

# A STOLEN LEGACY: COLONIALISM AND THE EROSION OF AFRICAN IDENTITY IN *WEEP, NOT CHILD*

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## Abstract

*Weep not Child* (1964), is an autobiographical book. It identifies the period of World War II and investigates the reasons for the Mau Mau uprising. The book depicts the effects of colonialism as well as the violent response of the indigenous people to their dehumanization following losing their own territory and culture. Additionally, Thiong'o illustrates solutions to these challenges in Kenyan past. Also he has emphasized the tight connection between the lives of Kenyans and the surroundings. The purpose of this paper is to examine African lives and their identity crisis during the colonial era, including how they suffered from losing their own territory and how non-native people stole their culture and imposed their own in place. Colonial powers attempted to stifle African identity and impose Western values in a number of ways. One of them being language, African languages were replaced by English, which was enforced as the official language of education, further solidifying the supremacy of Western culture. A social hierarchy was established by colonial education, which marginalized individuals who did not receive a Western-style education and gave preference to those who did. The negative impacts of this system on people and communities are emphasized throughout the novel. Many Africans rejected colonial education's attempts to repress their identity and culture, despite the difficulties it presented. The book demonstrates their tenacity and will to keep their culture alive.

**Keywords:** colonialism, identity, colonial era, language.

## Introduction

"The Orient is watched, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of what the Description de l'Egypte called "bizarre jouissance." "The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness." (Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1978:170)

The research article addresses the pain caused by the colonizers to the Kenyans. The national liberation struggle of Kenya its struggle against the colonizers and its origin the beginning of colonial rule in Kenya and the entry of traders and colonists are

described in this fresh. There are two key elements in this book. The educational system is one. This arrangement demonstrates the Native Americans' perspective on their country and culture. The negative impacts of colonialism on people and communities are emphasized throughout the book. Kamau's experiences are representative of the larger challenges Africans had throughout colonial control. African cultural beliefs and customs clash with Western education, religion, and ideals brought about by colonialism. Western ideas lure the younger generation, which includes the protagonist Njoroge, away from their cultural roots and create a breach in families and communities. Ian Glenn (1981, pp. 53-66)

in his paper titled "NgugiWaThiong'o and the Dilemmas of the Intellectual Elite in Africa: A Sociological Perspective" African culture, which is based on oral traditions, elder respect, and community values, is being supplanted by colonial powers' promotion of individualism and materialism. A sense of alienation and identity loss resulted from the imposition of Western values and the repression of African languages and cultures. But the book also shows how strong African people were in their fight against colonial rule and to protect their cultural legacy.

### **The Imposition of Colonial Education**

*Weep, Not Child* explores the imposition of colonial education systems and how they undermine African identity and cultural values as a primary issue. Western-style education gradually supplanted indigenous modes of information transfer and education during the colonial era. People started flocking towards the western education in hopes of becoming equal to the British. This had a significant impact on the novel's Kenyan characters. The history of colonialism is portrayed in the book *Weep, Not Child*. The topics include the period from the start of colonization until Jomo Kenyatta's leadership during the days of struggle and independence. The novel's most noteworthy feature is its emphasis on culture of Kenya. Kenya was a tribal country, and tribes lived there. Kenya was the home of numerous tribes, each having an own personality embedded into its culture and language. A man with four sons named Ngotho was in charge of the village. At least one of them went to school. This book is a reaction against colonialism. Although the indigenous people preferred learning English, they nevertheless wanted the white settlers to leave their land. The other lads were laborers on the British colonists' estates. It was because of their efforts that they eventually joined the Mau Mau revolt. They were willing to sacrifice their

lives for such a brutal crime. Their country's independence was what they desired. They fought for the independence of the nation. They were both slain and attacked because of their affection for the nation. In essence, they were accountable for the landlord Mr. Howlands's murder. They gave their life in this brutal act. The book explains how African pupils developed a sense of cultural inferiority and alienation as a result of colonial education. The story of Ngugi depicts the protagonist Njoroge's time at the missionary school, where he is exposed to a curriculum that emphasizes Christian doctrine, English literature, and other aspects of European "civilization." Indigenous knowledge, languages, and historical narratives were suppressed in this educational system to make the people question their origin and roots. Tanure Ojaide (1992, pp. 43–57) in his paper titled "*Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity*" illustrates that "Modern African literature is written in indigenous African languages used in Africa. Written African literature is very new compared to the indigenous oral tradition of literature which has been there and is still very much alive. While there are literary works in Yoruba, Hausa, Zulu and Sotho, among others, this literature in African indigenous languages is hardly known outside its specific linguistic frontiers." The languages of Africa were not able to gain much momentum or popularity in the world that they probably deserved as a culture. Njoroge is more and more estranged from his heritage and absorbed into the ideals of the colonists as he advances through the colonial educational system. When Njoroge is forced to decide between going home to support his family during the Mau Mau insurrection and continuing his studies at a renowned mission school, it exemplifies this internal conflict. It also sheds light on the conflict faced by the characters in the novel in following and embracing their own culture that led to the isolation of these

people at large. According to the novel, there was a split between educated Africans like Njoroge and their traditional communities as a result of colonial schooling.

### **The Suppression of African Languages**

The systematic suppression of African languages in favor of English was closely related to the imposition of colonial education. African languages were marginalized as English was promoted by colonial authorities as the language of education, power, and advancement. Since people who wish to rise in society—like Njoroge—must be proficient in the language of the colonists, English becomes an instrument of colonial control. Africans are further marginalized by the perception that African languages are inferior or inappropriate for "civilized" schooling. Ngugi shows how this linguistic imperialism undermined Kenyan society's cultural underpinnings in *Weep, Not Child*. The book describes how the usage of native languages, such as Gikuyu, in public places and schools was outlawed by the colonial authorities. Characters that are compelled to speak in a foreign language, such as Njoroge's father Ngotho, are less able to completely convey their experiences and worldviews. There is a cultural divide between the younger, educated generation and the older, uneducated population as a result of the emphasis on English in the educational system. This created a divide within families as well in the way they were perceiving the British occupation. The society was divided. Njoroge, who thinks education will free his people, grows more and more estranged from his heritage as he receives an education in a system that minimizes the importance of his mother tongue and culture. African people's sense of self and belonging is undermined by colonization because language is a fundamental component of identity. Loss of language ultimately definitely results in loss of culture. African civilizations, which were rich in oral traditions used to

transmit stories, history, and wisdom from one generation to the next through their native tongues. This helped them keep their culture alive while simultaneously fighting for it. African language suppression obstructs the transfer of knowledge and culture, which results in the loss of cultural legacy. Ngotho is one of the novel's characters that stands in for the elder generation, whose knowledge and ties to the country are neglected since they are not included in the Western educational system. The colonized populace was meant to be culturally disenfranchised through this language subjugation. Ngugi has been an outspoken opponent of the persistence of European languages as the primary language of instruction and writing in postcolonial African literature. He contends that colonialism's legacy of marginalizing African languages contributes to the ongoing loss of indigenous identities. Ngugi's own dedication to advancing African languages as a way of decolonizing the mind is reflected in the novel's portrayal of this linguistic conflict.

### **Resistance and the Reassertion of African Identity**

*Weep, Not Child* shows the Kenyan people's tenacity and resolve to maintain their cultural identity in spite of the crippling effects of colonial control. Throughout the book, people such as Njoroge's brother Boro reject the colonial system and seek to reclaim their land and autonomy. The Mau Mau rebellion is portrayed as an embodiment of this defiance. The novel shows an underlying current of cultural pride and a resistance to entirely renounce one's identity, even among those lured into the colonial education system, such as Njoroge. The wider struggle of educated Africans to balance their newfound knowledge with their ancestral origins is reflected in Njoroge's inner agony. *Weep, Not Child*, however, also shows the Kenyan people's tenacity and resolve to protect their traditional heritage in

spite of the destruction caused by colonial control. With characters like Njoroge's brother Boro opposing the colonial system and battling to restore their land and autonomy, the novel's portrayal of the Mau Mau revolt symbolizes the Kenyan people's unyielding spirit and their refusal to give up their identity in the face of insurmountable difficulties. The novel shows an underlying current of cultural pride and a resistance to entirely renounce one's identity, even among those lured into the colonial education system, such as Njoroge. The wider struggle of educated Africans to balance their newfound knowledge with their ancestral origins is reflected in Njoroge's inner agony. The story implies that many Africans, including Njoroge, retained a strong bond with their cultural heritage and a desire to keep their identity despite the colonial authorities' attempts to brainwash them into adopting a Western viewpoint. The characters' engagement in the Mau Mau insurrection, loyalty to customs, and usage of their native tongues all demonstrate this. The book illustrates the Kenyan people's unwavering dedication to preserving their cultural heritage and regaining their proper place in their own country, despite tremendous obstacles. Ngugi gives illustrations of the Kenyan people's resistance to colonial values and ongoing assertion of their cultural sovereignty throughout the entire book.

### Conclusion

In the end, *Weep, Not Child* provides a balanced viewpoint on the various ways that African identity was undermined by colonization. The book shows how damaging colonial control was, but it also shows how resilient the Kenyan people were and how hard they worked to regain their cultural sovereignty in the face of insurmountable obstacles. The novel *Weep, Not Child* by NgugiwaThiong'o is a compelling and moving examination of the effects of colonialism on

the cultural legacy and feeling of self of the Kenyan people. Ngugi highlights the terrible effects of this cultural loss on people and communities in the novel by depicting the imposition of colonial schooling systems and the systematic suppression of African languages. The novel's portrayal of the Kenyan people's battle to maintain their identity in the face of insurmountable obstacles is proof of their tenacity and unshakable dedication to their cultural heritage. The novel shows the tenacity and determination of the Kenyan people to resist this cultural assimilation and reassert their rightful place in their own country, even as the colonial authorities sought to strip them of their connection to their land, their traditions, and their ways of being. In the end, *Weep, Not Child* is both a potent indictment of the colonial mission and a tribute to the human spirit's unwavering resilience. The current conversation on the effects of colonialism and the value of cultural preservation in the face of injustice has benefited greatly from Ngugi's work. Through the novel's illumination of the experiences and perseverance of the Kenyan people in the face of hardship, it presents a compelling and motivational story that has a lasting impact on readers worldwide.

### Works Cited

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