



## **HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION AND YOUTH IN NGUGI'S *WEEP NOT, CHILD***

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### **Abstract**

*Human rights are essentially the rights of people. They are the rights that an individual can avail and enjoy, by virtue of being born as a human being. It means the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of an individual guaranteed by the National Constitution or embodied in the international conventions and they are enforceable by the judiciary. Ngugi in *Weep Not, Child* has tried to express the grave reality of his nation as he covers the time duration from colonialism to post colonialism and Neocolonialism. In the works of Ngugi the subordinate masses try to resist the dominant group. The novel is set before and during the emergency in Kenya. It presents the picture of a village community that disintegrates as a colonial settlement resulting in the alienation of people from their ancestral god given land. Land is the visible symbol for Kenyans as well as the means of establishing contact with the ancestral spirits. Ngotho is the legitimate owner of the land. His aboriginal title is based on genealogy. Jacobo is the native aid of Mr. Howlands. He forces the natives to work on his master's farm. He takes precaution that no other native farmer can become rich like him. He plays a role of middleman in case of supplying workers to work on low wages.*

**Keywords:** *Human rights, life, liberty, emergency, colonial, land.*



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Sending the natives without considering their opinions in the war by the Whites is physical exploitation. For this the Whites showed the natives the greed of offering them their land after returning from war. But their after war experiences were shocking. The whites refused to hand over natives their land. Because of this cheating Boro joined Mau Mau movement as a protest. In Kenya land is the visible symbol and remains important element of the struggle between natives and non – natives. The novel expresses the frequent desires of the landless natives to get the land from the non – natives. Ngugi's characters are the common beings. They are victims of exploitation. And as a natural reaction they accept the way of protest for expressing their anger. "Violence breeds violence: and hatred breeds hatred. The young men like Boro have fought in foreign wars and are now involved in bloodshed in their own homes" (Thiong'o, 31). A dire cheating from non-natives compels Boro to accept a means of violent protest. The readers seem it as a natural way of expressing anger. It is a natural reaction of natives.

Boro's killing of Mr. Howlands in *Weep Not, Child* is a natural reaction. Any community or human can tolerate the injustice to a certain extent. But the Whites exploitation of the natives is unlimited. Portrayal of killing the innocents, sexual exploitation of women, continuous attacks on culture, compelling to follow natives is well pasteurized in a form of words in his first three novels. He is seen as a committed social activist and forced the Kenyan government to take note of his novels. The following pages are the modest attempt to study Ngugi's novels in the light of above study.

Ngugi's first novel *Weep Not, Child* portrays a picture of an important stage in Kenyan struggle for independence. The novel bears the tenure of Kenyan national movement for freedom against colonialism. It also emphasizes the clash between the native and colonial culture. It impresses the reader with the issues of exploitation and protest of the Kenyans. Njoroge's elder brother was forcibly sent to the war. After war when he returned to Kenya, he feels that he is returned in a land of unemployment. The colonialists promised the Kenyan soldiers before going to war on behalf of colonial nations that they would offer them a reward in the form of land. But the colonialist did not fulfill their promise. Boro is a victim of the existing conditions created by colonialists in Kenya. Boro is the representative of the young generation and the very product of colonial policies. The colonial masters have recruited the native Kenyans for war without considering their opinions. The Kenyans are exploited in various ways by the colonial masters. The new education introduced the Western ideas in Kenyan schools. They put before the Kenyans the European models of bravery: "The real aim of colonialism was to control people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control through culture of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control" (Ibid., 16). The new education converted the school students as a dreamer. Njoroge desires to change the present condition of his home and nation by acquiring new education. In the development of the novel the reader realizes Njoroge believes in the Bible and becomes the victim of new education. The preaching of Bible has created a soft corner in Njoroge's mind about Whites. After the tragic death of Ngotho and the imprisonment of his brothers he realizes that colonial education is mere hallucination.

The colonial masters during colonial reign have used different means to exploit the natives. They sent the natives to war to fight against their enemy. They threatened the natives by saying that, “The first one was to drive away the Germans who had threatened to attack and reduce the black people to slavery”(Ibid. 5). For exploiting the natives the colonial masters created a fear in their mind. They forced Italian prisoners to build tarmac road for the whites. After war some of them preferred to remain in Kenya and married native women. The children of this hybridization are ugly and some grows up small wounds all over the body and mainly around the mouth. It seems dirty, some called it as punishment. Some of them protested and decided that, The natives are honest in their protest. The White masters snatched the land of the natives by offering them different greeds. Later natives converted into landless labor. Ngotho states, “What happened O Murungu, to the land which you gave to us? Where, O Creator went our promised land? Have you left your children naked?” (Ibid. 25). The White masters want to exploit the natives endlessly. Physical exploitation of the natives by the White masters is a common thing in colonial period. Ngotho states his experience: “Then came war. It was the first big war. I was then a young, a mere boy, although circumcised. All of us were taken by force. We made roads and cleared the forest to make it possible for the warring White man to move more quickly. The war ended, we were all tired. We came home worn out but very ready for whatever the British might give us a reward. But, more than this, we wanted to go back to the soil and court it to yield, to create, not to destroy. But Ng’o! The land was gone”(Ibid. 25). In this way the White masters embezzled the natives’ land. Like Ngotho, numbers of ancestral lands were snatched by the White masters and converted them into landless. Boro, the son of Ngotho too is a victim of White masters exploitation. He has experienced the pangs of physical exploitation: “Boro too had gone to War, against Hitler. He had gone to Egypt, Jerusalem and Burma. He had seen things. He had often escaped death narrowly” (Ibid. 26). Boro is victimized by the Whites and is sent on the war forcibly without considering his consent. Boro being a representative of young generation always claims that Ngotho and his generation is responsible for the misery of the natives. To express his protest he says, “How could these people have let the White man occupy the land without acting?”(Ibid. 27). Ngotho is forced to work on the farm previously owned by him and later snatched by Mr. Howlands. Boro does not like this act of Ngotho. He protests against white masters, “How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?”(Ibid. 27). Boro curses the previous generation. He blames Ngotho for continuing to work for Mr. Howlands.

The whites by misappropriating the power continued to exploit the natives. Ngotho shares his experience, “Some went in procession to Nairobi soon after the end of the first war to demand the release of their leader who had been arrested. People were shot and three of them died” (Ibid. 42). The Whites are violating the rules of human rights in Kenya. They can pick up and or put behind bars anyone under any charge. Blood became cheaper in colonial tenure. Due to the day-to-day harassment, the natives used to protest against the atrocities of the Whites. Ngotho in a protective manner states, “Yes, Black people have their land in the country of black people. White men have their land in their own country” (Ibid. 43). It is Ngotho’s straight and simple prediction but the feeling behind it are deep. Since the Whites are bitter in their attitude towards natives, the natives are deprived from the right to protest against scanty salary. The Whites have crossed all limits of exploitation. Mr. Howlands, the White settler later on becomes the District Officer, threatens the workers not to join the strike otherwise they will instantly lose their job. Ngotho determines to participate in a strike. His second wife Nyokabi insists him not to join the strike. But Ngotho is not in a state to listen anyone. So he beats his wife and said, “Shut that mouth. How long do you think I can endure this drudgery, for the sake of a White man and his Children”? (Ibid. 53). It is Ngotho’s protest burst out at the end of his endurance. Meetings in connection with the strike of the workers have called by Kiarie. Boro and others speakers came from Nairobi to address the meeting. Kiarie address the meeting of workers and put a record of history before the workers. He said “All the land belonged to the people – black people. They had given it by God. For every race had their country. The Indians had India. Europeans had Europe. And Africans had Africa, the land of the black People”(Ibid. 57). Kiarie wants to create the sense of protest in the minds of the workers by recounting injustice and exploitation. The Whites systematically converted the natives as landless by using both knowledge and power. He again presents an account of physical exploitation of the natives by Whites. He said, “Our fathers were captives in the first Big War to help in war whose cause they never knew. And when they came back? Their land had been taken away for a settlement of the White soldiers. Was that fair? (No!) Our people were taken and forced to work for these settlers. How could they have done otherwise when their land had been taken and they and their wives were required to pay heavy taxes to a government that was not theirs? When people rose to demand their rights they were shot down. But still the serikali and settlers were not satisfied. When the second Big war came, we were taken to fight Hitler – Hitler who had not wronged us – We were killed, we shed blood to save the British Empire from defeat and collapse”

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(Ibid. 57-58). Kiarie glorifies the bravery of the natives. The natives fought with a valor for the whites. However natives are deceived by the whites. When the natives demanded the land, the whites cruelly killed them.

Mr. Howlands and his native aid Jacobo want to crush the strike. They used the government retinue and police force to crush the strike. “At once the police acted, throwing tear-gas bombs and firing into the crowd, and two men fell as the panic-stricken mob scattered” (Ibid. 59). The Whites in this way misuse the government machinery and police force to crush the natives’ movements. Every action initiated by the whites was to take revenge on the natives. The natives are forced to pay more money on education. Njoroge comments, “Fees had risen for those who went to standard V in the new school. Besides, there was the building fund to be paid” (Ibid. 61). Colonizers’ forces the natives to pay the high fees along with the building fund. It is not affordable to the natives. The Whites prohibited the natives to start school. “Independent and Kikuyu Karing’a schools, which had been built by the people after a break with mission, had been closed by the Government, and this made the situation worse” (Ibid. 69). The Whites decided not to raise the new competitors in the area of education. Boro, an anguished representative of the young generation always speaks in an angry manner. He is the victim of colonial policies. The Whites subject the natives to physical exploitation: “After they took us to the field, I lost you. Then you escaped, and the police became more vigilant and even beat some people. Before day break, we were put into trucks. We did not know where we were being taken. I feared that we might be killed. This feeling become stronger when we came to forest and the truck in which I was slowed down. I immediately got the idea that I should jump, which I did. They were taken by surprise and before they could fire, I vanished into the forest. Look at my knee”(Ibid. 70). The Whites under any allegation pick up anyone and exploit in various ways. The school boys are even aware of this cruelty of the whites. Seeds of protest are sown in the minds of the new generation. It is the production of Whiteman’s atrocities. The children prefer to support the Mau Mau movement and activists.

Njeri, an illiterate mother of Njoroge is also aware of the suppression and injustice of the Whites on natives who are the legitimate masters of the land: “The White man makes a law or a rule. Through that rule or law or what may you call it, he takes away the land and then imposes many laws on the people concerning that land and many other things, all without people agreeing first as in the old days of the tribe. Now a man rises and opposes that law which made right the taking away of land. Now that man is taken by the same people  
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who made the laws against which that man was fighting. He is tried under those alien rules. Now tell me who is the man who can win even if the angels of God were his lawyers....? I mean” (Ibid. 74). The Whites prepared and implement the laws for their convenience to oppress the natives in every possible manner. Njeri remarks that even angels of God are unable to help the natives in colonial Kenya. After arresting Jomo, a freedom fighter, charges are levelled on him and the case stands before the court. All Kenyans keep their eyes on the hearing. Jomo is declared guilty. Boro is shocked by this decision and says, “Now they’ll make us slaves. They took us to their wars and they killed all that was of value to us...” (Ibid. 75). Fearless person like Boro also comes under the clouds of fear. The Whites have managed the judicial system and they forced the court to deliver the judgments in their favor. Mr. Howlands, a typical White settler is best example of exploiter. He orders his native aid Jacobo: “Just keep an eye on the sons. Arrest them for anything, curfew, tax, you know what” (Ibid. 79). Jacobo tells Mr. Howlands that Ngotho and his sons are closely related with Mau Mau. So Mr. Howlands orders him to arrest Ngotho’s sons. Ngotho’s family is at the center of action in the novel. His family is much suffered by the exploitation of the Whites. Sick Ngotho informs his son Boro, “They have taken your mother and brother away’, Ngotho said, his head still bowed... Njeri was released. Kori would be sent to detention camp, without trial (Ibid. 81). The white uses the native soldiers in order to exploit the natives. The natives are deprived of the high posts by the whites. The Whites greeting hands with the soldiers are playing the bloody game of exploitation in Kenya during colonial period: “It was said that some European soldiers were catching people at night, and having taken them to the forest would release them and ask them to find their way back home. But when their backs were turned they would be shot dead in cold blood. The next day this would be announced as a victory over Mau Mau” (Ibid. 84). It is the fine example of the endless exploitation of natives by the Whites’. They want to crush the Mau Mau movement supported by the natives. The Whites’ cruelly killed the poor natives in order to weaken the movement. “Barber and – and - ? Six in all were taken from their houses three nights ago. They have been discovered dead in the forest” (Ibid. 85). To be fed up with these atrocities, the natives used a way of protest. In this connection Jacobo told Mr. Howlands about the hand-written note in which it is stated, “STOP YOUR MURDEROUS ACTIVITIES OR ELSE WE SHALL COME FOR YOUR HEAD. THIS IS OUR LAST WARNING” (Ibid. 98). The Whites forced the natives to use such ways of protest. The soldiers ask to produce their identity. Some are unable to produce it. “One of them was beaten so much that is urinated on

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his legs” (Ibid. 101). They beat and torture the man. The natives are ready to give the answer to the Whites in a tit for tat manner as far as issue of exploitation is concerned. According to instruction of Mr. Howlands the police rush Siriana Secondary School and arrested Njoroje. In the police station he is tortured by the police and Mr. Howlands. “Mr. Howlands rose and came to Njoroje. He was terrible to look at. He said, ‘I’ will show you’. He held Njoroje’s private parts with a pair of pincers and started to press tentatively. ‘You’ll be castrated like your father”(Ibid. 118). The Whites do not spare the school boys from the practice of exploitation. This inhuman treatment forced the natives to take recourse to violent protests to articulate their disagreement with policies of the whites.

In his marital life Mr. Howlands is not happy. His wife Suzannah does not satisfy him. For getting relief Mr. Howlands said, “He wondered if he would go and get the black woman he had taken the night before. He had discovered that black women could be a good relief” (Ibid. 128). In this way women become the victim of white’s officer’s lust. He considers the native women as thing of entertainment. Boro decides to avenge Mr.Howlands: “The door opened Mr. Howlands had not bolted the door. He glanced at his watch and then turned round. A pistol was aimed at his head. ‘You move you are dead’. Mr. Howlands looked like a caged animal. ‘Put up your hands’. He obeyed. Where was his habitual guardedness? He had let a moment of reflection unarm him. ‘I killed Jacobo’. ‘I know’. ‘He betrayed the black people. Together, you killed many sons of the land. You raped our women. And finally you killed my father. Have you anything to say in your defense?” (Ibid. 128). Boro has used the violent way of protest because he has lost endurance power. The readers do not feel sympathy towards the murder of Mr. Howlands. The reader’s sympathy is with Boro. Ngothos’ whole family is scattered.

In short, Ngugi being a social critic and writer of people tries to highlight the issue of exploitation by colonial masters and protest as a reaction to it. As a revolutionary literary figure, Ngugi has, in his novels highlighted the issues of suppressed Kenyan masses. He also continues to fight against the injustice of natives and betrayal of Kenyan heritage by the native ruling authorities. In his novel Ngugi, glorifies a tradition of protest against foreign attacks and social discrimination of Kenyans. Kenyan independence movement is major source of inspiration for Ngugi. He has found a wider scope of protest in the historical struggle of independence. British colonialism has introduced imperialism into Kenya in order to obtain sufficient control of the Kenyan labor force.

In short, Mr. Howlands is a man who represents oppressive colonial system. He is the owner of land. Even Jacobo has to serve him because he is a white man. Europeans proved them cunning by grabbing the land of black people. The black people believed that the white men are robbers and violators of their human rights.

Notes

*Thiong'o, NgugiWa. Weep Not, Child. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd. 1964.*