



# The Interminable Disillusionment of Africans in Selected Novels of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o

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## Abstract

African literary works have been put to good use in a society that requires the intervention of writers to combat socio-political and economic predicaments. The objective of this article is to look at the theme of disillusionment in selected novels by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o from various periods. *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *Petals of Blood* (1977), and *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) are the three novels selected. The anti-colonial struggle, post-independence disillusionment, neocolonialism, the cold war, and globalization were all key global and local paradigm-shifting circumstances in which these novels were published. The study contends that people's disenchantment should not be limited to the era following the nominal independence of African states because the disillusionment is still a concern in Africa. Thus, the study indicates that African people have been disillusioned throughout history, with the main causes being traced to several local and global contexts. The author demonstrates that the sufferings of African people did not come to an end over time; rather, they are seen as complicated. Finally, the findings imply that a comparative investigation of disillusionment in various contexts helps determine how socio-political ills evolve through time on the one hand, and looks for potential remedies to alleviate the predicaments on the other hand.

**Keywords:** Disillusionment, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, African Literature.

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## 1. Introduction

The modern African literary tradition, especially the writing of fiction, is known for its social responsibility. Literature could not flourish in a 'vacuum' Ayo Kehinde (2003) says; rather, it is produced within a society in oral or written form, whether that society is literate or illiterate (Kehinde, 2003). Kehinde's statement signifies the social duty an African writer has to his or her society. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo also firmly believes that the literary work by African writers should not divorce itself from the realities on the ground. Ngũgĩ et al (2006) posit that "... any art that divorces itself from those social forces that impinge on human

lives can only be an art which is denying itself its real life-force. So politics, economics – everything which has to do with the struggle of human beings – is a legitimate concern of art" (Ngũgĩ et al, 2006). Most African writers argue that, in the context of Africa, art and the artist are inextricably linked to the service of an oppressed society as a result of various painful experiences. Chinweizu and Madubuike (1975) also express the role of an African writer in uttering the topical issues of the community. They claim that, in keeping with our traditions and needs, the writer's role as a public voice in Africa necessitates that the writer take on the obligation of reflecting on public issues. Because we recognize that art is in the public domain in

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Africa, the artist must have a sense of social commitment (Chinweizu & Madubuike, p. 78-79). Melakneh (2008), for his part, claims that it is impossible to separate African literature from African history, which, over the centuries, has been shaped by the peculiar experiences of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, in which its natural resources were drained, labour exploited, national pride denigrated, and traditional values disrupted (Melakneh, 2008).

Therefore, based on the above claims by different African scholars that art and the artist are responsible for revealing the burning issues of society, African writers were successful in serving society at different trying times. While dealing with diverse experiences of society, the practice of novel writing in the modern period of Africa is divided into three different historical phases. For instance, Ayo Kehinde (2004) generally classifies the phases as follows: "Initially, African literature was a tool for celebrating the heroic grandeur of the African past; later it was used for anti-colonial struggle. Presently, it is being employed as a veritable weapon for depicting the post-independence disillusionment in Africa "(Kehinde, 2004, abstract).

The first phase is generally thought to have occurred prior to the 1950s, when the writings were characterized by racial affirmation via cultural nationalism. During this time, the virtues of blackness were lauded, and Africa was portrayed as a utopia. The novelists aim to build the self-esteem of an African individual, in contrast to the disfiguring images given by colonialist narratives. Melakneh (2012) describes this period as a period of idealization of the past. He says, "African writers of this period contend that Africa had advanced systems of economic organization, quasi-democratic political arrangements, and well developed cultural institutions" (Melakneh, p. 69).

The anti-colonial period, which is mostly known to have occurred between the 1950s and the mid 1960s, is distinguished by writings that criticize unjust and brutal colonial rule. Anti-colonialist novels are the peculiar characteristics of the second phase, as they are a protest against colonialism. Finally, African writers, along with armed resistance against colonial rule, succeeded in unchaining themselves from the yoke of colonial rule. Then the burden of ruling the newly liberated states of Africa falls on the shoulders of former freedom fighters and a few elites. However, these indigenous ruling classes rose to political power and changed the course of the hope and expectations of the masses, unexpectedly leading to disillusionment. Thus, the third phase, immediately after independence, is known as the post-independence disillusionment period in African literary history. The theme of the writers also

changed from anti-colonial criticism to the depiction of the despair and disenchantment of the people.

Chinua Achebe affirms the logical shift made by African writers from fighting colonialism to fighting local political leaders. Achebe (1966) asks, "Should we keep at the old theme of racial injustice (...) when new injustices have sprouted all around us? I think not" (Achebe, p. 138). During the post-independence period, resistance to local bourgeois leaders and the pressures of neocolonialism became recurring themes.

Adekunle Olowonmi (2008) explains that despite the beautiful discussions about Africa's glorious past, the reality of life for the continent's inhabitants remains bleak. In their writings, African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara, and others have managed to portray the themes of political corruption, civil strife, despair, and disillusionment in post-independence Africa. Africa's underdevelopment can be attributed to a number of issues (Olowonmi, p. 46).

The reality of Africa after independence is usually depicted in the literary works produced by African writers with gloomy and dystopian settings and despair and disillusionment themes. Ngũgĩ put it straightforwardly that "To the majority of African people in the new state, independence did not bring fundamental changes. It was independence, with the ruler holding a begging bowl and the ruled holding a shrinking belly. It was independence with question mark "(Ngũgĩ, 1993, p.65). Generally speaking, the third phase of African novel writing focuses on postcolonial disenchantment and neocolonialism. Melakneh (2012) says the literary themes of this period include the legacy of colonialism, social problems such as corruption, and economic disparities in newly independent countries (Melakneh, p. 71).

In general, African literature reflects the sociopolitical and economic realities of the African continent. As Olowonmi (2008) notes, "African literature becomes an encyclopedic containment of the experiences of the people of the continent" (Olowonmi, p. 46).

In the present paper, an effort is made to examine Ngũgĩ's depictions of the predicaments of the masses in his colonial and post-independence/neo-colonial novels such as *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *Petals of Blood* (1977), and *Wizard of the Crow* (2006). This study is based on the premise that there is a close relationship between African literature and its historical contexts as tried to be described so far. Thus, three of Ngũgĩ's novels that reflect the disillusionment of the people in different periods are explored with the goal of highlighting how he has been depicting the pains and disillusionment of the masses. Ngũgĩ believes that

independence did not bring the freedom the people had fought for, implying the need to never quit the fight for full freedom. There are always anti-human socio-political issues to throw people into dismay. Thus, Ngũgĩ is one of the few African writers who depict the pains and disillusionment that evolve with time. People's suffering appears to be a never-ending curse that, like a chameleon, changes colour to fit into the emerging circumstances.

The current analysis argues that disillusionment is not a one-time occurrence that can be traced solely to the post-independence era. Rather, during the slave trade, the colonial period, and post-independence Africa, there was disenchantment. "During the colonial era in Africa, the continent was enslaved by colonial overlords who plundered its human and natural resources" (Okune & Timothy, 2017, p. 46). As a result, the focus of this research will be on African people's disillusionment as reflected in the anti-colonial, post-independence, and contemporary neocolonial novels of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o. To put it another way, disillusionment, according to this study, is the people's predicaments and sorrows as a result of colonial rule's harshness, the corrupt post-independence political system, and neocolonial looting, all of which have thrown people's lives into chaos.

Finally, the research is based on a textual analysis of the novels as well as the contexts in which they were created. Adrean Beard (2001) says, "Texts are produced by authors who live in the political and social world of their time, and we gain a better understanding of their works by taking these contexts into account" (Adrean, p. 3). The research focuses on how the characters in the novels respond to disenchantments and sufferings, both individually and collectively. So, the analysis also shows the novels' aesthetic excellence in reflecting the problems of Kenyan society, in particular, and the African continent in general.

## 2. Analysis and Interpretation

The following chapter provides a description of the selected novels, as well as a brief analysis and interpretation. The analysis procedure deals with individual novels one at a time in chronological order. Thus, the first novel to be given would be *Weep Not, Child* (1964), followed by *Petals of Blood* (1977), and then *Wizard of the Crow* (2006).

### 2.1. Regret and Anger in *Weep Not, Child*

*Weep Not, Child* is set in Kenya's Gikuyu village during the turbulent and violent 1950s. It was Ngũgĩ's first novel, published in English in 1964. It is essentially a novel about the consequences of the Mau Mau movement on regular men's and women's lives, particularly Ngotho's family, a symbolic figure for Kenyans. *Weep Not, Child* begins with an epigraph quoted from Walt Whitman's poem, *On*

*the Beach at Night* that could signal the theme, the setting, and the mood. It is divided into two parts, each with a sub-topic. Part one seems to depict relative optimism. The mood is calm and bright. Njoroge, the protagonist, has been hopeful that his family would be better off as he is getting an education. Except for Boro, the elder son of Ngotho, the family members feel stable. However, the second part begins with a gloomy sub-topic, 'Darkness Falls', to show the changing mood, from optimism to despair, resulting from the intensified anti-colonial war of the Mau Mau fighters.

There are intergenerational dialogues in *Weep Not, Child* in which the superstitious old generation laments the lost land and the younger generation criticizes their forefathers' carelessness. The elderly are remorseful, while the young are distressed. But both parties are suffering from disillusionment over the loss of the land that resulted from colonial rule.

Land, the monumental metaphor in *Weep Not, Child*, acts as a symbol, representing the Kenyan people's glorious past. Land is an umbilical cord that spiritually connects people to their ancestors. But that symbol seems now to be in ruin. Land ownership became a story about yesterday, throwing Kenyans into a deep disillusionment in which restoration is only attainable via struggle. This situation directly creates a sense of a blame game between generations. The most striking anxiety of the new generation is the issue of landlessness due to the forefathers' submissiveness, as Boro claims. Boro's disenchantment with his father and other elders also stems from their inability to fight for the repossession of the land.

Boro occasionally laments the predecessors' failure to preserve the God-given land. When he returned from World War II, he remained landless and jobless. He believes that his generation is estranged from the land of their forefathers as a result of the weakness of people like Ngotho, his father—a metaphor for the superstitious generation who gave up to colonizers. Boro is always upset and says, "... it was through the stupidity of our fathers that the land had been taken" (Ngũgĩ, 1964, p. 41).

Boro could also be taken as a metaphoric figure for the younger generation gnawing on the loss. Ngũgĩ displays a fiery relationship between the older and younger generations. Boro has little respect for his father, and he even expresses his disdain for him on occasions. He feels that there are awful historical situations in Kenya—a history of surrender. The people have allowed imperialists to infiltrate the heart of the country. Boro believes Kenyans would not have been landless if their forefathers had resisted the invasion of colonialism from the onset.

For his part, Ngotho is afraid of having an open conversation with Boro, except to externalize Boro's recurrent rage at the Big War. The ancestors were considered docile to the white people by the young Kenyans. But, when the elderly recount stories, they frequently tell the children how hard they tried to fight the colonial invasion. However, they are currently trapped in superstitious beliefs; they have failed to protect themselves and are now waiting for the so-called prophecy to come true. Boro angrily says, "How could these people have let the white man occupy the land without acting? And what was all this superstitious belief in a prophecy?" (1964, p. 27).

The disillusioned younger generation believes that alienation from the land was entirely due to the faults of their forefathers. As a result, this generation, with more experience than their grandparents, was determined to take on the task of mobilizing society against British colonial control. Even though it goes against deeply ingrained cultural norms, mobilization may be accomplished by seizing leadership from the elders. This leadership role created a significant divide between the older and younger generations. The youth seem to believe that the struggle could be aborted unless some traditional norms are challenged, taking the role of leadership from the elders.

Later, Ngotho was involved in the struggle against colonial rule. Ngotho's sudden involvement and interest in the Mau Mau war is ignited because of Boro's challenge to his authority in giving the oath. He is a firm believer in fortune's fulfilment. His interest in the fight is a sporadic interest. He is primarily motivated by a basic loss of authority brought on by the youthful Mau Mau fighters like his son, Boro. The disillusionment caused by British colonial rule created a divide between father and son.

The regretting old generation repeatedly gets disrespected by the younger generation. The disrespect seems to thrust Ngotho towards supporting the Mau Mau rebel group. Ngotho is interested in the Mau Mau war not only because the war made him lose authority in the family but also because he seems desperate for the old ways—waiting for the end of his disenchantment. He has been waiting for years for the white men to go the way they came. But he becomes hesitant about the prophecy after the conversation with Mr. Howlands.

'Kwa nini Bwana. Are you going back to-?'

'No,' Mr. Howlands said, unnecessarily loudly.

'...Your home, home...'

'My home is here!'

Ngotho was puzzled. Would these people never go? But had not the old Gikuyu seer

said that they would eventually return the way they had come? (Ngũgĩ, 1964, p. 32).

Ngotho had been waiting for the time for the white men to leave his land so that he could finally see Boro and the other sons smile as they would be reconnected spiritually to the land of their ancestors. Ngotho might have thought that the smile would rekindle a new light between the old and the new generation. But now, Ngotho seems tired of the interminable dismay.

On the other hand, Boro explains the possible scar the struggle could leave between these generations. He is confident the lost land will finally come back to the people. But the struggle for land has been so violent and bloody. It is violent not only because it is an armed struggle, but also because it crosses the boundaries of socially respected values. He says, "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" (Ngũgĩ, 1964, p. 102). Despite all his anger at the forefathers, he still feels guilty about some of his offensiveness against the elders. Furthermore, he mourns the deaths of fellow Kenyans who chose to work with colonialists. In the process of reclaiming their lost land, black people fought each other; their elders and values were disrespected; and these incidents caused a schism within society, revealing the dismay of different generations living through the tumultuous colonial period in the 1950s and 1960s.

## 2.2. Post-independence Dystopia in *Petals of Blood*

The novel's four disillusioned major characters arrive in Illmorog, a small rural village in Kenya, to escape their disappointing previous lives. For example, Munira, for example, is regarded as a failure by his family because he has not amassed money like his father at any cost. His father, the landlord Ezkieli, instils guilt in him. He is seen as a failure by his family, who drove him away from Limuru, his birthplace, and began working as a teacher in Illmorog. Indigenous values are pushed to the margins as the value of capitalism (worshipping money) infiltrates society subconsciously. People began to honour those people with money, regardless of their source. He could not accumulate wealth by robbing his people as his father did, so he left Limuru.

Abdulla returned from the detention camp disabled after independence in search of a job, only to discover that he would not get it unless he had money or connections to the post-independence corrupt system. On the other hand, he witnessed Kimeria, the sell-out, enjoying the fruits of independence, which drove Abdulla furious. The betrayal was too much for Abdulla to endure. Explaining the situation, he bitterly says:

I went back to the village, sold the other half acre. I collected my few blankets and my donkey and journeyed, following the sun. I wanted to go deep into the country where I would have no reminder of so bitter a betrayal.

Escape you might call it.

But I had died a death of the spirit: only recently has blood started flowing in my veins (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 255).

He discovered the renegades were having a good time, which left him depressed after Kenya gained independence. He fled to an unknown place, but an ideal place for self-exile.

Karega was kicked out of school, and the girl he loved committed suicide. He requested to study black literature, black culture, and history in a black country, but he was expelled from school. Mukami, whom he adored, killed herself after her father refused to marry Karega. After a fruitless attempt to find work in the city, he felt absurd since he was confused, upset, and disheartened, which brought him to Illmorog. Unless one has a connection to one of the authorities in a government position, finding a job becomes a nightmare. Kenyan youths' expectations have deteriorated. Wanja's life had been a sequence of setbacks, including childhood pregnancy and then barrenness, running away from home, kidnapping attempts, and fire. She, too, is looking for a place to hide from her history in Illmorog. All of the ups and downs these characters have gone through are direct implications of colonial authority in Africa, which lasted for a long time.

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ purposefully uses stories from the Bible and an excerpt from Walt Whitman's poem at the beginning of Part One to establish the gloomy tone and despairing thematic issues of the novel. It also alludes to African and non-African historical records to support the novel's disillusioning settings. Both individual and collective disillusionment situations are portrayed in this novel. The author appears to allude to the most disillusioning experiences of the Illmorog people in the novel. The residents of Illmorog have lived through a devastating drought that resulted in famine and hunger, as well as post-independence officials' looting, exploiting, abusing, and humiliating the people.

The allusion to scriptures such as revelation foreshadows the dystopian mood that readers encounter in the novel. *Petals of Blood* portrays more of the gloomy circumstances, with all the deceptions, dejections, and fatalities enough to cause disillusionment among the masses. However, it concludes with a vision and a call to action: continue to struggle until a true victory that benefits the masses (the proletariat and peasants) is achieved.

### 2.3. The Post-independence Capitalists

As a proponent of the socialist political system, Ngũgĩ argues that the ideology enables the lower class to struggle and overthrow oppression by the upper class. Ngũgĩ worked tenaciously to expel the capitalist political and economic structures that had been exploiting Africans for years. He shows the cooperation of the church and the government institutions in exploiting the people in *Petals of blood*. Society's dismay was heightened by the extreme and merciless exploitation, as well as the oppressive socio-political structures.

In contrast to established African values, the introduction of capitalism influenced individuals to worship the coin, causing them to lose touch with humanity. The greed of the elites has grown to unimaginable proportions. For example, when Joseph becomes ill during the villagers' journey to the city, and when the four main characters roam from one household to another in the Blue Hill village, they are shocked by people's greed and indifference to human pains. The new capitalist socioeconomic system is the source of selfishness and ignorance towards humanity. Even so-called reverends, or religious leaders, were observed contextualizing a Bible phrase to discuss the infamous "no free lunch" capitalism slogan. Ngũgĩ has also included some poignant scriptural excerpts to demonstrate how religion is covertly used to exploit ordinary people. As a result, he urges readers to open their eyes and consider how even the sacred book gets different interpretations in Africa.

Munira, Abdulla, and Karega went to Reverend Jerrod Brown's residence to get some medication for Joseph. However, following prayer, the reverend dismissed them, accusing society of being unwilling to work hard. "The Bible is (...) clearly against a life of idleness and begging," he stated (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 148). Even religious people, who are supposed to show sympathy to human beings, become ignorant and immoral towards other people's suffering. However, logically speaking, the Scriptures at that moment would not help in the healing of those in need.

After independence, the people of Kenya were pierced by the thorn of betrayal by their elites who held positions in religious and political institutions. The struggle against colonial rule has brought nothing for the common people; rather, it has enabled a few to ascend to prosperity. Both the church and the government have exploited the people; the church through the sweet words quoted from scripture and the state (the officials) through unfulfilled promises.

Hence, the concluding stanza from Blake's poem is coherently included in the second part of the novel with no meaning alteration to show the similar

corrupt socio-political atmosphere in post-Uhuru Kenya. Let's look at it in detail.

Pity would be no more,  
If we did not make somebody Poor  
William Blake

The above excerpt is taken from *The Human Abstract* by William Blake, from which Ngũgĩ quotes the very first couple of lines from the first stanza. The poem is part of the collection "*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." With six quatrains, *The Human Abstract* presents a closer analysis of the four virtues: *Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love*, that constituted both God and Man in "The Divine Image." The poem's speaker claims that pity would not exist if there were no poverty or greedy human beings. If everyone was happy, mercy would be unnecessary. The poem describes how selfish religious leaders and government officials destroy the lives of innocent people.

According to Christian teaching in the scripture, "The Divine Image" speaks of mercy, pity, peace, and love as an umbilical cord that binds man to God. Similar to Blake, Ngũgĩ argues humans should show mercy and pity to fellow beings rather than ridicule their pain as the reverend did. These virtues of delight, however, have been corrupted by fake religious leaders and oppressors of the soul. They used the values of Christianity to exploit the people. The reverend ridiculed the saying: "Most of us seem to prefer a life of wandering and begging to a life of hard work and sweat" (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 148).

Ngũgĩ wanted to expose the treacherous tendencies of highly respected religious leaders who were hiding their greed in the sacred book's words of God. The new Christian religion introduced by the colonialists undermines natural and local values. Therefore, Ngũgĩ argues that pity, as one of the traditional Christian virtues, does nothing to help those Africans suffering from poverty. Rather, the virtue is seen to represent a kind of passive and pretentious sympathy that registers no obligation to diminish suffering or create a more just world for everybody. Seeing their mischievous behaviour, Karega commented on Abdulla's suggestion to try another household to get help for Joseph. "This time we must avoid Europeans and clergymen" (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 149), says Karega, since these people have failed to show mercy to others' pain.

Ngũgĩ stressed the misinterpretations of the Christian virtues, and he deliberately brought these lines from William Blake to reveal the prevailing reality. The novel creates a dialogue to criticize the touchstone virtues that were praised as values of Christianity as preached for generations. The Reverend Jerrod Brown is a good example of someone who abused these virtues; he showered the three helpless characters with verses from the Bible. On their unsuccessful return, Karega, in an upsetting tone, describes the situation to Wanja:

'Do you remember the hymn we were singing at the beginning of the journey?' He recited the words. 'They are hungry and thirsty, those who have not eaten the loaf of Jesus. Do you know the Reverend holy bastard could only offer us the food of the spirit, the bread and fish of Jesus?' (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 149).

The four main characters have witnessed the religious men being pitiless about the community's real problem. These religious men attempt to numb the people with sweet words from the Bible. They make fun of concrete suffering by giving untimely spiritual advice. The incident brought to light pity, contrary to its innocent abstraction, and reveals a system and value based on hypocrisy and repression.

Karega's annoyance towards the Reverend suggests how intellectualized Christian values become the breeding ground for religious leaders to exploit people. The author criticizes the way pity, peace, and love is used as manipulative mechanisms in controlling society and exploiting them immorally. Thus, if people had not unnecessarily harmed other people, pity would not have been there since all is well.

In short, the novel portrays capitalism and its allies as the major sources of disillusionment for the people. The callous colonial rule is exposed along with other socio-political and economic crises in Kenya. The Biblical allusions and quotations are mostly used to show how the church, in collaboration with colonial institutions, exploits the masses.

#### **2.4. African Repressive Regimes and the Neocolonial Powers**

Ngũgĩ's disenchantment with the leadership in post-independence Africa and the direct influence of the neocolonialists on the continent once again led him to compose this thrilling novel. *Wizard of the Crow, a densely packed novel written in a traditional African storytelling style, delves into the political, economic, and social disillusionments of Kenyans post-independence*. The novel is set in a fictional setting called the Aburirian Republic, which is led by a totalitarian dictator known only as "The Ruler" throughout the novel. This Ruler is the second ruler of the free republic of Aburiria who does not allow any competing viewpoints other than his regime. It seems that Ngũgĩ wrote this novel allegorically to imply the time of Daniel Arap Moi, the second president of Kenya after Jomo Kenyatta.

On the other hand, a group of people, led by a strong female character named Nyawira, consistently stands up against the repressive regime. This group of people represents and fights for the rights and freedoms of the masses. Then, another character,

Kamiti (the Wizard), joins the people's struggle led by Nyawira, who used to be a secretary for Tajirika's construction company. Later, Tajirika became a minister in the Ruler's administration. Kamiti, a jobless graduate of Masters of Business Administration, and Nyawira, the leader of the Movement for the Voice of the People, formed an alliance (disguised as a wizard and witch) to resist the repressive system of the Ruler.

<sup>1</sup> It seems a deliberate shift in style of writing to suggest the need to begin entertaining diverse voices in African politics. As a result, *Wizard of the Crow* can be read as a polyphonic novel in which Ngũgĩ purposefully presents diverse voices in which the author is an observer rather than a director of perspectives.

With a uniquely African story-telling tradition, the author demonstrated his skill in weaving seemingly contradictory socio-political viewpoints together, balancing the novel's artistic excellence. It is a carnivalesque novel that creates a space for the centrifugal forces of language to promote unofficial societal directions. On first reading, readers can identify monologic and dialogic discourses. The novel vividly depicts the clashes between the Ruler's repressive system and the counter-discourse by the Movement for the Voice of the People. The Ruler's parrot ministers, for example, are the instruments used to implement the repressive system of governance against the will of the masses.

On one occasion, Minister Sikiokuu said, "You and the country are one and the same," echoing his Ruler (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p. 136). This is one sign of establishing a one-man party system in which the people are doomed to accept the Ruler's mightiness. Citizens must obey the Ruler's orders without question. The Ruler always asserts that he is the country and the country is him, implying that his words are supreme ideas that cannot be refuted by other opposing viewpoints. Ngũgĩ's criticism is that the political environment in Africa is full of immoral ministers who support repressive governments.

The Ruler pledges to demolish any party that attempts to challenge the country's ruling party. Apart from the regime's ideas, voicing a different point of view is gravely punishable. The Ruler's voice is unalienable. "In Aburiria there was only one party, and the Ruler was its leader. Let it be known to the entire world, he declaimed, that from this minute the Movement for the Voice of the People ceases to exist aboveground or underground. The Ruler was the sole voice of the people, and they loved it so" (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p. 39). This is a typical character of an authoritarian government in which

The way the characters are depicted to reveal dialogic discourse in *The Wizard of the Crow* is a significant departure from the previous novels. The unimaginable sufferings of Aburirians are told through the eyes and thoughts of Kamiti (the Wizard), Nyawira (the leader of the Movement for the Voice of the People), constable Arigaigai Gathere (A.G), and the omniscient narrator. The characters each have their own point of view, which are the typical characteristics of a polyphonic novel no other ideas that contradict the state are permitted except its own. Despite the pessimistic atmosphere, the Movement for the Voice of the People challenges the regime's every move to lighten the hope of the people.

Ngũgĩ built the novel with a variety of voices, and the dialogue between these voices is typical of a polyphonic novel. The novel acknowledges various independent voices that contribute to the story's development. The author refrains from exerting his control over the characters. "Let me say as the narrator that I cannot confirm the truth or falsity of the existence of the chamber [of secret daemons at the state house]," he says (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p. 11). Ngũgĩ urges African governments to tolerate the existence of different voices (a reference to political parties) to make Africa a better place for the masses.

*Wizard of the Crow* is an allegorical novel that alludes to the entire sociopolitical and economic history of Kenya's second and longest-serving president, Daniel Arap Moi. Moi's regime was widely regarded as a dictatorship that grossly violated human rights in the country. His regime is also regarded as a one-party system that stifles free expression. For instance, in response to an American envoy's suggestion that different political parties be allowed, the Ministers roared in unison, "We in Aburiria know only One Truth, One Party, One Country, One Leader, One God" (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p. 701) in defense of the repressive system. There is no political freedom in Aburiria that works towards improving the lives of the common people.

The Ruler and the Ministers' uproarious remark are aimed at both domestic opponents and foreign allies. The Ruler emphasized that his regime is the only accurate system of governance. Even though the Ruler is seeking funding for the Marching to Heaven project from Western donors, he will not allow alternative viewpoints to compete in Aburiria. Ngũgĩ exposes the insanity of African leaders and neocolonial powers that are exacerbating poverty of the in Africa. The neocolonialists use their superficial narratives of "democracy" and "human rights" to intervene in the affairs of sovereign states and indirectly execute what they want. Aid and loans are the mechanisms

<sup>1</sup> A polyphonic novel is a "novel in which a variety of conflicting ideological positions are given a voice and set in play both between and within individual speaking subjects, without being

placed and judged by an authoritative authorial voice" (David Lodge, 1990, cited in Ali Jamali Nesaria, 2015, p. 645).

by which they force other countries to obey the order. Howard Nicholas (2015) says, "we give them [Africa] aid to keep repressive regimes in powers"<sup>1</sup>. These superpowers use aids and the new gospels ("democracy" and "human rights") to plunder the resources of third-world nations and bring them under their murderous control. The author criticizes domestic and foreign pressures on the people, which always prevent their struggle from succeeding.

Even the Ruler objected to the idea of allowing a multi-party system in his country, pointing out that this is Africa, a continent made up of sovereign states that do not require lectures on democracy from former colonial powers. At first glance, his response to the American envoy appears to be that of a patriot seeking to protect his people from neocolonialists' invasion. He responds: "We have said good-bye to colonialism and left it on the dunghills of twentieth-century history. I want to remind you that we are in Africa, and we, too, have our African forms of governance. The democracy that is suitable for America and Europe is not necessarily suitable for Africa" (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p. 702). The Ruler's remark is quite ironic, given that the lives of the people have deteriorated as a result of his ignorance and self-centered personality. His remark indicates that while parties and leaders change, the authoritarian system of government continues to make people's lives hell.

The neocolonial powers are responsible for the continuation of the African people's suffering. They lend money and aid to flimsy projects like Marching to Heaven to control sovereign states and force them to serve the interests of the superpowers. Inevitably, the country becomes a dependent state, and its leaders carry out orders from Western countries to maintain power at any cost. "One need only catalogue the ills the West has done to Africa to see that such blame has its basis in solid historical facts. We cannot lay back and wait for the West to realize the harm it has done and repent" (Ngũgĩ, 2004, p. 26).

The Ruler made another ironic remark when the envoy replied, "We are your friends," euphemizing the kind of direct order from his country. "Then let's agree to disagree," said the Ruler (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p. 702). The Ruler of Aburiria never entertains opposing viewpoints, but he desires the coexistence of opposing viewpoints with his foreign allies. He proudly informed the envoy of the execution of "...seven thousand and seven hundred citizens in just seven days for posing a threat to the stability through protests in the major cities demanding social change" (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p.711). Apart from the demand for human and democratic rights, these people committed no crime. But the Ruler had them

killed for holding a different viewpoint that his repressive regime had outlawed. The author mockingly criticizes African dictators for having no room for opposing views and perspectives.

However, to appease his Western allies and secure some bounties, the Ruler attempted a superficial democracy. He knows how to keep them on his side with a fictitious promise of reform. The Ruler maintains a single point of view while pretending to be a democrat in front of his Western allies. As is customary for African leaders, he wrote a book about the birth of 'democracy.' Henry Morton Stanley wrote the book, a White Englishman. "The Birth of Baby D: The Ruler and the Evolution of an African Statesman: An Objective Biography" (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p. 905). The book appears to have been written for two reasons: first, to deceive the neocolonial powers' repeated requests for reform; and second, to consolidate his monologic discourse and gain the people's trust. Nonetheless, the neocolonial powers' role in keeping Aburiria in poverty through maladministration is bold. The author of the book on democratic reform is an Englishman who understands Western interests.

## 2.5. Coup D'état in Africa- the vicious circle

Usually, to the misery of Africans, political change comes through the bloodshed of civil war. Ngũgĩ once again emphasizes the failure of democratic power transition in Africa, which usually comes through either military force or a coup d'état orchestrated by the neocolonial powers. However, the change results in nothing more than new faces within the old repressive system. In *Wizard of the Crow*, the dictatorial regime of the Ruler ended with a palace coup led by Tajirika. Tajirika became the next president of the Free Republic of Aburiria. However, the worst thing is that Tajirika always wanted to be a white man who was suffering from a disease called "white-ache". Tajirika once consulted the Wizard of the Crow on how to be a white man. "The cure the Wizard of the Crow had prescribed had been in response to Tajirika's desire to become a white Englishman, moreover, an ex-colonial type" (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p. 902). These African political figures always dream of being heartless to their people, like former colonial rulers.

Tajirika's character symbolizes those submissive individuals in political power that trade national interests for neocolonial powers. He gets ashamed of his black skin; he wants to be like a white man. Because he has no self-esteem, he does anything that keeps him in power, at the cost of his country and the people. Ngũgĩ explains that Tajirika is an allegorical character who is still unable to get decolonized.

<sup>1</sup> Howard Nichols. (2015). 'underdevelopment' in Africa- What's the Real Story? Critical Collective, [YouTube video]

Tajirika had been one of the ministers of the Ruler who directly played a role in the massacres and detention of the people. Maybe the author wanted to imply the unbreakable chain of disillusionment in Africa. In a vicious circle, the African political crisis is made to change from bad to worse. Even though there is a glimmer of hope around the end of the novel, the struggle for freedom still awaits a long way ahead. Tajirika will not be different from the Ruler. The regime in Aburiria continues to be authoritarian, as it was during the era of the Ruler. African leaders, as soon as they ascend to power, begin wagging their tails at the neocolonial powers. The extract below shows the character of typical African leaders when they ascend to power. "Tajirika addressed the nation and pronounced the end of Baby D. A new era of imperial democracy had dawned, he said, and ordered the construction of a modern coliseum on the site once earmarked for Marching to Heaven" (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p. 918). It is a superficial change, not a real system change that builds political institutions, protects citizens, builds the economy, and improves the lives of the masses. However, the people are always doomed to follow a single perspective uttered by an authoritative regime.

Almost everything was destroyed by the time political change took place in Africa. Even the most significant experience and administrative systems are doomed to fall, and a new system is adopted from scratch. Thus, in the above extract, the author comments on the cost of starting everything from scratch for African countries like Aburiria. Even though *Baby D* might be superficial and planned to deceive the Western allies, it could be transformed into a real democratic administrative system rather than throwing the whole project into the dust bin.

### 3. Conclusion

The root cause of disillusionment in the novels chosen is the deep-rooted socio-political and economic deprivations of the masses. The novels selected are found to be expressions of the disillusionment of the people. Roland Barthes (1975) in *The Pleasure of the Text* says, "Literature is the expression of disappointment" (Barthes, p. 39).

From the vantage point of the historical contexts of colonialism and the contemporary political upheavals that resulted from these incidents, the disillusionment of the characters is best portrayed. Rather than change and improvement, people's lives keep on deteriorating like never before. Again, historical incidents and contemporary social, political, and economic contexts are significantly intertwined in *Petals of Blood* that depict the pain of the people. Similarly, in *The Wizard of the Crow*, the disillusionment of characters is shown with the help of historical and contemporary socio-political

contexts. In the novel, neo-colonialism and globalisation are the dominant contexts through which social, political, and economic issues are stitched together to show the predicaments. Kamiti in the *Wizard of the Crow*, like Karega, struggled to find work in Aburiria. He earned university degrees from India, but remained jobless in Aburiria, where the republic is soaked in corruption.

All in all, the disillusionment of the people in the novels selected is portrayed vividly in relation to specific contexts of the time. The author has tried to show how the sufferings of African people keep worsening rather than improving. The three novels reveal that the predicaments show no change as time passes; rather, it is the system of robbing the people that changes. So, for years, the grief of the people continued till this day. The post-independence period denied the hope and expectations of the people, and the contemporary period (neo-colonialism and globalisation) came up with more canines than before to callously bite the people.

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