

**Human Relationship, a *Sine Quo Non* of Africans to Surmount
Western Influence: A Reading of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's
*Wrestling with the Devil : A Prison Memoir***

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Abstract:

The power of resilience in the community of Africa is closely inter-knitted with individual's power of resilience. Human relationship is an alliance through which African society can conquer the influence of Western dominance. The memoir, *Wrestling with the Devil* serves well to expose the passionate diligence of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o to convey the fact that progress of Africans depends on human relationship, which is a *sine quo non* of Africans in the conflict of western influence. Occidents gain power over orients by utilizing the division among orients in ethnic and religious lines. Ngũgĩ 's depiction of the tragic end of the African rebellions in the memoir substantiates the occidents power over orients. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 's *Wrestling with the Devil* depicts the challenges that he has faced while writing a novel under the twenty-four-hour surveillance in the Kamiti prison. The study aims to expose the necessity of human relationship or unity among Africans to conquer the western influence which damages the country.

Keywords: Human relationship, Western influence, resilience, unity

Wrestling with the Devil is a powerful prison memoir written by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. He begins the work half an hour before his release from the prison on 12 December 1978. The memoir refabricates his existence under twenty-four-hour surveillance in the Kamiti Maximum Security Prison. He also secretly wrote a novel, *Devil on the Cross*, on hoarded toilet paper during his stay in the prison. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's memoir is a thought-provoking account of Kenyan history. One of the significant points Ngũgĩ wishes to emphasize to his people is that human relationship is the sine qua non of Africans to overcome the western influence. Imperialism always wins, when the victims are divided on ethnic and religious lines. He says that a disunited Africa only helps Western Imperialism and the enemies of African progress.

Ngũgĩ communicates the necessity of human relationship among Africans and also portrays how imperialism strengthens its arms by dividing people of Africa through depicting the various incidents happened in Kenya during his stay in the prison. In prison, he used to listen carefully the day-to day life in Kenya which is spelled by the new prisoners and other political prisoners. He illustrates the idea of unity through the lives of many African rebellions and their sacrifice.

Mekatilili wa Menza, leader of Giriama people's resistance to British rule from 1913 to 1914, is one of the inspirations for Ngũgĩ's fictional character Warringa in the novel, *Devil on the Cross* which he wrote during his stay in the prison. She was arrested in the year 1913 and exiled from her home area. She voices to preserve the African tradition which is spoiled under the western influence. Through her life, one can see the gender inequality is the dividing line which makes her helpless in her effort to unite Africa. Most of the men in Giriama society are not ready to take the woman, charismatic leader, Mekatililiwa Menza as their leader. So, she used to convey the ideas by dancing Kifudu, one of the traditional dances of Giriama. It helps her to convince men of her society to consider her as leader. Ngũgĩ states Mekatilili's oath was, "unify clans"(80)

There is no proper evidence for Mekatilili wa Menza's death. Giriama people gradually starts to forget her as well as her sacrifice for the society. Joseph Mwarandu, Giriama lawyer founded Malindi District Cultural Association in the year 2003 and the association used to conduct Mekatilili wa Menza Cultural festival once in a year. The main aim of the festival is to emphasize unity among Africans against imperial power and destruction of their tradition.

Jomo Kenyatta, the first Prime Minister and the first president of Independent Kenya joined hands together with the presidents of Ghana, Congo, Tanzania and Senegal to spread Pan-

Africanism which blossoms political unity of Africa. Pan-Africanism is a worldwide movement that encourages solidarity between all indigenous ethnic groups of African descent.

Kenyatta in his childhood admired Western culture. Later on, he realizes the value of his own culture and tradition. He joined in the first African political protest movement in Kenya. As a result of his position as the general secretary of Kikuyu Central Association, he has to lose his municipal job. Kenya launched a monthly Kikuyu language newspaper called *Mwigithania* in the year 1978. Kenya helped organize the fifth Pan-African Congress, which met in Manchester, England with W.E.B. Du Bois of the United States in the chair. Kwame Nkrumah, the future leader of Ghana, was also present. Resolutions were passed and plans discussed for mass nationalist movements to demand independence from colonial rule.

Kenyatta's original name is Kamau Ngengi. He changed his name after he joined in the African political protest movement as Kemyatta. Ngũgĩ describes the necessity of Unity among Africans by giving the words of Kenya as:

He was then truly a spokesman of the peasants and workers, and he took up the cause of the peasants of the various nationalities in Kenya: Wakamba, Abaluhya, Dholuo, Gikuyu, Giriama, Maasai, the lot. He articulated the need and necessity for a revolutionary unity of peasants and workers of Kenya to overthrow British imperialism. (227-28)

Kenyatta's Pan-Africanism movement emphasizes unity among clans whereas the apartheid which is implemented in Africa possessing the indirect western influence, encourages partition among clans. Many Kenyans do not bear the thought of Kenya without Kenya. Kenya is betrayed by his own people and died because of no proper medical attention to rescue him.

Ngũgĩ records the African people's view on these two movements while he is surviving in Kamiti prison. Ngũgĩ's depiction of Kenya in the memoir makes the people to understand human relationship is the necessity to overcome western influence.

Ngũgĩ picturizes the disunity among African people through his portrayal of Kimathi and his Kenya Land and Freedom Army. Kimathi was the spiritual leader of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army. Ngũgĩ depicts Kimathi's shock on betrayal happened in his life by his own people in his play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Kimathi is celebrated by his people as an anti-colonialist

hero. After his death, Kenyan people came to know that. He was betrayed even by his own brother. Ngũgĩ writes that the great leader realizes later that unity is essential among his people to attain the goal of liberty. Ngũgĩ writes, “What is fascinating how quickly the needs of the struggle compelled such leaders to see the imperative of greater unity among the various nationalities” (80).

The Kenya Land and Freedom Army made the ordinary carpenters, plumbers and bicycle repairers into people who could handle the weapons skillfully. Finally, Kimathi thinks whether his efforts succeed on seeing the betrayal of his own people. Ngũgĩ satirizes the betrayal happened to Kimathi in his play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Kimathi refers all the European collaborators take part in this betrayal as traitors:

You ... traitors to your people ...
 sellers of your own people ... For what?
 Your own stomachs. A seat at the master's
 table. A bank account. A partnership in
 business ... Our people will never forget you, fat traitors. (57 -58)

The western power utilizes fear and greed as their weapon to inculcate segregation among Africans. Kimathi was sentenced to death and hanged cruelly. The imperialists sadistically killed the rebellion leaders and politicians who support the freedom struggle of Africans in order to invest fear as weapon to succeed in their goal. Ngũgĩ says whenever he thinks of the brutal atmosphere of Kamiti prison, it haunts him. He says that the culture of fear discovered by imperialists, “hovered over us, its shadow looming larger and larger on our consciousness as days and nights rolled away without discernible end to our sufferings” (77).

Apartheid is another indirect weapon of western power implemented to create division among the African people. Apartheid was the range of laws implemented by the National Party that placed detailed restrictions on the behaviour of the different races in the country. Ngũgĩ satirizes this law through his depiction of a robber character, who longs for a world in which the wealthy few alone gain immortality by buying organs sold by him and leaves death, the property of the poor. The robber character is created by Ngũgĩ in his work *Devil on the cross*. The depiction of this robber character is led by the tit bit news he hears during his stay in Kamiti

prison about the heart surgeon Barnard whose apartheid views promulgated among the public during the period.

Ngũgĩ portrays the tragic end of Kofi Awoonor while he sees his picture in the *Newsweek* magazine. Kofi Awoonor is a Ghanaian poet and author and also Ghana's permanent representative of United Nations who headed committee against apartheid. He was shot down brutally at the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi. He meets this tragic end only because he writes the things which "are not right" (201) according to the imperialists.

Ngũgĩ records many bitter memories of African rebellions who fought for the liberty of Africa in his memoir. Ngũgĩ firmly emphasizes the necessity of unity among African clans as well as he accounts the disunity of Africa. Ngũgĩ also clearly depicts the culture of silence and fear implemented by imperialist to divide the people of Africa.

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