

The Moot Issue of Crime and Deterrence in *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

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Abstract: Elaborated on an otherization-based attitude, this article fends off the gloomy and shaky curtain of a reciprocal hate to spotlight the pang and travail which, indeed, turn the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized into a pugilistic day by day set-to. In his main right stuff to wedge apart the indigenous' in-groupness spirit, the strangers from afar shake asunder the Canvas that fuel and abet the villagers' topmost grit and mettle to stand against a bleak and threadbare existence. This being, the thought process browses through the abstruse questions of crime and guilt in a reference frame of colonization in Kenya and Nigeria. Likewise, the blueprint of poetic justice sounds like a clear-cut voice that meets justice in the name and by dint of a people's cohesiveness and one-ness.

Keywords: colonization, struggle, violence, crime, deterrence, justice.

INTRODUCTION

Going back over to the period of Emergency which stands as one of the most testing ages of turbulence in the colonial history of Kenya and Nigeria, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe spotlight the weaknesses of a drop-out local community. In their perpetual quest for a society based on the goodwill of a communal life, the Kenyan and Nigerian writers make a study of the individual wedged in the dangerous ploy of individualism. In so being, Ngugi shows a great gist of his responsibility which he means to take on in his capacity as a "master, a messiah, and a messenger" [1].

In the intended history-reconstruction project, the Kenyan novelist targets to sift and boot the wrong weed out of the good sowing in the Kenyan field of hope and enlightenment. His *élan* will be shared by Chinua Achebe who, through his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, writes back to deconstruct an idea according to which Africa was in a *heart of darkness* before the arrival of colonizers. The Nigerian thinker dedicates his work to the heartfelt political, social and cultural impediments that gangrene the local community's walk toward freedom.

Both authors raise then the problematic of crime and deterrence in contexts of nip and tuck violence in countries where the destiny of the indigenous is expected to be a heluva lot of destitution. Figureheads among African men of letters, Ngugi and Achebe lay bare the different goals of criminal punishment among which one can mention deterrence, retribution, and restraint.

Deterrence is the prevention of crime. There are two types of deterrence: specific and general.

Specific deterrence "refers to the preventive effect of a specific punishment imposed upon a guilty person to deter him or her from future crimes [2]." General deterrence is intended to any person who contemplates committing a crime. It "describes the effect that punishment has when it serves as a public example or threat that deters people other than the initial offender from committing similar crime [2]."

In this work, it will be of primary interest to pinpoint political measures that act as deterrent and political identities protagonists bear to defend the standpoints that give ground to their death penalty in the above mentioned novels. Hence a strong analysis on poetic justice which, indeed, finds ground on a collective pointy *raisons d'être*.

Crime and sentence

In the American Encyclopedic Dictionary, the word sentence boils down to "a decision of what punishment is to be inflicted on a convicted person [3]. It is a chastisement which is felt by the guilty individual

as something painful, a suffering and prevention, a sensitive bother.

Being to the point of mankind's history and civilization, sentence has always been viewed as a means of punishment which helps to cast down criminal act, establish equality between men, and create a society that jibe with harmony and mutual respect. However, with the advent of colonization in Kenya, the British resorted to criminal punishment which aimed at different goals whose main concern remained the domination of the white colonizer over the oppressed indigenous.

Handled and carried on by the colonial authorities in Kenya, corporal punishment in *A Grain of Wheat*, carries out a deterrent function. To get information from the Mau Mau fighters or make them own up their oaths, the colonial police resort to corporal castigation on suspected freedom fighters in their villages, and custodial camps. *Hola* is one of these camps where violence enshrines as official policy to chicken out the stouthearted resistance. Its administrator, Mr Cowan, outlines a scheme to make the hardcore detainee in the camp be in compliance with colonial authority. His first step in the process of ill-treatment is to get the prisoners obey work order. Cowan explains that should the inmates not immediately "proved amenable to work then, they should be – in the phrase – manhandled" [4]. John Maina Kahiku - a former detainees in *Hola* camp - speaking quite with dignity, describes what happens on March 1959 to 85 convicts:

We refused to do this work. We were fighting for freedom. We were not slaves. There were two hundred guards. One hundred seventy stood around us machine guns. Thirty guards were inside the trench with us. The Whiteman in charge blew his whistle and the guards started beating us. They beat us from 8 am to 11: 30. They were beating us like dogs. I was covered by the other bodies. Just my arms and legs were exposed. I was very lucky to survive. But the others were still beaten. There were no escapes for them. 11 men lay dead and 60 were seriously injured [4].

Those horrendous treatments, strongly uplifted in *A Grain of Wheat*, turn the combatant's lives into a pugilistic day after day exercise. Robson and Thompson, two colonial administrators, believe that corporal chastisement legs them up to dampen a repetition of infraction by guilty victims. They martyr freedom fighters to frighten and snide them out of the idea of opposing a might and main resistance to the colonial system: "eliminate the vermin, he would grin his teeth at night. He set the white officers and warders on them. Yes eliminate the vermin [5]". Once

imprisoned, the forest fighters are tortured into a nail-biting agony and dispirited on to the edge of confession and abdication. This fictionalized practice finds evidence in John Nottingham – a district officer in the colonial service from 1952 to 1961. He plainly explains:

The way that it found was that if you beat them [forest fighters] up enough they would confess an oath. So what you do is beat them up and then you give them a bit of paper and a piece of blunt pencil and say, confess! I took it I took it! You are now a human being [4].

On the same note, in *Things Fall Apart*, following the example of the local civilian populations of Reng'ei and Thabai in *A Grain of Wheat*, residents of Abame village, who are all attention about the White colonizer's presence, refuse to be bludgeoned into submissiveness. Their village is the right nook where they, by might, express their inner freedom and roots of peaceful balance. Being well connected to traditional values and steeped in a proud history, Abame hamlet is inhabited by a value-driven community who raise the social religious vector, whereby they safeguard their guiding principle of commonness and in-groupness. However, in crossing the inner nooks and corners of the village, the White conqueror stretches the villagers' patience to limit. The latter take a strong stand to expurgate and stop dead the invaders' progress. Thereby, they find convenient to send out a strong alarm signal to the intruders. Put off for life by the gaucheness of the stranger's presence in their territory, the country-dwellers of Abame reserve a tragic fate to the "man who was riding an iron horse" [6]; for they find it respectful to abide by the oracle's recommendation that gives the go-ahead of the killing of the white invader:

The elders consulted their oracle and it told them that the man would break their clan and spread destruction among them [...] so they killed the white man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree [6].

This specific deterrent on the white harbinger does not, however, lead to a general deterrent on the intruders. Like the freedom fighters in *A Grain of Wheat* who manage to punish out the colonizer, the Abame villagers yank at the stranger to prevent him from putting "a knife on the things that held [them] together [6]". They killed those who threaten the common sense of belonging to a social togetherness. Hence the legitimacy of their use of force.

Parallel to Abame villagers, but a far cry from them in their objective and the way they precede, colonizers in Thabai and Reng'ei put on display their prime concern to keep themselves first in position. In the name of legality, Nottingham, and Thompson,

indeed, regard the detainees' confessions as a cleansing act, a return to a normal and legal life. At word's points, Thomson, with a bone-crunching attitude, plays to flatten detainees into renouncing the oath they have taken. He then resorts to brutality to achieve specific deterrence and therefore rehabilitate the "Mau Mau adherents to a normal life [12]".

D. O Robson's and D. O Thompson's deliberate will to harm, results in what Hannah Arendt regards as "the triteness of evil [7]". Killing a recognized Mau Mau becomes an ordinary spectacle which testifies the inordinate violence used by the oppressors. The latter call on public hanging to achieve general deterrence. Indeed, considered to be a correlate of justice, public execution is to demoralize the Mau Mau backers and thwart, at the same time, the revolutionary trend. *De facto*, the hanging of Kihika on a tree located in a market place is a warning and terrorizing message to all the insurgents in Reng'ei and Thabai.

Kihika was hanged in public, one Sunday at Reng'ei Market, not far from where he had once stood calling for blood to rain on and water the tree of freedom. A combined force of homeguards and police whipped and drove people from Thabai and other ridges to see the body of the rebel dangling on the tree, and learn [12].

The chastisement of the forest fighters' leader demeans some combatants' ardour, affects their sense of patriotism, and self-sacrifice. Actually, the exposition of Kihika's body is, to a certain extent, one of the reasons why Karanja goes over to the occupier. The narrator reveals:

He [Karanja] had gone to see Kihika hang from a tree. He had searched his heart for one has pity or sorrow for a lost friend. Instead, he found only disgust; the body was hideous; the dry lips over which a few flies played were ugly. What is freedom? Karanja had asked himself. Was death like that freedom? [...]. Soon after he confessed the oath and joined the homeguards to save his own life [12].

If emergency, because of its tragic consequences, has sadly marked the colonial history of Kenya, the tactic of total slaughter remains a distressing serial in the recent past of Nigeria. The forms of sentences with their goals constitute a privileged resonance chamber in the anti-colonization literature. Achebe, who seems to share Dollé's opinion according to which "one cannot achieve good literature with good sentiments[8]", has, in *Things Fall Apart*, depicted, without state of mind, the capacity of brutality the colonial regime shows, calling on retribution 'to do justice'.

Given that violence breeds violence, the colonizers who aim at waning in death any of revolution will lengthwise and crosswise, backfire in a ghoulis way to clear their names and proceed to a complete reversal of the situation. The villagers' sentence expressed against the harbinger doesn't have a major deterrent against the White men's ambition. They stage-manage a plan of vengeance and beyond reprisal objectives, to deter behavior that may stifle the colonial process. Abame is to be set as an example of brutal and iniquitous repression:

That was the day it happened. The three white men and a very large number of other men surrounded the market. They must have used a powerful medicine to make themselves invisible until the market was full. And they began to shoot. Everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home and a handful of men and women whose chi were wide awake and brought them out of that market [6].

This tragedy has a strong effect on the Umuofia's communities. The latter are afraid of going through the same fate experienced by Abame people. They want to play it soft with the intruder. Obierika who tries to convenience his fellow, Okonkwo, to redeem his hostile position toward white invaders, speaks this way "have you not heard how the white man wiped out Abame[6]?". Fear is then instilled throughout other villages and the white man's killing medicine proves to be efficient when it comes to shaping a deterrent mind set among indigenous people. Like Robson and Thompson in *A Grain of Wheat*, Whites colonizers in *Things Fall Apart* focus on the task at hand to ensure that this will not happen again.

In portraying legal violence as a form of sentence, Ngugi, and Achebe, on the one hand, describe the colonizer's cynicism, and on the other, the failure of the official policy of ruckus before the autochthons' heroic rebuff of alienation. If the public hanging of Kihika scares some guerrillas into betrayal, it does not, all the same, put to rout the anti-colonial struggle which, in Achebe's, culminates to the advent of a *cultural hero*.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe takes an opposite view and introduces a "cultural heroic voice" in the character of Okonkwo. In deconstructing and reconstructing African History at large, the Nigerian writer targets to stand for his population's ability to shape a nation that finds ground on issues related to traditional roots. He makes allegiance to his community's custom and remains in close contact with authentic cultural practices and social codes. To protect the "central tenets of Igbo life [and] live up to their original or pure intention [6]", Okonkwo surges into an extremist stand as for the ideal application of Igbo law

and cultural indications. Like Kihika, he brushes aside any idea based on compromise. The ideology he drives at and defends with tooth and claw is shaped into the cultural mainstream of the Igbo-land. Close to Kihika's assertiveness, Unoka's son aversion to the new faith to the new faith breaks through the limits of his society's standards to bear the hallmark of a political and cultural diehard

When Umuofia is invaded by colonizers, Okonkwo, as *a man of action*, fiercely rises against the foreigner's presence and advocates a war-like resistance: "when the old gods are desecrated [...] Okonkwo insists on violent action to punish the transgressors [6]". He stands for both specific and general deterrent so as to dishearten the intruder to ambition a further step in his conquest. His strong commitment to the protection of laws and regulations will bring him to take hand in the killing of some white intruders. As Kihika, in *A Grain of Wheat*, is being crossed out to set an example to others, Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*, ventures an opinion according to which the Whites are to be wiped out of Mbanta, Umuofia and Abame:

I have also heard that Abame people were weak and foolish. And did they not fight back? Had they no guns and machetes? We would be coward to compare ourselves with men of Abame [...] we must fight these men and drive them out of the land [6].

On equal basis with Kihika, Okonkwo calls for a common reaction to save a common property: heathen gods, and customary legacy. He rejects Mbanta weakness and shoulders the mandatory duty to kill in the name of cultural identities. In so doing, Okonkwo wedges out a strong deterrent means to cast off, one in a while, Umuofia's people's *pietà*.

In both novels criminal punishment drives at deterring, restraining, incapacitating, and offsetting, among the local communities, those who are believed to be unlawful and dangerous individuals for the Whiteman's interests. Their plans of rebellion are wrecked, and their dignities scorned.

In the Name of a Harambee spirit: Poetic Justice

Defined as being the writer's unforeseen solution which consists in drawing the attention of the reader by a fatal punishment of one of his or her characters, poetic Justice, in *A Grain of Wheat*, is a reflection of a writer's vision rooted in a socialist philosophy. In reality, it is in the difficult context of colonial resistance that Ngugi lays bare a character's drama of existence, Mugo, who makes sacred his personal liberty to the detriment of the well-being of his society. Ngugi rejects this egotist mind and proposes to "sweep the room [for] dirt can so quickly collect in a

clean hut! [12]"; which collective-minded initiative will enable the emergence of a more lightened society in Kenya. As for Achebe, he sheds light on an individual who, for having worked himself out to unhook the title of nobility in his society, lives in the appropriateness of wealth.

However, in his objective to achieve his life-long dream to engender himself, Okonkwo distances his manners away from the bulk of the Igbo identity. He is then to be vented out of the cultural mainstream of his community.

In his ardent call for a united and cohesive society, Ngugi creates a tension which opposes the individualist and the group. On the resolution of this tension depends, to a certain extent, the social framework in which the black community of Thabai will evolve. To avoid the alienation of the salutary dimension of communal life, the Kenyan writer extirpates the most striking selfish side of his society, sharing at once Peter Abraham's view, which appears in these words: "Anybody not an 'insider' [of a group] is an enemy, actually or potentially – someone to distrust, someone to fear, someone to keep at bay[9]". Since Mugo privileges his personal happiness, he cannot escape the tragic consequences of his attitude which brings him into the uncomfortable position of an unwanted betrayer, deserving no place in 'his' society. Through his death, Ngugi joins Tom Mboya who argues: "Most African tribes have a communal approach to life. A person is an individual only to the extent that he is a member of a clan, a community or a family [10]".

Mugo's incapacity to display an affective fraternity towards his surrounding world disqualifies and labels him a bearer of evil. His strong need to "live [his] life [and never] involved in anything [12]" is hindered by the impassable network of interpersonal relations among Kenyans who are imbued with a certain altruism, a reciprocal sacrifice. His failure to live a solitary life and his tragic end recall K.A Busia who says: "The African view of man in general lays more emphasis on his membership of a group than on his individuality [11]." The expression of the lonely man's individualism is a permanent threat for his community. Mugo fails to understand that the achievement of the being is only possible in the framework of the communitarian solidarity. Ngugi presents him as a stranger whose existence in the newly independent Kenya leaves much to be desired. Therefore he "has to die. Ngugi suggests no other alternatives [5]."

As for Achebe, he lays naked 'a sad story' that culminates to the death of a 'cultural hero'. This tragic death found by Okonkwo is warranted by different purposes. Okonkwo's principle which consists in

regarding farming as a means of climbing the social ladder and then building up a personal social standing is not a genuine solution to liberate himself from a skewed system. His philosophy of life based on self-reliance and self-esteem attitude logically leads to an unhappy ending. In a community rusted by the will of power and material possession, selfishness and disunity become real bottlenecks for the weak, and the have-nots. If Mugo's punishment is due to his sidelining from his community's preoccupations, Okonkwo's distancing from his people is a direct result of his option that consists in centering himself in the ins and outs of his community with an extremist slant. Okonkwo kills, goes to war, rebukes his wives, gives tough rides to sons and daughters, assassinates tribal rivals and other intruders to show up his rootedness in his traditional faith: "he is too faithful to the collective mythology and his interpretation of ideological codes is too lateral[6]." Therefore, his understanding of commonness is wronged by his blind engagement in the use of extreme brutality to sort out social predicaments his precinct comes across with.

Indeed, while Mugo walks the night of selfishness, Okonkwo merges in the shadow of xenophobia. He considers white men's values as being exotic ones and therefore values to be suppressed with the extermination of their bearers. His stand as a public hero gives him no margin to embrace the notion of otherness. Okonkwo's identity is rooted in a unique approach that cannot but lead him to a self-destruction. He is not, indeed, aware that "the mirror that reflects their values also conceals what is unseen and unspoken [6]". Uchendu clear cuts this point when he further asserts that: "the word has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others [6]".

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Mugo looks himself in the mirror of his society and admits his fault. He then denounces his own misdeed so as to go through the justice of the Kiama. As for Okonkwo, he refuses to shatter down the mirror of his ideology to ease his approach on cultural appliance and openness. He therefore surges in "repression desire and reversal" before killing himself for not having any longer a margin to let his cultural expression browse throughout Umuofia.

CONCLUSION

At long last, it definitely appears that Ngugi and Achebe, through the aforementioned works, have, point-blank, condemned deterrent violence, extremism and individualism in colonial African societies. Through haw-eyed observations, they ward off evil and gloss over societal flaws in their communities, giving them impetus to bounce back from the hole of disunity and communitarism they enclose themselves. In so doing, they mouth off the political colonial system

bereft of reason and the gaucheness of some societal pitfalls that distance away African from riding the crest of the wave of commonness and togetherness; nonetheless the racial and ethnic disparity that portray the period of cultural clash between the West and Africa.

This purificatory vision is not a simple theoretical view. It is a vision of committed writers concerned with the necessity, the unavailability of salutary relations between the individual and his or her circumferential world. Actually, through poetic justice, Ngugi shows an act of faith in the unity, the cohesion of the Kenyan people whose 'regeneration' must be safeguarded, purified from any blemish that can compromise "the real harambee spirit [12]", the sense of self-help and self-sacrifice which are indispensable levers for a harmonious life in any community. The interdependence of personal and social relations he advocates in this novel calls his attention in one of his literary works through which he confirms that: "the community serves the individual. And the individual finds the fullest development of his personality when he is working in and for the community as a whole [12, 13]".

Ngugi endeavors to show that individualism provides neither happiness nor rejoicing. It merely ends up in irreversible deceptions. As for Achebe, he, in *Things Fall Apart*, highlights, the consequences of cultural extremism which can culminate in a categorical rejection of otherness and togetherness. He defends the idea of a cultural identity that has to be inclusive enough to wipe out animosity and the misunderstanding among men and women who drive at living and evolving in a limited territory.

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