

**Reclaiming Liberation through Resistance in A
Grain of Wheat: A Postcolonial Study**

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Abstract:

Resistance against colonial regime to regain liberation and independence is a pivotal dimension of study of postcolonial literature. Postcolonial literature confers the ideological, racial, ethnic and cultural concerns of the states which are suffering or have suffered under colonial domination. Similar concerns resonate in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's A Grain of Wheat. The work serves as a moving examination of postcolonial Kenya, capturing the peculiarities of liberation movements and the difficulties associated with establishing a new nation following colonial rule. Set within the context of postcolonial literature, the novel deftly explores the complex relationships between identity, power, and resistance in a country making the shift from colonial oppression to independence. The present research focuses on the lives of different characters of the novel in pre-colonial and post-colonial Kenya. The paper also analyzes the relation between whites and blacks and the difference between their socio-political status with certain negative and positive consequences under colonial ideology. Furthermore, the oppression and violence perpetrated upon Kenyans in the past as well as present by colonial powers is also underscored in the selected text. The colonizers' unruly dominance stirs the rebellion and resistance in the colonized masses. This study aims to highlight the revolt and resistance of the colonized natives against colonizers in A Grain of Wheat with the

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theoretical underpinnings of Frantz Fanon's views propounded in *Black Skin White Mask* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. This study examines the ways in which Ngũgĩ's *A Grain of Wheat* reflects the notions of resistance and freedom articulated by Fanon, providing a compelling story that highlights the work's significance within the larger context of postcolonial studies and the continuous fight for justice and autonomy.

Keywords: *Colonialism, Post Colonialism, Resistance, Independence, Violence, Oppression*

1. Introduction:

History of global relation and territorial expansion is replete with the vicious pursuit of one nation to conquer or subjugate the other nation. So, struggle for liberation and independence by the controlled nation is a major concern of postcolonial literature and theory (Doran, 2019). In fact, it deals with the literature of those countries which are presently colonized or were formally colonized; hence, their traditions, culture and various other social norms underwent drastic changes. The current study analyses *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi WA Thiong'o mainly with specific focus on struggle for independence. It has been an occasion which has transformed the situation of Kenya from a marginalized state under the rule of the British domination and hegemony to a sovereign, independent and self-reliant state.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is a renowned African writer and a well-known figure when it comes to post colonialism. Ngugi's works are known as a living voice for all those people who are suffering under the tyrant rule of colonizers. His writings are entrenched in history of colonialism and post colonialism, in political and material circumstances, demanding rights of natives who suffer, and to let them free from all sorts of exploitations and marginalization. Ngugi, in his all writings in general and in *A Grain of Wheat* in particular, gives the message of resistance, revolt and hope which help one to get rid of all kinds of atrocities and oppression.

A Grain of Wheat was first published in 1967. Through the characters of Kihika, Mugo, John Thompson, Mumbi, Karanja and Gikonyo, Ngugi describes the history of Kenya by making the event of Independence Day 1963 a major highlight. The action of the novel revolves around villager's attempt to find the person who has betrayed Kihika. The work understudy separates two classes on terms of colonial ideology: one belongs to the class who are rulers and higher in rank while the others are those who are being ruled and are lower in rank.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* holds a prominent position in the field of postcolonial literature, as it provides an in-depth examination of the

intricacies involved in the struggle for liberation and opposition to colonial oppression. Based on Frantz Fanon's groundbreaking research on decolonization and the psychology of colonialism, this study explores how Ngũgĩ's story emerges as a powerful representation of the interaction between both individual and collective liberation. The in-depth study shows that how the lives of natives are getting effected by colonizers and the difficulties natives are facing to run their lives. They are deprived to be called human beings by colonizers. The researchers' focus in the study is upon colonial ideologies, identity, agency, the search for independence and revolt of colonized people to get freedom from colonization. For the said objective, the lives of natives in pre-colonial and post-colonial time span and their resistance against the barbarity of colonialism to their destination of decolonization are probed deeply grounded in Fanon's theories of resistance and cultural reclamation.

2. Literature Review:

This section documents the reviews of a few relevant works to find research gap for the present study. The review of the literature seeks to explain the current discourse on postcolonial studies and its implications for current socio-political struggles around the globe by placing Ngũgĩ's narrative within the theoretical frameworks of liberation and resistance developed by Fanon.

Many writers have documented the moving stories of people struggling under the oppressive grip of colonial power in literary archives, each contributing their own viewpoints and insights into the struggle for freedom. In addition to being historical documents, their works are potent monuments to the spirit of defiance that endures and the unwavering quest of freedom across all boundaries and civilizations. Amílcar Cabral (1973) in *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amílcar Cabral* delivers the struggle of Africa to get freedom from colonial rule. For him liberation is possible for the colonized natives if they will show a strong resistance against colonial truth. In order to get their cultural roots back from the colonizers there must be a rise on behalf of the indigenous natives to prove themselves as independent nation. His particular focus was on the rise of rural masses who can surely deny colonial ideology to get rid of their contradictory identity and suppressed enslaved lives.

Purple Hibiscus (2003) is a postcolonial novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who is a Nigerian author. E. Dhivaya (2016) in "Imprints of Post-Colonialism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus" makes it clear that Purple Hibiscus is a post-colonial novel with a direct critique on effects and

outcome of colonialism. Setting of the whole novel is in Enugu, which is a city disturbed by the disastrous effect of colonialism. The protagonist or the central character of the novel is Kambili, a teenager who along with her brother and father's story narrates political infirmity, cultural and identity concerns and economic deadlock of postcolonial Nigeria. The fiction clearly throws a light on the consequences of colonialism on the lives of people. It also informs the readers that how nations are left with so many problems and issues to solve even after the departure of colonizers.

Through portraying the conflict between indigenous cultures and European imperialism in Nigeria, Achebe's literary works eloquently reflects the worldwide colonial predicament. In works like *Things Fall Apart* (2006), he delves into the subtleties of cultural identity, power struggles, and the long-lasting effects of colonial encounters through intricate characters and situations. Md. Mahbulul Alam (2014) in "Reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* from the Postcolonial Perspective" mentions that *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is a novel about post-colonialism. In his novel Achebe makes it clear that culture was not a new thing for African people rather they were quite rich in their cultural norms before the arrival of the colonizers in their states. By presenting and emphasizing upon its complex pre-colonial Igbo culture, cultural diversity and cultural dynamics, the book subverts colonial narratives. Achebe presents an analysis of the effects of European colonization in Africa by critiquing colonial misconceptions and delving into themes of identity, tradition, and change. The novel *Things Fall Apart* is about cultural and traditional norms of primitive and aboriginal Igbo. Achebe shows that how the colonialism effected the cultural and psychological lives of people. This novel is a kind of reaction against colonial strategies which is represented by Okonkwo, who resists against the adoption of colonial ways of life.

The postcolonial experience is profoundly insightfully embodied in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's literature. Kenya's independence fight and its aftermath are examined in his works, with a focus on issues such as political resistance, cultural rebirth, and the pursuit of real African identity in the face of colonial and neocolonial problems. Agir (2022) in "In-Between Culture in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's 'A Grain of Wheat'" explores the hybrid and in-between relationship presented through Homi K. Bhabha's concept of 'in-between' in the novel. The contact zone between the colonizer and the colonized becomes a place of "colonial invasion and resistance; also a place of cooperation and reception" (p. 61) with which new cultural manifestations emerge.

Review of various works related to the issues of struggle for independence against colonial rule is helpful to prove this study as a beneficial increment in already existing knowledge in its particular field of study.

3. Conceptual Framework:

This theoretical framework provides a critical lens to examine Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, exploring how it portrays and engages with the ideas of reclaiming liberation through various forms of resistance in the postcolonial Kenyan context.

Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Mask* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) examines issues of resistance and emancipation in the backdrop of colonial and postcolonial countries which also serve as theoretical framework of this study. The intricate dynamics of identity formation and cultural oppression are made clear by Fanon's examination of the psychological and social effects of colonialism. His idea of liberation includes existential and psychological freedom from colonial system in addition to political independence. Moreover, Fanon's support for resistance—both nonviolent and violent—highlights the agency of colonial peoples in opposing and overthrowing dominant regimes.

In *Black Skin White Mask* (1952), Frantz Fanon discusses the psyche of black man under the rule of white colonisers. By analyzing the psyche of Black people, Fanon highlights the fact that how the black people are forced to leave their cultural norms and origin with the arrival of white rulers. Though the black people first consider themselves as victims but later many of them will try to appropriate themselves according to the cultural norms of the colonizers. Fanon makes it clear in *Black Skin White Mask* that in order to be equal with white man a black man needs to be whiter. But on the other hand, he says that a black man can never reach to the level of equality with the white man, because he is always treated as an inferior creature.

Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) is basically about the fight for emancipation and independence from colonialism. The colonialists believe that the culture they introduce to the colonized is inherently fascinating to the native population. This fascination is ironical in a sense because through this culture colonizers keep colonized down. Fanon was also concerned about the psychological consequences of violence upon colonized by the colonisers. After facing their violent attitude, the natives accept their place as inferior and marginalized people. Fanon also focuses on the contribution of the intellectual in transformation and revolution in society. Fanon argues that when the colonizers

leave, the recovery of pre-colonial culture is very important for the natives. By focusing on these views of Frantz Fanon, this study analyzes *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.

4. Analysis:

The colonial dominance and coloniser's implementation of its policies and strategies in the colonized state against the will of the natives gives rise to revolt and resistance against colonial hegemony. Whenever natives realize that their political structure, cultural freedom, social organization, education system and economic freedom is being exploited by colonizers they become rebellious against them. Combination of excessive violent atrocities done by colonizers and rebelliousness of the colonized lead towards revolutionary transformation in history of a nation. This shows that though the colonizers come in one's land with civilizing mission yet they fail to do any such progressive work in reality. For them, all human beings are not of equal worth, and it eventually leads towards the superiority of white men and inferiority of black men. Similar was the scenario leading towards Kenya's independence from colonial rule in 1963 when Kenyans started a movement named "Mau Mau" to raise their revolt against British rule. *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o discusses the same situation leading towards the liberation and independence of Kenya.

The study very clearly explores the nationalist and resistant movement Mau Mau in Kenya by highlighting Kenyan's passion and determination to achieve independence from colonial control. The tussle between the ruler and the ruled is presented through main characters of the novel: Mugo is a farmer and a great man in villager's eyes but in actual he is a person who has betrayed Kihika; Mubmi is a beautiful lady of village; Gikonyo is Mumbi's husband; Kihika is Mumbi's brother and leading person in Mau Mau freedom movement; John Thompson is a white man with colonial ideology, and Karanja is a man working under white man willingly. The novel revolves around villager's effort to find who has betrayed Kihika which led to his murder eventually.

Mau Mau movement unites villagers who are fighting for their rights from the white rulers who snatched their land without any agreement or permission from them. It was the rising scale of violence of colonizers on colonised which gave rise to Mau Mau movement. It was the cultural disorder, economic and political exploitation of colonizers, which adds more importance to the rise of this independence movement. It reflects that people are very passionate for achieving freedom, which is a daily reminder of their lives. "In the name of black man's

freedom I salute you” (Thiong’o. 1957, p. 5). It shows the determination of the people for their freedom.

From the very beginning of the novel, it is shown that the British government took away all the comforts and cultural and material assets of the Kenyans. People are contrived to leave their land on the order of British government. People have lost their right to live freely because everything was under the control of British colonizers.

Thabai was a big village. When built it has combined a number of ridges.... While the Whiteman’s sword hung dangerously on people’s neck to protect them from their brethren in the forest. Some huts had crumbled; a few had been pulled down. Yet the village maintained an unbroken orderliness; from a distance it appeared a huge mass of grass from which smoke rose to the sky as from a burnt sacrifice. (p. 5)

It shows that the lives of villagers were very much affected after the arrival of white man. Not only villagers of Thabai were the victims, but also the whole Kenya was suffering from this dilemma. Peace and harmony was no longer a part of people’s life. This shows that how colonists raise the level of exploitation to dominate over natives. Lands which were very dear and beneficial for natives were ruined by the British rule. They were not worried about the natives’ choices of life but the only thing they want was the control over everything owned by the ruled. The natives were so uncertain about their condition, because they were not sure that what is going to happen with them the next moment:

One day people in Thabai and Rung’ei woke up to find themselves ringed round with black and white soldiers carrying guns, and tanks last seen on the road during Churchill’s war with Hitler. Gunfire smoked in the sky, people held their stomachs. Some man locked themselves in latrines; others hid among the sacks of sugar and beans in the shops. Yet others tried to sneak out of the town towards the forest, only to find out that all roads to freedom were blocked. (p. 7)

It reflects the colonizers’ violence perpetrated upon the natives. People go through all this barbarity to attain freedom but to be free from colonial rule is not that easy for them. Colonizers have caused a lot of troubles in their lives, which is not easy to overcome. The author makes it clear that freedom and independence is possible at a heavy cost. Human loss is on peak during the state of emergency. Colonizers are taking the lives of natives by calling them terrorist. While in actual they are only freedom fighters and not terrorists. From the very beginning of the novel, the readers are informed that whoever is suspected as a freedom fighter who

belongs to Mau Mau movement is shot dead as a terrorist.

Kenyans are determined to regain their independence. They have truly realized that Kenya is their country and white man must not dare to take it away from them. Their goal is to liberate themselves:

We shall never rest

Without land,

Without freedom true

Kenya is a country of black people. (Thiong'o, 1957, p. 26)

The violent treatment of the natives by the colonisers give rise to their self-respect and make them realize that Kenya is their country, so they must get it back from British colonizers. Violence as a means to give rise to self-respect is an accepted aspect by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Ngugi also agrees on the same point and highlights it in *A Grain of Wheat*. The people who show revolt and resistance are taken to detention camps, to stay there for years to bear hungry days and nights and are brutally treated. This situation underscores Fanon's point "concerning violence" (1968, p. 19).

The whole narrative of the novel reflects a conflict between past and present. Ngugi makes it clear that how different characters lived in pre-colonial state and how they suffered during the colonizer's regime. It was not easy for the villagers to survive during colonial era after being culturally and linguistically damaged: "...the many wounds which our people had suffered were too fresh for the eye to look at, or the hand to touch (Thiong'o, 1957, p. 75). Though they were about to attain liberation and independence yet they were unable to forget their wounded selves under tyrannical domination of white colonizers. People were devoid of eating food during the Emergency held by colonizers. Mumbi who is the leading female character in the novel faced a lot of difficulties while her husband Gikonyo was in detention camp. She and her family were suffering from starving days and nights. She tells Mugo about such days:

Within days, the two hours of freedom were reduced to one. And as the time limit neared, even the one hour of freedom was taken away. We were prisoners in the village, and the soldiers had built their camps all around to prevent any escape. We went without food. The cry of children was terrible to hear. The new D.O. did not mind the cries. He even permitted soldiers to pick women and carry them to their caves. (p. 163)

When there was Emergency held by the British government, villagers were thrown out of their homes and their houses were burnt. Villagers were ordered to

dig trenches which would serve as a hurdle against villagers' entry into their own village. The old beauty of the village was destroyed for the development plans of the colonizers. The white men were using land for their benefit and economic gains, rather to build houses for the villagers. "Do you know that we all thought the end of the world had come?" (p. 163). Mumbi's comments on brutality of colonizers refers to the suffering of Mumbi and her family in particular and of all villages and of Kenya in general.

With the rise of Kenyan's revolt and resistance, the colonizers were condemned to leave Kenya. It was very difficult for them to leave Kenya because they ruled the land for years and could not leave it easily but they were bound to do so as "Kenya is a country of black people" (p. 26). They evacuated Kenya believing that the natives cannot survive without white colonizers. This attitude of White man is depicted through John Thompson who was the head at the Rira detention camp, when Mau Mau movement was on its peak in Kenya. Later, he has to leave his post and Kenya which makes him angry. He thinks that, "We are not yet beaten, Africa cannot, cannot do without Europe" (p. 188). Ngugi highlights the evil nature of British people by showing their interaction with others. John Thompson's view about Uhuru and Mau Mau movement is also full of hatred, as he says, "Mau Mau is evil: a movement which if not checked will mean complete destruction of all the values on which our civilization has thriven (p. 55). Once, Thompson broke a glass which symbolically represents Kenya's splitting apart because of the flawed strategies of British colonizers. Ngugi suggests here the reconstruction of Kenya to reinstate the lost economy and cultural norms.

Betrayal is an important issue of post-colonial literature. Ngugi in his novel exposes the psyche of a person who becomes a traitor against his own people i.e Mugo. He is the leading character praised throughout the novel by all characters as he was the leading member of hunger strike in detention camp. He was considered as equally famous and courageous as revolutionary Kihika was. He had also helped a pregnant woman when British colonizers were beating her. It was near the end of the novel that he confessed his crime for betraying Kihika. It happened during the speech at Independence Day when General R. asked for the traitor who had betrayed Kihika. While he was asking, Mugo came forward and confessed:

You asked for the Judas. You asked for the man who led Kihika to this tree, here. That man stands before you, now. Kihika came to me by night. He puts his life into my hand, and I sold it to the white man. And this thing has eaten into my life all these years. (p. 252)

He was thinking about a big reward from the British government which can turn his life towards prosperity. But unlikely that conflict ruins his life and gives him a title of traitor, ultimately leading towards death. Ngugi criticizes this kind of attitude on behalf of a native.

In some cases, the colonized people of colonized countries though in the beginning are bound to follow the colonizers' culture unwillingly, yet later some of them get used to their ways of life willingly. Similar was the case with Karanja in *A Grain of Wheat*. He was the person who unlike other villagers felt a kind of protection by living under the power of British. In the beginning, he was afraid of death by the British rulers when he saw his friend hanged by British government. After that Karanja started working for the colonizers. He joined them to identify those people who were working for Mau Mau. "What is freedom? Karanja had asked himself. Was death like that freedom? Was going to detention freedom? Was any separation from Mumbi freedom? Soon after this he confessed the oath, and joined the home-guards to save his own life" (p. 261). When White men left Thabai, he also wanted to leave it because he couldnot live without the protection of White man. Karanja like Mugo proved himself a traitor. He had sex with his friend's wife when he was imprisoned in detention camp. Apart from that he also betrayed his mother and above all his land by working as a shooter to shoot terrorists as a British employee. It leads to the life of Karanja as an alienated and depressed person, who idealizes white power but being black he cannot reach to the superiority of white man.

Resistance for the sake of liberation remains an important part of the novel but this independence took away many things from their lives. Their lands are lost and they are not able to forget the wounds this colonial period has left in their lives and in their hearts. As General R S recalls all sufferings on the day of independence while delivering his speech:

The whiteman went in cars. He lived in a big house. His children went to school. But who toiled the soil on which grew coffee, tea, pyrethrum, and sisal? Who dug the roads and paid the taxes? The whiteman lived on our land. He ate what we grew and cooked. And even the crumbs from the table, he grew to his dogs. This is why we went into the forest. He who was on our side, was against us. That is why we killed our black brothers. Because, inside, they were whitemen. And I know even now this war is not ended. We get Uhuru today. Tomorrow we shall ask: where is the land? Where is the food? Where are the schools? (p. 250)

It shows how gravely they all were suffering during the colonial rule. A big

difference between the status of White and Black man is reflected here. White man used to behave like a superior creature who treats all natives like they are not even human beings. They even treat their animals in a better way than they treat a black man. Here is a reference to the occupation of land of natives by Europeans as well. The European colonizers occupy the natives' land illegally under the pretext of progress of the state. Hence, the owners became the laborers while those who were settlers became the owners forcefully. Therefore, they had to do all the things they could do to raise their own economic system and cultural heritage for which they asked for an independent state.

Throughout the novel, the author projects optimism against a lot of disappointing moments. Characters are hopeful that one day they will get freedom from colonial rule and they are waiting for that day. In the end of the novel, it is made clear that hope of the people is not false. Actions of different characters reveal that they are hopeful to be free again. Mumbi wants her brother to get education with a hope to let him live a better life in future. Similarly, people have never stopped to fight against colonizers with a hope that Kenya is their country, a country of black people, so it has to be independent from the domination of any foreign power. Even a conflict between the relationship of Gikonyo and Mumbi is resolved later on. When Gikonyo asks Mumbi to come again next day, "he thought about the wedding gift. A stool carved from Muiri wood. 'I'll change the Woman's figure. I shall curve a woman big-big with child'" (p. 280). Gikonyo's intentions towards his relation with Mumbi are full of fertile hope, to start a new life by forgetting the past. His plans also symbolise the future fertility of Kenya which was lost due to the colonizer's arrival but it will be regained in liberated era.

The villagers regard the death of all the natives as sacrifice for the sake of their people and their country. This perspective leads to the fact that sacrifices of Kenyans will surely bring a positive and progressive change in Kenya for a happy, independent and free life. *A Grain of Wheat* thus is all about those people who have initiated independence struggle for Kenya and sacrificed their relations and lives for those who will live a life of freedom in independent Kenya.

5. Conclusion:

To conclude, we can say that the current study resonates strongly the natives' resistance, resilience and sacrifices to end coloniser's hegemonic rule, racial discrimination and cultural assaults for the sake of freedom and decolonization in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* with the help of Frantz Fanon's post-colonial philosophy which offers a comprehensive examination of the

intricacies of decolonization (Ismail 2018). Fanon's notion of psychological decolonization is evident by the portrayal of every character who struggles to find meaning and independent identity in Kenya in the selected text as Ngugi illustrates the difficulties of decolonization and nation-building with characters like General R., who stands for resistance, sacrifices of freedom fighters like Kihika and Mugo, who represents the inner turmoil of the colonized. The novel critically reveals the controversial colonial ideologies and its effects on the lives of natives. Apart from the focus on the struggle against colonialism, the author proves that despite the betrayal, determined and unified hope and revolt can help people to achieve liberation and independence for their own sake and for the sake of their whole nation.

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