



The Causes and Prosecution of the Independence Struggle in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *WEEP NOT, CHILD*

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Abstract – The independence struggle as it is carried out in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* has one main cause: the land spoliation by the white settlers. The white settlers have taken Kenyan people's fertile lands once they have set foot on the Kenyan soil during the colonial period. The Kenyan people, seeing that their fertile lands have been illegally occupied by the settlers, have thought it worthwhile to fight in order to recover their lands. To this need for the recovery of the lost lands, should be added the need for political independence. However, that independence struggle has not been carried out without prosecution. To reach their goal, the Kenyan workers have decided to go on a general strike whose objective is to paralyse the whole country and to force the colonial government not only to return the fertile lands to the Kenyans who are their rightful owners, but also to grant political independence to Kenya. The general strike which is prompted by nationalists such as Jomo Kenyatta has failed and a state of emergency has been decreed by the colonial government. This state of emergency marks the beginning of the Mau Mau war which has mainly taken place in the forest. The Mau Mau freedom fighters have been prosecuted by the colonialists and their stooges, the black traitors, who have fought their own brothers on their side. Although there have been deaths on both sides, the Kenyans have been more affected by the war. In the end, they have not been able to recover their fertile lands, and they have not had the political independence they have been longing for. Jomo Kenyatta has eventually been arrested, tried, found guilty and imprisoned.

Key words: independence, struggle, spoliation, settlers, prosecution.

Résumé – La lutte pour l'indépendance telle qu'elle a été menée dans *Weep Not, Child* de Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o a une raison principale : la spoliation de terre par les colons. Les colons ont pris les terres fertiles des Kenyans une fois qu'ils ont mis pied sur le sol kenyan pendant la période coloniale. Les Kenyans, voyant que leurs terres fertiles ont été illégalement occupées par les colons, ont jugé utile de lutter dans le but de recouvrer leurs terres. A ce besoin de recouvrement des terres perdues, doit être ajouté le besoin d'indépendance politique. Cependant, la lutte pour l'indépendance n'a pas été menée sans persécution. Pour atteindre leur but, les travailleurs Kenyans ont décidé de faire d'aller en grève générale dont l'objectif est de paralyser le pays entier et de forcer le gouvernement colonial non seulement à retourner les terres fertiles aux Kenyans qui sont leur propriétaires légitimes, mais aussi à octroyer l'indépendance politique au Kenya. La grève générale qui a été suscitée par des nationalistes tels que Jomo Kenyatta a échoué et un état d'urgence a été décrété par le gouvernement colonial. Cet état d'urgence marque le début de la guerre des Mau Mau qui a principalement eu lieu dans la forêt. Les combattants de liberté Mau Mau ont été persécutés par les colons et leurs bourreaux, les traîtres noirs, qui ont combattu leurs propres frères à leur côté. Bien qu'il y ait eu des morts des deux côtés, les Kenyans ont été plus affectés par la guerre. A la longue, ils n'ont pas été capables de recouvrer leurs terres fertiles, et ils n'ont pas eu l'indépendance politique qu'ils ont désirée ardemment. Jomo Kenyatta a été finalement arrêté, culpabilisé et emprisonné.

Mots clés: indépendance, lutte, spoliation, colons, persécution.

1. Introduction

The Kenyan people have lost the lands that the Creator has graciously offered them following their contact with the white people during the colonial period. Once the colonialists have set foot on the Kenyan soil, they have illegally seized some Kenyans' fertile lands. They have settled on those fertile lands which they use for agriculture. This situation has increased the poverty of

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the Kenyans who have to rely on those settlers for their survival by working for them on the very lands that they have snatched from them. As time goes by, the Kenyan people can no longer bear this exploitation. Therefore, they have decided to recover their lost lands and to go further by demanding their political autonomy in order to rule themselves. This is the struggle for independence or the Mau Mau war. Although land is very important for the Kenyans, land spoliation has occurred in Kenya after World War I. The objective of this article is to pinpoint the causes and prosecution of the independence struggle, taking the particular case of Kenya through a study of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*.

2. The importance of land in Kenya and land spoliation after World War I

Land is very important among the Gikuyu people. According to them, the land on which they have been living peacefully before the white man's arrival has been given to them by the Creator, God, through their two forebears, namely Gikuyu and Mumbi. The quotation below makes it clear:

[...], God showed Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land and told them,
 "This land I hand over to you. O Man and woman
 It's yours to rule and till in serenity sacrificing
 Only to me, your God, under my sacred tree..."¹

The quotation above shows that the Gikuyu people's land has been given to them by God. As such, they consider it as something sacred. Once the colonisers have set foot on the Kenyan soil, they have seized the fertile land which the people almost worship, since it has been handed over to them by God according to Gikuyu legend. Mugo wa Kibiro, a great Gikuyu overseer, has warned the tribe about the coming of the white man. So, there is no wonder when the colonisers have come to dispossess the Gikuyu people of their sacred land after World War I. It is queer that even the people who have helped the colonialists fight World War I have lost their land. Ngotho, one of the characters of the novel, who has been one of the victims of this situation tells about his misfortune in these terms:

'Then came the war. It was the first big war. [...]. All of us were taken by force. [...]. The war ended. We were all tired. We came home worn out but very ready for whatever the British might give us as 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. My father and many others had been removed from our ancestral lands. He died lonely, a poor man waiting for the white man to go. [...]. The white man did not go and he died a Muhoi on this very land. It then belonged to Chahira before he sold it to Jacobo. I grew up here, but working ... [...] ... working on the land that belonged to our ancestors....'²

¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, London: Heinemann, 1966, p. 24.

² Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child, op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.



The ex-service men who have fought World War I on the side of the colonisers have been dispossessed of their fertile lands by the very people that they have fought for. It means that instead of rewarding them for the service rendered, the colonisers have thought it worthwhile to dispossess them of their fertile. In other words, their reward has been a mere punishment. Such a revelation is surprising for some of Ngotho's children like Njoroge as it can be seen in this quotation: "[...]. For Njoroge, it was a surprising revelation, this knowledge that the land occupied by Mr Howlands originally belonged to them."³

Capitalising on what Mugo wa Kibiro, the overseer, has said in his prophecy, the Kenyans have not thought it worthwhile to fight for their lost land. They have just waited, expecting the white man to leave one day so that they can recover it. Needless to say, the prophecy has misled the Gikuyu and the colonisers have occupied their fertile lands. Boro seems to be right when he thinks that the prophecy is absurd and wonders how his people have let the white man occupy the land without acting. He complains that his father continues working for a man who has taken his land: "[...]. To his father, he says: 'How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?'"⁴ By accusing his father of going on serving a man who has taken his land, Boro has probably forgotten that his father has no alternative left. He needs money to survive; so, he cannot stop working. Ngotho seems to feel responsible for the situation which has led them to lose their land as it can be seen in this quotation:

[...]. For Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this land. He owed it to the dead, the living and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over this shamba. Mr Howlands always felt a certain amount of victory whenever he walked through it all. He alone was responsible for taming this unoccupied wilderness.⁵

Land is so important among the Gikuyu people of Kenya that Kamau, one of Ngotho's sons, declares: "[...]. A man without land must learn to trade."⁶ The importance of land as compared to education is highlighted in Ngotho's speech in the following quotation: "[...]. 'Education is everything,' said Ngotho. Yet he doubled this because he knew deep inside his heart that land was everything. Education was good only because it would lead to the recovery of the lost lands."⁷ Kamau talks about the importance of land to Njoroge in these terms:

[...] mere salary without a piece of land to cultivate is nothing. Look at Howlands. He is not employed by anybody. Yet he is very rich and happy. It's because he has land. Or look at Jacobo. He's like that because he has land.... Boro has no land. He could not get

³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.



employment. You know how bitter he is with father because he says that it was through the stupidity of our fathers that the land has been taken. [...] ⁸

The quotation above shows that land is so important in Kenya that even a civil servant or any other worker is expected to have it for his welfare. All those who are rich in the country are those who own land. There is no employment for young men like Boro who is bitter with his father and accuses him of being stupid simply because their ancestral land has been taken by the settlers. He has neither land nor employment in a world dominated by the white man. He is frustrated because he cannot understand how and why the settlers have taken their land. This frustration is general in colonial Kenya and has led to the Mau Mau war which goes side by side with the prosecution of the Kenyans by the colonisers. The Kenyans have attempted to recover their lost land after World War I and World II.

3. The Kenyans' attempt to recover their lost land after World War I and after World War II

3.1. *Ngotho's generation's attempt to recover the lost land after World War I*

Although Boro is very bitter with his father and accuses his generation for failing to try to get the lands back, it is clear that they have tried to do something to recover their lost land at that time. They have not watched the settlers snatch their fertile land from them as Boro thinks. The following quotation is a proof of that fact:

'[...] Father said that people began pressing for their rights a long while back. Some went in a 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. You see people had thought that the young leader was the one who would make the white man go.' ⁹

To some extent therefore, the struggle for independence or for the recovery of the lost land has started just after World War I. The Kenyan people have started pressing for their rights that they have lost through their contact with the Western world. Their leader has illegally been arrested by the colonial government although they are fighting for a noble and just cause. They have helped the colonisers to fight their enemies during the war in spite of the fact that they have nothing to do with the war in fact. After their leader's arrest, they have been brave enough to demand his release and to face the colonisers' wrath. Three of them have even lost their lives as a result of the shooting of the Kenyans' procession that has occurred.

Needless to say, instead of releasing their illegally arrested leader, the colonisers have shot the poor Kenyans who are simply demanding the release

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁹ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.



of their leader who has been illegally arrested for leading his people to fight for the recovery of their lost land. They have even killed three of them. This shows that the settlers have caused atrocities when the natives have rightly demanded the return of their lost lands. The struggle which has started after World war I has continued after World War II.

3.2. *The Kenyan people's attempt to recover the lost land and to fight for political independence after World War II through a general strike*

The struggle for the recovery of the lost land which has started just after World War I has been carried on after World War II. Speaking of Njoroge who has identified Gikuyu and Mumbi with Adam and Eve, the narrator writes:

His belief in a future for his family and the village rested then not only on a hope for sound education but also on a belief in a God of love and mercy, who long ago walked on this earth with Gikuyu and Mumbi. It did not make much difference that he had come to identify Gikuyu with Adam and Mumbi with Eve. To this God, all men and women were united by one strong bond of brotherhood. And with all this, there was growing up in his heart a feeling that the Gikuyu people, whose land had been taken by the white men, were no other than the children of Israel about whom he read in the Bible. So although all men were brothers, the black people had a special mission to the world because they were the chosen people of God. This explains his brother's remark that Jomo was the Black Moses.¹⁰

Njoroge's identification of Gikuyu and Mumbi with Adam and Eve in the quotation above and of Jomo Kenyatta with the Black Moses seems to suggest that what is written in the Bible is being fulfilled or to some extent enacted by human beings, both whites and blacks on earth. The Gikuyu people whose land has been taken by the white men are equated with the children of Israel referred to in the Bible. Njoroge seems to like Jomo Kenyatta, the political leader of the nationalists, like many other Kenyans as it can be seen in the quotation below:

Njoroge listened keenly as they talked of Jomo. Already he felt intimate with this man. For Njoroge was sure that he had read about him in the Old Testament. Moses had led the children of Israel from Misri to the Promised Land. And because black people were really the children of Israel, Moses was no other than Jomo himself. It was obvious.¹¹

Like Moses who has led the children of Israel from Misri to the Promised Land, Jomo Kenyatta is looked upon as the man who can lead the Kenyan people to independence which rhymes with the recovery of their lost land. He is one of the great African nationalists. As such, he is looked upon as the Messiah or rather as the saviour of the Kenyans from colonial yoke. Strikes have been used as strategies for the struggle for independence. Here is a proof of this:

The men also talked of the strike. All men who worked for white men and Serikali (the Government) would come out on strike. The Government and the settlers had to be

¹⁰ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.



shown that black people were not cowards and slaves. They too had children to feed and to educate. How could people go on sweating for the children of the white men to be well-fed, well-clothed and well-educated? [...].¹²

It is clear that the Kenyan people have resorted to a general strike in order to demand their rights and break the chains of the slavery to which they have been subjected by the colonialists in their own country. Even those who do not work in the civil service but in the private sector have decided to go on strike because of the general malaise which prevails in the country. This shows that solidarity prevails among the people who are determined to put an end to colonial rule. However, there are often traitors wherever group solidarity prevails. For that reason, someone wonders whether the strike will succeed probably because he knows that there are traitors among the people. One of the people's leaders thinks that: "[...] everybody will go on strike. Every black man everywhere. Even those in the police and the army will sit down too."¹³

The colonisers have started prosecuting the poor workers who are on strike instead of listening to them in order to meet their demands. Mr Howlands represents those colonisers in the novel. He is practically the only active white settlers who owns a big farm which he has fraudulently acquired like many unnamed settlers. As such he is afraid of losing his fertile land in case the Kenyans recover their land. The only alternative left for him is to prevent them from protesting at all costs. So, he has sprung no surprise when he has threatened the workers who have gathered to discuss the strike instead of listening to them as it can be seen in this quotation:

Mr Howlands called all his men. This was unusual. But he had not much to say because he did not want to waste time. He just warned them that if any man went on strike he would instantly lose his job. How could he allow a demand strike interfere with any part of his farm? Even the Government could not interfere with this. The blacks could ask and agitate for anything. Such things were clearly affairs of the Government [...]. And yet paradoxically, as the strike approached, he wanted a strong government action - an action that would teach these labourers their rightful places.¹⁴

That quotation reveals that Mr Howlands is ready to dismiss the workers who will dare to go on strike. He does not want to tolerate any demand strike to interfere with any part of his farm. He thinks that it is the responsibility of the Government to solve the problem of strike by taking strong action capable of teaching the labourers their rightful places, probably the places of slaves that they have always occupied. As it may be expected, some people are pessimistic about the outcome of the strike. For instance, one of Ngotho's wives, Nyokabi, does not see any reason why her husband will go on strike because it may make him lose his job and consequently bring about starvation in the family. She has

¹² Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.



made it clear in the conversation that Ngotho has had with her. Here is part of the conversation:

'I must be a man in my own house.'
'Yes - be a man and lose a job.'
'I shall do whatever I like. I have never taken orders from a woman.'
'We shall starve....'
'You starve! This strike is very important for the black people. We shall get bigger salaries.'
'What's black people to us when we starve?'¹⁵

The quotation mentioned above clearly shows that Ngotho does not mind whether he loses his job or not. He has resorted to violence by slapping his wife because he does not want to hear about stopping the strike. This poses the problem of the workers' determination to carry on the strike whatever happens. Ngotho's wife has tried to woman him so as to make him give up the strike which is so important not only to him, but also to the other black people. She even seems to think that the money that his employer pays him is enough for them. Her action is justified by the fact that she fears that the strike should fail and lead to her husband's dismissal. Ngotho has ended up slapping her because he can no longer bear her intrusion in an affair which he thinks does not concern her. Here is the outcome of the conversation between Ngotho and his wife:

'Shut that mouth. How long do you think I can endure this drudgery, for the sake of a white man and his children?'
'But he's paying you money. What if the strike fails?'
'Don't woman me!' he shouted hysterically. [...].
'What if the strike fails, tell me that!'
Ngotho could bear it no longer. She was driving him mad. He slapped her on the face and raised his hand again. [...].¹⁶

The simple fact that Ngotho has resorted to violence by slapping his wife shows the extent to which the strike is important for him. Like many other Kenyans, Ngotho does not want to hear about the failure of the strike. They inwardly fear the possibility that the strike may fail. To make it successful, the workers have organised a meeting as it is mentioned in the quotation below:

'It's the strike!' A woman told him. [...]. Today was the great day of the strike - the strike that was meant to paralyse the whole country.
Many people had gone to the meeting which was being held on the first day of the strike. They had streamed into the meeting ground like safari ants. All knew that this was a great day for the black people. Ngotho too had gone to the meeting. Who could tell but that the meeting might open the door to better things? [...].¹⁷

The quotation above clearly shows that the strike is meant to paralyse the whole country and to force the colonisers to retreat. The fact that many people have gone to the meeting organised by the workers' leaders shows that there is

¹⁵ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁶ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.



general malaise in the country. The black people look upon the first day of the strike as great day because the meeting held on that day is meant to open the door to better things or rather to pave the way for their liberation from colonial yoke. The black people are determined to succeed in recovering their lost land. Kiarie, one of the organisers of the meeting has spoken about the land in these terms:

All the land belonged to the people – black people. They have been given it by God. [...]. He told them how the land had been taken away, through the Bible and the sword. 'Yes, that's how your land was taken away. The Bible paved the way for the sword.' For this, he blamed the foolish generosity of their forefathers who pitied the stranger and welcomed him with open arms into their fold.¹⁸

Needless to say, the black people have lost the land that has been given to them by God because of the generosity and hospitality that have characterised them from time immemorial. If they had not welcomed the white men, the latter would not have ended up taking away their land. It is true that those white men have not shown their real intention at the beginning. They have just used the Bible to deceive the black people at their arrival. They have endeavoured to divert the Africans' attention first before revealing their real intention which is to seize their fertile land by using the sword. Kiarie complains further about that sad fact in these terms:

'Later, our fathers were taken captives in the first Big War to help in a war whose cause they never knew. And when they came back? Their land had been taken away for the settlement of the white soldiers. Was that fair? (No!) Our people were taken and forced to work for the 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. [...]. 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.'¹⁹

The quotation above sums up the role played by black people during World War I and World War II. Although they have toiled and lost their lives in order to save the British Empire, their reward has come in the form of punishment as I have put it earlier. The colonisers have taken their land from them and have imposed taxes on them. To fustigate the land spoliation caused by the white settlers and to show the extent to which land is important for the Gikuyu people, Jomo Kenyatta writes: "When the European comes to the Gikuyu country and robs the people of their land, he is taking away not only their livelihood, but the material symbol that holds family and tribe together."²⁰

Their independence struggle is therefore due to the fact they are fed with all the atrocities heaped on them by the colonisers. Violence and atrocities are committed on both sides as Mau Mau soldiers seek to drive the Europeans

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁹ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

²⁰ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, London: Heinemann, 1979, p. 317.



away from the land from which they have alienated Africans, a land which is rightfully theirs according to legend, law and custom. They are led in their struggle by Jomo Kenyatta who will later become the first president of independent Kenya. He has been referred to in the quotation below:

[...]. God had now heard their cries and tribulations. There was man sent from God whose name was Jomo. He was the Black Moses empowered by God to tell the white Pharaoh 'Let my people go.'
'And that's what we have gathered here to tell the British. Today, we, with one voice, we must rise and shout: "The time has come. Let my people go. Let my people go! We want back our land! Now!" [...].²¹

The only alternative left for the Kenyan people is to rely on Jomo Kenyatta whom they look upon as the Black Moses who can lead them to the Promised Land which stands for independence in this case. Jomo Kenyatta is therefore considered as the Black Moses sent by God to liberate the Kenyan people from colonial yoke. Their leader, Kiarie, has made it clear in the following quotation that their strike must be a peaceful one: "Remember, this must be a peaceful strike. We must get more pay. Because right is on our side we shall triumph. If today, you're hit, don't hit back..."²² The quotation suggests that the workers' strike is going to be a peaceful one and hence they need nobody to pacify them.

As it generally happens in Africa, from the colonial period onwards, the police have prevented the workers from continuing their meeting as it can be seen in this quotation: "The police had surrounded the meeting."²³ The first strategy used by the police once they have surrounded the meeting is to use Jacobo to pacify the people although their strike is a peaceful one. The quotation below is a proof of that fact:

[...]. A white police inspector had got up on the platform. And with him - *Jacobo!* Ngotho could not understand. It was all strange. It was only when Jacobo had begun to speak and was urging people to go back to work and not listen to some people from Nairobi who had nothing to lose if people lost their jobs that Ngotho understood. Jacobo, the richest man in all the land around, had been brought to pacify the people. [...]. For one single moment Jacobo crystallized into a concrete betrayal of the people. He became the physical personification of the long years of waiting and suffering - Jacobo was a Traitor.²⁴

Needless to say, Jacobo is a traitor who has betrayed his people by accepting to be brought in to pacify the people who have decided to go on strike. The persecution of strikers which has been referred to in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's first novel, *Weep Not, Child*, is recurrent in his other novels, especially in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*. It is true that all his novels are set in Kenya and hence describe the same actions. However, the strike seems to be the

²¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

²² *Idem.*

²³ *Idem.*

²⁴ *Idem.*



most important weapon used by the Kenyan people in their struggle for liberation in *Weep Not, Child*.

As a black rich man, Jacobo is not expected to interfere with the people's struggle for independence by disrupting their meeting. Like many other rich men, his sole intention is to preserve the wealth that he has accumulated fraudulently by exploiting the people on their own land. In more accurate terms, self-interest is what has led some black people to fight the independence struggle on the side of the colonisers. The people are right to wage them down as traitors insofar as their action is seen as a betrayal. The crowd, led by Ngotho cannot help attacking Jacobo, who is looked upon as a traitor, when he has urged the workers to stop the strike. Here is what has happened:

[...]. Ngotho rose. He made his way toward the platform while everyone watched, wondering what was happening. He was now near Jacobo. The battle was now between these two – Jacobo on the side of the white people and he on the side of the black people.

All this happened quickly and took the people by surprise. And then all of a sudden, as if led by Ngotho, the crowd rose and rushed towards Jacobo. At once the police acted, throwing tear-gas bombs and firing into the crowd, and two men fell as the panic-stricken mob scattered. [...].²⁵

As it generally happens in Africa, the police who are also workers and live in the same conditions as the people are on the side of the colonisers, and as such, they too are traitors. Jacobo has had such a behaviour probably because he does not want to lose his ill-gotten wealth once independence is won by black people. In the same way, he wants to prevent other black people from becoming rich after independence. That is what the narrator means when he declares: "He is an enemy of the black people. He doesn't want others to be as rich as he is."²⁶ The white men have involved him in the battle because they think that he has a lot of influence on the people and that they can listen to him easily. Unfortunately, the people do not like him in fact. Because of his interference, two men have died apart from those who have been wounded like Ngotho who has openly attacked him. One of the characters deplors that attack in these terms: "Why did he do it? His action caused the death of two men."²⁷ As an answer to the question mentioned in that quotation, another character of the novel says:

'Ah, who could not have done as he did! I sat next to him, and I would have done the same thing. It would have been all right if it had been a white man, but a black man – like you and me! It shows that we black people will never be united. There must always be a traitor in our midst.'²⁸

²⁵ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁷ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

²⁸ *Idem.*



The quotation above poses the problem of the betrayal of the black traitors who support the white men against their own brothers because of their self-interests. The allegations that black people will never be united and that there must always be a traitor in their midst seem to be true. This situation can never come to an end unless Africans change their attitudes especially by avoiding self-interests in favour of collective interests.

Because of the treachery of some of them, the white men have succeeded in dividing them to rule during the colonial period. For instance, because of the treachery of some Kenyan people, all the leaders of the land, including Jomo Kenyatta, who have led the people in the independence struggle have been arrested during the general strike: "One night people heard that Jomo and all the leaders of the land were arrested. A state of emergency had been declared."²⁹ As one of the characters has put it, "They want to leave the people without a leader."³⁰ The following quotation shows the extent to which Jomo Kenyatta is famous all over Kenya:

Njoroge was a little annoyed when he heard about Jomo's arrest. He has cherished the idea of seeing this man who had become famous all over Kenya. He could still remember a meeting arranged in the market place by K.A.U. It was many month after the strike that failed. K.A.U. was the society was the society of black people who wanted *Wiyathi* and the return of the stolen lands. The society also wanted bigger salaries for black people and the abolition of colour-bar.³¹

Jomo's arrest is meant to fragilise the workers' movement and break their strike. To some extent, its aim is to stop the independence struggle that the people have started. Jomo Kenyatta is arrested, tried, found guilty and imprisoned. It means that the general strike has failed. Meanwhile, a state of emergency is declared by the colonial government. The Kenyan people who have gone to the forest to become freedom fighters are waged down as terrorists by the colonisers and their stooges: "They said you were terrorists."³²

Kori explains why they oppress the black people in these terms: "They want to oppress people before Jomo comes out. They know he'll win the case. That's why are afraid.' [...]"³³ The Kenyan people have not been united during the struggle for independence in *Weep Not, Child*, contrary to white people who are always united as it is mentioned in this quotation: "... 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

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁰ *Idem.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³² Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.



us...."³⁴ The Kenyan people have eventually attempted to recover the lost land and to fight for political independence through the Mau Mau war which has not happened without prosecution.

3.3. *The Kenyan people's prosecution during the Mau Mau war*

The Kenyan people's prosecution during the Mau Mau war has occurred through a curfew which has been instituted by the colonial government as a result of the workers' strike and the turmoil that has followed it. The colonial government has seized the opportunity to imprison the poor masses against the requirements of the curfew as it can be seen in this quotation: "Breaking the curfew order was not a very serious crime. It means a fixed fine for everyone – young and old alike. But in this case, when the money for the fine had been taken, only Njeri was released. Kori would be sent to a detention camp, without trial. [...]"³⁵ Even schools have not been spared during that period of upheaval. For instance, a school has received a menacing letter. The following quotation is a proof of this: "The letter said that the head of the headmaster plus the heads of forty children would be cut off if the school did not instantly close down. It was signed with Kimathi's name."³⁶ Referring to the curfew, the narrator says:

Conditions went from bad to worse. No one could tell when he might be arrested for breaking the curfew. You could not even move across the courtyard at night. Fire were put out early for fear that any light would attract the attention of those who might be lurking outside. It was said that some European soldiers were catching people at night, and having taken them to the forest 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.³⁷

The quotation above shows that the curfew has made the situation worse insofar as black people are arrested and killed by some European soldiers. They wait till night to take the poor masses by surprise and arrest them so as to kill them in the forest. An example is provided in the following quotation which is a conversation between Kamau and Njoroge, two characters of the novel: "Haven't you heard, that the barber and –and –? Six in all were taken from their houses three nights ago. They have been discovered dead in the forest."³⁸ The situation is so dramatic that an old preacher has spoken about it, referring to the past of the Gikuyu tribe which is now dislocated:

The old preacher was in the pulpit. He spoke of the calamity that had befallen the Gikuyu people, a tribe that long ago walked with God, a tribe that had been chosen by God himself who had given it a beautiful land. Yet now blood flowed there freely, covering the land with deep, red sin. He talked of the young men and women who would never be

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³⁶ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.



seen any more. His face was dark as he talked of the many who were lying in the detention camps. Why was this so? It was because people had disobeyed the Creator, the Giver of Life. The children of Israel had refused to hearken unto the voice of Jehovah. They would be destroyed in the desert where they would be made to wander for forty years.³⁹

Through the quotation above, it is clear that the old preacher has drawn a parallel between the situation prevailing in Kenya because of the Mau Mau war and the Bible. This Biblical implication is meant to make the people aware of the fact only God can save them from this situation. What seems to be abnormal in that situation is the fact some black people, the traitors, are fighting on the colonisers' side. This makes the white men laugh at the black people of the country as it can be seen through the example of Mr Howlands in this quotation:

Mr Howlands felt a certain gratifying pleasure. The machine he had set in motion was working. The blacks were destroying the blacks. They would destroy themselves to the end. What did it matter with him if the blacks in the forest destroyed a whole village? What indeed did it matter except for the fact that labour would diminish? Let them destroy themselves. Let them fight against each other. The few who remained would be satisfied with the land the white man had preserved for them. [...].⁴⁰

It is clear that Mr Howlands uses a policy of divide and rule to get the black people to fight each other so that the white men will be safe. That policy of divide and rule has prevailed in the country even before the emergency insofar as Jacobo represents the handful of Africans who are allowed to own and farm land. They are the privileged Africans who have been allowed by the colonisers to accumulate wealth at the expense of the majority of Kenyans. Such people are agents of division within the African society. They are the white men's stooges. There have been so many deaths that Boro does not see any difference any more whether they recover the lost land or not. He has made it clear in these terms: "The lost land will come back to us maybe. But I've lost too many of those whom I loved for land to mean much to me. It would be a cheap victory."⁴¹ According to Boro, because of the numerous death which have resulted from the Mau Mau war, it has another meaning to him. He has made it clear in the following quotation:

Boro had always told himself that the real reason for his fight to the forest was a desire to fight for freedom. But this fervor had soon worn off. His mission became a mission of revenge. This was the only thing that could now give him fire and boldness. If he killed a single white man, he was exacting a vengeance for a brother killed.

'And Freedom?' the lieutenant continued.

'An illusion. What Freedom is there for you and me?'

'Why then do we fight?'

'To kill. Unless you kill, you'll be killed. So, you go on killing and destroying. [...].'⁴²

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴⁰ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴² *Idem.*



Freedom has become meaningless for Boro and probably for other Kenyans who have remained silent. The independence struggle has become futile for him. Its futility lies in the fact that it cannot bring back those who have died during the Mau Mau war. The following conversation between him and the lieutenant proves it:

'But don't you think there's something wrong in fighting and killing unless you're doing so for a great cause like ours?'
 'What great cause is ours?'
 'Why, Freedom and the return of the lost heritage.'
 'Maybe there's something in that. But for me Freedom is meaningless unless it can bring back a brother I lost. Because it can't do that, the only thing left to me is to fight, to kill and rejoice at any who falls under my sword. But enough. Chief Jacobo must die.'⁴³

For Boro, the fight for Freedom is no longer a great cause as it has been at the beginning. It has become something different. Even innocent people like Njoroge have been prosecuted during the Mau Mau war. Although he knows nothing about the murder of Jacobo, Mr Howlands and company want him to say that he knows about it. In the same way, Ngotho has been tortured after Jacobo's murder which he is accused of being responsible for although he is innocent. Despite the fact that he is tortured, he does not regret Jacobo's death. Talking of him, the narrator says: "In spite of his pain, however, he never regretted the death of Jacobo. In fact, immediately after Jacobo's death, Ngotho felt grateful. This was an act of divine justice."⁴⁴

Mr Howlands has eventually castrated him, which highlights the atrocities perpetrated by the colonial regime. Referring to all sorts of torture including castration that the Kenyan people have undergone during the Mau rebellion, a website document entitled "Book Review: Mau Mau History Relived in *Weep Not, Child*," mentions:

In their 70s and 80s, the three Kenyan men and one woman - Ndiku Mutua, Paulo Nzili, Wanbugu wa Nyingi and Jane Muthoni and representing the wider community of Kenyans abused during the rebellion claim they faced torture including castrations, sexual abuse and repeated beatings.⁴⁵

The quotation above shows that many Kenyans have undergone torture during the Mau Mau emergency in Kenya. Mr Howlands has later discovered that Ngotho has taken the guilt of murdering Jacobo to save his son Boro who has eventually avowed that he has killed Jacobo. Mr Howlands apparently knows that he is the one who has killed him. If he really knows that Boro is the one who has killed Jacobo, one wonders why he has chosen to torture Ngotho to the extent of castrating him like a bull. Boro accuses Mr Howlands and his likes of raping their women and killing his father. Mr Howlands has nothing to

⁴³ Ng g wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁵ Bamaturaki Musinguzi, "Mau Mau history relived in '*Weep Not, Child*' - Reviews & Profiles", <http://www.monitor.co.ug/artculture/reviews/-/691232/1233102/-/8p4h9z/-/index.html>.



say in his defence probably because he is aware of the fact that everything is clear. He claims that the land on which he has his farm and his house is his. By saying this, he seems to have forgotten that he has not brought any land from his native country. Boro accuses him of taking their ancestral land; and he has eventually killed him as it is mentioned in the quotation below:

Mr Howlands thought him mad. Fear overwhelmed him and he tried to cling to life with all his might. But before he could reach Boro, the gun went off. Boro had learnt to be good marksman during the Second World War. The white man's trunk stood defiant for a few second. Then it fell down.⁴⁶

Mr Howlands is a settler who has tried his best to fuel the Mau Mau war through the various actions that he has taken. He has actively taken part in it by torturing and killing some Kenyan people who are claiming for their rights. Needless to say, he is the prototype of settlers who have illegally occupied the Kenyans' fertile lands on which they are exploited and stay as squatters. Mr Howlands' death is therefore a kind of justice that Boro has rendered to his country by ridding it of a parasite representing the colonisers.

4. Conclusion

Through what has been said so far, I can conclude that the Mau war has not been rewarding for the Kenyan people in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*. Although the Kenyan people's fight in order to recover the land that the colonialists have taken away from them is for a just cause, it has not been successful. The failure of the Mau Mau war in the novel is mainly due to the fact that the Kenyans are divided among themselves. This internal division has been caused by the colonialists once they have set foot on the African soil. The demand for the lost land and for political independence through the leadership of great nationalists such as Jomo Kenyatta has not been rewarding for the Kenyan people. On the contrary, they have lost many of their countrymen in the war. Anyway, the Mau Mau war will later lead Kenya to independence.

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