

Research Papers



'National Consciousness' in Ngugi Wa Thiango's "A Grain of Wheat"

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Abstract

The basic objective of this paper is to focus on the rise of nationalist writing is one way of furthering this revolution in African writers like Chinua Achebe, Ayi-Kwei- Armah, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Plath, etc. Post-colonial literature is a branch of postmodern literature concerned with the political and cultural independence of peoples formerly subjugated in colonial empires. Indian literature in English which is accessible to us in the west stills its roots in colonial literature and the tensions between East and West. A European naturalism is often present a concern to posit Africa as an arena within which Western readers can identify realities, is inherent within much of this writing. First part of this paper consists a brief note on nationalism and other aspects of post-colonial theory, key terms and philosophers. In the second part, I made an attempt to explain the concept of national consciousness in Ngugi Wa Thiango's "A Grain of Wheat"

Post colonialism is an intellectual direction that exists since around the middle of the 20th century. It developed from and mainly refers to the time after colonialism. The post colonialism can found countries became independent. Nowadays, aspects of post colonialism can be found not only in sciences concerning history, literature and politics, but also in approach to culture and identity of both the countries that were colonized and the former colonial powers. However, post colonialism can take the colonial time as well as the time after colonialism. Some would date its rise in the Western Academy from the publication of Edward Said's book 'Orientalism' (1978). The growing currency within the academy to the term 'Postcolonial' was consolidated by the appearance in 1989 of the 'The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures' by Bill Ashcraft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin.

Ngugi wa Thiango born January 5th, 1938 is a Kenyan author, formerly working in

English and now working in Gikuyu. His works include novels, plays, short-stories, essays and scholarship, criticism and children's literature. He is the founder and editor of the Gikuyu-language journal, Mitiiri. Ngugi went into exile following his release from a Kenyan prison in 1977; living in the United States, he taught at Yale University for some years, and has since also taught at New York University. His famous works are The Black Hermit, 1963 (play), Weep Not, Child, 1964, The River Between, 1965, A Grain of Wheat, 1967, etc.

Ngugi wa Thiango arises the concepts such as negritude nation and nationalism. Fanon defined anti-colonial nationalism. He might recap following points in the novel A Grain of Wheat. He asserts the rights of colonized peoples to make their own self-definitions, rather than he defined by the colonizers. He offers the means to identify alternative histories, cultural traditions and knowledge which conflict with the representations of colonial discourses. He presents the cultural inheritance of the colonized

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people in defiance of colonial discourses, etc.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *A Grain of Wheat*, 1967, concerns the achievements of Kenyan independence on 12 Dec, 1963. It explores several issues that have been raised in this chapter: how a writer contributes to the forging of national consciousness by narrating the people's struggle against Western domination; the process of inserting national symbols as well as the pitfalls; the challenge of independence; the danger of neo-colonialism. *A Grain of Wheat* is set during the four days leading up to Uhuru. Its central characters are the members of peasant society of Thabai Ridge, and through their memories Ngugi examines how the struggle for independence impacted on the ordinary lives. Much of the novel occurs in flashback and bears witness to the Mau Mau Rebellion rule. On 20th Oct, 1952 a State of Emergency was declared in Kenya and several leading personalities in the push for independence were arrested. As a consequence, many peasants left their homes and took to the hills where they waged a guerrilla war against colonial powers. Ngugi's prime focus is on ordinary people, not their leaders. Ngugi is following Fanon's concept of nationalism in making the people for the novel. His narrative constitutes a vital attempt to give voice to the people's collective identity and history. The novel's unnamed narrator specifically uses a collective voice in the novel, often using such as phrases earned men will, no doubt, dig into the troubled times which we in Kenya underwent, and he locates himself as belonging to the people of Thabai in his comment that in our village and despite the drizzling rain, men and women and children, it seemed, had vacated themselves into the streets. In terms of Fanon's work on national culture, the narrative voice of the text contributes to the construction of a national consciousness.

This sense of creating a narrative of the people is borne out by the novel's representation of the Thabai villagers. *A Grain of Wheat* gathers the stories of series of interrelated characters, none of which is granted the position of its primary hero or heroine. Each character has their own chequered past of them, Kihika, has been killed by the time of Uhuru. Kihika is remembered as one of the heroes of the anti-colonial movement and had fought as a freedom fighter in the hills. Another key is Mugo. He is celebrated for defending a female villager, Wambubu, from being beaten while digging a trench for the authorities. The novel focuses on a specific location common to all the characters, Kihika attended a Church of Scotland

school where he received a Christian education and became obsessed with the story of Moses and the children of Israel. Kihika's knowledge of the Bible is used to resist the colonial teaching he is exposed to. The Bible was one of the chief resources that Christian missions used to condemn indigenous African religious practices and was often cited to legitimate the presence of the British in Africa, spreading Christian enlightenment in heathen lands. Kihika finds inspiration in the Biblical story of Moses which provides him with a way of rationalizing and mitigating Kenyan resistance. His sense and support of the people is derived from a mixture of Biblical education and ancestral knowledge. Kihika preaches the importance of collective action rather than individual endeavor in his advocacy of anti-colonial resistance. Throughout the novel there remains a tension between individual and collective action that is never fully resolved. Ngugi's depiction of those who are assuming the vacated seats of power in newly independent Kenya. As Kenya approaches Uhuru of the British settlers and administrators prepare to leave the country for good. One settler, Richard Burton, puts his farm up for sale. Gikonyo and five others decide they want to buy it. Later in the novel, Gikonyo discovers that Burton's farm has been bought and 'the new landowner was their own MP'. Ngugi suggests that even on the day of independence the people's struggle is being betrayed by a new ruling class that has little concern for the people:

"General R. recalled Lt. Koina's recent misgivings. Koina talked of seeing the colonial past still haunting Independence Kenya." (p.220).

To sum up the examination of *A Grain of Wheat*, I would like to point out that many writers had kept nation as the central theme of their writing. Here, in the text Ngugi had inserted the theme of national consciousness with the inclusion of African history, politics, culture, education, rebellion, dressing, manners etc.

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