## AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LANGUAGES

Thesis

## “COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COLONIAL RESISTANCE IN SEMBÈNE

**OUSMANE’S *GOD’S BITS OF WOOD* AND NGUGI WA THIONG’O’S *WEEP NOT, CHILD”***

By

## HAFSAT ADAMU

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**OUSMANE’S *GOD’S BITS OF WOOD* AND NGUGI WA THIONG’O’S *WEEP NOT, CHILD”***

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**DEDICATION**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## ABSTRACT

*This research is designed to afford the understanding of the common cultural heritage between francophone and Anglophone postcolonial African literature. For the purpose of this research, Sembène Ousmane’s God’s Bits of Wood and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Weep Not Child will serve as reference points for francophone and Anglophone literature respectively within the paradigm of postcolonial theory. Through a comparative analysis of the themes exploring colonial resistance in both novels, this research will analyze the socioeconomic contexts*

*within which the novels were written and how they affect the narrative and the authors’ style*

**Keywords:** colonial resistance, postcolonial, decolonization, postcolonial theory

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# General Introduction

**CHAPTER 1**

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The later nineteenth century was a period of dramatic change in African history and the African condition in general. From the Berlin Conference of 1885 to the end of the Second World War, most of the African continent was formally under colonial rule; therefore, colonial historiography of Africa took precedence (Ogot 71). Based on this colonial historiography, Africa is a continent without history; therefore, the African people were without history as well. Colonial and imperialist narratives of African history painted the picture of Africa as ‘the dark continent’ with a literary example being Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (Vogel 98)*.* This led to remarkable and noteworthy historical processes, movements and efforts within the continent being interpreted by imperial standards.

Based on the notion of social Darwinism and a long-standing history of imperialism, Western European colonialists saw Africa as the next best choice for colonial expansion following the unification of Italy and Germany in the late nineteenth century which left no room for imperial domination in Europe (Mills 2). They were also of the belief that their wealth and power gave them the right to claim foreign lands. What could possibly be understood as cultural imperialism led to the assumption that colonized people were better off with European economic systems and technology and that Europeans were racially superior. Amidst all this, indigenous African populations lost their lands and independence, saw the replacement of their traditional economies by capitalist systems which resulted in a loss of their trade networks and had their cultures and traditions severely repressed while being treated as inferior, as depicted in the poem “White Man’s Burden” by Rudyard Kipling.

For these reasons, African history became the history of Europeans in Africa, by justifying their presence on the continent as ‘civilization mission’ that will eventually lead

Africa to the path of history (Robinson and Gallagher 28 ). Colonialism, however, severely distorted the dynamics of the continent in the sense of its relation to other cultures and its interaction with the rest of the world. It should be noted that prior to the Berlin Conference there was European presence on the African continent, although it was largely limited to the coastal areas (Boahen 12). Eventually, the European presence on the African continent grew to the extent that all African countries with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia were under colonial rule.

The reaction of indigenous African populations to such colonial subjugation has often been de-emphasized as a result of the connection between the condition of Africa’s historiography and its colonial history. It stands to reason that, historically, colonial resistance across the continent would often be misconstrued as almost nonexistent mostly because the first wave of such efforts was overall unsuccessful (Ogot 78). Basically, resistance was difficult to attempt following colonization because of the refusal of the Europeans to respect existing hierarchy and social systems in some places and their refusal engage in diplomacy with African rulers. Also, the technological gap and Europe’s track record of colonial conquests made them formidable opponents. However, the indigenous African populations remained resilient (Msellemu 149).

Throughout the period of legitimate colonial rule and political dominance of Africa by Europe, there remained a constant resistance whose nature was severely influenced by the complexities and intricacies of the power and political relationships between Africans and the colonialists. African nations continued to wage various forms of resistance – armed and against the establishment and persistence of colonial rule – up until the end of the First World War when European power weakened in the wake of rising African nationalism which led to significant changes in the nature of resistance movements against colonial rule (Bankie and Mchombu, 30). The Ashanti battles against British invaders in the late 19th century and the

Libyan battles against Italian invaders were symbolic towards resisting colonial rule. Following the formal establishment of colonies, the indigenous African populations remained relentless in their efforts towards resisting colonial administration. The Maji Maji Uprising of 1905 which took place in south eastern Tanganyika – modern day Tanzania – saw the cooperation of local in fighting and resisting colonialism along with the Nandi Uprising and Samouri Toure Mandinka revolt around modern-day French West Africa (Ross 91).

The end of the First World War came with huge implications for the global political landscape. First, the League of Nations mandate led to the loss of colonies, e.g. Germany lost Tanganyika, which is present-day Tanzania and Namibia etc. Second, the cost of war and its vestiges made colonies difficult to maintain in the sense that it resulted in inflation and the collapse of global capitalist structures: these two factors and the subsequent rise of African nationalism being the third factor largely contributed globally to the changing perspective on colonialism in general (Bankie and Mchombu 33). By the same time, the Negritude movement was gaining momentum in France and the Caribbean with its foremost proponents such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Leon Damas, Aime Cesaire, Franz Fanon, Alioune Diop etc. This movement notably shaped the nature and quality of literature that would later emerge on the continent (Diagne). The Second World War came with the greater implications for colonies and their colonizers, as most of their home countries were no longer the world powers. During this time, African colonies became largely disillusioned and revamped their anti-colonial struggles. However, anticolonial struggles at this time were laced with nationalist sentiments similar to the feeling that triggers the resistance and revolution in Senegalese-based *God’s Bits of Wood* by Sembene Ousmane and Kenyan-based *Weep Not, Child* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o.

## Arrangement of Chapters

This research has four main chapters and the content of each chapter is illustrated below: Chapter 1 – Research Design: This comprises introduction to the study, background, and

scope of Research, Objectives, Research Rationale, Literature Review, etc.

Chapter 2 – “Do They Burn, These Bits of Wood?” is a part that covers thematic analysis of the novel *God’s Bits of* Wood by Sembène Ousmane in an attempt to understand the fictional version of the Dakar-Niger 1947 strike as a form of colonial resistance.

Chapter 3 – “And So the Child Weeps” is the part that covers the thematic analysis of *Weep Not, Child* in context of the Mau Mau Rebellion as a form of colonial resistance.

Chapter 4 – “They Neither Burn nor Stop Crying” is the chapter that covers the summary of key findings through a comparative analysis of the two previous chapters and the conclusion

## Background to the Study

Literature, far from the general perception of being an end product in form of a novel, story or poem, must be seen as a process that expresses the human experience in a broader and deeper context. Through the representation of actions that go out of the ordinary, literature tends to cover almost every aspect of the human experience such that it becomes a manifestation of human society. In this light, literature becomes so profound that it is able to break down some social barriers. For example, slave literature played a major role in the abolition movement preceding the American Civil War. Similarly, this was also the case with the anticolonial sentiments in former African colonies; where their efforts failed, anticolonial leaders filled with the spirit of national self-determination took to their pens and papers in some sort of literary resistance to fight for independence.

# Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this research is to examine two novels – *God’s Bits of Wood*

by Sembene Ousmane and *Weep Not, Child* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o – as works of

postcolonial literature in context of colonial resistance by comparing the depiction of colonial resistance in each of the novels. By doing so, this research will further assess the

* + - themes exploring the representation of colonial resistance and its overall implication on the African literary tradition;
    - social and economic contexts within which the novels were written and to what extent they influence the authors’ works

# Research Rationale

This research will add to the body of existing knowledge on written African literature and serve as a material source for further research in aspects of colonial resistance.

The findings from this research will provide valuable insight on some of the factors that prompted and sustained African resistance to colonialism and analyze its implications on the representation of the African condition in its written literature.

This research will also help provide a broader understanding of the shared cultural heritage between post-colonial societies.

# Scope and Limitations of Study

This study is designed to examine the themes employed by two authors in providing a portrayal of colonial resistance in their works as it shuffles between fact and fiction in its representation. The limitation of this research is the necessity of restricting the number of works selected for this investigation. There are many additional stories written in the postcolonial period by and about both authors, and these might also have been included. In order to examine the works more closely, I have elected to focus on elements within which the resistance movement functions as either a central theme, an important backdrop or a means of liberation.

# Theoretical Framework

One of the important contributions of modern African literature to contemporary studies is

its veracity in representation and objective understanding of Africa’s history – colonial history especially. A common misconception about Africa’s reaction and orientation towards its colonialism is the idea of submissiveness therefore the continent’s condition in terms of colonial subjection is often misconstrued as one of complete passivity. This misunderstanding brought about the need for African stories to be told in African voices which became established and essentially sustained under the comprehensive field of postcolonial literature.

Colonialism was a means of claiming and exploiting foreign land therefore postcolonial literature has a range of concerns given this past. It is mainly concerned with reclaiming spaces and places in order to reestablish the link between indigenous populations and their homelands through narrations, descriptions etc. It is also committed to asserting the cultural integrity of previously colonized people by restoring the richness and uniqueness of their cultures which were systematically repressed under colonial rule. It also seeks to revisit history so as to give historical accounts from the perspective of the colonized people. This is because colonizers had the habit of portraying their subjects as existing outside of history

Postcolonial theory, therefore, is employed as a framework in this research for the purpose of addressing literary efforts to revisiting, revising and retelling the history of the colonized people. Because most colonized nations were victims of the supposed cultural, racial, religious and moral superiority of the European colonizer, this not only justified the “civilization mission” but it obscured the true reaction of colonized societies given European hegemony of the colonized societies. The representation of colonial resistance in European historiography of colonized nations ranges from almost non-existent to very minimal hence the focus of postcolonial literature on literatures from former colonies, literatures responding to the experience of former colonies and literatures produced by their diaspora and their roles in the independence movement of former colonies

## Literature Review

By the early twentieth century, European powers had consolidated their rule all over Africa with the exception of a few countries. Africa under imperialism and colonial rule was subjected to European policies of political, economic and social structures. Apart from the apparent subjugation and inferiority complex that the colonial process created for African colonies, it had – and still has – adverse effects on the history of the continent in the sense that it was mostly through Eurocentric lenses.

Therefore, often underwritten about this period in African history is the level of resistance put up against the establishment of colonial rule. However, following independence and decolonization, African literature supplemented the mainstream narrative with the development of postcolonial literature and theory in the larger context of cultural studies. In this research, resistance movements as depicted in specific postcolonial literature will be analyzed in order to address the general misconception of colonial resistance in Africa.

Defining a literary movement simply by the era and geographical space within which it occurred fails to address significant aspects of the movement in terms of its writing style, social, political and cultural impact. This tends to be the issue when postcolonial literature as derived from postcolonialism – referring to the colonial period, its influences, and aftermath – is defined simply as literature of former colonies alone. As a multifaceted term in context of its theory, studies and application, postcolonial literature becomes difficult to define. However, postcolonial literature is often classified based on representation and/or resistance along with the daunting task of addressing historical imbalance in the colonial interpretation of former colonies.

In Representation and Resistance: A Cultural, Social, and Political Perplexity in Post- Colonial Literature, Yang discusses the function of the postcolonial novel as a reflection/representation of its originating nation and how it acts as a sign of resistance against

its colonizers. Furthermore, this article evaluates the analysis of postcolonial literature based on how reasonably a literary piece represents its indigenous people or how it reflects the resistance and reactions of the colonized population towards the colonialists.

Edward Saïd in *Orientalism* discusses the need for understanding Third World (mostly former colonies) ideas, cultures and histories through power relations and domination. His work, *Orientalism,* deals with Western propagated ideas of the “Orient” at different levels: first, a scholarly and academic discipline which includes teaching and writing about the Orient; second, the ontological and epistemological characteristics of the Orient as a mode of thought; third, and finally, the Western system of dominating, reshaping and controlling the Orient under the broad subject of Orientalism (12).

Similar to the understanding of postcolonialism, orientalism is not simply by its geographical distinction as it includes the aesthetic study of its economy, political, historical and social dimension of representing an intellectual culture that is usually trivialized by the idea of “Otherness” and exoticism. The essential idea of analyzing power relations and domination in former colonies allows a more critical view of their representation and manner of resistance in and outside of literature.

According to Tiffin, postcolonial literary efforts must assume a homologous stance rather than the counter-discursive strategies it has become subjected to as a result of European domination. This further reflects the notion of cultural imperialism; whereby comparative literary studies focus more on European cultures and languages such that the elements within cross cultural studies involving elements of postcolonial studies adopt the faulty assumption that implies universality as the sole purpose of comparison (19). This European hegemony over Third World affairs and concerns tends to obscure the subjective representation of other cultures within the same conditions. In studying colonial resistance, Tiffin further points out in “Postcolonial Literature and Counter-Discourse” the significant function of literature and texts

in social mobilization and their role in restructuring and impacting revolution considering the essence and relevance of the text in the European context of Africa’s colonial history given its intrinsic element of identification and ‘reidentification’ (20).

Following the formal recognition of Africa and its history as a scholarly field of inquiry, the study of Africa’s colonial history became a point of interest despite its misrepresentation of resistance to colonial rule. According to Robert J. Ross, there appears to be an unaddressed gap on analyzing colonial resistance movements. In the article “African Resistance to the Imposition of Colonialism: A Historiographical Review” Ross investigates and evaluates various forms of primary resistance to the imposition of European colonial rule in Africa from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century with special focus on East and Central Africa ( 90). Most resistance to colonial rule is analyzed and evaluated based on the Robinson and Gallagher’s premise of “collaborators” and “resisters,” both of which function as part of the social structure within a society.

Resistance is defined in “The Partition of Africa” as the “… the passionate protest of societies which were shocked by a new age of change” based on the hypothesis that non- sedentary societies were more likely to oppose colonialism than urbanized societies with proper functioning bureaucracies (Robinson and Gallagher). While this is not entirely the case with resistance in Africa, it can be seen that African resistance to colonial rule failed in some region and was successful in some regions for a multitude of reasons, which may or may not include the theory of collaboration and resistance.

Stephen Slemon writes in “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Third World” about the trans historic nature of the entire colonial concept to which Africa was subjected, leading to the subsequent creation of Third and Fourth World entities (32). This is because this quality tends to obscure the defining characteristics of nations and cultures as basic units identifying colonialism as a social force. Therefore, understanding resistance within such a

space requires the understanding of the cultural oppression and economic control exerted by colonial powers across the continent. Additionally, this implies that any literary attempts found to be emerging from such cultural dimensions are assumed to be infused with radical and revolutionary content, thereby giving the impression that there are capabilities of what Slemon refers to “literary resistance.”

Literary resistance did not emerge as limited to textual expression alone. As understood through postcolonial theory, literary resistance was responsible for alternation and reshaping across political, social and cultural spheres. Though universally binding in its mission, literary resistance varied based on the colonial landscape. Michael Christopher Low codified the need for expanding and reevaluating African history of colonialism and resistance in African history in the article “Rethinking Colonialism and Resistance in West Africa: Historiographic Connection for Classroom.” Despite the generally assumed and apparent dichotomy between different colonies e.g. Francophone and Anglophone across West Africa, Low writes that focusing on the disparity sidelines the existing similarities drawn from their shared colonial history, decolonization, spread of capitalism etc.

## CHAPTER 2

**DO THEY BURN, THESE BITS OF WOOD?**

## Introduction

Martin Heidegger’s “Origin of the Work of Art” puts forth the idea that the origin of the work of art cannot exist without the art (4). For Sembène, revolution is the art, such that it is visible to the reader every step of the way in his 1960 novel *God’s Bits of Wood*. The title of the Sembène Ousmane’s novel *God’s Bits of Wood* is derived from a Senegalese superstition whereby instead of counting humans, one counts “bits of woods” so that it does not attract the attention of the jinns, who will likely take them away. Beyond the folk art of this superstition, the term “bits of wood” maintains the similar red-hot revolutionary stint as the author. This section of the research will focus on colonial resistance as embodied historically in the Dakar- Niger 1947 strike and fictionally represented in Sembène’s novel. The strike will be analyzed as a mode of colonial resistance along with themes that function for the same purpose.

## Sembène Ousmane and God’s Bits of Wood: A Summary

The name Ousmane Sembene is synonymous with literary and artistic resistance. For half a century, Sembene established himself as one of the most prolific writers and filmmakers in Africa. In his words, “…art was revealed to me as life is revealed to a blind man. Without art, there are no free men” (Gadjigo).As the first to produce an Africa feature film, he inspired a wave of revolutionary filmmakers from the continent like Sarah Maldoror, whose careers were born out of the liberation movement of the 1960s. Although his target audience was African, he gained international acclaim for his works at Cannes, Venice and Berlin. His urge to write and later to make movies has inspired several generations of African artists. The success of his work is marked by the force of his storytelling, which often explores the themes of colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, resistance etc.

Popularly dubbed as the ‘father of African cinema,’ Sembène was an instrumental figure in shaping Africa’s postcolonial identity through his films and literature. Sembène’s early history of rebellion, starting with his expulsion from colonial school, only showed how much he was willing to defy convention. Right from the beginning, he started out as

revolutionary. During his years in Marseilles where he served as a dock worker before returning to Senegal to concentrate on filmmaking, Sembène wrote his first book *God’s Bits of Wood*, making it one of the first books in post-independent Africa to cite the active role of women in the liberation process (J. C. Robinson).

First written under the title “Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu,” *God’s Bits of Wood* was first translated from French and published in 1960, a period of political significance across the African continent. It is a politically charged novel about revolutionary struggle without being overbearing in its morality, which is based on the 1947-48 railway strikes that took place between Dakar, Senegal and what is now Mali on the western coast of Africa. It is centered around workers demanding higher wages, pensions, allowances for their families and recognition of their union by the railroad company owned by the French colonial administrators. It is a highly visual novel that portrays many strikingly vivid images, which is quite expected from someone who would later become a filmmaker (Ousmane).

The novel shows how this strike changed the lives of the different communities that actively participated in the strike. From the beginning of the story, it is easy to tell that the plot of the story is going to border heavily on communal life and efforts. The novel begins with a scene of the gathering of women in a little community in Bamako, the family of Bakayoko, where the reader is introduced to Old Niakoro. She is preoccupied with the impending strike of the railroad workers. The older generation, as seen with Niakoro are against the strike, while the younger generation sees the strike as a means of resistance and revolt and also as a necessity in regaining their rights.

As the plot unfurls, the community - both young and old; men, women and children - is forced to admit that the strike is an appropriate response to the unfair treatment that is propagated by the colonial authorities and their policies. The communities encounter some sort of "enlightenment" heavily inspired by the teaching of Ibrahim Bakayoko. Bakayoko is the

leader of the strike who has receded from view before the novel’s beginning until towards the denouement. Bakayoko, much to the dismay of the community of strikers and the reader as well, seems less interesting as he had been while he was out of sight

The community of strikers are seen to be resilient despite the absence of Bakayoko, whose influence was necessary for the strike to gain and maintain its momentum. Furthermore, the strikers are seen to make important decision even in the absence of Bakayoko such as the recognition of the role of the strike on their overall condition, hence the decision to move forward with it and eventually the dilemma of having to deal with strike breakers like Diarra and Beaugosse. At this point, the reader is brought to see the role of major characters as the strike picks up pace. Fa Keita, a well-respected elderly man, is one of the foremost promoter of the strike who is later arrested. Tiemoko, a close associate of Bakayoko, is one of the Bamako delegates and also the judge of Diarra’s desertion of the strike. Ramatoulaye is one of the characters Sembene uses to illustrate the transformation of the role of the women during strike.

A larger part of the book takes place in the Senegalese town of Thiès, a town characterized by “rickety shacks, some upturned tombs, walls of bamboo or millet stalks, iron barbs, and rotting fences” (13) – yet it continuously shows itself as the heart and center of the strike. Scenes in Dakar introduce characters that are more cosmopolitan and morally ambiguous as they navigate the tides of the strike. While Bamako is where the strike begins, Thiès is where the action begins to take place with the women’s march led by Penda and the strikers led by Bakayoko to Dakar, which leads to the general workers’ strike. The book also highlights the oppression faced by indigenous populations during the colonial era. After each attempt by the French authorities to oppress the workers to give in, these communities of people only become more resilient, especially the women who play such a vital role in actually making the strike successful and ensuring that the authorities acknowledge the need for change in the

working conditions. The march of the women serves as statement of their strength and courage. The novel comes to a close with the strike giving way to a general workers' strike, which ends in just ten days.

## Revolutionary Zeal: The Railway Strike

The discourse on dialectical materialism which suggests that historical events in terms of movement and change are interpreted as a series of contradictions resulting from a collision of social forces; that social consciousness, which emanates from matter, leads to the greater importance of social struggle in human societies thy transform, is essential to understanding Sembène’s *God’s Bits of Wood*. By applying this dialectical approach to Senegal’s colonial history and the struggles against it, he expresses liberation as the reality which forms part of the overall quest for social freedom and justice (Thiong'o, *In the Name of the Mother 33*).

The 1947 railway strike as fictionally recreated in *God’s Bits of Wood* shows anti colonial solidarity of the local people against colonial exploitation and injustice. The strike also reveals the consciousness of the characters towards their social and economic fate. This consciousness within the workers is triggered as a result of unfair colonial policies enforced by the imperialists and the apparent inequity between railway workers in Thiés, Dakar and Bamako. In essence, it ignites a force within the workers (or characters) – a force of creating a new image and experience for themselves without the adverse implication of their social and/or economic factors. The awareness that comes with this struggle for a brighter tomorrow brings about, in the characters, a zeal and determination to be liberated from strangulating colonial economic exploitation. The main conflict that gave rise to the strike is reflected in two characters, Bakayoko the relentless leader of the strike and Dejean, a French official who was determined to punish all the strikers unless they return to work (Cooper 91).

As a piece of revolutionary literary art*, God’s Bits of Wood* is dedicated to the transience of prevailing social realities of the African society such that the strike as portrayed in the novel

acts as a catalyst such that the strikers are left with questions regarding their individual and collective identities as a colonized people. Additionally, the strike function in a manner in which the workers seek to deconstruct the very way they see themselves and the way that people see them. While this research is elected to focus on the account of the strike as reenacted in the novel, it must also take into account the factual history of the strike. Doing so allows a deeper understanding of Sembene’s style in context of postcolonial concerns of rewriting and personalizing history. Despite the heavy Marxist undertones that echo all through book and render the railway strike a class struggle before anything else, the strike, its precursors and implications mark a turning point in the anticolonial struggle (Dick 172).

The victory of the strikers in the *God’s Bits of Wood* shows a change in the condition of indigenous African populations in French West Africa and their status as a colonized people. Indeed, the novel undeniably belongs to the general trend of the awakening of Africans in the aftermath of the Second World War (Bankie and Mchombu 40). It presents above all a true pan-African nationalist movement, especially on several fronts whose driving forces are socialist-inclined as seen in the significance of communal efforts and class consciousness. *God’s Bits of Wood* strongly develops the theme of the revolt and society. Through the victory of the railway on the colonial administration, Sembene announces the advent of a new Africa (Gadjigo).

## Themes in God’s Bits of Wood

The author describes the fracture of the colonial society: the upscale neighborhoods of the colonists baptized "Vatican" on one side, and on the other, "the Medina" neighborhoods of black colonized on the other side. This cleavage is exacerbated by a strike that starves those left behind. The novel also shows us how ordinary people become heroes during a strike that puts their physical and, above all, mental strength to the test, the strikers having to cope with food shortages laid down by the colonial administration, abuses and all forms of humiliation.

In the seamless execution of the plot, the novel artfully explores themes that are relevant to the need for resistance at every level as illustrated by the workers’ strike.

Where the general premise of the novel is the strike, then the driving force of the strike is the revolt. The theme of revolt is vividly embodied by the characters all through the novel beginning right from Thiès such that it brings up subthemes like the march to Dakar, their solidarity as a common people etc. In fact, *God’s Bits of Wood* traces the uniting theme of revolt through the strike as a form of resistance to and liberation from colonial rule. With Bakayoko as an obvious representative of the theme as such, it is also seen through other heroic characters such as Ramatoulaye. The revolt and the strike also come with underlying implications of violence that is seen across all three locations through the course of the book. However, it reaches its peak in Bamako with the death of Niakoro and the infliction on Adjibidji, Bakayoko’s adopted daughter.

The overarching function of revolt as a theme in this novel stems from the broader context of resisting colonial rule. It can be then seen that another major theme explored in the novel is colonization and decolonization. On the subject of colonization, it manifests itself through the behaviors and convictions of the French authorities as seen through the characters. First, there is Dejean, the director of the régie, Isnard who was born on the railway line and also this class of workers, and Edouard, the labor inspector, who serves as an intermediary for the leaders of the governed to negotiate with the union. These men try by all means to bend the strikers. They try to bribe some union leaders, they make false promises, and even go as far as the complicity of religious figures to make the strikers feel guilty, like El Hadji Mabigue.

In his own way of fictionalizing history, Sembene does not only pay tribute to the great strike and his “comrades in the union” but he also immortalizes a powerful resistance and reaction to colonial rule. In many ways, *God’s Bits of Wood* exposes the delirious colonial spectacle, robust protest against the exploitation of the working class, passive resignation,

humiliation and alienation, like the African paradigm of a resolutely militant literature. The exploration of this theme in the novel allows the reader to penetrate to the very heart of a world full of tensions and crises, to apprehend a world where hideous misery is everywhere present, fierce, ruthless, assaulting “bits of wood.” Essentially, the strike crystallizes a decisive moment in the historical evolution of the Senegalese resistance to colonial rule and the struggle for independence. Also, without falling into the trap of excessive moralization, it exalts the ideals of solidarity and equality

Sembène’s Marxist orientation laces through his compelling storytelling techniques and is developed as a theme in context of the class struggle of the working class. More than that, it also stresses their importance as a community where it shows how the cardinal values of society become helpless, inoperative, and obsolete when the daily routine becomes inhumanly difficult, and how these same values, paradoxically, remain the refuge and the shield of this same society before the adversity, in front of the siege. Through this theme, *God’s Bits of Wood* addresses the persistence of racism in the sense that it is not only their economic status that determines the social fate but also the color of their skin. The workers suffer a grave injustice and demand to enjoy the same benefits as the foreign workers who work with them. They feel exploited, and therefore willing to sacrifice everything to win their case.

## Conclusion

Sembene Ousmane’s view of Africa is uncompromising. The colonial mechanics and its disastrous consequences are laid bare. His dialectic of oppression will engender a cinematographic writing that is relevant, strict and without concessions, deeply rooted in and totally impregnated with popular culture. Borrowing from folklore without betraying it, and restoring the African reality in all his eloquence, his breathing and his rhythms, Sembene shows that the workers' strike, which lifts prohibitions and defines a new way of relating between employers and employees, between men and women, has a symbolic and ideological

significance: by transforming workers and women in a radical way, by offering the reader a revolutionary vision of African societies.

## Introduction

## CHAPTER 3

## …AND SO THE CHILD WEEPS

Literature is precisely the invention of a voice to which a specific origin cannot be assigned, which is why, according to Roland Barthes, the reader gets to a stage where the identity of the author is lost. Barthes writes in “The Death of the Author” that that an author has no role in the interpretation of the representation within his/her work (4). However, in the writings of Michel Foucault, the “author function” is the role of the author in discourse which was a term developed in his 1969 essay “What is an Author?” He further discusses that the author function does not affect the whole text in the same way because it is not a spontaneous entity but rather a carefully constructed social position (211). Both theorists acknowledging the existence of the author is where Ngugi wa Thiong’o seeks to strike a balance. His function as an author – or lack of it – is seen through a carefully constructed position whereby it plays a role in the perception of his works (Shahjahan 275).

This section of the research will focus on the novel *Weep, Not Child* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o which tells the tale of Kenya’s journey towards independence. It will focus on the novel’s reflection of the Mau Mau rebellion as a means of liberation from colonial rule by exploring the themes within the novel that are relevant to this thesis.

## Weep Not, Child, Ngugi wa Thiong’o: A Summary

As one of Africa’s foremost writers and an ardent anticolonial activist, Ngugi wa Thiong’o has seamlessly captured the essence of the mid-century colonial trend that swept across the African continent, especially in Kenya, in most of his works. The mid twentieth century was also a period that was characterized by literature associating itself with the wide movement of, opposition to and alteration of former colonies. His work *Weep Not, Child* functions dually within this paradigm, first as part of this stream of literature and second for the far-reaching questions it raises in a larger context of decolonization (Rao 644).

The style impetus of Ngugi’s fiction is closely linked with the reality of the Kenyan colonial experience and the resistance against it to the extent that the focus of his works

including *Weep Not, Child,* is mostly on the conflict between the white-settler colonial class and indigenous African populations. As he darts between history and fiction in his retelling of Kenya’s colonial encounter and the dynamics of the Mau Mau revolution, Ngugi engages his readers by exploring the intricacies of his characters’ innermost convictions in a colonial situation. In spite of Ngugi’s evident commitment to exonerating and vindicating the rebellion, he is still able to focus on the lack of success of the revolution due to shortcomings from within the native populations (Iweriebor 43).

Ngugi wa Thiong’o describes colonialism “as a process of alienation (*Barrel of a Pen*, 4). In his other works, along with this, Ngugi has shown the impact of colonial land and labor policies on the Kenyan indigenous populations. In terms of understanding his social commitment and responsibilities as a writer, his writings often correspond with the function of literature as a weapon of liberation. This was also the kind of literature that was believed to represent the rousing spirit of nationalism during the dawn of independence in order to facilitate social change and transformation. Through his works, *Weep Not, Child* in particular, he pushes the transformative power of literature in a historical, social and economic context.

The general premise of the book is based on the loss of ancestral land suffered by the Kikuyu population, the colonial education system and anticolonial sentiments framed in the Mau Mau uprising and its function as a means of resistance. While exploring the detrimental effects of colonialism and imperialism along with the effects of violence as a way of overcoming oppression and dissension, the novel also blends in the idea of nationalism which also functions as the novel’s central plot. Along with vestiges of World War II, the uprising and politics of the Mau Mau, intertribal and racial conflicts, the novel also reflects and represents the complex journey leading up to the birth of modern Kenya (Agho 44).

The novel describes the Mau Mau prising in Kenya and the tragic dispossession of an entire people from their ancestral land. The novel is divided in two parts, the first part focusing

on the education of the central character, Njoroge, and the second part focusing mainly on the uprising in Kenya and the ensuing turmoil. Njoroge lives with his family on the land of Jacobo, a “nouveau riche” African who has earned a lot through his dealings with white settlers, namely Mr. Howlands, who happens to be the most powerful land owner in the area.

As the first person to have formal western education, Njoroge stands out from his very traditional and conservative family thereby making him an important character in the book. Through Njoroge’s role as a round character, the reader is introduced into the life of his family. Njoroge used to have three brothers before World War II where one of his brothers Kori, lost his life. Kori’s death is shown to have an intense effect on the family especially on his other brother Boro who had also served in the war. While Njoroge goes to school, his other brother Kamau goes to the city where he is engaged in an apprenticeship with a carpenter. Their father Ngotho, who works as a peasant farmer for Mr Howlands, is broken by the loss and disability to reclaim his ancestral. Mr Howlands is a British farmer that has managed to acquire vast land and plantations and represents the British settler colony in Kenya.

When the conditions worsen for black workers in Kenya, a strike breaks out in demand for higher wages and better economic conditions. While the strike receives general support, a few people like Ngotho are skeptical about it. His concern mainly stems from his relationship with Mr. Howlands and the fear of losing his job. Despite all of this, Ngotho shows up at the demonstration, where white police forces bring Jacobo, an indigenous Kenyan who is a corroborator with the settlers at the expense of the rights of other black Kenyans.

Amid this crisis, the Mau-Mau movement is gradually picking up pace as a result of Jomo Kenyatta’s upcoming trial, Kenyatta here is symbolic as the representation of Kenya’s fight for independence. Larger protests ensue following the Jomo’s unsuccessful trial. Mr Howland and Jacobo are seen to forcibly suppress the activities of the Mau Mau movement,

which is a movement for economic emancipation, cultural and political independence of the Kenyan population. The book progresses with the characters losing hope, Njoroge especially. Towards the end, Jacobo is assassinated by some members of the Mau-Mau movement who are lateer revealed to be Njoroge’s brothers. It is also revealed that Boro is the leader of the Mau-Mau revolution.

## Guerilla Aesthetics of the Mau Mau Revolution

British administrative policies in Kenya during the colonial period played a major role in the rise of the Mau Mau movement. Therefore, a good understanding of the Mau Mau also requires an understanding of the condition in Kenya during the colonial period. When British occupation of Kenya was formalized, the threat that British imperial culture posed to traditional Kenyan values brought about racial, spiritual and cultural conflicts within the society (Iweriebor 78).

The Mau Mau uprising was a revolt against colonial rule in Kenya that took place between 1952-1960. It is largely considered to be the single most important event in Kenya’s history of independence from British colonial rule. The Kikuyu, Kenya’s largest ethnic group, were extensively economically marginalized as a result of white-settler expansion. They faced issues like the expulsion of Kikuyu tenants from farms, loss of land to white settlers, poverty and lack of true political representation which later led to the revolt. Although the uprising was mainly targeted towards the British colonial forces and the white settler communities, most of the violence took place between rebel and loyalist Africans. Because of that, the uprising often appeared as a civil war between the African population. While it was a civil war, it was also a war of independence (Allina-Pisano 192).

The revolution came in order to resist and oppose the power of the colonial class. The novel’s account of the Mau-Mau rebellion gives an insight on how politics affects social life in the way it changes family ties and what they stand for and the quest for and meaning of

freedom while dashing the hopes of young Kenyan in an atmosphere filled with despair. At the center of the Mau Mau rebellion was the desire for access to basic rights such as fair wages, equal social and economic opportunities, return of ownership to alienated Kikuyu and most importantly national self-determination of indigenous Kenyan populations (*Barrel of a Pen* 90). However, where resistance increased, the level of repression from the British colonial class increased as well.

Through the Kenyan Mau Mau Revolution, *Weep Not, Child* reveals the impact of colonial policies on pre-independent Kenya and the need to overthrow British imperial control especially in terms of land ownership and market policies in relation to the use of land. It also pays tribute to the moral courage and resilience of Kenyans to standing up against such hardship and suffering in the pursuit of freedom. This further shows the necessity for protest, conflict, and to some extent, mass revolution in the fight for freedom. The violent conflict in the novel, as stated earlier, stems from the establishment and consolidation of racial superiority as a result of British administrative policies which pose a threat to the traditional and cultural values of the landless marginalized Kikuyu population.

The web of conflict, as such, is presented in the novel through its characters such as Ngotho, a traditional African, to whom land is not simply a means for economic sustenance but also a connection to his ancestry, connection between the living and the dead, and Mr. Howlands, a European settler and a farmer, who proclaims that the user of the land is the rightful owner of the land. There is also Jacobo, a ‘loyalist African,’ who seems dedicated to thwarting all efforts of the rebellion and people’s quest to regain their land and their freedom, a character who symbolizes betrayal. The younger generation as seen in Boro, Kamau and, although a bit differently from his two brothers, Njoroge, also represents resistance. Boro and Kamau are shown towards the end of the novel as actively involved with the Mau Mau and its

operations while Njoroge sees Western education, rather than violence, as the tool towards ultimate liberation (*In the Name of the Mother* 36).

## Themes and Symbols Explored in Weep Not, Child

With Ngugi’s impeccable style, the characters are able to play their critical roles in raising awareness on the untold stories of Kenya’s struggle for independence. *Weep Not, Child* is highly judgmental of colonialism in that it deals with themes that are essential to dismantling the legacy of colonialism and achieving true political and social freedom. Despite the more apparent themes, including colonial resistance which is the focus of this research, the novel explores other themes that are relevant to the execution of the plot in a naturalistic way that allows deep critique of the colonial experience and the resistance towards it in Kenya.

In many ways, education as a theme in *Weep Not, Child* is brought to light through different characters. First, colonial (Western) education is distinguished from the informal education that one gains by the mere awareness of one’s environment. Here, Njoroge who is the first to go to school in his family and completely oblivious to the political tension around him is contrasted with his brothers Boro and Kamau who are not only aware of the situation around them but are also ready to confront, with resistance, the tides of colonial rule. The juxtaposition of these two perspectives implies that colonial (Western) education cannot compete with education acquired through continuous interaction with the world.

Ngugi’s socialist inclination is reflected in the novel by emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts and collective action of the community against colonial subjugation and as a way to reclaim their land. This, similar to the Marxist notion of class consciousness, brings the characters to the consciousness of their colonial reality, which serves as a precursor for the struggle and resistance embodied in the rebellion. It also illustrates how individuals and separate families came to be pulled together into forming new allegiances and rejecting previous loyalties within the bounds of existing traditional hierarchies and power structures.

Land, needless to say, is shown in the novel as the biggest issue that gives rise to the rebellion such that it functions both as a theme and a symbol. First, land shows colonial supremacy and power. When the Kikuyu were dispossessed of their land for the reason of white-settler expansion, it created life-threatening conditions for them given that land is a major factor of production. This left them at the mercy of the colonialists, further emphasizing the superiority of the colonialists. Second, the meaning is seen to have morphed through the execution of the plot in the sense that it stops being land in the literal sense and it begins to stand for the independence of the Kenyan people. Its essence from this viewpoint and as reflected through other themes reiterates the need for Kenyans to fight back for their land, such that the violence of the Mau Mau, though not entirely successful nor justified, seems necessary.

On the issue of land, Njeri, the wife of Ngotho, expresses the unfairness that resulted due to the expropriation of land “The white man makes a law or a rule. Through that rule or law... he takes away the land and then imposes many laws on the people concerning that land and many other things... Now a man rises and opposes that law... He is tried under those alien rules” (75). Land, as a result, forms an overarching connection among all the factors leading to the resistance of the Kenyans as seen with the Mau Mau rebellion.

## Conclusion

Ngugi’s fictional version of events and representation of the human condition given the political context gives not only a balanced view of the situation in colonial Kenya, but also the setback and challenges of Kenya and Kenyans. With the focal point of his early works including *Weep Not, Child* being political independence, all other ideals for Ngugi lose their essence when taken out of this context. While trying to maintain a detached stance, Ngugi’s approach to political freedom in *Weep Not, Child* necessitates acts of violence and protest in fighting back alien policies such as the socioeconomic and political policies of the colonial rule that affected native and cultural heritage.

## CHAPTER 4

**THEY NEITHER BURN NOR STOP CRYING**

## Introduction

**“**They Neither Burn Nor Stop Crying” because the continuously flowing tears of the weeping children extinguish the flames of the almost charred wood. Colonial resistance forms a large part of Africa’s colonial history. Its exploration sheds light on the factors that prompted it, sustained it and eventually transformed it to the liberation of the African people. This chapter will outline an in-depth analysis of the themes explored in previous chapters in order to achieve the main goals of this research, which is the understanding of the influence of the themes explored in both works on the African literary condition and also the social and economic context within which both works are situated and the extent to which they affect the writer’s stance and style. Essentially, this analysis will largely be of a comparative form whereby converging elements as they appear in both works will be subjectively analyzed.

## Between Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi wa Thiong’o

Most of African literature, similar to its history, has often been shaped by the unifying factor of colonialism, which has altered societies in almost every way imaginable. This peculiar condition of postcolonial societies then emphasizes the link between literature and society when Africans began to condemn the moral decadence of their societies and challenge the structure that sustains the repressive policies to which they are being subjected. Ultimately, this praxis went as far as to define the relevance to African writers through their struggle to foster sociopolitical and cultural revolution by literary means and efforts. Therefore, it can be seen that postcolonial African literature has grown through time and through various ways to become a writing of protest, militancy and social commentary among many other features while maintaining reasonable creativity,

and it is also for these reasons that Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi wa Thiong’o have continued to stay relevant even outside literary context.

Postcolonial literature is often associated with the need to alter history in a manner which is contrary to the colonizer’s description and depiction of African societies as predictable societies which exist in a timeless vacuum and are unable to progress without the colonial intervention – effectively understood as ‘interference,’ hence the resistance element of postcolonial literature. Sembene Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood* and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child* can easily be described as the models for social activism of revolutionary character in Africa, as both writers have artistically contributed to the resistance culture of postcolonial African literature. For writers, such as Sembène and Ngugi, postcolonial theory exists and functions beyond the praxis of postcolonial theory and extends into fields of ethnicity, cultural studies, history etc.

Furthermore, the carefully constructed representation of colonial resistance in *God’s Bits of Wood* and *Weep Not, Child* within the multiple folds of fact and fiction allows a more critical perspective on the social role of Sembene and Ngugi as authors, which reveals two ideas. First, both authors have assumed the role of historians within their own societies. This is based on the understanding that literature is socially significant in its reflection of society. With the Dakar-Niger strike and the Mau-Mau rebellion respectively taking the center stage in both novels, the whole narrative maintains its fictional essence and value while holding historical relevance for the Senegalese and Kenyan population and the collective independence movement of the African continent. Second, it reveals the unmistakable difference between the professional historian and the author as a historian. The historian as an expert and professional fundamentally records, reports, explains and analyses history in contextual relationship with current conditions. The author as a historian similarly explains and interprets history and then goes further to

reconstruct the past by exploring the deeper meanings of these historical events consequently creating something new.

There exists a universal cultural heritage between the aesthetics of Sembene and Ngugi in terms of the cultural freedom and its assertion through the use of language. Early on in *God’s Bits of Wood*, the notion of cultural freedom is put forth in the little exchange between Niakoro and Adjibidji that reflects a language conflict. Niakoro laments while talking to Adjibidji

If I call you I am told not to disturb you- and why? Because you are learning the white man’s language… Among my people, who are your father’s people too, no one speaks the white man’s language, and no one has died of it! Ever since I was born – and God knows that was a long ago – I have never heard of a white man who had learned to speak Bambara, or any other language of this country. But you rootless people think only of learning his, while our language dies (p.4)

Bakayoko, the leader of the strike, caught in a similar encounter during one of the negotiations says to the French delegates “Since your ignorance of our language is a handicap for you, we will use French as a matter of courtesy (p.181)” further adding that the courtesy of which he speaks “will not last forever.” Both instances show a manner of expressing their quest for cultural freedom through asserting the equality of African and French languages and consequently, African and French humanity. In the same way, *Weep Not, Child* promotes cultural freedom through Ngugi’s writing style that is essentially foregrounded in the Kikuyu culture and values. As a strong critic of imperialism, Ngugi advocate for a radical approach towards decolonization, which includes a return to pre-colonial and indigenous languages. Beyond the novel *Weep Not, Child,* Ngugi’s writing can be said to reside at the pinnacle of imperial and colonial criticism where language becomes his concern in so many ways. Generally, language has

been an issue of contention when it comes to African literature such that there is an unending debate on what should be spoken in the literary piece by the characters and what the piece itself should be written in (Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind* 34). When it comes to Sembene, the issue was tied to reaching a wider audience, an African audience in particular, outside of literature while taking the language debate into consideration, hence his decision to venture in to filmmaking and continuously bridging the gap between literature and cinema. For Ngugi, the language debate focuses on the wider picture of decolonization of which he is quite vocal in his subsequent works especially *Decolonising the Mind* where he continues to write about the conflict that exists at the cleavage of two competing cultures and its effect on the individual and the community eventually (p. 65). In *Weep Not, Child* Njoroge becomes the embodiment of this conflict. While being overly conscious of the fact that he is among the first of his family to have access to Western education generally understood as a power source, Njoroge as a product of conventional upbringing is almost all through the book to struggle with their Western values he is exposed to through education.

The ability to construct through fiction the histories of Senegal and Kenya and their struggle for independence remains a remarkable achievement for Sembene and Ngugi. Both resistance movements reflected in the novels, despite being unsuccessful in the story but functional in the larger context of independence, play a major role in the fight for freedom and liberation from colonial rule in both countries. Some of the failure and causes of lack of success can be seen in the complacency of some Africans and their willingness to maintain the status quo, which were seamlessly characterized in El Hadji Mabigue and Jacobo. Substantively, a deeper analysis of these characters reveals them as proponents of colonial imperialism that allow for further entrenchment of colonial policies that have led to the current condition of the people as seen in the novels. Both

characters are seen as parallel to each other in the sense that they stifle the efforts of the people as they are fighting for their rights. In fact, this continues to play a larger role beyond the actions of these two characters as it is reflected in the other characters. The narrator in *God’s Bits of Wood* shows a moment of awareness for Houdia M’Baye and the reader as well “Suddenly Houdia M’Baye recalled the tone of Ramatoulaye’s voice when she said Real misfortune is not just a matter of being hungry and thirsty; it is a matter of knowing that there are people who want you to be hungry and thirsty” (p.54). Similarly, Kamau reflects bitterly as he speaks to Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child*

Blackness is not all that makes a man ... There are some people, be they black or white, who don't want others to rise above them… It is the same with rich people. A rich man does not want others to get rich because he wants to be the only man with wealth ... Some Europeans are better than Africans ... That's why you at times hear father say that he would rather work for a white man. A white man is a white man. But a black man trying to be a white man is bad and harsh. (p. 22).

Generally speaking in terms of both works, the actions of Africans that conformed to the ‘colonial way of life’ were unfavorable to the resistance movements and it is within such behavior that the biggest threat to the strike and rebellion can be understood.

Fundamentally, both novels can be seen to function intrinsically as dramatic ironies in terms of the actions of some characters towards the strike and the rebellion. With situational ironies, the outcome significantly differs from general expectations. Therefore, what appears to function as a situational irony in *God’s Bits of Wood* is El Hadji Mabigue’s corroboration with the French colonialists along with others like Diarra and Beaugosse. Ideally, one would assume that an African with a favorable relationship with the French people could intercede on behalf of the locals. Comparatively, the same is the case with Jacobo in *Weep Not, Child*. As the plot is gradually revealed, the reader is

brought to see that such characters do not only operate against the community of strikers but also effectively reveal the harshness of the conditions to which such people were subjected. Situational ironies function to implicitly discern literal meaning from surface meaning such that the apparent contradiction is true only in appearance while the obscure meaning turns out to be the reality. This means that Jacobo and El Hadji Mabigue are basically African only in form but not in substance.

The idea of community and the notion of class struggle surfaces somewhat subtly as a unifying factor between the two works and the authors. The concept of community which loosely translates as class struggle is evident in the fact that the central focus in both works is the working-class people, maybe not so much so evidently in *Weep Not, Child*. However, this may be seen to function in the larger context of the alienation faced by the common people such as the land policies. Furthermore, Ngugi and Sembene through their woks can be seen as exhibiting anti-bourgeoisie sentiments as a result of the highly revolutionary character that is present in their aesthetic representation of colonial resistance (Dick 172). Bakayoko, for so many reasons through *God’s Bits of Wood*, expresses what can be considered as a new consciousness with heavy undertones of economic freedom for the marginalized and exploited people. Similarly, the youth in *Weep Not, Child* while being categorically alienated/forgotten and being the victims of most of the oddities of colonialism at the time, represent hope for the nation; a hope for a reverse wave against the harsh colonial policies.

The similarities between Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi wa Thiong’o cannot be overemphasized. However, within the same elements that shape their narrative techniques and writing styles lies the glaring contrasting factor. Exceeding the dependence of both novels on postcolonial framework, the correlating factors of colonization and decolonization, and the attentive reconstruction of history to resemble fiction, Sembene

appears to be more forthcoming to the Modernist literary perspective than Ngugi. With *God’s Bits of Wood*, Sembene puts forth a story that is not shaped based on an individual but by the sweeping effects of the strike on colonial West Africa. For this reason, *God’s Bits of Wood* is often compared to Emile Zola’s *Germinal*, an experimental novel of highly naturalistic character based on the Anzin Strike of 1884. Through the descriptive detail in *God’s Bits of Wood* and its inevitable similarity to Zola’s *Germinal*, Sembene reveals a modernistic method of writing that incorporates European literary tradition (Haricharan 30). Distinctively, Ngugi deflected the threat to traditional culture and values that was posed by the European culture and consequently became a source of spiritual, cultural and racial conflict. Unlike Sembene’s naturalistic approach in which the narrator is detached from the action, Ngugi renders his characters’ emotional actions and reactions to reach out to the external world.

The historically-rich character of *God’s Bits of Wood* and *Weep Not, Child* gives the reader a reason to want to delve into the dynamics of fictionalized versions of colonial resistance. However, what keeps the reader going in most cases is the genius with which the events are put together to form a coherent narrative. With the use of literary devices that add to the originality of both works, *God’s Bits of Wood* and *Weep Not, Child* effortlessly reach out to and engage their audiences. The relevance of literary devices to a literary work cannot be overstated given that the ultimate meaning of a literary piece is subject to its application of literary devices. While various literary devices can be stumbled upon across in both works, the main focus will be on the paradox of ‘oral

literature’ that is ever present in the African literary tradition and is unescapable given the prehistorical existence of songs, poems, fables etc. The oral literary tradition manifests itself in culturally influenced literatures such as *God’s Bits of Wood* and *Weep Not, Child* through proverbs, folktales, myth, songs etc. For these two authors, Sembene and Ngugi,

literature was not just a form of protest or social activism but also a means of promoting African culture and values (Nazareth 251).

In terms of characterization the central characters hold a role so powerful and important that they seem imbued with a wave of literary elements that put forth the narrative. The central characters are defined as the characters that are essential and instrumental to the resistance movement; Bakayoko in *God’s Bits Wood*, and Jomo, though behind the scenes and merely alluded to, in *Weep Not, Child.* Bakayoko is mentioned all through the story but only makes an appearance towards the end; though he is believed to be the ‘heart and soul’ of the strike, he seems to be mainstream when he is finally revealed to the reader and somewhat more powerful when he was out of sight.

However, this does not deter his zeal to lead the union. Jomo, on the other hand, is an expository character as he is discussed only by other characters and does not have a visible role in the plot. Regardless of this stark contrast, both characters stand to symbolize, to an allegorical extent, the liberation of the indigenous people. More so, they both represent a source of confidence and inspiration for the indigenous people in terms of their colonial resistance. Therefore, it can be concluded that the two characters allude to the forthcoming independence of both Kenya and Senegal.

## Conclusion

The role of social commentary that has been adopted by literary artists and intellectuals and conveyed through literature, both fictional and nonfictional, contributes significantly to the continuous discourse on colonialism. Within the postcolonial theory of literature, this paradigm serves its purpose of reclaiming and recreating cultural spaces while rewriting an underwritten history of rich cultures and people across the continent. This therefore gives literature the power to keep historically relevant events within a timeless and enduring space. Furthermore, the growing relevance of literature in the wake

of African nationalism came a long way for the national self-determination of colonized African populations. This paved the way for literature to effectively become a tool of resistance, revolution and protest. Additionally, this meant that African literature in particular needs to be understood within the social and economic factors that shape it.

Both Sembène Ousmane and Ngugi wa Thiong’o are seen to have been shaped by the socioeconomic contexts around which their works have been situated. Additionally, they have adopted resistance element that is covered in postcolonial theory. The resistance to colonialism that is reflected in both works reveals underlying feelings, efforts and factors that have prompted and sustained resistance movements and eventually the independence movements across the continent – with the most recurring and converging factors as education and the role of cultural heritage. While posing a conflict when it comes to balancing values, it is also important when it comes to addressing the reality of the overall condition of former colonized nations.

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