson, but pity for a man who is aware of his inner weaknesses and desires, and struggles to suppress them".

The omniscient narrator in the progression of his narrative accentuates the intensity of emotion, allowing the reader to imagine the adrenaline rush in Thompson. His obsessive behaviour wanting to train the colonised at all costs. John Thompson will demand absolute respect for British authority by not allowing the colonial administration

to be ridiculed by Mau Mau prisoners. Indeed, during the Kenyan Liberation War, detainees complained about the ill-treatment inflicted in the cells. This only served to inflame Thompson, who ordered collective punishment after they threw rocks at the guards. These treatments are amplified by w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, p.134) as follows:

Thompson was on the edge of madness. Eliminate the vermin, he would grind his teeth at night. He set the white officers and warders on the men. Yes - eliminate the vermin. But the thing that sparked off the now famous deaths, was a near-riot act that took place on the third day of the strike. As some of the warders brought food to the detainees, a stone was hurled at the men and struck one of them at the head. They let go the food and ran away howling murder! Riot! The detainees laughed and let fly more stones. What occurred next is known to the world. The men were rounded up and locked in their cells. The now famous beating went on day and night. Eleven men died.

The narrator says it himself through this text, John Thompson is about to go crazy. A madness that is expressed by the obsession with violence, through its lexical field "eliminate the vermin, murder! Riot, beat, eleven deaths". The narrator also manifests to be asserting that the task of "eliminating" the troublesome character is given to white soldiers only because they are the only ones likely to carry out this type of order well. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (1991, pp.249-250) explains the origin of pathological violence towards the Negro:

In the period of colonization when it is not contested by armed resistance, when the sum total of harmful nervous stimuli overstep a certain threshold, the defensive attitudes of the natives give way and they then find themselves crowding the mental hospitals. There is thus during this calm period of successful colonization a regular and

important mental pathology which is the direct product of oppression.

In order to plant the seeds of European imperial social and political models and Eurocentric modes of existence, the racial coloniser employs various forms of violence, overt and covert kinds of [pathological] violence, physical and psychological varieties of violence, to quarantine the racially colonised to the *world* of white supremacist colonial capitalism. Then, racism becomes pathological when it involves unjustified violence. While the racist ideology of civilisation triggers mental illness in John Thompson, the revolutionary ideology reinforced by the experience of war only made Kihika's sadism more legitimate.

Militarily, Mau Mau failed. Psychologically, Mau Mau was an incontestable force that continues to occupy an unsettling or disturbing place in the European and white African imagination. Significantly, D. Maughan-Brown (1985, p.260) denotes that the term 'Mau Mau' was a chimera, a pure figment of the settler imagination. Constituted by and existing only within colonial discourse. This therefore explains [pathological] aggressiveness which takes on a form of sadism. From the above statement, I can therefore affirm that the relationships of John Thompson, strong in his collective identity, with the indigenous populations are determined by dialectical relations also called cultural hangovers. These are, among other things, transfers of concepts and ways of thinking inspired by a desire for political, economic and cultural domination. Drawing on scientific racism thinking, colonialists doubted the very humanity of colonised people and doubted whether they had souls.

2. Leadership Commitment and Sacrifice

The response to heartless violence with equally cruel violence turns out to be the work of neurotic leaders, enlightened by their quest to rehabilitate the Kenyan people. The action starts in a Thabai village on Uhuru Day. Kihika is the character who is directly opposed to Thompson. He is the emblematic figure of the struggle of the Mau Mau peasants, in the village called Tahbai, for the appropriation of the land of their ancestors. The gaze that the people have on Kihika, at the beginning of the novel, is very admiring, even blissful, in the face of the character's speeches. According to these villagers, Kihika embodies the liberation movement, through his speeches full of demagoguery and passion. Villagers caught up in rebuilding their lives late and ill-defined justice in the bitter aftermath of their entangled pursuit of Uhuru - liberation or freedom - reflect on their poisonous memories of jealousy, meanness, betrayal, and disillusionment. While self-sacrifice has great potential moral value, it can also be used to justify the most brutal acts. *A Grain of Wheat* takes on a full meaning from the biblical words through Saint Paul's vision. It refers to the true Christic sacrifice which involves the death of a *Christ* embodied by Mugo who releases the people from their tension through the truth, offering them new life, by recreating cohesion within the community. What is more, *A Grain of Wheat* has three epigraphs, which are biblical quotations underlined by Kihika in his personal bible. Their location in the novel correlates with the evolution of his thought. Through the last below quotation, w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, p.201) allows the reader to understand the fundamentals of Kihika's messianic philosophy. In the first two verses, w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, pp.31/128) includes the notion of *exodus* hinting at affliction, laments, sorrow and suffering:

And the Lord spoke unto Moses,
Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him,
Thus saith the Lord,
Let my people go.
Exodus 8: 1 (w. T. Ngũgĩ, 1986, p.31).
And the Lord said, I have surely seen the
Affliction of my people which are in Egypt,
And have heard their cry by reason of them
Taskmaster; for I know their sorrows.
Exodus 3: 7 (w. T. Ngũgĩ, 1986, p.128).
Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of
Wheat falls into the ground and die, it abideth
Alone: but if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit.
St John 12: 24 (W. T. Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 201).

The first two verses come from the *Old Testament*, they are the words of God who first sends Moses to tell Pharaoh to deliver his people who are in captivity in Egypt, and then affirms that he is aware of the suffering of his people orchestrated by the Pharaoh of Egypt. The connection of these two verses underlined in red is that the people do not take part in their own liberation but rather they must wait for liberation by the action of God. At the beginning of his religious quest, the novelist tells the reader that Kihika was passionate about the story of Moses, since he concludes that he was greatly inspired by it. However, the third verse taken from the *New Testament* delivers a message of sacrifice for a freedom that passes through death, which then constitutes a different vision from the first. Ngũgĩ's fiction advocates a different approach – remembering the traumas and betrayals of the past in order to move on and to ensure that the heroic participants in Kenyan anti-colonial resistance might realise the economic and political empowerment for which they fought.

With *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngũgĩ sees all things that revolve in the novel. He sees from the mind of the characters. He

takes the reader into the life of each character. He is ubiquitous. He sees what goes on in Mugo's hut and what happens in Gikonyo's chamber. Although Gikonyo remains firm for the first few months of his detention, the passage of time wears him down and eliminates any noble thoughts of freedom or national suffrage. Driven by a vain hope to be released early, Gikonyo confesses the oath, betraying his country and shaming him. Gikonyo secretly carries this guilt and shame with him for the rest of the story, becoming a vessel through which to explore the dark effects of a burden of guilt. He knows that Mugo's prevalent thought and guilt haunt him. He helps to give a better judgment of each character by taking the reader into characters' lives. Ngũgĩ employs this method or technique to convince his readers that he has enough information about the events of Kenya people, his hometown. He also employed the flashback narrative technique to solve the puzzle and suspense that have been created in the minds of the readers. It was through the flashback device that the real narration of Kihika's death was made overt. Most of the events are revealed through flashbacks with the purpose to create suspense.

Ngũgĩ's writing style is uniquely different from most African writers. One major style of Ngũgĩ is his use of characters. His characters are always of the lower class and usually the masses. He uses this style to 'express the suffering and the aspiration from' the masses. He uses characters of low status in the society. Mugo, Karanja and Gikonyo are symbols of the poor masses or peasants in Kenya. Another style of Ngũgĩ is his use of figurative expression in his work. His language use, characters' selection and flashbacks' use add to his work's subject matter the evil of colonialism to keep the reader enthralled. Indeed, the flashbacks describe Mugo as an individual avoiding all contact with the outside world. The narration

gives the reader Mugo's portrait, whose sole activity is the work of his field with a view to future prosperity. He thus spent all his time on the sidelines. In this regard, w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986: 194) clarifies that "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". While Kihika comes into the picture as Mugo was at home safe from the British Army's orchestrated raids on the village in search of Freedom Troopers. The meeting between the two characters is described through the thought of Mugo who fears deep within him, the reaction of this man whom he considers to be mad, and the onslaught of the British armed forces who could arrest him for complicity. Kihika offers him to create a movement that would operate in the shadows. For that purpose, he gives her an appointment in the forest to discuss it. This is how Mugo's hopes were fully dashed. He had established a barrier between himself and the outside world as he wanted to avoid any hindrance to his success. This separation was symbolised by the lock on his door that he put on his way home. But after this episode he removes the lock from his door and goes to sleep. Admittedly, at first sight, w. T. Ngũgĩ, (1986, p.193) suggests that "This action ideally symbolises the character's resignation". This character's trait, which does not correspond to the Kikuyu sense of community, which materialises during the support of the soldiers of freedom, only makes it even more complex how to explore the character's mentionable actions in the story.

The insurgents attack a police station, in reaction, the British arrest many young people, even Mugo, the defeatist is arrested and his wife beaten. In reaction to the construction of a railway by the British coloniser, but they were defeated and killed. Through Mugo's and Gikonyo's

respective journeys, *A Grain of Wheat* argues that redemption and freedom from guilt can only be gained by open confession and willingness to face the consequences of one's actions. Mugo, while in custody, believing he respected the British, feels unfairly accused and refuses to cooperate. The inmates believe that he is an inspiration for his courage, and therefore of resistance. Fear invaded him, he who had always wished to live outside the armed conflict, anxious instead to acquire the happiness and prosperity he had never known since his unhappy childhood. He is therefore terrified by the idea of being arrested for complicity in the resistance movement, but at the same time, he realises that Kihika's speech and attitude were only reflecting an obsessive behaviour which is a sign of neurosis. In this context, w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, p.191) cogently accounts for the reader that "He spoke without raising his voice, almost unaware of Mugo, or of his danger, like a man possessed. His bitterness and frustration were revealed in the nervous flow of words. Each word confirmed the Mugo's suspicion that the man was mad". However, they laid the seeds for an even more violent challenge to the colonial order that was to come. Kihika, substituting the Kenyan people for the Jewish people, now prefers the example of the third to the first two, which for him have not borne any fruit since the existence of the Movement. He is therefore in favour of a sacrifice that above all resembles a collective suicide. Throughout his fight, this notion will be his watchword. Mixing his philosophy with historical facts, he even goes so far as to state the flaws in the Christian view of sacrifice as he tries to reason with Karanja. Accordingly, w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, p.95) writes:

"Yes - I said he had failed because his death did not change anything, it did not make his people find a centre in the cross. All oppressed people have a cross to bear. The Jews

refused to carry it and were scattered like dust all over the earth. Had Christ's death a meaning for the children of Israel? In Kenya we want deaths which will change things, that is to say, we want true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another".

From the above passage, the narrator has greater insight into the narrative events, context, and the characters' motives, unspoken thoughts, and experiences, than any individual character does. Thus, the narrator, as a member of the town Thabai, or perhaps as a member black victimised in general, refers to "we", making him a part of Kenyan community. Kihika therefore uses weapons, both figuratively and literally, brought by the West to free himself from its grip. Thabai people had a high opinion of Kihika. He was their hero. They wanted him to lead the people for the Uhuru celebration and deliver a speech eulogising Kihika's sacrifice to the community. It was believed that Mugo had given shelter to Kihika on the crucial night when Robson was killed. Indeed, Thomas Robson is a British District Officer who rules over Thabai until Kihika assassinates him. Although he is briefly depicted as Tom the Terror, a terrifying and cruel oppressor and hunter of Freedom Fighters, his main purpose in the story is to be killed by Kihika. Although the Thabai villagers mistakenly view Mugo as a brave, noble hero who gave shelter to Kihika, it is revealed in the final act of the story that Mugo is responsible for his death, betraying Kihika to John Thompson to save himself from the power of the white man. Therefore, according to the critic E. Palmer (1972, p.32), the evolution of the novel makes it possible to grant extenuating circumstances to Mugo who denounces Kihika to the officer of the District John Thompson, who will have him hanged later:

It is already being suggested, therefore, that Kihika is the kind of young man who would engage in reckless exploits and try to involve others in them. There is even a wicked flicker of irony implicit in the fact that the man who could now talk passionately of passive resistance in the Ghandi-Moses tradition, and conjure the vision of thousands of men and women throwing themselves in front of moving trains, will later indulge in the most wanton acts of destruction. It has been suggested, in fact, that our sympathy for Kihika should not be absolute. Reduced sympathy for him must mean a corresponding increase in sympathy for Mugo.

Through the character of Kihika, the novelist demystifies the moral character of the heroes of the war which opposed freedom fighters to the forces of the Empire. The hostility of the people towards the colonial administration, at its extreme point, can therefore be perceived through Kihika. Like the author, Kihika defends a nationalist ideology which gives way to the truth. Then, a new fight can begin. A fight which opens up the possibility of a social revolution that the people will no longer be robbed. Instead of idealising them, the novelist exposes the atrocious acts accomplished by freedom fighters. Thus, the whole objective w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, p. 191) pursues is that:

We only hit back. You are struck on the left cheek. You turn the right cheek. One, two, three – sixty years. Then suddenly, it is always sudden, you say: I am not turning the other cheek anymore. Your back to the wall, you strike back... See? We must kill. Put to sleep the enemies of black man's freedom... A people united in faith is stronger than the bomb. They shall not tremble or run away before the sword. Then instead the enemy shall flee. These are not the words of a mad man. Not words, not even miracles could make Pharaoh let the children of Israel go. But at midnight, the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first born of Pharaoh that sat on throne unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon. And all the

first-born of the cattle. And the following day, he let them go. That is our aim. Strike terror in their midst. Get at them in their homes night and day. They shall feel the poisoned arrow in their veins. They shall not know where the next will come from. Strike terror in the heart of the oppressor.

The recurring theme of murder and violence in his speech, i.e. "Kill", "smote all of the first born", "strike terror", "poisoned arrow" reveals the "dark" side of this character who is also affected by a form of sadism characterised by death. The novelist looks inspired by the psychological report of the suffering caused by the war of liberation that shaped mental illness.—Given flashbacks interrupt the chronological order of the main narrative to take a reader back in time to the past events in a character's life, Ngũgĩ uses this literary device to help readers understand historical facts in the story or learn more about the characters. The author may use the front line action or "present" line of the story, to show readers a scene that unfolded in the past.

3. Breaking Free of the Colonial Yoke: a Death Wish?

A Grain of Wheat is a post-colonial novel which narrates the incidents of the colonial period. The present time of the narrative is the four days leading up to Kenya's Independence from British colonial rule in December 1963. Asphyxiated by the colonial yoke, the people decide to react by revolting against those they consider to be invaders and oppressors. The narrator describes the anguish that Mugo experiences as he guilts himself throughout the novel as war veterans want him to give a speech on Independence Day. The suggestive metaphor of civil war is eventually realised in ways that make national discord a transparent allegory for Kenyan political upheaval. Although the narrator alludes to his motivation when he realises that a reward is promised

to whoever would deliver Kihika, Mugo's main concern is to evade all contact with the movement. The narrative thread, i.e. storyline gives the reader a glimpse of Kihika's pathological aversion. Like his enemy John Thompson, he is obsessed with violence. While at home oblivious to British soldiers' raids in the village, Mugo is awakened by Kihika who seeks refuge in his home. Despite this repression, the revolutionary movement is gaining momentum. Kihika has specifically become like a ferocious beast ready to pounce on the oppressive enemy. His speech shows that he feels no sensitivity to the bloodshed. When he faces Mugo, his whole speech is strongly inspired by biblical stories and words. In his madness Kihika manifests to take himself for a new prophet, coming to improve the works of Jesus and reinterpret the biblical word in such a way he happens to justify the murder against the colonisers.

Mugo's dreams and the outcome of the novel present him as the saviour of the people, not for his active part in the liberation movement, but for his confession which will lead him to his liberating sacrifice. His act will have the symbolic effect of freeing the people from the burden of lies and hypocrisy shown by certain actors in the movement when striving for political and economic empowerment. At the beginning of the novel, Mugo is presented as a character charged with a painful history independent of the situation of colonial oppression. The misinterpretation of his premonitory dreams, in which he becomes the saviour of the people, will serve to repress his emotions and his existential reflections. In this respect, w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, pp.127-128) articulates description of colonial repression as follows:

In bed that night, he dreamed that he was back in Rira. A group of detainees was lined up against the wall, naked to the waist. Githua and Gikonyo were among them. From another corner, John Thompson came

holding a machine-gun at the unfortunate men against the wall. He was going to shoot them – unless they told what they knew about Kihika. All at once, Githua shouted: Mugo save us. The cry was taken by the others: Mugo save us. The suppliant voices rose to a chanting thunder: Mugo save us. And John Thompson had joined the condemned men and he was crying out louder than all the others: Mugo save us. How could he refuse, that agonized cry. Here I am, Lord. I am coming, coming, riding in a cloud of thunder. And the men with one voice wept and cried: Amen.

From the above passage, the narrator emphasises divine words misinterpretation. Initially, Mugo is completely mistaken when he thinks that acts of bravery in favour of the people will erase his sense of guilt. The narrator describes Mugo as an orphan mistreated by his aunt who was supposed to raise him. The descriptions of his suffering through the bad words of his aunt testify to his trauma which will greatly influence his personality. All in all, the major lesson that the villagers can learn from Mugo's confession is that their external struggle against the coloniser has to be followed immediately by an internal struggle against their moral weaknesses if a healthy nation is to be sought. On the novel's own terms, a reading in which the nationhood that fulfils the destiny of Mau Mau resistance is aligned with the parturition that fulfils male potency would not be unfounded. For the reason that *A Grain of Wheat* turns sentimentally towards a uterine national allegory to the extent that S. Gikandi, (2000: 113) expects Ngũgĩ's readers to enter his novel through "two scenes of reading: an allegorical scene in which they are invited to identify with the grand narrative of nationalism and its desires, and an ironic scene in which they are asked to be alert to the discrepancies between the structure of the narrative and the

experiences it represents". Ngũgĩ's version of Kenyan history as a history of individuals, heroes and martyrs on the eve of independence, reveals the psychic tension caused by a feeling of guilt and concealed through the glorification of the so-called war heroes. This is how on Independence Day, Mugo decides to free himself from his guilt, which by analogy will free the people, by revealing his betrayal to them. Kihika thus divulges a terrifying message for Mugo. He considers that terror through murderous violence constitutes the only effective weapon against the British invader. The case of colonial wars, in particular, forged this aggressive and murderous character, which is not innate among indigenous peoples, but due to colonisation, F. Fanon (1991, p.309) refers to "The Algerian's criminality, his impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequence of the organization of his nervous system or of characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation". The Algerian's action is therefore different from that of John Thompson, but these two types of action end up resembling each other in form. However, the psychological motivation of the two characters is not the same. Despite the victory of the movement and the imminent accession to independence, the tension is maintained among all the characters. Although the praise is given to their action in favour of freedom, S. A. Gakwandi (1977, p.109) pretends that the novelist uses realism in revealing characters' limits:

A Grain of Wheat comes close to being a historical novel. Its plot owes almost everything to the violent events of the Mau Mau movement. In many ways the novel is a defence of that movement. It is a creative interpretation of national history in a favourable light. It celebrates national heroes who fought for a national cause although it does so without idealizing them.

A novel concerned with forging a national consciousness out of a shared historical experience. The main characters desperately need to reconcile themselves to their unavowable histories of mutual betrayal before embracing a collective future. These unresolved individual pasts and their subtle interconnections are revealed via a series of recollections, flashbacks and confessions. Hence, each character's life story is carefully woven into the broader narrative of Kenyan history. The result is a complex, layered and multidimensional narrative. This means that the focal characters, Mugo, Gikonyo, Karanja and Kihika, to name the most prominent, can be taken as simply expressive of the people as a whole, as an essential unity. While some continue to fuel hatred by directing their aggression towards those who have betrayed the movement, others feel guilty of betrayal. Thus, in a quest for realism in relation to post-colonial discourse, the novelist brings in Mugo, a character who sounds insignificant, in order to offer the real liberation or therapy of the people who must go through truth and forgiveness. Indeed, contrary to the simplistic dichotomy that has all too often pitted the colonised community and its ideals against the colonists in post-colonial literature, A. Breidlid (2002, pp.87-88) exemplifies the complexity of Mugo's psychological depiction which amounts to dealing with the divergence of points of view between him and his community:

There are several things to be noted here: First Mugo's story of escape or exclusion punctures any notion of African monolithic collectivism. Secondly, the text, by exposing Mugo as the protagonist, interrogates the boundary-fixing and the sidelining and marginalisation of those who are not in step with the meaning carriers in that world. Mugo's position of liminality is a noteworthy reminder of the exclusions of nationalism and the liberation movements, whether self-imposed or not, and cuts across the image

elsewhere in the novel of a Party or Movement which invites us to forget these exclusions by stressing its democratic ideas of being for all people and encompassing the diversity of the Kenyan population.

Although Mugo does not wish to be involved or even to help, he is too passive and indecisive to resist, and afterward becomes a key figure amongst his people and a symbol of resistance against the British, even though he secretly betrays Kihika to his death. Far from perfect, Mugo's justifications are both objective and subjective. Thus, his share of objectivity is reflected in his realism in the face of Kihika's violent discourse, whose recurring reference to the demand for bloodshed frightens him. In the narration, w. T. Ngũgĩ (1986, p.15) gauges Mugo's feeling:

Mugo felt a constriction in his throat. He could not clap for words that did not touch him. What right had such a boy, probably younger than Mugo, to talk like that? What arrogance? Kihika had spoken about blood as easily as if he was talking about drawing water in a river, Mugo reflected, a revulsion starting in his stomach at the sight and smell of blood.

Subjectively, Mugo argues that individualism keeps you out of trouble. It is for this reason that solitude turns out to be, according to him, the best way to achieve his goals. In this respect, Maughan-Brown suggests that Ngũgĩ's representations of Mau Mau are tainted by an emphasis on individualism, rather than on the collective resistance of the community. This stress on individualism problematises Ngũgĩ's Marxian sympathies, because the fictional representation of collective resistance emerges only as savage killers or rapists. More dangerous, perhaps, the privatised sensibility for which the novel appears to argue is ideologically suspect, since it excuses the characters' various political betrayals on the grounds of human frailty. D.

Maughan-Brown (1985, pp.249-250) makes this point quite forcefully:

Ngũgĩ's general implication seems to be that once concepts like 'the masses' and 'collective consciousness' are subjected to the test of close-up scrutiny what emerges is a network of private, self-delusory, messianic identifications which testify to an underlying principle of competition as the mainspring of human conduct. Thus endemic guilt and bad faith underlie even the 'best deeds' – another formula for original sin.

As Maughan-Brown suggests, a residual Christianity underpins Ngũgĩ's representations of the Mau Mau insurgency. Rather, Ngũgĩ privileges a literate, Christian Mau Mau, which synthesises the liberal ideal of principled rebellion and which inevitably gestures towards an elitist reconstruction of the insurgency's guiding values and orientations. In the reader's view, such moments reflect ideological compromises between Ngũgĩ's political vision and his subject formation.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the current study has brought out the novel's title symbolism that just like the planting of a grain of wheat brings about the subsistence of the whole community, the death of the protagonist, Mugo, brings about the unity of the whole Kenyan community against the British colonial rule. This unification bears fruit and leads to the Kenyan social and economic empowerment. Therefore, it is not by showing demagoguery, like Kihika, that Mugo manages to completely liberate his people, but rather thanks to the truth, to the restoration of an authentic interpretation of the meaning of sacrifice through fight and revolt. Combating imperialism, injustice and decolonisation's betrayal of ideals by colonial powers, Ngũgĩ aspires to

humanistic perspective of empowerment in a nation of growing economic inequalities.

The text analysis has substantially been in line with Ngũgĩ's vision for fashioning a national consciousness through a shared historical experience. For this end, the author weaves in a labyrinth of betrayals in order to show the sacrifices made during the struggle for freedom and independence. In this regard, I have explored Ngũgĩ's fiction like a re-enactment of the events during the pre-independent Kenya. Symbolically, the novel represents the social contribution to fulfil and empower Kenyans in terms of positive sense of self, self-control, decision-making skills and pro-social connectedness. If violence is the only way for the Gĩkũyũ to fight British oppression, the discussion has shown the author's ideological motivation unravelling that lands' true owners are reduced to beggars, squatters, and slaves who could only breed discontent and outbursts of revolt. Thus, to fight for liberation is to fight for a free Africa by breaking the silence of guilt.

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