

Research Article

The Importance of Education in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Select Novels

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ABSTRACT

Poverty and class discrimination is the cause in their angst, alienation, and silent anger which make him dream about a better world in Africa. Education is the only weapon which changes the African society and the western world. The destruction of capitalism and its replacement with social change will not look unless Africans revolt and radically change the inherited western educational system. Palmer believes that Ngugi treats the theme of education here the purpose and contempt of imperialist education is thoroughly scrutinized and its relevance to the African situation questioned. Education should apt to freedom of African and cultural rebirth in African continent. Ngugi expressing it to the political plane means more than using education as a weapon or means to achieving political goals just like. Gandhiji quotes a pen is mightier than a sword.

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INTRODUCTION

Education and religion have worked hand in hand with the capitalist political and economic power structure to create social classes in the Third World. At the beginning of colonialism, to be educated (which meant to be a Christian), was a certificate for entry into the middle class. The native middle class exploiter is distinctly identified and severely criticized in Ngugi's works. They include the Jacobos, Mzigos, Chuis, Kimerias, Wawerus, and the Kiharas. They form a buffer (sub-periphery) between the masses (the periphery) and the main exploiters, the settlers and their home-based counterparts such as the Kimeendeeris, (the core capitalists) creating a solid capitalist social structure.

Ngugi is acerbic in his criticism of the educational system in Kenya. He has described it as a system that "nurtured subservience, self-hatred, and mutual suspicion. It produced a people uprooted from the masses. Reflects inequality with reverent awe for achievement of Europe (Home coming -14). The true role of education as articulated through Karega and demonstrated through Wariinga and Gatuiria is clearly captured and expressed in Barrel of Pen, where Ngugi states that:

Education is the process of integrating the youth into the entire system of social production. It does so (1) by imparting knowledge about the two basic relations on which the entire society including its culture is erected, i.e. the relations between man and nature and relations between man and man and (2) by imparting a certain outlook or attitude to the two relations (Palmer 164).

Karega advocates and imparts precisely this idea of education. Wariinga and Gatuiria are informed by this same idea.

In the first and second novels, education does not perform this role. Rather, it is portrayed as an agent of capitalism; a means of getting one closer to the whites and a sure path to wealth and power. Thus, people like Waiyaki and Njoroge crave it and feel a deep sense of loss when they are expelled from school. They see western education as the light of the country, the key to success and wealth, and a means to regain the stolen lands. However, their approach is elitist. Despite Waiyaki's efforts and enthusiasm, he fails to realize that "education for an oppressed people needs to be expressed on the political plane" (TRB 138). Expressing it is the political plane means more than using education as a weapon or means to achieving political goals. It means also, and more importantly, that it must have its base in the ideology of the people, for that is the only way in which it can become a process of integrating (people) into the entire system of social production.

The suggestions that emerges from the experience of waiyaki and Njoroge are meaningful in education, That must be found in self-knowledge and educational wisdom through experience and other understanding of one's own Environment. History and culture are the Education tools that are not to indiscriminate books written by foreigners who are acting as agents for imperialism. Karega states the point very succinctly in POB, when he says: "The education we got had not prepared me to understand those things: It was meant to obscure racism and other forms of oppression" (165).



Thus, in rejecting this kind of education that “nurtured subservience and self-hatred,” Karega and others ask to be taught African literature and African history, “for we wanted to know ourselves better,” refusing to be “reflected in white snows, spring flowers fluttering by on icy lakes” (170). Education is important for the advancement of man and for the fight to regain the alienated land and political freedom, but the content and method of imparting it must be relevant. Although Palmer believes that Ngugi treats the theme of education here as he does in the previous novels, he agrees that “the purpose and content of imperialist education is thoroughly scrutinized and its relevance to the African situation questioned” (Barrel of a Pen 88).

The difference in understanding the essence of education between Waiyaki and Njoroge on the one hand and Kihika on the other is synchronized in education's dichotomous roles in POB. This is achieved through the juxtaposition of the opposing educational (and ideological) values of Munira and Karega, and the synthesis of the same in Joseph, a synthesis that shows victory for Karega's values over Munira's. In DOC, Ngugi puts into practice Karega's educational values through Wariinga, Gatuiria, and the student leader.

Munira and Karega are composite parts of western education: The negative and the positive; the one consumed in ignorance having blindly accepted from the slavery of imperialist education and using it as a means to achieving ideological ends. Ngugi believes this dichotomy; this compositeness is inevitable in a neocolonial society.

It is the use of education as an instrument of capitalism and its formation – in this case, the destruction of capitalism and its replacement with social change will not come unless Africans revolt and radically change the inherited western education system. In advocating this change, Ngugi hopes that many Karegas, Josephs, Gatuirias, and Wariinga's will emerge who can mobilize the masses as the student leader does in DOC. In fact, such a change is already taking place as students go on strike to demand that their studies “should be related to the liberation of our people” (POB 339); though this may be seen as wishful thinking on the part of the author.

Of all Ngugi's protagonists, only Wariinga and Gatuiria are able to successfully go through with formal education. However, Ngugi does not use them to glorify western education. Rather, he uses them to reiterate the idea that education *per se* is important, but it is not everything. Moreover, Wariinga's education, and even Gatuiria's to some extent is more or less self-education, a fact Ngugi demonstrated earlier on through Kihika and later through Karega who calls himself a graduate of the university of the streets. Both Wariinga and Gatuiria do not see education as a privilege that puts one above others, as Waiyaki and Njoroge saw it. Their education brings them closer to the masses.

Wariinga does menial jobs, working as a mechanic, for she wants to eat out of her sweat. Gaturiria, the most ideal creation of Ngugi's intellectuals, combines intellectualism with radicalism. Although he works in the university, he is not one of those Ngugi accuses of hiding behind classroom walls. He is down-to-earth and practical in the application of the education. A composer and researcher in African culture, he hopes to compose a piece

of music whose theme and instruments, including voices, will be Kenya's symbol of unity. His objective in researching into African culture is to end cultural imperialism. “It is cultural imperialism” he says “that gives birth to the mental blindness and deafness that persuades people to allow foreigners to tell them what to do in their own country” (DOC 58).

The role of art, the artist, society and in the struggle against imperialism, and indeed, against nature, is one idea Ngugi considers and expresses through Gatuiria's career. The idea is briefly touched on in AGW where Gatu the storyteller and Mau Mau activist keep the spirits of other detainees afloat. That music is the medium Ngugi chooses for Gatuiria to fight imperialism is an indication not only of his belief in the therapeutic power of art but also in its unifying power as universal language, otherwise tagged “harmony in polyphony.”

Christianity and education have bred numerous other institutions for the sustenance of capitalism. The law, its enforcement agencies such as police and courts, political parties, banks and their “development” projects and loans, and aids schemes have sprung up, all trademarks of Euro-American imperialism. All these have come under rigorous attack in Ngugi's novels and he takes them up as they come into being or reveal themselves as aspects of capitalism. There is a pattern that reveals Ngugi's strategy that shows a systematic approach, from campaign against to the physical combat with capitalism.

Ngugi's politics manifests itself in his novels as a maturing idea. Its indications become stronger and clearer with each novel while the author exhibits an increasing militancy as both himself and his characters mature. The novels become increasingly socialist. DOC is more political propaganda than art and presents Ngugi's most militant approach to artistic creation. The book functions as a Marxist revolutionary sermon. The militancy is demonstrated through the four major characters, Wariinga, Wangari, Muturi, and Gatuiria. These are the author's mouthpieces as it clearly shows in his endorsement of everything they say or do. Ngugi's maturing idea can be traced in the development of these four characters through his five novels.

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