Weep Not, Child

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O

Born in central Kenya in the late 1930s, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o belonged to a family that suffered as a result of the conflict between British colonialists and the Kenya Land Freedom Army, a guerilla army to which Ngũgĩ's half-brother belonged. After attending one of the first high schools in Kenya to provide education to Africans, he went to Makerere University in Uganda, where he wrote and debuted his first play. During this time, he met Chinua Achebe, who read drafts of Ngũgĩ's first two novels, *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*. Achebe was so taken by Ngũgĩ's work that he served as advisory editor in the publication of the author's initial novels. In 1967, Ngũgĩ embraced Marxism and renounced his Christian name (James Ngũgĩ). Nine years later, he was imprisoned after publishing a starkly political play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (or *I Will Marry When I Want*). During his detainment, he decided to stop writing in English, and composed *Devil on the Cross* in the Gikuyu language. An outspoken anti-colonialist, Ngũgĩ has worked for many years as an activist and author, and is now a Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine. He has a wife and six children, four of whom are authors themselves.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Weep Not, Child takes place during what's known as the Mau Mau Uprising, a period in the 1950s in which groups of Kenyans came together to form a guerilla army that opposed British colonial rule. Beginning in the 1940s, people like Jomo Kenyatta—an anti-colonial activist—started advocating for Kenyan independence, ultimately forming the Kenya African Union (KAU). However, certain members of the KAU became more militant and aggressive than the original group, eventually using violence to resist the oppressive rule of the British government. This is how the Mau Mau formed, and because of their violent tendencies, many Kenyans came to fear them, despite the fact that the group was originally established to protect them. Of course, the white settlers were also violent, and by 1960 had killed over 11,000 people, whereas only 32 settlers were killed, according to the official record (though the unofficial count is likely much higher, considering that the Kenya Human Rights Commission published a death tally upholding that 90,000 Kenyans were killed during the eight-year conflict). Kenya finally moved toward true independence from colonial rule in 1960, though the Mau Mau Uprising died down significantly in 1956, when Dedan Kimathi—the true leader of the resistance—was captured. In 1964, Jomo Kenyatta became the country's first president.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Due to its examination of the effects of British colonialism on an African country (Kenya), *Weep Not, Child* is similar to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a novel about how Nigeria changes after the arrival of white settlers. In fact, many of Achebe's works are related to *Weep Not, Child*, including his novel *No Longer at Ease*, which traces a Nigerian man's journey away from his village to receive an education. Both *Weep Not, Child* and *No Longer at Ease* look at the impact formal education has on African communities, ultimately showcasing both the limits and advantages of traditional schooling. Like *Weep Not, Child*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* also takes place in Kenya and deals with both the Mau Mau Uprising and the damaging effects of British colonialism.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Weep Not, Child*
- **When Written:** 1962
- **Where Written:** Kampala, Uganda
- **When Published:** 1964
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Central Kenya
- **Climax:** Having murdered Jacobo, Boro sneaks into Mr. Howlands's house and shoots him.
- **Antagonist:** Mr. Howlands, Jacobo, and the British colonialists who have taken over Kenya and sown division amongst Africans.
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Imprisonment. After Ngũgĩ was imprisoned because of his play *I Will Marry When I Want*, he was named a Prisoner of Conscience by Amnesty International, the organization responsible for eventually setting him free.

Forced Exile. While promoting his 1980 novel *Devil on the Cross* in England, Ngũgĩ heard that the Kenyan government planned to assassinate him upon his return. As such, he sought exile in England and other countries, and even narrowly avoided an assassination attempt in Zimbabwe in 1986.

PLOT SUMMARY

Njoroge lives with his family in central Kenya. When he is a young boy, his mother, Nyokabi, tells him he will be the first person in the family to attend school. Overwhelmed with happiness, Nyokabi runs to Kamau and tells him the good news, reveling in the idea that he will receive an education. Kamau is Njoroge's half-brother, since their father, Ngotho, has another wife named Njeri. Upon hearing that Njoroge will be going to school, Kamau congratulates his younger brother, and the two boys compare their futures, discussing the fact that both an education and a carpentry apprenticeship (which is what Kamau is pursuing) will benefit their family.

Shortly thereafter, Njoroge gathers with his family in the evening and listens to his father tells stories about the past. Addressing several neighbors, Kamau, Njoroge, his wives, and his eldest sons, Boro and Kori, Ngotho tells the story of how he and his fellow Kenyans lost their **land** to white settlers. Explaining that he was enlisted by the British during World War I, he says he was whisked away from home in order to build roads throughout Kenya that would help the war effort. All the while, he says, he looked forward to returning home and collecting whatever "reward" the white settlers would bestow upon him and his people for contributing to a war that had nothing to do with the Kenyans themselves. However, when he finally returned, he discovered that the white colonialists had kicked his family off their ancestral land and taken over the farm that was their livelihood. Unable to do anything, he and his father lived as *Muhoi* (serfs), working on land that used to belong to them and waiting for the day that the white people would vacate Kenya. However, this day never came, and Ngotho's father died a *Muhoi*.

The one silver lining, Ngotho tells the people listening to his story, is that an old Gikuyu prophet has foretold that the land will one day be returned to its rightful owners. When he says this, though, Boro shows cynical disdain. Having fought and lost his brother in World War II, Boro is a silent, brooding figure who resents not only the white settlers, but his elders, who he believes failed to protect the land. Tired of waiting for this prophesy to come true, Boro interrupts his father's story, saying, "To hell with the prophecy. How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?"

Amidst these tensions, Njoroge starts school. On his first day, several other boys pick on him, but they're warded off by Mwihaki, who is from the same village as Njoroge and whose sister, Lucia, is a teacher. What's more, Mwihaki's father, Jacobo, is the richest black man in the area because he is a landowner. After Mwihaki helps him fend off bullies, Njoroge takes a liking to her, and the two children become close companions who both value the opportunity to attend school. During this time, though, a bitter enmity grows between their fathers, as Ngotho and Jacobo clash over how to respond to a workers' strike. Ngotho, for his part, feels compelled to join the strike as a way of responding to Boro's critique that he isn't doing enough to win back their family's land. However, he isn't certain it's a good idea to simply stop working for the white settlers, since doing so will mean losing his job at the white Mr. Howlands's farm, which used to be Ngotho's land. Indeed, Ngotho works for Mr. Howlands because he wants to stay close to the earth he used to own. When talk about a strike circulates, Mr. Howlands threatens to fire his employees if they join the movement. Nevertheless, Ngotho can't contain his rage when he discovers at a village meeting that Jacobo has sided with the white settlers. As Jacobo walks to the front of the group with several white police officers and urges his people to refrain from striking, Ngotho finds himself so furious that he rises and advances upon Jacobo. Followed by his fellow villagers, he beats Jacobo and flees, though not before a police officer strikes him in the face with a baton.

In the aftermath of this event, people start talking about Jomo Kenyatta, a political leader who they believe will help drive away white settlers. Unfortunately, though, Jomo has been captured, and although everyone believes he will be freed once he has a hearing, this is not the case. As such, the collective sense of hope suffers in Njoroge's village. As for Njoroge's family, they are forced to move off Jacobo's land, so they relocate to Nganga's property (Nganga is Kamau's carpentry master). Meanwhile, Boro and Kori move to Nairobi, where Boro becomes even more passionate about the oppressive practices of the white settlers. As Njoroge continues to go to school, tensions between Kenyans and white settlers mount, especially since the Mau Mau—a militant group opposing the colonialists—tries to recruit new members.

As the years pass, Ngotho struggles to support his family. To make things worse, Jacobo is made chief of the village, and Mr. Howlands becomes a Directing Officer of the "homeguard" (the colonial police force). As such, Jacobo now goes from house to house with armed guards, searching for people who have joined the Mau Mau. Around this time, Boro and Kori become more and more politically active by joining the Mau Mau. Ever since Ngotho attacked Jacobo, Boro has been harsh on his father, upholding that his rash decision only escalated tensions. Because of this constant criticism, Ngotho has become meeker around his son, allowing Boro to speak over him because he's embarrassed. However, when Boro tries to convince him to pledge an oath to the Mau Mau, he refuses.

Before long, Njoroge tests into a prestigious high school. Although he and Mwihaki no longer attend the same school and rarely see one another—partly because Mwihaki goes to a boarding school far away, and partly because their families are enemies—she asks him to spend time with her one time when she's home on break. During this meeting, she invites him to her house, and though he's hesitant, he accepts. When he arrives,

he has a stilted conversation with Jacobo, but the man treats him kindly enough, saying that he hopes Njoroge does well in school so that he can "rebuild the country." Afterwards, Mwihaki leads him to a hill, where she admits that she's afraid of all the turmoil surrounding them. Njoroge, for his part, tries to console her by insisting that "sunshine always follows a dark night." Impressed by his optimism, Mwihaki invites him to run away with her, but he refuses, saying that he couldn't bear to leave his family when conditions are so bad.

As the Mau Mau continues to recruit new members, it grows more and more violent, ultimately posing a threat to the very people it aims to protect. This pleases Mr. Howlands immensely, as he delights in the fact that black Kenyans are "destroying" one another. During this period, Jacobo uses his power as chief to take revenge on Ngotho's family. To do this, he tries to imprison Boro and Kori, though he only manages to catch Kori, picking him up when he walks outside after curfew with Njeri, who is also detained (though unlike Kori, she is quickly released).

One day, Njoroge is pulled out of his new European-style school by armed men who work for Mr. Howlands. He is then brought to Mr. Howlands and tortured. After asking Njoroge where Boro is and whether or not Njoroge himself has taken the Mau Mau oath, Mr. Howlands asks him, "Who murdered Jacobo?" When Njoroge is unable to answer, Mr. Howlands fetches a pair of pincers and puts them against the boy's scrotum, saying, "You'll be castrated like your father." As Njoroge screams, Mr. Howlands tells him that Ngotho has already confessed to killing Jacobo, but before Njoroge can react, he passes out from pain.

Several days later, Njoroge recovers, and his two mothers—who were also detained—are released along with him. Shortly thereafter, Njoroge sees his father in the family hut. He has been beaten severely and can barely speak, but when he sees Njoroge, he assumes that his son has come to laugh at him because he has failed as a father to protect his family. Apparently, Boro snuck into the village from the woods and murdered Jacobo and then disappeared once more. Knowing that Mr. Howlands would assume that Kamau was the one who did the deed, Ngotho worked up the courage and turned himself in, claiming he was the one who killed Jacobo. After beating and castrating Ngotho, though, Mr. Howlands understood that the man was only trying to protect his son, and despite the fact that he has wanted to murder Ngotho ever since the workers' strike, he released him. Now, just as Ngotho is about to die, Boro appears in the entrance of the hut. "Forgive me, Father—I didn't know—oh, I thought—" Boro says, stumbling. "I had to fight," he says, asking his father for forgiveness. "All right," Ngotho says, straining to lift himself onto one arm. "Fight well." Telling his son to "turn his eyes" to God, he lies back and dies, and Boro runs off once more. Sneaking into Mr. Howlands's office, he tells the man that he was the one who killed Jacobo, and then he shoots Howlands in the head. On his way out, Boro fires at as many officers as possible before getting captured and taken away.

In the aftermath of this violence, police officers detain Kamau, so that now Kori, Boro, and Kamau are all in custody. As such, Njoroge is the only brother left, meaning that he has no monetary way to continue his education. Because of this, he spends his days working for an Indian man in a market, constantly feeling ashamed because everyone who sees him knows what has happened to him and his family. After getting fired one day, he decides he must see Mwihaki, who he believes is his final source of "hope." When they meet, he confesses his love to her and insists that they should run away, but now it is Mwihaki's turn to decline, saying that Njoroge must maintain his hope for a better future. Although it's clear that she loves him back, she refuses to elope with him, ultimately leaving him distraught and hopeless—so hopeless, in fact, that he leaves his house the next evening and makes his way to a specific tree, where he fashions a noose and prepares to hang himself. Just as he's about to end his own life, though, he hears Nyokabi's voice calling his name on the road, and despite the fact that he feels ashamed for failing to finish his education and is hopeless about the future, he walks out to meet her. On the way home, they encounter Njeri, and the three of them walk home as Njoroge asks himself why he didn't go through with his suicide plan. "*Because you are a coward*," a voice within him says. "Yes," he whispers. "I am a coward." Saying this, he runs home and opens the door for his mothers.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Njoroge – Njoroge is the protagonist of *Weep Not, Child*. A boy living in central Kenya, Njoroge is the first person in his family to receive an education—a fact that makes him deeply proud. When Njoroge's biological mother, Nyokabi, tells him he'll be attending school, he's beside himself with excitement, quickly going to tell his half-brother, Kamau, the good news. In fact, everyone in Njoroge's family is invested in his education, believing it will bring honor to the family and enable him to uplift the entire community. As such, Njoroge applies himself feverously to his studies, often competing—in a friendly way—with Mwihaki, a girl he has known since childhood and who is the daughter of Jacobo, a rich man who eventually becomes the enemy of Njoroge's father and older brothers. As Njoroge's family descends into turmoil as a result of the tensions between Kenya's white settlers and the militant Mau Mau group fighting for freedom, Njoroge tries to focus on his studies, ultimately believing his education is the only thing that will ensure a better future. In keeping with this, he also turns to religion, insisting that he and his people will be delivered from suffering. As he grows older, though, his brothers and father

are consumed by their rivalry with Jacobo, making it increasingly hard for him to pursue an education. Eventually, he is taken out of school and tortured by Mr. Howlands, a white landowner who believes his father killed Jacobo. In the aftermath of this traumatic event, which leaves his family with nothing, Njoroge is unable to continue his education. Cut off from all sense of hope, he turns to Mwihaki, but she refuses to run away with him. As a result, he decides to commit suicide, but changes his mind when he hears his mother calling his name.

Ngotho – Njoroge's father. Ngotho has two wives, Njeri and Nyokabi, and multiple children, but he institutes a "stable" familial "centre," thereby establishing a unity that not all polyamorous families have. When he was a young man, he was forced into military service by the British colonialists during World War I, a period in which he helped the settlers build roadways throughout Kenya. When he returned, he expected to be rewarded for having contributed to the war effort, but was surprised to find that the British had stolen his family's land. Believing a prophecy that white people will eventually be driven away, Ngotho stays close to his land by working for Mr. Howlands, a white settler who now presides over the farm. Prone to indecision, Ngotho finds himself torn when his fellow Kenyans organize a workers' strike against the settlers. Because Mr. Howlands has said that anyone who strikes will be fired, he isn't sure whether or not to keep working. Despite this indecision, he suddenly determines to join the strike when he discovers that Jacobo has betrayed Kenyans by siding with the white settlers—in a rage, Ngotho stands up at a village meeting and attacks the man, instigating a feud that lasts the entire novel. To make things even more complicated, Ngotho's son, Boro, constantly shames him for failing to protect the family. In order to prove Boro wrong, Ngotho later takes the blame for killing Jacobo (even though Boro is the one who committed the murder). This is the old man's last attempt to prove his honor, and he dies after Mr. Howlands castrates and beats him.

Jacobo – The richest man in the village, and the owner of the land upon which Njoroge and his family live on. Jacobo is one of the only black farmers allowed by the white settlers to grow pyrethrum (a profitable crop that can be used to make insecticide and medicine). Because of this, he eventually sides with the colonialists when his fellow Kenyans try to resist them by organizing strikes and fighting back using guerilla warfare. In fact, Jacobo's allegiance with the white settlers is what inspires Ngotho to action; when Jacobo tries to urge other villagers to refrain from striking, Ngotho attacks him because he believes he's a traitor. In turn, Jacobo and Ngotho's families are pitted against one another, though this doesn't stop Njoroge from spending time with Mwihaki, Jacobo's daughter. Nonetheless, the feud between Jacobo and Ngotho is intense and long, as Jacobo becomes chief of the village and joins forces with the white Mr. Howlands, ultimately using his power to take revenge on Ngotho's family. Unsurprisingly, then, Njoroge's friendship with Mwihaki becomes untenable after his older brother Boro kills Jacobo.

Mr. Howlands – A white settler in Kenya who has taken over the land that used to belong to Ngotho's family. Originally from England, Mr. Howlands fought in World War I but soon became disillusioned with the war and his country. As such, he went to Kenya in the aftermath of the conflict, thinking of it as a place he could "conquer." Years later, his eldest son was sent to fight in World War II, where he died, effectively solidifying Howlands's resentment toward his home country. At the opening of *Weep Not, Child*, Howlands employs Ngotho as a farmhand, and though his wife, Suzannah, often fires their employees, he never lets her fire Ngotho because he knows Ngotho is a competent farmer. However, when news of a workers' strike begins to circulate, he warns Ngotho and his other employees that anyone who joins the movement will be fired. Despite this, Ngotho does end up going on strike, making an enemy of Mr. Howlands. Later, Howlands becomes the District Officer of the colonialist "homeguard," a position he is initially hesitant to accept because it realigns him with England. Nonetheless, he soon comes to love his job as District Officer because it enables him to oppress people like Ngotho and the members of the Mau Mau, all of whom Howlands resents because he knows they want to reclaim their land—land over which he firmly believes he has dominion. In fact, he feels so strongly about defending his farm that he eventually tortures Ngotho and Njoroge after Boro kills Jacobo. After having castrated Ngotho and beaten him almost to death, though, Howlands releases him, realizing that Ngotho is only trying to protect his family. Shortly thereafter, Boro sees what Howlands has done to his father, sneaks into Howlands house, and kills him.

Boro – One of Njoroge's older brothers. A brooding and traumatized young man, Boro has seen terrible violence in World War II, in which he fought for the British without believing in the cause. Worse, Boro lost his half-brother, Mwangi, with whom he was extremely close. Since then, he has remained uncommunicative and angry, rarely speaking about the war except to curse the fact that the white settlers forced him and his people to fight. Boro also chastises his father, Ngotho, for failing to stand up for his family when the white settlers first took their ancestral lands. In turn, Ngotho ends up trying to prove himself by attacking Jacobo—an act that leads his family into a feud with Jacobo that consumes them all. In fact, after Boro runs away to join (and eventually become the leader of) the Mau Mau, he returns to his village and kills Jacobo, feeling as if the only thing that matters in life is that he kill his enemies. Because of this, Mr. Howlands arrests Boro's entire family and tortures both Ngotho and Njoroge. After Boro sneaks back home to watch his father die (since Howlands eventually releases Ngotho), he becomes so enraged that he

runs to Mr. Howlands's house and murders him before finally getting captured himself.

Mwihaki – Jacobo's daughter. Mwihaki has known Njoroge since they were both children. Because of this, she helps him navigate his way through his first few days of school, since her sister Lucia is a teacher, and the other students therefore respect her. In this way, Mwihaki and Njoroge become good friends, despite the fact that their families are wary of their connection. After several years, Mwihaki goes to a boarding school outside of town, but she still sees Njoroge when she's home for break. While spending time together one day, Mwihaki confesses to Njoroge that she is often scared about the future, saying that the country has become so "dark." Thankfully, though, Njoroge is able to buoy her spirits by insisting that things will improve if only they both continue to focus on their studies and maintain their hope in the future. Mwihaki takes this advice to heart so thoroughly that she manages to adopt this worldview even after Boro kills her father. Indeed, it is this sense of hope, optimism, and resilience that ultimately encourages her to refuse Njoroge's plea that they run away together after all the violence that has passed between their families. Telling Njoroge that they have a "duty" to their country to stay and help make things better, she urges him to go on waiting for a new day, and though this disappoints him, she also admits that she is in love with him.

Nyokabi – Njoroge's mother, and one of Ngotho's two wives (the other being Njeri). Nyokabi is the reason Njoroge ends up going to school, since she is the person who insists it would be a good idea for him to get an education. She does this because she sees it as an honor to have a son who has received a formal education and can speak and write in English. When Ngotho contemplates joining the workers' strike, Nyokabi urges him to think about their family, upholding that his first priority should be to provide for his children and wives. After Ngotho dies and the majority of Njoroge's brothers are imprisoned, Nyokabi goes looking for Njoroge, who has decided to commit suicide. Calling his name, she coaxes him out of the woods and away from the noose he has prepared, ultimately convincing him—without saying much—to focus on the fact that he still has both his mothers.

Njeri – Njoroge's "elder" mother, and one of Ngotho's two wives (the other being Nyokabi). Njeri is Kamau, Kori, and Boro's mother, but she is also close with Njoroge, since Ngotho's entire family is close-knit and strongly connected. During the intense turmoil between the white settlers and her fellow Kenyans, Njeri laments the fact that "all white people stick together" but that "black people are very divided."

The Barber – A talkative and popular man who fought in World War II and now works as a barber in the town of Kipanga. The barbershop serves as a cultural hub throughout *Weep Not, Child*, a place where men go to discuss the latest news and talk about the drama unfolding between Kenyans and the white settlers. A vivacious and mildly irreverent man, the barber is eventually rounded up and killed along with five other men in the middle of the night. When Kamau tells Njoroge this tragic news, he admits that no one will ever know whether the white settlers or the Mau Mau were responsible for this heinous act.

Kamau – Njoroge's half-brother, and one of Njeri's sons. Slightly older than Njoroge, Kamau is apprenticed to the village carpenter, Nganga, whom he dislikes because he thinks Nganga isn't teaching him enough. Nonetheless, Kamau believes in the value of learning a craft, which he upholds will enable him to support Njoroge's education. And although Njoroge himself constantly tries to convince Kamau to attend school, Kamau remains committed to the notion that becoming a craftsman will help his family in the long run. Indeed, this *does* come to pass, since it is Kamau who eventually pays for Njoroge's education after Ngotho is fired from his job working for Mr. Howlands. Later, Kamau is captured and detained by the white settlers because they think he killed Jacobo, though Boro is the one who committed the murder. Despite the fact that Boro ends up confessing to the crime, though, the white settlers do not release Kamau.

Kori – Njoroge's older half-brother, and one of Njeri's sons. Kori is a gifted storyteller who often brings news home from Nairobi, where he becomes increasingly involved in political resistance. Indeed, it is Kori who often tells tales of Jomo Kenyatta—stories that rouse Njoroge and his family members. Kori eventually joins the Mau Mau, along with Boro. Because of this, Jacobo decides to detain him by capturing him when he accidentally breaks curfew with Njeri one night. And although the government quickly releases Njeri after Ngotho's family pays the necessary fines, they keep Kori in prison, and Njoroge fears at the end of the novel that he be killed in detention.

Jomo Kenyatta – A nonfictional character, Jomo Kenyatta was the Prime Minister of Kenya from 1963 to 1964, and served as the country's first president from 1964 to 1978. However, *Weep Not, Child* takes place in the 1950s, before Kenyatta rose to political office. During this time, Jomo was an anti-colonial activist and the president of the Kenya African Union, which sought independence from British rule. Because he was an outspoken anti-colonialist, the British government arrested him and accused him of playing a key role in organizing the Mau Mau. And though he was innocent, he was convicted and imprisoned until 1959, at which point he was sent into exile for another two years. His trial factors into the narrative of *Weep Not, Child*, as Njoroge's family and community waits with bated breath to discover whether or not he's found guilty. When he is indeed convicted, Kenyans feel as if their only ray of hope has been extinguished.

Nganga – The carpenter to whom Kamau is apprenticed. Nganga is a rich man who Kamau believes is taking advantage of his apprenticeship by forcing him to do grunt work that teaches him nothing. However, Kamau changes this opinion

when Nganga allows his family to build huts on his land after Jacobo forces them out of their homes. Unfortunately, Nganga is later kidnapped and killed—along with the barber—in the middle of the night, and no one knows whether the white settlers or the Mau Mau are behind the act.

Stephen – Mr. Howlands's youngest child. Although Mr. Howlands wants to be able to pass the farm to a son when he dies, he doesn't think Stephen has what it takes to watch over the land. Whenever Njoroge sees Stephen, he is afraid because the young white boy stares at him. Once, Stephen even advances upon him, but Njoroge runs away before finding out what he wants. When both boys are older, they encounter one another during a soccer game between their two schools, and Stephen tells Njoroge that he always wanted to speak to him as a child but that he was too afraid to do so.

Suzannah – Mr. Howlands's wife. Like Howlands himself, Suzannah is from England, but she agrees to move to Kenya with Howlands because she is "bored" with her life. However, she eventually comes to dislike life in Africa, and so she focuses on her children while also taking out her discontent on the Kenyans who work for her.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Isaka – A passionate young man who teaches at Njoroge's school. Njoroge later encounters Isaka in church, where he reads an intense Bible passage that rattles Mwihaki's sense of hope for the future. Unfortunately, Isaka is murdered by white settlers on his way to a religious gathering.

Dedan Kimathi – A nonfictional character. The leader of the Mau Mau, Kimathi is the subject of much conversation at Njoroge's school, where students tell stories about his cunning ability to evade white settlers.

Kiarie – One of Kori and Boro's friends from Nairobi. A politically active young man, Kiarie visits Njoroge's village and encourages his fellow Kenyans to go on strike, though he urges them to remain peaceful—a suggestion Ngotho immediately ignores by attacking Jacobo mere minutes later.

Lucia – One of Jacobo's daughters, and Mwihaki's older sister. Highly educated, Lucia is a teacher at the first school Njoroge attends.

Mwangi – Njoroge's only biological brother, who died in World War II. Mwangi's death has had a profound effect on Boro, since the two young men were remarkably close.

Juliana The self-righteous wife of Jacob.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

DIVISION AND CONQUEST

Based on a turbulent period of Kenyan history that saw the slow upheaval of British colonial rule, *Weep Not, Child* examines the impact of cultural division. More specifically, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o illustrates how thoroughly British settlers were able to sow discord in Kenya as recently as the 1950s, essentially pitting Kenyans against one another in order to better conquer and rule the country. The ubiquity of this practice is made evident in *Weep Not, Child* by the white Mr. Howlands's satisfaction when he sees that the Kenyans he wants to oppress are in fact "destroy[ing] themselves." Pleased that his enemies are warring, he prospers on **the land** he stole from black Kenyans like Ngotho. And though people like Ngotho recognize that feuding with other Kenyans only keeps them from uniting against their collective enemy (the white settlers), the conflicts they have with one another are too pressing and immediate to ignore. Indeed, when Ngotho's eldest son joins the Mau Mau (a group of activists fighting for Kenyan independence), his family is torn between this militant group and other Kenyan-born people who have pledged allegiance to white colonists. This is significant, considering that Ngotho's family has until this point always been closely connected. As such, Ngũgĩ illustrates how easy it is to become disempowered by the kind of division that takes place under oppressive colonial rule, ultimately suggesting that even the most unified groups of people can fall prey to divisive tactics.

Early in *Weep Not, Child*, Ngũgĩ makes a point of establishing the close connection that runs throughout Ngotho's family. Like other men of the Kikuyu people, Ngotho has two wives—Njeri and Nyokabi—with whom he has multiple sons. Despite what Western readers might assume about the potential competitive nature of this arrangement, though, Ngũgĩ goes out of his way to emphasize that Ngotho's family members are closely connected. "The feeling of oneness was a thing that most distinguished Ngotho's household from many other polyamorous families," Ngũgĩ notes, suggesting that this sense of unity is "attributed to Ngotho" himself, who keeps the family together because he acts as a "stable centre."

Having established this feeling of "oneness," Ngũgĩ goes on to show the adverse and divisive effects of colonialization on Ngotho's family. After World War I—when Kenyans were enlisted to serve for the British—people like Ngotho returned to their homes to find that white people had taken ownership of their land. Unfortunately, there was very little to do about this, since the Kenyan government itself was ruled by English colonists. As such, Ngotho and his fellow veterans were forced to take jobs working on farms that used to belong to them. Then, after years of toiling for low wages, they organized a workers' strike and demanded better pay. This is what Ngotho

faces in the first half of *Weep Not, Child*. Working for Mr. Howlands on land that used to belong to his own family, he finds himself torn between going on strike and keeping his job. "[Mr. Howlands] warned [his workers] that if any man went on strike he would instantly lose his job," Ngũgĩ writes, illustrating the difficult decision Ngotho faces. Unfortunately, the tense indecision that arises as a result of this dilemma eventually works its way into Ngotho's family, as he argues with Nyokabi about the pros and cons of uniting with the rest of the workers. "We shall starve," Nyokabi points out, to which Ngotho replies, "This strike is important for the black people." In response, Nyokabi says, "What's black people to us when we starve?" This question gets at the heart of the dilemma Ngotho's family faces, as it highlights the ways in which the white settlers and their monopoly of power have forced Kenyans to either turn against their community members or sacrifice their own wellbeing.

While Nyokabi urges Ngotho not to go on strike, Boro—his eldest son who joins the Mau Mau—criticizes Ngotho for failing to advocate for his fellow Kenyans. In keeping with this, Boro's friend Kiarie comes to Ngotho's village for a meeting and urges everyone to join the strike, saying, "Today, we, with one voice, must rise and shout: 'The time has come. Let my People go.'" However, not everyone agrees with this mentality, which is why Jacobo—a rich black man who has sided with white settlers—stands and argues that his people should "go back to work and not listen to" people like Kiarie. Suddenly impassioned and angry, Ngotho sees Jacobo as a traitor and, as such, rises, advances, and attacks him, ultimately inciting a feud between his and Jacobo's family that culminates not only with his own death, but also with Jacobo's and Boro's at the end of the novel. And as these two families antagonize one another, readers come to understand that this kind of discord only keeps Kenyans from confronting their true oppressors: the white colonists.

As the conflict between Kenyans and white colonists rages on, internal disputes only become more pronounced. Although individuals like Boro join the Mau Mau to protect their people through the practice of guerilla warfare (a form of warfare in which armed civilians organize to resist traditional military forces), they ultimately wind up terrorizing their own communities by violently coercing people to join them. Unsurprisingly, this is much to the delight of people like Mr. Howlands, who relishes the discord he observes taking place amongst the Kenyans he wants to disempower. "The machine he had set in motion was working," Ngũgĩ writes. "The blacks were destroying blacks. They would destroy themselves to the end. What did it matter with him if the blacks in the forest destroyed a whole village? [...] Let them destroy themselves. Let them fight against each other. The few who remained would be satisfied with the reservation the white man had set aside for them." The "reservation" Ngũgĩ—and, in turn, Mr. Howlands—refers to in this moment is the unappealing opportunity to work for low wages on Howlands's farm, an existence that might seem tolerable compared to the violent dealings of the Mau Mau. As such, it becomes clear that the white settlers are all too eager to inspire division amongst the people they're trying to exploit, which Mr. Howlands does by encouraging Jacobo to exact revenge on Ngotho, thereby adding fuel to the fire of their already tumultuous relationship. In this way, Ngũgĩ showcases how harmful division can be to a community, especially when malicious people use it to oppress and rule an otherwise cohesive, unified culture.

VIOLENCE AND REVENGE

In *Weep Not, Child*, Ngũgĩ frames violence as futile and self-perpetuating. Although characters like Boro believe in taking revenge on the people who have oppressed them, readers see that violent retribution is ineffective when it comes to bringing about positive change. Indeed, the true result of Boro's decision to murder Jacobo—who has wronged his family and community—is that Njoroge (Boro's little brother) is suddenly taken out of school, beaten, and interrogated by the governmental powers affiliated with Jacobo. Unfortunately, this throws Njoroge's life completely off-course, effectively ruining his upwardly mobile trajectory by bringing his hard-earned education to an abrupt end. And yet, Boro remains unable to accept that his violence has done nothing but harm, as he goes forth and murders Mr. Howlands, too—an act that further imperils his family by forcing one of his other brothers into jail and ensuring that Njoroge will never again have the financial support necessary to continue his schoolwork. Considering that everything Boro does to advocate for his family members only further disempowers them, then, it becomes obvious that Ngũgĩ believes violence is self-defeating, a means of destruction that becomes an end in and of itself without ever managing to effect meaningful change.

Because British colonizers have stolen **land** from the Kikuyu people, there's no doubt that retaliation is in order. Otherwise, people like Ngotho and his sons will never regain their homeland. Kiarie (Boro's friend from Nairobi) outlines this in his speech to Ngotho's village, but he stresses the importance of peaceful action, saying, "Remember, this must be a peaceful strike. We must get more pay. Because right is on our side we shall triumph. If today, you're hit, don't hit back..." However, Boro has trouble committing himself to peaceful resistance, since he has been to war and experienced terrible violence. One night, he listens to his father tell the story of how their family lost their land. "Boro thought of his father who had fought in the war only to be dispossessed," Ngũgĩ writes. "[Boro] too had gone to war, against Hitler. He had gone to Egypt, Jerusalem, and Burma. He had seen things. He had often escaped death narrowly. But the thing he could not forget was the death of his stepbrother, Mwangi. For whom or for what

had *he* died?" In this moment, Boro becomes angry about the fact that he and his family members have been forced to fight—and, in some cases, die—for a cause that has nothing to do with them. As a result, he wants to rectify this death and destruction by rising up against the white settlers and embracing a form of resistance that has nothing to do with peace. This, he hopes, will help him cope with the meaninglessness of his brother's death.

Simply put, Boro behaves violently *because of* the violence he has experienced. Having fought in World War II and "seen things,", he has been taught a lifestyle of hate and aggression that is difficult to leave behind. This is why he joins the Mau Mau and takes violent revenge on the British colonizers. As he does so, though, Boro discovers that violence only brings about more violence, creating a never-ending cycle of brutality. In a conversation with a Mau Mau lieutenant, he admits that he has lost sight of everything except the idea of exacting revenge on his enemies. "Don't you believe in anything?" the lieutenant asks, to which Boro replies, "No. Nothing. Except revenge." In turn, the lieutenant asks if he cares about winning back the land, and Boro says, "The lost land will come back to us maybe. But I've lost too many of those whom I loved for land to mean much to me. It would be a cheap victory." At this point, then, all Boro cares about is inflicting pain onto the people who have wronged him. Taken aback, the lieutenant asks Boro if he believes in "freedom," and Boro tells him that freedom is merely an "illusion." "Why then do you fight?" asks the lieutenant. "To kill," Boro answers. "Unless you kill, you'll be killed. So you go on killing and destroying. It's a law of nature." In this moment, readers see that Boro has stopped fighting for a cause. Instead of devoting himself to the idea of regaining his land and freeing his people, he has become obsessed with revenge, thinking that the only way to respond to the violence he has experienced is by perpetuating it himself. In turn, Ngũgĩ suggests that violence is self-generating, something that can come to seem like an end in and of itself rather than a means by which a person might effect actual change.

Although he doesn't alter his ways, it's evident that Boro recognizes the futility of violence. For example, when he's finally about to kill Mr. Howlands, he feels nothing. With the gun pointed at the white man, he explains why he also killed Jacobo: "He betrayed black people. Together, you killed many sons of the land. You raped our women. And finally, you killed my father. Have you anything to say in your defence?" Despite the fact that these words sound impassioned, it's worth noting that Boro is simply setting forth a narrative of revenge, as if this is the only thing he can think about after living a life of violence. "Boro's voice was flat," Ngũgĩ notes. "No colour of hatred, anger, or triumph. No sympathy." In this moment, readers see that Boro has gotten nowhere even though he's finally about to exact the revenge he has been dreaming about all this time. Unsurprisingly, this unfeeling, unsympathetic state continues even after he shoots Mr. Howlands: "He felt nothing—no triumph." By including this, Ngũgĩ demonstrates the pointlessness of pursuing violent forms of revenge, which do nothing to make a person feel better about what has happened to them. In fact, it isn't until Boro gives himself over to the police (thereby letting go of his dedication to violence and vengeance) that he feels any kind of relief. "At last he gave up," Ngũgĩ writes. "Now for the first time he felt exultant." In turn, it becomes clear that Boro's compulsive violence hasn't helped him cope with his difficult life, failing to bring him any kind of satisfaction or relief. And yet, he has continued to murder, perpetuating a cycle of ruthless revenge that is not only ineffective when it comes to bringing about change, but also detrimental to his own well-being. In this way, Ngũgĩ intimates that the only way to cope with violence and injustice is by removing oneself from the self-perpetuating revolutions of hate.

HOPE, PROGRESS, AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Throughout *Weep Not, Child*, Njoroge clings to his hope that life will improve if only he continues to work hard for the things he values and loves. First and foremost, this means pursuing an education, which he believes will enable him to uplift his community. Indeed, his desire to learn is admirable because it not only indicates his determination to improve himself, but also his motivation to help the people he cares about. In turn, his commitment to upward mobility signals his optimistic outlook, which enables him to envision a better future for his people. Unfortunately, though, the senseless violence surrounding him eventually interferes with his hope, ultimately discouraging him from having faith in the vision of a better "tomorrow," and forcing him to resign himself to the bleak reality of his life. In doing this, he stops thinking about making progress, instead focusing only on the present as a way of coping with the fact that he has no resources he might turn to in order to improve his life. As such, Ngũgĩ illustrates the dispiriting reality of living in countries torn to pieces by violent conflict. And though he doesn't condemn Njoroge for slipping into cynicism—which he intimates is an understandable response, given the circumstances—he also doesn't fully condone Njoroge's newfound pessimism. In this way, Ngũgĩ simply draws attention to the tragedy of disillusionment, which can so easily befall people living in the midst of political and cultural turmoil.

The entirety of Njoroge's family believes in his determination to receive an education. For instance, his father's obsession with regaining the family **land** factors into the boy's desire to become upwardly mobile, which he hopes will enable him to help his father. "Njoroge listened to his father," Ngũgĩ notes during a scene in which Ngotho talks to his son about their lost land. "He instinctively knew that an indefinable demand was

being made on him, even though he was so young. He knew that for him education would be the fulfilment of a wider and more significant vision—a vision that embraced the demand made on him, not only by his father, but also by his mother, his brothers, and even the village. He saw himself destined for something big, and this made his heart glow." In this passage, it becomes clear that Njoroge sees his own education as something that will empower not only himself, but his family, too. Indeed, he believes there's a "demand" for him to succeed. Thankfully, he sees himself as "destined for something big," so this "demand" doesn't feel like a burden. In fact, Njoroge relishes the idea of delivering his family from poverty and oppression, and this is a testament to his optimism.

Part of Njoroge's hope has to do with his relationship with Mwihaki, with whom he bonds over matters of education. Although Mwihaki is the daughter of Jacobo—a family enemy—she and Njoroge manage to transcend the tension or animosity that might otherwise threaten their connection. This is possible because they both thrive on the idea of improving themselves through education, and they enjoy going through the school system together. In this way, the progress Njoroge makes is wrapped up in his budding but unacknowledged love for Mwihaki. In a passage about one of Njoroge's first days of school, Ngũgĩ writes, "The two had shared each other's hopes and fears, and [Njoroge] felt akin to her." It is this shared sense of "hope" that enables their bond to persist even after their fathers become dangerously pitted against one another.

Later, when Njoroge is admitted to a school Mwihaki didn't get into, he consoles her by emphasizing the importance of maintaining her commitment to education, which he upholds will still enable her to improve her life. "Our country has great need of us," he says, but she expresses her doubt that they'll be able to change anything. "You are always talking about tomorrow, tomorrow," she says after he tells her that the "sun will rise tomorrow." "What is tomorrow?" she presses. In response, Njoroge demonstrates his unwavering hope, saying, "You and I can only put faith in hope. Just stop for a moment, Mwihaki, and imagine. If you knew that all your days life will always be like this with blood flowing daily and men dying in the forest, while others daily cry for mercy; if you knew even for one moment that this would go on forever, then life would be meaningless unless bloodshed and death were a meaning. Surely this darkness and terror will not go on forever." This is an important moment because Njoroge reveals that the only way he knows how to cope with his bleak reality is by investing himself in the idea of a better future. This is why he has so wholeheartedly committed himself to education. And because he feels strongly for Mwihaki, he urges her to embrace this optimism, arguing that it's her only option.

Unfortunately, Njoroge loses his "faith in hope" when governmental thugs pull him out of school and torture him for information about a violent act he knows nothing about. After this, he stops attending school, instead spending his time making money in the markets. "For the first time Njoroge was faced to face with a problem to which 'tomorrow' was no answer," Ngũgĩ notes. After a while, Njoroge decides to visit Mwihaki—the only person or thing in his life that still gives him a sense of hope for the future—and professes his love to her. "At last he had said it. For now he knew that she was his last hope," Ngũgĩ writes, revealing that Njoroge has embraced a form of "hope" that isn't forward-looking and idealistic, but rooted in that which exists in the present: love and companionship. This, it seems, is the only thing he can control, and so it's what he focuses on. However, Mwihaki hasn't given up her belief in a better future, and so she declines his invitation to leave Kenya. When she tries to remind him that their country needs them, Njoroge voices his disillusionment, saying, "All that was a dream. We can only live today." Unfortunately, though, even investing in the present becomes difficult for Njoroge once Mwihaki makes clear that she won't elope with him. "Njoroge had now lost faith in all the things he had earlier believed in," Ngũgĩ explains, "like wealth, power, education, religion. Even love, his last hope, had fled from him." Disenfranchised by his government and dispirited about the idea of self-improvement, Njoroge finds that he has nothing to "hope" for—not even love. In this way, Ngũgĩ traces the demise of the boy's optimism, ultimately revealing how thoroughly violence and oppression can thwart even the most motivated people and their dreams of progress.

PRIDE AND HONOR VS. GUILT AND SHAME

In *Weep Not, Child*, Ngũgĩ considers how a person's sense of honor informs the way he or she behaves. Most notably, Ngotho spends a great deal of energy thinking about whether or not he's upholding his familial duties as the head of his household. However, because he's unsure how to respond to the various challenges that present themselves—including whether or not to rise up against colonialists—he finds himself feeling guilty for failing to actively protect his family. Indeed, the notions he takes to heart about what it means to be a patriarch ultimately lead to his death, as he tries to make up for his failure to stand up to the people who have terrorized his sons. By showcasing the ways in which guilt can steer a person to his or her own demise, then, Ngũgĩ implies that shame isn't necessarily something that should always motivate a person to redeem him- or herself. In keeping with this, he presents Njoroge as someone who also feels guilt and shame, but who learns to accept—or at least live with—these shortcomings. Of course, this attitude doesn't help Njoroge regain his sense of pride or honor, but rather enables him to keep on living. In this manner, Ngũgĩ hints at the fact that it's often necessary to recognize guilt and shame as unavoidable realities, however difficult this is to accept.

When Ngotho first takes a stand against white settlers in *Weep Not, Child*, he does so because Boro has made him feel ashamed for failing to take action. During an evening of storytelling, Ngotho tells his family and friends about how the British stole their **land** by forcing him and his fellow Kenyans away from home during World War I. When they returned, he explains, people like Mr. Howlands had forced their families off the land. And though Ngotho believes in a Kikuyu prophecy that Kenyans will soon regain their land, Boro remains unconvinced and expresses his disappointment in the fact that his father has heretofore done nothing to win back what belongs to him. "To hell with the prophecy," Boro erupts. "How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?" By saying this, Boro shames his father, stripping the man of his authority and making him feel like a weak leader. This is why Ngotho proceeds by beating Jacobo for siding with the white men. Unfortunately, though, this attempt to establish his honor is hotheaded and ill-advised, ultimately inciting a slew of violence between his and Jacobo's people that harms his family more than it protects them.

Unsurprisingly, Ngotho later regrets his impulsive decision to defend his honor. "Perhaps he had blundered in going on strike. For he had now lost every contact with his ancestral land," Ngũgĩ writes, suggesting that Ngotho's fragile ego has led him into an even worse situation. However, even though Ngotho regrets what he has done, he still believes he was left with no choice, since continuing to do nothing would have made him appear weak. "But what could he have done? He had to go on strike," Ngũgĩ notes. "He had not wanted to be accused by a son anymore, because when a man was accused by the eyes of a son who had been to war and had witnessed the death of a brother, he felt guilty." In this moment, Ngũgĩ highlights Ngotho's discomfort with the idea that his son might "accuse" him of inaction. In turn, readers see that Ngotho cares first and foremost about defending his honor—a vanity that leads him into precarious situations.

Ngotho isn't the only character in *Weep Not, Child* to whom honor is important. Like his father, Njoroge fears letting down his loved ones. As he witnesses the degradation of his father's sense of pride, he himself works hard to ensure that his education will bestow honor onto him and his family. "He knew that something had happened to Ngotho," Ngũgĩ writes, "who no longer looked anybody straight in the face; not even his wives. Njoroge was sure that if a child hit Ngotho, he would probably submit." Witnessing his father's apparent shame, Njoroge commits himself to education; "Through all this, Njoroge was still sustained by his love for and belief in education and his own role when the time came. And the difficulties of home seemed to have sharpened this appetite. Only education could make something out of this wreckage." Going on, Ngũgĩ explains that Njoroge sometimes sees himself as "a possible savior of the whole God's country." In this way, readers intuit that Njoroge has idealized the idea of his own success, reveling in his pride.

It is perhaps because Njoroge is so proud of his image as a "savior" that he is later so guilty when he finds himself incapable of continuing his education. After finally testing into a prestigious school, he is pulled out of the classroom for good by colonists who think he knows something about Jacobo's death. Considering that Boro killed Jacobo because of the bad blood between their families—a dispute instigated by Ngotho in an attempt to prove his honor—it's easy to see that no good has come from this family's obsession with pride. If Boro hadn't shamed his father for failing to stand up to the white man (and if Ngotho hadn't been motivated to act by this guilt), then no conflict would have arisen with Jacobo, and Njoroge would have been able to continue his studies and "[made] something out of this wreckage."

Unfortunately, the men in Njoroge's family let macho notions of pride and honor guide their actions, and this keeps Njoroge from completing his studies. As a result, he feels guilty for failing to meet his goal—so guilty that he resolves to hang himself, though Nyokabi finds him before he goes through with it. And though he walks home with her and Njeri, he feels no relief at having decided to stay alive. "[Njoroge] felt only guilt, the guilt of a man who had avoided his responsibility for which he had prepared himself since childhood," Ngũgĩ writes, emphasizing that Njoroge sees the interruption of his education as a personal failure. Nonetheless, he decides to live. Just before reaching home, he asks himself why he didn't kill himself. "I am a coward," he answers before "[running] home and open[ing] the door for his two mothers." This is an important line, as Ngũgĩ suggests that Njoroge has decided to focus not on his shame, but on what he still has in life: his mothers. In doing so, he essentially accepts his own shortcomings, refusing to let stubborn notions of pride and honor lead him—like his father and brother—to death. As such, Ngũgĩ frames guilt and shame as inherent parts of life that people must learn to withstand without behaving rashly.

LAND OWNERSHIP AND POWER

The majority of the disputes and tensions that arise in *Weep Not, Child* have to do with **land** ownership. Because white settlers like Mr. Howlands came to Kenya and took possession of farms belonging to black families, it's obvious they don't have a true right to the land. Unfortunately, though, this doesn't mean they don't benefit from their newly acquired property. In keeping with this, Ngotho correctly believes that land ownership leads to power, since having a farm is the only form of stability in a country that is at odds with itself. Mr. Howlands, for his part, recognizes this connection between land ownership and power—so much so, in fact, that his conception of what it means to have a farm is wrapped up in notions of dominion and authority, as if by

claiming a plot of earth he can assert his will and subjugate not only the people who work for him, but the land itself. This stands in stark contrast to Ngotho's ideas about land ownership, since he approaches the matter with a spiritual kind of reverence, understanding the instrumental role the earth has played in shaping his culture. As such, Ngũgĩ presents readers with two ways of looking at land ownership, ultimately demonstrating that Mr. Howlands's notion of using the earth for his own benefit is a power-hungry and exploitative way to engage with nature.

Ngũgĩ emphasizes the importance of land ownership early in *Weep Not, Child*. "Any man who had land was considered rich," he writes. "If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money." This is no doubt because the Kenyan government is in such turmoil that only the ability to produce one's own wealth is valuable. Indeed, people like Jacobo plant pyrethrum (a plant that makes insecticide and medicine), thereby creating a source of riches that they can sell on their own instead of working for low wages on someone else's farm. The problem, of course, is that many Kenyans are unable to do this because white people like Mr. Howlands moved onto their land while they were absent during World War I. "We came home worn-out but very ready for whatever the British might give us as a reward," Ngotho says, telling his family about what it was like to return after the war. "But, more than this, we wanted to go back to the soil and court it to yield, to create, not to destroy. But N'go! The land was gone. My father and many others had been moved from our ancestral lands. He died lonely, a poor man waiting for the white man to go. […] The white man did not go and he died a *Muhoi* on this very land." Not only have Ngotho and his family been dispossessed of their land, they're also forced to work on the very soil to which they are entitled. When Ngotho says that his father "died a *Muhoi*" on his own land, he means that the old man was essentially a serf, someone working for a place to live. By outlining this injustice early in the novel, Ngũgĩ shows readers why Ngotho is so insistent upon reclaiming his land. After all, it belongs to him and his family.

At the same time, Ngotho's motivation to win back his land isn't a simple matter of justice and ownership. Rather, he wants to nurture the earth, using the "soil" "to create" instead of "destroy." As such, readers see that he has a profound respect for the land, one that transcends selfish notions of proprietorship. This is why he works for Mr. Howlands. Simply put, he will take any opportunity to interact with the land that belonged to him and his ancestors, as he feels a responsibility to maintain this slice of earth. For example, when he walks alongside Mr. Howlands and surveys the grounds, he is acutely aware of his connection to the land. "For Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this land. He owed it to the dead, the living, and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over this *shamba*," Ngũgĩ notes. The bond Ngotho has with this farm goes beyond the superficial notion of ownership, especially because he feels indebted to "the unborn of his line," who he hopes will benefit and prosper because of his commitment to the land.

Like Ngotho, Mr. Howlands also feels strongly about the farm. In fact, his connection to the land is rather surprising, considering that he didn't grow up in Kenya and could most likely buy and operate a farm almost anywhere in the world. Nonetheless, he is devoted to what he sees as his corner of the earth. Rather unexpectedly, he even conceives of his connection to this land in spiritual terms. "There was only one god for him—and that was the farm he had created, the land he had tamed," Ngũgĩ writes. Strangely enough, this kind of spiritual bond to the earth is similar to the way Ngotho approaches the notion of land ownership, especially considering the fact that Ngotho thinks about losing the farm as a "spiritual loss." However, there is a notable difference between the way these two men conceive of the earth. Whereas Ngotho sees the land as part of his cultural and familial heritage—part of a way of life that existed before him and will go on existing after he's dead—Mr. Howlands mistakenly thinks that he has "created" this farm. In other words, he thinks he has total dominion and control over something that in reality is much bigger and more significant than his temporary and arbitrary ownership. This, Ngũgĩ insinuates, is a foolish and egocentric way of thinking, a worldview that springs from the false belief that land ownership means anything other than treating and maintaining the earth with respect.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE LAND

In *Weep Not, Child*, the earth itself—and especially the land that white settlers stole from Ngotho's family—represents the difference between colonialist notions of ownership and the wholistic, spiritual bond many Kenyans form with their farms. When Ngotho comes home from World War I to discover that white settlers have kicked his family members off of their ancestral land, he puts his faith in a prophecy upholding that the white people will one day vacate the country. Biding his time until this day, he works for Mr. Howlands, who now owns the farm that used to belong to him. He does this simply because he wants to remain close to the land, since he feels a responsibility to maintain this stretch of earth. "He owed it to the dead, the living, and the unborn of his

line to keep guard over this *shamba*," Ngugi writes, indicating that Ngotho's connection to the land has to do with his emotional and ancestral investment in the soil itself. In fact, he experiences the loss of his farm as a "spiritual loss," whereas Mr. Howlands sees the farmland as a "wild country" that he can "conquer." By contrasting these two worldviews, Ngugi uses the land to symbolize the vast cultural differences between Kenyans and the white settlers, ultimately showing readers that colonialism's obsession with land ownership arises out of a fundamental sense of greed and a total disregard not only for other people, but also for the earth.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Weep Not, Child* published in 1964.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Why should the white men have fought? Aaa! You could never tell what these people would do. In spite of the fact that they were all white, they killed one another with poison, fire, and big bombs that destroyed the land. They had even called the people to help them in killing one another. It was puzzling. You could not really understand because although they said they fought Hitler (ah! Hitler, that brave man, whom all the British feared, and he was never killed you know, just vanished like that), Hitler too was a white man. That did not take you very far. It was better to give up the attempt and be content with knowing the land you lived in, and the people who lived near you.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears in the first chapter of *Weep Not, Child*, as Ngũgĩ outlines the way Kenyans perceive the white settlers who have rushed into their homeland as a result of the first and second world wars. When the author says, "You could never tell what these people would do," he casts the British colonialists as inscrutable and fickle, as if killing "one another with poison, fire, and big bombs" is something they might do on a whim. This tendency toward violence, Ngũgĩ implies, is baffling to Kenyans, who are a rather unified group of people. However, readers will soon see that this isn't necessarily the case anymore, considering that the African characters in *Weep Not, Child* find themselves at odds with one another because of the colonialists' divisive tactics. By establishing the fact that Kenyans are "content" to simply know "the land [they live] in" and "the people" they live next to, Ngũgĩ essentially prepares readers to see how thoroughly colonialization tears them apart.

The first two valleys went into the Country of the Black People. The other two divided the land of the Black People from the land of the White People. This meant that there were four ridges that stood and watched one another. Two of the ridges on the opposite sides of the long sides of the plain were broad and near one another. The other two were narrow and had pointed ends. You could tell the land of Black People because it was red, rough, and sickly, while the land of the white settlers was green and was not lacerated into small strips.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Ngũgĩ goes out of his way to establish the geographical layout of the land upon which his characters live. In a novel that stresses the importance of land ownership, this description is worth paying attention to, since it instills in readers an awareness of how the earth itself works its way into the social dynamics at play between Kenyans and white settlers. Indeed, the land is a physical manifestation of the division between these two groups of people, as made evident by the fact that the "land of the white settlers [is] green" whereas the "land of the Black People" is "red, rough, and sickly." What's more, the land that belongs to Kenyans is "lacerated into small strips," which is an indication that they have been forced to divide up small tracts of land between themselves while the British colonialists enjoy large swaths of green earth without worrying about encroaching upon one another.

Some people said that black people should stick together and take trade only to their black brethren. And one day an old poor woman said, "Let Africans stick together and charge very low prices. We are all black. If this be not so, then why grudge a poor woman the chance to buy from someone, be he white or red, who charges less money for his things?"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

This is an explanation of the markets that exist in Kenya. These markets are divided by Indian and African vendors, and because Indians tend to sell cheaper goods, they receive more customers. This is why "some people [say] that black people should stick together and take trade only to their black brethren." According to this point of view, the black community should invest in itself rather than play into the kind of divisive habits that further disenfranchise the community as a whole.

However, it's clear that certain Kenyans use this argument for their own benefit, distorting it in an attempt to get better deals while shopping. For instance, when this unnamed "old poor woman" says that Africans should "stick together," she immediately adds that the only way to do this is by charging "very low prices." Of course, this is a reasonable request, since she is poor, but it's worth noting that this will not necessarily empower or help her fellow community members, since this practice requires black vendors to underprice their goods. When the old woman says, "If this be not so, then why grudge a poor woman the chance to buy from someone […] who charges less money," she essentially threatens to take her business elsewhere, thereby playing into the divisions that are already beginning to separate Kenyans from one another.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Nyokabi was proud of having a son in school. It made her soul happy and lighthearted whenever she saw him bending double over a slate or recounting to her what he had seen at school. She felt elated when she ordered her son to go and do some reading or some sums. It was to her the greatest reward she would get from her motherhood if she one day found her son writing letters, doing arithmetic, and speaking English.

Related Characters: Njoroge, Nyokabi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, it becomes clear why Njoroge is so excited and eager to go to school: his mother—and, presumably, his entire family—believes wholeheartedly in the value of education. Not only does Nyokabi think her son's education will enable him to do all sorts of things like write letters, do math, or speak English, she also sees his academic life as a point of great pride. Indeed, his education makes her "soul happy," giving her a feeling of total "elat[ion]" that is "the greatest award" of "motherhood." In turn, readers see where Njoroge's motivation to do well in school comes from: a desire to please his family members and make them proud, thereby bringing honor to his family.

❝ Suddenly he realised that he did not want to meet her while he had on that piece of calico which, when blown by the wind, left the lower part of his body without covering. For a time he was irresolute and hated himself for feeling as he did about the clothes he had on. Before he had started school, in fact even while he made that covenant with his mother, he would never have thought that he would ever be ashamed of the calico, the only dress he had ever known since birth.

Related Characters: Mwihaki, Njoroge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

When Njoroge goes to school, he wears European-style clothing, shedding the piece of calico that he has worn "since birth." As such, he becomes suddenly aware and self-conscious of his normal way of dressing, since he has now experienced a new way of presenting himself. In this particular passage, he sees Mwihaki approaching him on the road after school, after he has already taken off his European-style clothes. As a result, he realizes he doesn't "want to meet her while he [has] on that piece of calico." In turn, he feels guilty for the shame he experiences in this moment, since he understands that rejecting the calico cloth is like rejecting his culture and, thus, his family. And yet, he can't help but feel embarrassed, so he jumps off the road and out of Mwihaki's sight. In this way, Ngũgĩ spotlights the small ways in which pride—and, for that matter, shame—can motivate a person to change the way he behaves.

"Blackness is not all that makes a man," Kamau said bitterly. "There are some people, be they black or white, who don't want others to rise above them. They want to be the source of all knowledge and share it piecemeal to others less endowed. That is what's wrong with all these carpenters and men who have a certain knowledge. 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."

Related Characters: Kamau (speaker), Nganga, Njoroge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Kamau speaks these words to Njoroge in a conversation about his apprenticeship with Nganga. He tells his younger brother that Nganga isn't teaching him anything, but rather forcing him to do meaningless grunt work that will ultimately do nothing to help him develop his carpentry skills. In response, Njoroge asks why Nganga treats Kamau this way, pointing out that Nganga is black, thereby implying that all black people treat one another with respect. "Blackness is not all that makes a man," Kamau replies, saying that some people "don't want others to rise above them," regardless of their race. Indeed, he tells Njoroge that there are certain people in this world who want to retain a sense of power and control. To do this, he says, they only "share" their "knowledge" "piecemeal" so that people who are "less endowed" will never manage to empower themselves. By saying this, Kamau addresses the divisions that run rampant throughout his and Njoroge's community—divisions inspired first and foremost by a desire for power.

"All of us were taken by force. We made roads and cleared the forest to make it possible for the warring white man to move more quickly. The war ended. We were all tired. We came home worn-out but very ready for whatever the British might give us as a reward. But, more than this, we wanted to go back to the soil and court it to yield, to create, not to destroy. But Ng'o! The land was gone. My father and many others had been moved from our ancestral lands. He died lonely, a poor man waiting for the white man to go."

Related Characters: Ngotho (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ngotho explains to his family members how it came to pass that he and his ancestors were kicked off their own land. "All of us were taken by force," he says, referring to the fact that he and many other young Kenyan men were forced to work for the British during World War I. While he and his fellow Kenyans were off making roads and "clear[ing] the forest to make it possible for the warring white man to move more quickly," white settlers were encroaching upon their ancestral land. Sadly, Ngotho returned from his wartime duties with a sense of optimism and hope, assuming that he would be "reward[ed]" for his contribution to the British war effort. Unfortunately, this reward never came. Instead, he had to reconcile himself to the fact that the white settlers took advantage of him. "But, more than this," he says, "we wanted to go back to the soil and court it to yield, to create, not to destroy." This is an important notion, since Ngotho is suggesting that he doesn't care about ownership as much as he cares about treating the land with respect. Indeed, he wants to farm as a way of "creat[ing]" and thus contributing to society. Unlike people like Mr. Howlands—who sees the land as something he can possess—Ngotho yearns first and foremost for the connection he used to have with his old farm.

When the war came to an end, Boro had come home, no longer a boy but a man with experience and ideas, only to find that for him there was to be no employment. There was no land on which he could settle, even if he had been able to do so. As he listened to this story, all these things came into his mind with a growing anger. How could these people have let the white man occupy the land without acting? And what was all this superstitious belief in a prophecy?

In a whisper that sounded like a shout, he said, "To hell with the prophecy."

Yes, this was nothing more than a whisper. To his father, he said, "How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?"

He walked out, without waiting for an answer.

Related Characters: Boro (speaker), Mr. Howlands, Ngotho

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

As Boro listens to Ngotho's story about how he and his ancestors lost their land to the manipulative white settlers, he slowly loses his temper. Thinking back to his own wartime experiences, he remembers coming home from World War II and feeling profoundly changed. Indeed, he was "no longer a boy but a man with experience and ideas." Unfortunately, though, he quickly saw that his contribution to the British war effort would go largely unrecognized by the colonialists, who continued to deprive him and his family of their land. As such, he knows what Ngotho himself felt upon returning from World War I to see that his land had been stolen. Unlike his father, though, he can't imagine simply letting this happen. "How could these people have let the white man occupy the land without acting?" Of course, Ngotho believes in a prophecy upholding that the white settlers will one day leave the land, but Boro finds this too "superstitious" to count on. This is why he says, "To hell with the prophecy" and blames his father for failing to stand up to people like Mr. Howlands, who has "taken [their] land." In turn, readers begin to understand that Boro is too angry to sit idly by and wait for the colonialists to leave of their own volition. Indeed, it's clear he wants to take revenge by reclaiming his ancestral land, and he has little patience for Ngotho's passive attitude.

Chapter 3 Quotes

He just loved to see Ngotho working in the farm; the way the old man touched the soil, almost fondling, and the way he tended the young tea plants as if they were his own . . . Ngotho was too much a part of the farm to be separated from it. Something else. He could manage the farm labourers as no other person could. Ngotho had come to him at a time when his money position was bad. But with the coming of Ngotho, things and his fortune improved.

Mr Howlands was tall, heavily built, with an oval-shaped face that ended in a double chin and a big stomach. In physical appearance at least, he was a typical Kenya settler. He was a product of the First World War. After years of security at home, he had been suddenly called to arms and he had gone to the war with the fire of youth that imagines war a glory. But after four years of blood and terrible destruction, like many other young men he was utterly disillusioned by the "peace." He had to escape. East Africa was a good place. Here was a big trace of wild country to conquer.

Related Characters: Ngotho, Mr. Howlands

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ngũgĩ provides a close look at Mr. Howlands and his various motivations. First of all, he explains why Howlands doesn't let his wife—who regularly fires their employees—fire Ngotho. Indeed, he loves the way Ngotho "touche[s] the soil, almost fondling, and the way he tend[s] the young tea plants." Knowing that Ngotho is "part of the farm," Howlands insists that the old man stay to help him run a prosperous farm. What's important to note, though, is that his loyalty to Ngotho has nothing to do with the man himself. In fact, Mr. Howlands only cares about Ngotho insofar as the old Kenyan remains an asset to the farm. This aligns with Howlands's success-oriented worldview, which is what drove him to Kenya in the first place. Tired of England and "disillusioned" by World War I, Howlands came to Kenya because he thought it would be a good place to "conquer" the land. As such, Ngũgĩ juxtaposes Ngotho's wholistic connection with the earth and Howlands's unnatural, power-hungry desire to own and "conquer" the land, ultimately demonstrating the fact that these two men have completely different approaches when it comes to the notion of land ownership.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"Education is everything," Ngotho said. Yet he doubted this because he knew deep inside his heart that land was everything. Education was good only because it would lead to the recovery of the lost lands.

Ngotho rarely complained. He had all his life lived under the belief that something big would happen. That was why he did not want to be away from the land that belonged to his ancestors. That was really why he had faithfully worked for Mr Howlands, tending the soil carefully and everything that was in it. His son had come and with one stroke had made him doubt that very allegiance to Mr Howlands and the soil. And with this doubt had now come an old man's fear of his son. Boro had changed. This was all because of the war. Ngotho felt the war had dealt ill with him. It had killed one son! And the other was accusing him.

Related Characters: Ngotho (speaker), Boro, Mr.

Howlands, Njoroge

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

In the aftermath of Boro's outbreak—in which he guilt-trips Ngotho for failing to take action against the white settlers who stole the family land—Ngotho tries to turn his attention to Njoroge, telling him that "education is everything." In doing so, he attempts to place his hope in the young boy's future. This desire to recapture a sense of optimism makes sense, given that Boro has recently destabilized Ngotho's conviction that the white settlers will eventually leave their land. Indeed, Ngotho seemingly tells Njoroge to invest himself in his education as a way of reassuring himself that good fortune is on the horizon for their family. Unfortunately, though, he doesn't truly believe his own words, as he feels "deep inside his heart that land [is] everything." This is why he has worked for Mr. Howlands for so long: so that he can remain close to his ancestral lands. Now, though, Boro has shamed Ngotho for standing idly by while people like Howlands take advantage of him and his family, and he finds himself incapable of feeling hopeful about the future.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Njoroge usually stood on this hill whenever he wanted to see his mother or brother coming from a distance. If he saw any of them he ran and helped them carry whatever they had. It did not matter if it was Njeri or any of her sons. The feeling of oneness was a thing that most distinguished Ngotho's household from many other polygamous families. Njeri and Nyokabi went to the *shamba* or market together. Sometimes they agreed among themselves that while one did that job the other would do this one. This was attributed to Ngotho, the centre of the home. For if you have a stable centre, then the family will hold.

Related Characters: Ngotho, Nyokabi, Njeri, Njoroge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Ngũgĩ makes a point in this section of emphasizing the closeness of Ngotho's family. Unlike other "polygamous families," he upholds, there is a "feeling of oneness" that exists in Ngotho's household, as his two wives work together to complete the daily chores, and Njoroge treats both women like his biological mother. Although this passage might seem rather unimportant, it is actually significant, since it establishes the fact that this is a family that sticks together. In turn, Ngũgĩ prepares readers to understand just how troubling it is when Ngotho's family suddenly plunges into discord as a result of the divisive tensions set forth by the white settlers.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"I must be a man in my own house."

"Yes—be a man and lose a job."

"I shall do whatever I like. I have never taken orders from a woman."

"We shall starve . . ."

"You starve! This strike is important for the black people. We shall get bigger salaries."

"What's black people to us when we starve?"

Related Characters: Nyokabi, Ngotho (speaker), Mr. Howlands

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between Ngotho and Nyokabi when Ngotho is considering joining the workers' strike against the white settlers. Because Mr. Howlands has informed his employees that anyone who strikes will lose his or her job, Nyokabi advises her husband to refrain from joining the movement. In response, he insists that she can't tell him what to do, saying that he must be "a man in [his] own house" and that he can "do whatever" he wants. "We shall starve...," Nyokabi points out, but this does little to dissuade Ngotho from joining the strike, which he upholds is "important for the black people." By saying this, he stresses the fact that Kenyans must stand together as a unified group if they are to have any hope of resisting the white settlers' oppressive practices. Unfortunately, though, Nyokabi disagrees with this mindset, saying, "What's black people to us when we starve?" By showcasing Nyokabi's hesitancy to come together with her own community members, Ngũgĩ ultimately illustrates the difficult decision

people like her are forced to make between her own wellbeing and the welfare of her fellow Kenyans. This, it seems, is exactly the kind of choice the white settlers want people like her and Ngotho to face.

"Lord, do you think the strike will be a success?"

He wanted an assurance. He wanted a foretaste of the future before it came. In the Old Testament, God spoke to His people. Surely He could do the same thing now. So Njoroge listened, seriously and quietly. He was still listening when he fell asleep.

Related Characters: Njoroge (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

As his parents argue about whether or not Ngotho should go on strike—and as the entire village discusses whether or not the strike will be a "success"—Njoroge yearns for some kind of "assurance" that everything will work out. As such, he turns to religion, hoping God might give him a "foretaste of the future." Considering that Njoroge is always looking forward to the future—constantly working hard to ensure that he will succeed in school so that he can improve his life and the lives of his family members—it's no surprise that he now yearns for some kind of indication that the strike will be "a success." Indeed, his sudden religious thinking foreshadows his later devotion to Christianity, which—like his education—becomes something he can depend upon when thinking about what's to come. However, it's worth noting that he falls asleep while still "listening" for God's voice—an indication that religion will later fail to give him solace.

Chapter 7 Quotes

Jacobo, the richest man in all the land around, had been brought to pacify the people. Everyone listened to him in silence. But something unusual happened to Ngotho. For one single moment Jacobo crystallised into a concrete betrayal of the people. He became the physical personification of the long years of waiting and suffering—Jacobo was a traitor. Ngotho rose. He made his way towards the platform while everyone watched, wondering what was happening. He was now near Jacobo. The battle was now between these two—Jacobo on the side of the white people, and he on the side of the black people.

Related Characters: Jacobo, Ngotho

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ngotho learns—along with the rest of the village—that Jacobo has sided with the white settlers. During a meeting concerning whether or not Kenyans should go on strike, Jacobo walks to the front of the crowd accompanied by a white police officer, and everyone falls silent. As Jacobo urges his fellow Kenyans not to strike, Ngotho finds himself enraged. And though his anger is directly tied to the fact that Jacobo has become a "traitor," it's worth noting that Ngotho's intense reaction is perhaps tied to the fact that Jacobo's unwillingness to take a stand against the white settlers resembles Ngotho's own passivity. Indeed, Ngotho already feels guilty about having failed to resist the white settlers when they first took his ancestral land, and so he's all the more enraged when he begins to see Jacobo as a representation of this failure. "[Jacobo] became the physical personification of the long years of waiting and suffering," Ngũgĩ writes, intimating that Ngotho recognizes in his foe his own passivity and inaction.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Ngotho did not speak much. He sat in his own corner and Njoroge could not tell if he was listening to what was going on. Ngotho was changing. Soon after the strike Boro quarrelled much with the old man. He accused him of having spoilt everything by his rash action in spite of Kiarie's warning. Boro clearly had contempt for Ngotho. But he had never expressed it in words except on those two occasions. Since then, he had become more critical of Ngotho. Ngotho, as a result, had diminished in stature, often assuming a defensive secondary place whenever talking with his sons and their friends. For months he had remained in this position, often submitting unflinchingly to his son. And then Boro thought that he could make the old man submit to his will. But Ngotho made a determined resistance. He would not take the Mau Mau oath at his son's hands or instruction. There had been a bitter quarrel and Boro had stayed for a long time without coming home.

Related Characters: Jacobo, Kiarie, Njoroge, Boro, Ngotho

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

After Ngotho attacks Jacobo, Boro criticizes him for his public display of violence, which went against Kiarie's request that everyone remain peaceful. However, one of the main reasons Ngotho attacked Jacobo in the first place is that Boro made him feel guilty and weak for failing to take a stand against the white settlers when they initially took the family land. As such, readers see that Ngotho is often spurred to action by feelings of guilt and shame. Unfortunately, though, this can lead to rash decisions—decisions that Boro uses to further shame his father, ultimately creating a toxic loop of guilt that not only puts a strain on their relationship, but also pushes Ngotho into a submissive role that will likely encourage him to act rashly again sometime in the future.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ But what could he have done? He had to go on strike. He had not wanted to be accused by a son anymore, because when a man was accused by the eyes of his son who had been to war and had witnessed the death of a brother, he felt guilty. But Ngotho had always wanted to be gentle with Boro because he knew that the son must have been sorely tried in the war. The something that had urged him to fight against Jacobo certainly had no logic. But it alienated Boro further still.

Related Characters: Jacobo, Boro, Ngotho

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ngotho questions whether or not he should have attacked Jacobo at the village meeting. In his own defense, he feels as if he did the right thing because he upheld his responsibility to his community by going on strike and resisting the oppressive practices of the white settlers. However, he also understands that there was more to his decision than the simple fact that "he had to go on strike." Indeed, he recognizes that he felt "guilty" because Boro "accused" him of being weak and passive when the British colonialists first came to Kenya and stole land from the family. "[...W]hen a man was accused by the eyes of his son who had been to war and had witnessed the death of a brother, [a father] felt guilty," Ngũgĩ writes, suggesting that part of Ngotho's guilt has to do with the fact that Boro was "tried in the war." Ngotho, on the other hand, was simply forced to build roads during World War I. In turn, Ngũgĩ intimates that Ngotho is ashamed about the fact that his son was forced to experience intense violence in World War II while Ngotho was able to avoid such traumatizing situations. In this way, the author shows readers that Ngotho invests himself in macho notions of what it means to be courageous and is eager to prove himself to his son, who he knows has seen more violence and destruction than he has. This, it seems, is the main reason why he felt an "urge" to "fight against Jacobo."

❝ "The white man makes a law or a rule. Through that rule or law or whatever you may call it, he takes away the land and then imposes many laws on the people concerning that land and many other things, all without people agreeing first as in the old days of the tribe. Now a man rises and opposes that law which made right the taking away of land. Now that man is taken by the same people who made the laws against which that man was fighting. He is tried under those alien rules. Now tell me who is that man who can win even if the angels of God were his lawyers . . . I mean."

Related Characters: Njeri (speaker), Jomo Kenyatta, Boro, Njoroge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place the night that Jomo Kenyatta loses his trial and is imprisoned, an event that dashes the hope from Kenyans who wish to resist oppressive colonialist rule. In a long but politically insightful rant, Njeri breaks down the ways in which white settlers have subjugated Kenyans, explaining that "the white man" arrived in Kenya and instituted new "law[s]" and "rule[s]." In turn, these laws enable white foreigners to take land from Kenyans, so that when someone like Jomo Kenyatta tries to take a stand against this injustice, the colonialists can arrest him and find him guilty according to their own made-up "law[s]." Because of this corrupt system, Njeri feels hopeless and depressed, saying that there isn't anyone in the entire world who could fight this kind of oppression, "even if the angels of God were his lawyers." And without someone like Jomo to contest the white settlers, the future looks bleak for people like Njeri and her family.

Chapter 10 Quotes

There was only one god for him—and that was the farm he had created, the land he had tamed.

Related Characters: Mr. Howlands

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ngũgĩ expounds upon the nature of Mr. Howlands's supposed connection to the land he stole from Ngotho's family. For Mr. Howlands, this farm is like a "god"—a mentality that at first glance resembles Ngotho's spiritual connection to the earth. However, it's worth noting that Mr. Howlands does nothing to worship the land. In fact, he believes *he* "created" and "tamed" this stretch of earth. As such, readers see that his claim that the farm is his "god" is rather flawed, since he feels a strange sense of ownership over it and thus positions *himself* as a god. Needless to say, ownership is not something people normally feel about the gods they worship. In this way, Ngũgĩ demonstrates that Mr. Howlands is obsessed with the sense of power he derives from owning this land. And though he may think of this as a religious connection, it's clear that his relationship with the land has more to do with his own ego than any kind of spiritual bond.

Was he a man any longer, he who had watched his wife and son taken away because of breaking the curfew without a word of protest? Was this cowardice? It was cowardice, cowardice of the worst sort. He stood up and rushed to the door like a madman. It was too late. He came back to his seat, a defeated man, a man who cursed himself for being a man with a lost manhood. He now knew that even that waiting had been a form of cowardice, putting off of action.

Related Characters: Kori, Njeri, Ngotho

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears after Njeri and Kori are arrested by white police officers for breaking curfew. The only reason this happens is because Jacobo has decided that he wants to capture Kori and Boro, who he suspects are involved with the Mau Mau. When Kori and Njeri are arrested, Ngotho sits in his hut and listens to the entire exchange, unable to move even to fight for his family members. As such, he wonders if he is "a man any longer," a question that once again emphasizes his insecurities regarding his ability to protect his family. "Was this cowardice?" he asks himself, tortured by the shame he feels. Once more, he has failed to act in the interest of his family, and when he realizes that he has been a "coward," he rushes to the door to make up for his previous indecision, but it is "too late." Given the fact that Ngotho is a man who is often motivated to do bold and unwise things because of his guilt and shame, it becomes obvious in this moment that he will later try to make up for his failure to do anything to protect Kori and Njeri from the white officers.

Through all this, Njoroge was still sustained by his love for and belief in education and his own role when the time came. And the difficulties of home seemed to have sharpened this appetite. Only education could make something out of this wreckage. He became more faithful to his studies. He would one day use all his learning to fight the white man, for he would continue the work that his father had started. When these moments caught him, he actually saw himself as a possible saviour of the whole God's country. Just let him get learning.

Related Characters: Njoroge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

As discord and division corrode his family, Njoroge applies himself to his studies. He does this because he feels "sustained by his love for and belief in education." By focusing on academics, he manages to invest himself in the idea of a brighter future, one in which he might play a significant "role." In fact, "the difficulties of home" only make him more inspired to succeed, since he believes "only education [can] make something out of this wreckage." As such, readers see that he feels a sense of responsibility to compensate for the disastrous state of his family and, for that matter, the entire country. Indeed, commits himself to his education so wholeheartedly that he can imagine himself as someone destined for greatness. However, when Ngũgĩ says that Njoroge sometimes sees himself "as a possible savior of the whole of God's country," he hints at the fact

that the young man is perhaps blowing the positive effects of education out of proportion. In this way, the author prepares readers to witness Njoroge's eventual disappointment in the fact that studying hard won't necessarily turn him into a "saviour."

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Mr Howlands felt a certain gratifying pleasure. The machine he had set in motion was working. The blacks were destroying the blacks. They would destroy themselves to the end. What did it matter with him if the blacks in the forest destroyed a whole village? What indeed did it matter except for the fact that labour would diminish? Let them destroy themselves. Let them fight against each other. The few who remained would be satisfied with the reservation the white man had set aside for them. Yes, Mr Howlands was coming to enjoy his work.

Related Characters: Ngotho, Mr. Howlands

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

When Mr. Howlands first joins the homeguard as a Directing Officer, he resents the fact that he once again has to serve on behalf of England. However, he has now become swept up in the process of subjugating Kenyans, and he finds "gratifying pleasure" in his role as someone who can pit people like Ngotho and Jacobo against one another in order to sow division amongst Africans. Indeed, he feels as if he has "set in motion" a cycle of destruction, one in which "the blacks [are] destroying the blacks," thereby enabling him to maintain power. "What did it matter with him if the blacks in the forest destroyed a whole village?" he wonders, relishing the fact that the Mau Mau have become so violent against their own people. This is the point during *Weep Not, Child* when Ngũgĩ reveals the full extent of Mr. Howlands's egotistical depravity, portraying him as a man who not only is obsessed with "conquering" the earth itself, but who finds actual pleasure in subjugating others and encouraging them to kill one another.

❝ Boro had always told himself that the real reason for his flight to the forest was a desire to fight for freedom. But this fervour had soon worn off. His mission became a mission of revenge. This was the only thing that could now give him fire and boldness. If he killed a single white man, he was exacting a vengeance for a brother killed.

"And freedom?" the lieutenant continued.

"An illusion. What freedom is there for you and me?"

"Why then do we fight?"

"To kill. Unless you kill, you'll be killed. So you go on killing and destroying. It's a law of nature. The white man too fights and kills with gas, bombs, and everything."

Related Characters: Boro (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Boro speaks with a fellow member of the Mau Mau, eventually admitting that he is no longer motivated to fight by any kind of broader purpose, like freedom or land. Instead, he has embarked upon a "mission of revenge," one in which "freedom" means essentially nothing. Although he originally joined the Mau Mau because he believed it was his duty to advocate for Kenyan independence, the only thing he cares about now is "kill[ing]" his enemies. "Unless you kill, you'll be killed," he tells the Mau Mau lieutenant, adding, "So you go on killing and destroying." By saying this, Boro demonstrates that violence is self-perpetuating, something that eventually blots out all considerations except for those that pertain to acts of destruction. In this way, readers come to understand that Boro—a man traumatized by the things he saw in World War II—can focus only on the cycle of violence that has finally consumed his everyday life.

Chapter 18 Quotes

"Don't be angry, Mwihaki. For what can I say now? You and I can only put faith in hope. Just stop for a moment, Mwihaki, and imagine. If you knew that all your days life will always be like this with blood flowing daily and men dying in the forest, while others daily cry for mercy; if you knew even for one moment that this would go on forever, then life would be meaningless unless bloodshed and death were a meaning. Surely this darkness and terror will not go on forever. Surely there will be a sunny day, a warm sweet day after all this tribulation, when we can breathe the warmth and purity of God [...]."

Related Characters: Njoroge (speaker), Mwihaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

Njoroge says this to Mwihaki after she laments the fact that Kenya is undergoing such a difficult, trying period. When he tells her that he and she "can only put faith in hope," he suggests that they have no choice but to remain optimistic about the future, despite the fact that there is death, destruction, and anger all around them. Going on, he says that life would be "meaningless" if one were to think that things won't improve—that is, unless "bloodshed and death were a meaning" in and of themselves. This last sentiment recalls Boro's previous assertion that the only reason to fight is to go on "killing," a perspective indicating that he actually *does* think "bloodshed and death" are meaningful in and of themselves. As such, Njoroge's worldview stands in stark contrast to Boro's, and he places "faith in hope" by choosing to believe that "there will be a sunny day" in the future.

"Mwihaki, you are the one dear thing left to me. I feel bound to you and I know that I can fully depend on you. I have no hope left but for you, for now I know that my tomorrow was an illusion."

Related Characters: Njoroge (speaker), Mwihaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

Njoroge speaks these words to Mwihaki after he has lost faith in everything that used to give his life meaning. Indeed, he has lost everything: his father has died, his brothers are imprisoned, and Njoroge himself has been pulled out of school and tortured by the white settlers. Because of all this, he can no longer afford to continue going to school, and it's not necessarily clear whether or not he would go back even if he could, considering how disillusioned he has become with the idea that education and religious devotion can lead to prosperity. In this moment, though, he clings to his last shred of hope: his love for Mwihaki. "I feel bound to you and I know that I can fully depend on you," he says, emphasizing the fact that he has always been able to count on her. This is important to him, since everything else he's ever cared about has now failed to give him any sense of support. In turn, Ngũgĩ shows readers the extent to which Njoroge has ceased to believe in the idea of a better "tomorrow," thereby demonstrating that the oppressive conditions of colonialist governments can break the spirit of even the most inspired and hopeful individuals.

But as they came near home and what had happened to him came to mind, the voice again came and spoke, accusing him:

You are a coward. You have always been a coward. Why didn't you do it?

And loudly he said, "Why didn't I do it?"

The voice said: Because you are a coward.

"Yes," he whispered to himself, "I am a coward."

And he ran home and opened the door for his two mothers.

Related Characters: Njoroge (speaker), Njeri, Nyokabi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Njoroge walks home with Nyokabi and Njeri after having given up on his plan to commit suicide. As he walks along the road, he is taunted by an internal voice branding him as a "coward." This sense of shame recalls his father's own obsession with the notion of cowardice—an obsession that ultimately led him to his death, considering the fact that he decided to sacrifice himself to protect his son (a final attempt to prove his honor). When Njoroge contemplates his own honor, though, he comes to freely accept that he is a "coward." This is an important moment, as

Ngũgĩ suggests that the only thing keeping Njoroge from committing suicide is his ability to embrace his own shame. Rather than obsessively trying to prove himself, he says, "Yes, I am a coward," thereby dismissing the matter and enabling himself to focus on what he still has: his life with his two mothers. Indeed, *Weep Not, Child* ends with a line about Njoroge running home and opening the door "for his two mothers" because the phrase indicates that he has decided to pay attention to the positive elements of his life, despite the fact that everything else he used to care about has failed him.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Nyokabi calls her son, Njoroge, and asks him if he would like to go to school. Overjoyed, Njoroge can't believe his ears and fears that she might rescind her offer. "O, Mother!" he gasps, assuring her that he would love to go. "You won't bring shame to me by one day refusing to attend school?" she asks, and he insists that he would never do such a thing. *"O, Mother, you are an angel of God, you are, you are," he thinks. "And here I am with nothing but a piece of calico on my body and soon I shall have a shirt and shorts for the first time."*

In the opening scene of Weep Not, Child, *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o establishes the extent to which Njoroge believes in the importance of education. By showcasing the young boy's excitement at the prospect of going to school, he emphasizes the fact that Njoroge sees his education as a rare opportunity, one that he associates with progress, change, and advancement, as he focuses on how his schooling will take him out of his old clothes and into new ones.*

When Njoroge's half-brother Kamau comes home that evening, Njoroge tells him the good news and asks if their "elder mother," Njeri, has told him that he too can go to school. "No, brother," Kamau replies. "You know I am being trained as a carpenter. I cannot drop the apprenticeship. But I am glad you're going to school." When Njoroge says that he wishes Kamau could accompany him, his older brother says, "Don't you worry about me. Everything will be all right. Get education, I'll get carpentry. Then we shall, in the future, be able to have a new and better home for the whole family."

Although Njoroge and Kamau are focused on pursuing different paths, it's worth noting that they both want to create a better life for their family. As such, Ngũgĩ underlines the boys' desire to uplift their loved ones—an endeavor they believe will require not only an education, but also a practical ability to work and earn money. In turn, readers see that the environment in which these boys exist is quite demanding, as one must unite with his or her family members in order to succeed as a group.

Njoroge accepts that Kamau will not be coming with him to school. He then postulates that Jacobo—the most successful black man in town—is as rich as the white Mr. Howlands because he "got education." After he says this, Njoroge and Kamau wonder aloud why Mr. Howlands left England, which they see as "the home of learning." "I don't know," Kamau says. "You cannot understand a white man."

When Njoroge suggests that Jacobo is rich because he is educated, he expresses his belief that academic success leads to personal advancement and progress. On another note, Kamau's belief that he and his brother will never be able to "understand a white man" demonstrates the divide between black Kenyans and white settlers, ultimately establishing the rift that exists between these two populations—a rift that factors heavily into the plot of the novel.

Ngũgĩ explains that there's a road that runs "right across the land." This road is so long it seems to have "no end," and no one know of its "origin." "Only if you followed it it would take you to the big city and leave you there while it went beyond to the unknown, perhaps joining the sea," Ngũgĩ writes. "Who made the road? Rumour had it that it came with the white men and some said that it was built by the Italian prisoners during the big war that was fought far away from here." Considering the first and second world wars, Ngũgĩ poses a rhetorical question, saying, "Why should the white men have fought? Aaa! You could never tell what these people would do. In spite of the fact that they were all white, they killed one another with poison, fire, and big bombs that destroyed the land."

Ngũgĩ's attention to geography is important to note, as it calls attention to the significant role the land itself plays in Weep Not, Child. *By contemplating the history of this large road, the author invites readers to consider the ways in which the first and second world wars have shaped Kenya's landscape. Unfortunately, though, the colonial influence on Kenya remains inscrutable and mysterious to most of the population, since people like Njoroge and Kamau feel as if they "cannot understand" why white people are fighting against one another and why, for that matter, this fighting has driven them to come to Kenya and change the preexisting culture.*

Ngũgĩ suggests that, instead of trying to understand why Europeans fight amongst themselves, it's better to simply "be content with knowing **the land** you lived in, and the people who lived near you." If this isn't enough, he says, there are plenty of stories to hear in the village of Kipanga, which is reachable from Njoroge's village of Mahua by following "the big road," walking through the "ridges" and "valleys" and "small plains" that break up all of Kikuyuland, dissecting it into separate sections. The place where white settlers live, Ngũgĩ explains, is easily recognizable because of its lush greens. "You could tell the land of the Black People because it was red, rough, and sickly," he notes.

Focusing on the physical demarcations in the land, Ngũgĩ calls readers' attention once more to the division between Kenyans and the white settlers, who have taken dominion over the most verdant—and no doubt agriculturally profitable—areas. By zeroing in on the "red, rough, and sickly" hue of the "land of the Black People," he holds up a physical manifestation of the ways in which the white settlers have oppressed people like Njoroge and his family.

In the town of Kipanga, people visit the markets, shopping either at Kenyan or Indian stands. Although the majority of Kenyans distrust the Indians, they do most of their shopping with them because they believe they'll get better prices from them than from their own people. "Some people said that black people should stick together and take trade only to their black brethren," Ngũgĩ writes. "And one day an old poor woman said, 'Let Africans stick together and charge very low prices. We are all black. If this be not so, then why grudge a poor woman the chance to buy from someone, be he white or red, who charges less money for his things?" Some young men spend all of their time in the African shops, gaining an ominous reputation as people who are likely to become robbers or murderers.

When this unidentified woman says that all Africans should "stick together and charge low prices," it's easy to believe in the positivity of her message. However, there is a veiled sense of division in what she says, since she is essentially threatening her fellow Kenyans by saying she will shop elsewhere if they don't charge extremely low prices. As such, she urges vendors to sell without turning healthy profits. If they won't do this, she says, then they shouldn't critique her for shopping elsewhere. Of course, this seems reasonable, but it illustrates the extent to which newcomers in Kenya have sown division between Africans by encouraging competition that ultimately hurts the marketplace and, thus, the Kenyans who make their living by selling goods.

One particularly popular place in Kipanga is the barber's shop, where men go to tell and hear stories. Mostly, they talk about the two world wars, swapping tales of violence and destruction. One day, the barber talks about World War II, and when someone asks if it was similar to World War I, he says, "That was a baby's war. It was only fought here. Those Africans who went to that one were only porters. But this one… […] this one, we carried guns and we shot white men." This astounds his listeners, but he pushes on, saying, "Y-e-e-e-s. They are not the gods we had thought them to be. We even slept with their women." Shocked, the barber's customers ask him what it was like to sleep with white women, and he says, "Not different. Not different."

This conversation at the barber shop provides insight into the ways in which Kenyans conceive of the white settlers. When the barber says white people are not "the gods" that he and his fellow Kenyans used to think they were, he suggests that many Africans have conceived of these foreigners as powerful and untouchable. To sleep with a white woman, then, is to transcend the boundaries between the two races. This, it seems, is why the barber's customers are shocked: he has managed to prove that white people are no "different" than black people.

Having listened to the barber, Ngotho—Njoroge's father—goes home and thinks about his own wartime experiences, though he was only in the World War I. "As a boy he had been conscripted and made to carry things for the fighting white men," Ngũgĩ writes. "He also had to clear dark bush and make roads. Then, he and the others were not allowed to use guns. But in the barber's war! Ah, that was something. His own two sons had also gone to this one. Only one had returned. And the one who had returned never talked much about the actual war, except to say that it had been a terrible waste of life." When gets home, his wives Nyokabi and Njeri tease him for staying too long in Kipanga, but he ignores them by asking if Njoroge likes the idea of going to school. "He looked happy," Nyokabi says.

In this scene, Ngũgĩ outlines the ways in which war has affected people like Ngotho, who was taken away from his home in order to serve for a foreign cause. And although Ngotho himself didn't have to face violence, it's clear that the next generation—which fought in World War II—was not so lucky, as evidenced by the fact that one of Ngotho's sons never "returned." By hinting at the significant impact of the wars, Ngũgĩ effectively communicates to readers that Kenyans have been wrongfully used as pawns in conflicts that would otherwise have nothing to do with them, and he suggests that this kind of violence is nothing but a "terrible waste of life."

CHAPTER 2

That Monday, Njoroge goes to school. Because he doesn't know how to get there, Mwihaki shows him the way. "Mwihaki was a daughter of Jacobo," Ngũgĩ explains. "Jacobo owned **the land** on which Ngotho lived." Like Njoroge, Mwihaki is a student, but she has already started school, since her family believes in educating all of their children. In fact, her older sister, Lucia, is a teacher at the school. This gives Mwihaki a certain amount of power, which she uses to fend off bullies when they try to pick on Njoroge on his first day. Calling him a *Njuka*—a newcomer—they taunt him until Mwihaki tells them to stop, saying, "Yes, he is my *Njuka*. Let any of you touch him."

Although it is a very small-scale representation of the matter, Mwihaki's willingness to defend Njoroge against bullies foreshadows the ways in which these two children will come together in the face of antagonism and division. Unafraid of the aggressive boys who make fun of Njoroge for being a newcomer, Mwihaki proudly defends him.

Njoroge gets used to school, though he keeps to himself, making a point of returning home early so he won't encounter "bad boys" in the dark. Three weeks into the term, though, Mwihaki asks him to wait for her so they can walk home together. Talking on their way, they stop atop a hill near their village and pass the time. "It was sweet to play with a girl and especially if that girl came from a family higher up the social scale than one's own," Ngũgĩ notes. However, Njoroge fails to see that the sun is "sinking," and is startled when Nyokabi appears and anxiously rushes him home. "She did not want her son to associate with a family of the rich because it would not be healthy for him," Njoroge writes. Blaming this incident on Mwihaki, Njoroge promises himself he'll stop playing with her.

Ngũgĩ has already mentioned that Ngotho's family lives on Jacobo's land. As such, Mwihaki—Jacobo's daughter—has a certain elevated social status, which is why Njoroge's mother doesn't want her son playing with her. Of course, this is a rather strange reaction, since there is seemingly no problem with the idea of "associate[ing] with a family of the rich." At the same time, though, Nyokabi believes that playing with Mwihaki isn't "healthy" for Njoroge, an opinion that suggests a certain fear that her son will become too aware of the disparity—the division—between Kenya's rich and poor. In turn, readers see that white people and black people aren't the only divided populations. Rather, there are also rifts between Kenyans themselves.

After school one day, Njoroge urges his mother to tell him stories, but she tells him to do his homework first. "Nyokabi was proud of having a son in school," Ngũgĩ explains. "It made her soul happy and lighthearted whenever she saw him bending double over a slate or recounting to her what he had seen at school. […] It was to her the greatest reward she would get from her motherhood if she one day found her son writing letters, doing arithmetic, and speaking English." Indeed, she wants Njoroge to become educated because she doesn't think that her own "social circumstances and conditions" will help him grow up. "Her other son had died in the big war," Ngũgĩ writes. "It had hurt her much. Why should he have died in a white man's war?"

Once again, Ngũgĩ emphasizes the fact that Nyokabi and her family believe education will help Njoroge advance the whole family. This, Nyokabi hopes, will enable her son to avoid the gruesome and seemingly needless fate that her other son met during World War II, in which he fought for white people who only cared about their own cause.

Njoroge runs to find Kamau, who should be coming home from his apprenticeship. On his way, he passes Mwihaki's house and thinks about the interior of the kitchen, which he once visited on Christmas Day because Juliana—Jacobo's wife—invited him and a handful of other children who work on **the land** for a party. During grace, a boy next to Njoroge made a funny noise, and he couldn't help but laugh, setting off a chain reaction throughout the group that left him feeling ashamed. Delivering a "long lecture," Juliana said that if Njoroge was her own son, she wouldn't feed him for two days because her children all have "good manners."

When Njoroge thinks about his experience in Julianna's kitchen, it's clear he feels ashamed for his inability to demonstrate "good manners." What's more, it becomes evident that Julianna is self-righteous about the way she has raised her children, essentially insulting Njoroge's upbringing in an attempt to make him feel guilty for misbehaving. This moment is important to remember as the novel progresses, considering that Mwihaki—Julianna's daughter—is already growing close to Njoroge. It's obvious, then, that these two children must navigate their differences and the fact that they come from opposing backgrounds, and this is yet another reminder that there is division between Africans themselves, not just between black people and white people.

Njoroge makes his way along the path and sees Mwihaki approaching. Suddenly, he feels acutely aware of his calico cloth, which is barely covering "the lower part of his body." Angry that his mother made him change out of his school clothes, he "hate[s] himself for feeling" ashamed of his own clothes. "Before he had started school," Ngũgĩ writes, "[…] he would never have thought that he would ever be ashamed of the calico, the only dress he had ever known since birth." Nonetheless, he decides to avoid Mwihaki by turning into Jacobo's pyrethrum field. From this vantage point, he can see Mr. Howlands's **land**, which lies just beyond an adjacent ridge. "That was where Ngotho, Njoroge's father, worked," Ngũgĩ writes.

Njoroge's abrupt self-consciousness underlines the ways in which his new experiences in school have made him aware of the difference between people like him and people like Mwihaki, who are rich and undoubtedly influenced by European culture. In turn, he feels guilty for the shame he experiences in this moment, but this doesn't stop him from hiding from Mwihaki—a fact that demonstrates how feelings of shame and embarrassment can motivate a person to do things he or she might not otherwise consider.

As Njoroge goes to find Kamau, he passes Nganga's **land**. Nganga is the carpenter with whom Kamau is apprenticed, and Njoroge thinks about how Ngotho had to pay "a huge fattened he-goat and a hundred and fifty shillings" to convince the master to take on his son. "Nganga was rich," Ngũgĩ explains. "He had land. Any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but not land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money."

In this section, Ngũgĩ impresses upon readers the importance of land ownership, suggesting that there is nothing more valuable than owning a farm or "an acre of red earth." In turn, he intimates that this kind of proprietorship is a form of power, one that is more stable than monetary or material wealth. Unfortunately, Njoroge's family doesn't own land, which is why he is so sensitive to the supposed differences between himself and people like Mwihaki.

When Njoroge finally finds Kamau, his brother complains about Nganga, saying that the man isn't even teaching him anything but instead forcing him to carry tools and clean up the workspace. "But why does he treat you like that? He is a black man," Njoroge says. "Blackness is not all that makes a man," Kamau replies. "There are some people, be they black or white, who don't want others to rise above them. They want to be the source of all knowledge and share it piecemeal to others less endowed." Going on, he upholds that sometimes "Europeans are better than Africans," which is why Ngotho can be heard from time to time saying he'd rather work for a white man. "A white man is a white man," Kamau says. "But a black man trying to be a white man is bad and harsh."

When Kamau says that some people "don't want others to rise above them," he addresses the division in his community. He articulates the fact that those in power are eager to make sure others don't have a chance to increase their own wealth, whether this wealth comes in the form of ownership or "knowledge." By calling Njoroge's attention to the idea that certain black people try even harder than white people to disempower other Kenyans, Kamau touches upon the sad reality that Africans have become so divided and competitive that they spend all their energy struggling against one another instead of helping uplift their shared community.

That night, Njoroge gathers with his family to listen to stories. Included in this group are his older brothers, Kori and Boro. "Boro, who had been to the war, did not know many tribal stories," Ngũgĩ writes. "He drank a lot and he was always sad and withdrawn. He never talked much about his war experiences except when he was drunk or when he was in a mood of resentment against the government and settlers." Even when Boro does talk about the war, he rarely mentions his brother Mwangi, whom he loved deeply and who died while fighting in Europe.

It's clear that Boro has been changed by the things he witnessed as a soldier in World War II. Unfortunately, he lost his brother to a cause that has very little to do with Kenya, making the loss all the more painful because it seems needless and futile. What's more, the fact that Boro has returned from the war completely uninterested in participating in his culture's tradition of telling "tribal stories" suggests that violence has estranged him from his old life and companions. When he does talk, he only speaks resentfully about "the government and settlers," ultimately suggesting that the only thing he can think about is the way colonialists have ruined his life.

On this particular night, many family members are present. "Boro, Kori, and Kamau were all sons of Njeri, Ngotho's eldest wife," Ngũgĩ writes. "Njoroge's only true brother was Mwangi who had died in the war. But they all behaved as if they were of one mother." Settling in with his close-knit family, then, Ngotho tells a version of the creation story, explaining that God bequeathed their ancestors with **the land** before them. "Where did the land go?" Njoroge interrupts, and Ngotho says, "I am old now. But I too have asked that question in waking and sleeping." He then tells his family that an old seer prophesied that "the white man" would come and take the land that belongs to the Kikuyu people.

It's worth noting that Ngotho's family is especially close. This unity is important to keep in mind as the novel progresses, since Weep Not, Child *is largely about how discord can work its way into even the closest groups of people. On another note, Ngũgĩ once again stresses the significance of land ownership. By telling a creation story in which God presents land to the Kikuyu people, Ngotho intimates that the soil under his feet belongs to him, not to white men like Mr. Howlands, who have claimed it as their own. In turn, readers prepare themselves for a struggle between Kenyans and colonialists over the earth itself.*

"Then came the war," Ngotho says, continuing his story. "It was the first big war. I was then young, a mere boy, although circumcised. All of us were taken by force. We made roads and cleared the forest to make it possible for the warring white man to move more quickly. The war ended. We were all tired. We came home worn-out but very ready for whatever the British might give as a reward. But, more than this, we wanted to go back to the soil and court it to yield, to create, not to destroy. But Ng'o! **The land** was gone. My father and many others had been moved from our ancestral lands." Going on, Ngotho explains that his father died a *Muhoi* (a serf, essentially) on his own land. Now, Ngotho explains, he himself works on this ancestral land, which belongs to Mr. Howlands these days.

In this moment, Ngotho tells the story of how the ancient prophecy—that "the white man" would take the land belonging to the Kikuyu people—came true. In turn, readers see how British colonialists exploited Kenyans by forcing them to leave their homes to help in a war that had nothing to do with them. And while they were away, the British stole their land. Interestingly enough, though, Ngotho doesn't necessarily focus on the idea of ownership, but rather on the fact that he and his fellow Kenyans simply want to "court" the soil "to yield." Indeed, Ngotho wants to interact with the land so that he can "create" more life on earth through the process of farming. As such, readers see that his motivation to reclaim his land has little to do with greedy notions of ownership—a mentality that stands in stark contrast to the white settlers' exploitative ambitions.

Fortunately, Ngotho upholds that the old prophet also predicted that "the white man" would eventually be driven away. As such, Ngotho has spent his time working for Mr. Howlands, "waiting for the prophecy to be fulfilled." When Kori asks if he thinks this will ever actually happen, though, Ngotho says he doesn't know. There was once a time, he explains, when a certain man emerged and promised to drive away the settlers, "but he was killed by wicked people because he said people should stand together." Since then, Ngotho has continued waiting for the prophecy to come true, but he believes it might not "be fulfilled in [his] lifetime."

When Ngotho explains that the white settlers once killed a man who wanted to unite the people, he suggests that the colonialists want to actively prevent Africans from coming together. This is because any kind of true and widespread unification amongst Kenyans could lead to an overthrow of power. As such, it is in the best interest of the white settlers to keep black people divided. Unfortunately, this brings to mind the socioeconomic tensions that keep people like Njoroge and Mwihaki apart—evidence of the fact that the white settlers' strategy of sowing division amongst Kenyans is working.

Listening to his father, Boro thinks about how Ngotho "fought in the war only to be dispossessed." "He too had gone to war, against Hitler," Ngũgĩ writes. "He had gone to Egypt, Jerusalem, and Burma. He had seen things." When he came home from World War II, he found himself unable to find a job, and "there was no **land** on which he could settle." As he listens to Ngotho's story, these injustices reoccur to him and work him into a slow rage. "How could these people have let the white man occupy the land without acting? And what was all this superstitious belief in prophecy," he wonders, saying aloud, "To hell with the prophecy." Turning to his father, he says, "How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?" With this, he leaves the hut.

Boro can't stand the idea that his father and elders have let white people treat them so badly. Indeed, he feels as if people like Ngotho should be ashamed for their inability to take action against the settlers, and this infuriates him so much that he's unable to sit idly by while his father speaks about the matter. In turn, readers see that even Ngotho's close-knit family is susceptible to the kind of internal divides that arise as a result of the exploitative ways of the British colonialists.

CHAPTER 3

Walking to the work the next day, Ngotho thinks about Boro's words. For years, he has been waiting for the prophecy to come true, but now he wonders if he has "waited too long." "Now he feared that this was being taken as an excuse for inactivity, or worse, a betrayal," Ngũgĩ writes. When he arrives at work, Mr. Howlands greets him with something like kindness. Apparently, Ngotho is the only worker he treats this way. Indeed, Mr. Howlands's wife is very particular about the people they employ, constantly letting workers go on a whim, but Mr. Howlands has never let her fire Ngotho. This is because Mr. Howlands cares about his farm more than anything, and Ngotho is an excellent farmer: "Ngotho was too much a part of the farm to be separated from it."

Contemplating the division that has manifested within his own family, Ngotho is forced to reevaluate the way he has responded to the impact white colonialists have had on his life. The fact that Boro has now voiced his criticism, Ngotho's sense of pride is clearly beginning to suffer, since Boro has called into question his ability to protect the family and its ancestral lands. Meanwhile, Mr. Howlands's apparent kindness toward Ngotho is nothing more than a self-motivated attempt to wring as much as he can out of the land by using Ngotho's expertise to better care for the farm.

Mr. Howlands, Ngũgĩ explains, is a "product of the First World War," in which he fought for four years and saw "terrible destruction." As a result, he became "utterly disillusioned" and decided to leave England once and for all, ultimately making his way to Kenya because he saw it as "a big trace of wild country to conquer." After settling on what used to be the farm of Ngotho's family, he then returned to England to find a wife, which is when he brought back Suzannah, who was "bored with life in England." "Africa sounded quite a nice place so she had willingly followed this man who would give her a change," Ngũgĩ writes. "but she had not known that Africa meant hardship and complete break with Europe. She again became bored." Thankfully for her, though, she soon had a child, and this took her mind off her discontent.

Although Ngũgĩ presents Mr. Howlands as someone who dislikes violence and "destruction"—thereby humanizing him somewhat—it quickly becomes clear that this is a man who doesn't care about people like Ngotho. Indeed, Mr. Howlands only has his own interests in mind, as made clear by the fact that he abandons his country and its war in order to stake out a new life. What's more, he sees Ngotho's land as "wild country" that he can "conquer," an indication that he is attracted to the idea of asserting his will and subjugating not only the swathes of land he owns, but also the people he forces out in the process.

Not long after having her first son, Suzannah gave birth to a girl, and the family lived happily for a time. Eventually, their son started walking through the farm with Mr. Howlands, who relished the idea that he would be able to pass on **the land** after he died. Unfortunately, though, "European civilisation caught up with him again," and his son was sent to war. In turn, Mr. Howlands became further disenchanted with his own country and plunged into a deep depression. He would have "destroyed himself," Ngũgĩ writes, if he hadn't cared so deeply about his land, to which he suddenly applied all his "energy," "worship[ping] the soil" and toiling on the farm. During this time, Suzannah gave birth to another boy, Stephen, who "was now an only son." His daughter, for her part, had become a missionary and left her parents behind.

As Ngũgĩ narrates Mr. Howlands's past, it becomes clear that Howlands's obsession with the land is directly related to his desire to completely forget about England and the sorrows he's suffered as a result of the war. Indeed, he fought in World War I and was so traumatized and disillusioned by it that he fled to Kenya. It's no surprise, then, that he recommits himself to "worship[ping] the soil" when his son dies in World War II. The farm, it seems, is his only salvation. Unfortunately, though, he fails to take into account—care about—the fact that he has stolen this land.

Now, Ngotho walks with Mr. Howlands, each man surveying the *shamba*. "For Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this **land**. He owed it to the dead, the living, and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over this *shamba*." Mr. Howlands, on the other hand, feels triumphant as he moves over his land, thinking that "he alone" is "responsible for taming this unoccupied wildness." When he asks Ngotho what he thinks of the farm, Ngotho says, "It is the best land in all the country," to which Mr. Howlands says, "I don't know who will manage it after me…" Suddenly hopeful, Ngotho asks if Mr. Howlands is going home, but the white man simply replies, "My home is here!" Confused, Ngotho wonders if "these people" will ever leave.

Whereas Mr. Howlands sees the land as something to "conquer"—something that makes him feel victorious—Ngotho approaches the earth in a more wholesome, beneficent manner. By considering the significance this land had for his ancestors and the important role it will play in future generations of his family, Ngotho becomes something of a steward of the soil, working on the farm not for any kind of personal benefit, but because he respects it and wants to make sure "the unborn of his line" are able to reap its benefits. Unfortunately, the only way to do this right now is by working for Mr. Howlands, who mistakenly believes he has dominion over the farm.

CHAPTER 4

Njoroge continues to enjoy his time at school. In particular, he looks forward to taking English lessons from Isaka, a teacher with a mustache who is "jovial" and somewhat mischievous—a combination that causes the students to gossip about him and speculate about his romantic life. After one particularly fun and spirited reading lesson—in which Isaka teaches the children how to pronounce the letter "u"—Njoroge and his peers start calling him U-u. On that day, he goes home and tries to teach Kamau what he has learned, but Kamau "resent[s]" this, so Njoroge "give[s] up the idea."

Kamau has already made it clear that he believes in the value of education and the value of learning a trade. In the very opening pages of the novel, he even tells Njoroge that together they will be able to combine their knowledge and skills to uplift their family. However, Njoroge sometimes fails to recognize the importance of what Kamau is doing by becoming a carpenter, underhandedly suggesting that getting an education is the only way to make progress in life. What he fails to see, though, is that the family needs someone to make money in order to support his own education.

One day, Mwihaki asks Njoroge why he's avoiding her. "You always come out late," he lies, trying to hide the fact that he intentionally leaves before her so he won't annoy his mother like the last time she caught him spending time with Mwihaki. Nonetheless, this conversation reopens their friendship, and they begin to play on the way home. Passing Mr. Howlands's house, Njoroge says, "My father works here." He then explains to Mwihaki that he sometimes visits the farm to see his father. When he does, he often encounters Stephen, who stays close to his mother and stares at Njoroge. One time, though, Stephen saw Njoroge and started walking toward him. "I was frightened because I did not know what he wanted," Njoroge says. "I ran."

Njoroge's story about being "frightened" of Stephen demonstrates the extent to which these two groups—Africans and white settlers—are divided. Because Njoroge doesn't have any contact with people like Stephen (and because Stephen's people have taken advantage of Kenyans in the past) Njoroge assumes that the boy wants to harm him. This kind of fear, Ngũgĩ intimates, is how two groups of people remain so thoroughly divided for such long periods of time.

Mwihaki asks Njoroge if Stephen wanted to speak to him, but Njoroge says he doesn't know. "He may have wanted to quarrel with me," he guesses. "He is like his father. And you know—" Before finishing his sentence, Njoroge thinks about the story Ngotho told his family about how white people stole their **land**. Because Mwihaki is Jacobo's daughter—and because Jacobo is close to the white settlers—he decides he shouldn't say anything about this. Instead, he simply says, "All this land belongs to black people." Mwihaki agrees, saying that she's heard her father say the same thing. "He says that if people had had education, the white man would not have taken all the land," she adds.

Once again, readers witness the underlying tension in Mwihaki and Njoroge's relationship—a tension that has to do with the fact that Mwihaki's family is associated with white settlers like Mr. Howlands. On another note, when Mwihaki says that Jacobo believes white settlers wouldn't have been able to steal land from Kenyans if only Kenyans were educated, Ngũgĩ once again demonstrates how highly people like Jacobo value education.

The following year, Njoroge is bumped up to Mwihaki's class. Before the first day of classes, he spends time with Kamau, once more encouraging his brother to pursue an education. However, Kamau explains again that he doesn't want to go to school. "A man without **land** must learn to trade," he says. "Father has nothing. So what I am doing is important." If, he says, he becomes a skilled craftsman, he will be wealthy and will be able to support Njoroge's academic life. "Your learning is for all of us," he says. "Father says the same thing. He is anxious that you go on, so you might bring light to our home. Education is the light of Kenya. That's what Jomo says." Hearing this, Njoroge thinks about Jomo, a man he has heard about but about whom he knows very little, other than that he's well educated.

When Njoroge tries once more to convince his brother to pursue an education, Kamau reiterates that someone needs to find a way to support Njoroge, who will in turn repay the family by becoming educated. "Your learning is for all of us," Kamau says, ultimately suggesting that he and his family are investing themselves in Njoroge. Referencing Jomo Kenyatta (an anti-colonial activist), Kamau speaks hopefully about the future, and readers understand that Kenyans have found a de-facto leader (Jomo) who sets forth the positive idea that education is the path to a better future.

Before Njoroge starts school again, Ngotho says, "You must learn to escape the conditions under which we live. It is a hard way. It is not much that a man can do without a piece of **land**." He tells his son that "education is everything," but what he truly believes is that "land is everything." This is why he never wants to be far from "the land that belonged to his ancestors." Because of this, he has "faithfully" worked for Mr. Howlands for years, hoping that the prophecy will someday come true and drive white settlers out of Kenya. Now, though, Boro has made him doubt that this will ever happen. Listening to his father talk about land and Mr. Howlands's farm, Njoroge knows that "an indefinable demand [is] being made on him, even though he [is] so young," and this responsibility makes his "heart glow."

It is obvious that Njoroge finds motivation in the idea that his family is counting on him. Rather than shrinking under the "indefinable demand" that people like his father have placed on him, he takes pleasure in his responsibility. This is perhaps because he doesn't want to end up like his father, who is ashamed for failing to do something about the family's lost land. Indeed, if Njoroge can manage to work hard and succeed in school, he will never have to worry about feeling as if he hasn't done anything to advocate for himself or his loved ones.

CHAPTER 5

Ngũgĩ explains that Jacobo is one of the only Africans allowed by white settlers to grow pyrethrum. "It was said that he had stood in the way of similar permits being given to other people," Ngũgĩ writes. "White farmers who planted it also did not want many Africans to be allowed to grow any cash crop like pyrethrum […]." Often, Njoroge stands on a small hill overlooking Jacobo's crops and watches for his mother and brothers. If sees one of them, he rushes out to help them carry whatever they might have—even if it is Njeri or one of his half-brothers. "The feeling of oneness was a thing that most distinguished Ngotho's household from many other polygamous families," Ngũgĩ notes. The reason for this closeness, he suggests, is Ngotho himself, who acts as a "stable centre" for the entire family.

In keeping with the idea that British colonists don't want to empower Africans, Ngũgĩ explains in this section that only certain farmers are allowed grow pyrethrum, a profitable crop that can be made into medicine or insecticide. This recalls Kamau's earlier assertion that some people want to do what they can to keep power to themselves. By allowing a select few—like Jacobo—to grow pyrethrum, though, the settlers create a sense of competition and division amongst Kenyans, ultimately making it harder for people like Ngotho and Jacobo to unite and take a stand against the settlers themselves. In contrast to this divisiveness, Ngotho's family is remarkably unified, though it's worth noting that discord has already begun to work its way into this otherwise tight-knit group, since Boro has now shamed his father in front of the rest of the family.

Boro and Kori leave home to live in Nairobi. After their departure, Kamau and Njoroge contemplate what it might be like for their brothers in this new city. Kamau remarks that Boro resents Ngotho and "the old generation" because they failed to win back their ancestral **land**. Nonetheless, Kamau points out, the "old generation" *did* try. "Some went in a procession to Nairobi soon after the end of the first war to demand the release of their leader who had been arrested," he tells his younger brother, explaining that many of these people were shot by white people. After a moment of reflection, Kamau admits that he would also like to leave, admitting that he is going to end his apprenticeship because he already knows how to build furniture.

Kamau's story about the group of elders who went in protest to Nairobi is unsettling, for it suggests that it is difficult to take a stand against white settlers even as a large, undivided group. If Kenyans were unable to resist the colonialists back then, it's unlikely they'll be able to do so now, since the settlers have manufactured divisions in the community by giving certain people (like Jacobo) privileges over others, thereby creating power imbalances and socioeconomic rifts that didn't previously exist.

Upset that Kamau wants to leave, Njoroge reminds his brother of the workers' strike that is sure to happen soon. Nonetheless, Kamau says he doesn't think he'll participate in this strike against the white settlers and their exploitative ways. "But Father says that the strike is for all people who want the freedom of the black people," Njoroge says, but Kamau remains unconvinced, and the two boys start down the hill toward home. On their way, Njoroge asks Kamau who Jomo is, and Kamau answers, "Boro called him the black Moses." That night, Njoroge falls asleep thinking about how he wants to succeed in academia in order to avoid the fate of people like his father, who are forced to work for white settlers.

If successful, a workers' strike against white settlers could effectively force people like Mr. Howlands to treat Kenyans better. Though it might not convince the settlers to return land to people like Ngotho, it would at least force them to offer better pay. Unfortunately, though, this will only work if everyone who works for a white settler agrees to join the strike. Judging by Kamau's hesitancy, it seems unlikely that everyone will agree to take a stand against the settlers. However, it is hopeful that Kenyans now have a person to look to for guidance. Indeed, Boro upholds that Jomo Kenyatta is like a "black Moses," a statement implying that this man might deliver Kenyans from their suffering just as Moses delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Shortly thereafter, Kamau leaves Nganga and begins working as a carpenter in the African shops. Njoroge is glad that his brother hasn't decided to go to Nairobi, but he knows Kamau is growing older and will someday leave him behind. Unfortunately, he doesn't have many companions—other than Mwihaki—and so he takes refuge in books, turning most frequently to the Bible. "Njoroge came to place faith in the Bible and with his vision of an educated life in the future was blended a belief in the righteousness of God. Equity and justice were there in the world," Ngũgĩ writes. "If you did well and remained faithful to your God, the Kingdom of Heaven would be yours. A good man would get a reward from God; a bad man would harvest bad fruits."

As Njoroge goes to school and watches his brothers leave for Nairobi, he looks to religion for solace. This is unsurprising, considering that he is someone who wants to maintain his hope in the future. Religion, he believes, will help him maintain this hope, for he believes that if he remains "faithful," he will "get a reward from God." In this way, he conflates religion with education, seeing both as ways to make progress in life.

CHAPTER 6

When Kori and Boro visit home, they bring friends from Nairobi—friends who are politically active and passionate about the divide between white settlers and Kenyans. Njoroge notices that they often speak about Jomo, and so he listens intently, eager to know more about this mysterious figure. "For Njoroge was sure that he had read about him in the Old Testament," Ngũgĩ writes. "Moses had led the children of Israel [...] to the Promised Land. And because black people were really the children of Israel, Moses was no other than Jomo himself. It was obvious." Listening to his brothers and other men in the village, Njoroge hears conversations about the possibility of a workers' strike. "All men who worked for white men and [the government] would come out on strike," Ngũgĩ explains. "The government and the settlers had to be shown that black people were not cowards and slaves."

During this period, Njoroge hears his brothers and elders talking about hopeful developments. In particular, he is impressed by what he hears about Jomo Kenyatta, who he believes is like Moses because everyone says he will help black people find true freedom (which is what Moses did for the persecuted Israelites by delivering them from their oppression in Egypt). Meanwhile, on a more tangible, immediate level, Njoroge's loved ones consider the effect of the upcoming strike, embodying a sense of collective hope that this form of resistance will allow them to unite against the exploitative white settlers.

Kiarie, one of Boro's friends, speaks convincingly about the strike, insisting that he and his fellow Kenyans will successfully secure better pay and fairer treatment if they come together and take a stand against the white settlers. Unfortunately, Mr. Howlands has already warned Ngotho and the rest of his employees that if they go on strike, they will immediately lose their jobs. As such, Ngotho isn't sure what to do, and this creates discord within his family. Wanting to unite with his fellow black workers, he is inclined to strike, but Nyokabi urges him to remain in Mr. Howlands's employment, saying that the family will starve if he doesn't. "This strike is important for the black people," he replies, but she only says, "What's black people to us when we starve?"

When Nyokabi upholds that Ngotho shouldn't focus on "black people" as a whole when he needs to look out for his own family, readers see the difficult decision Kenyans are forced to make between preserving their own livelihood and uniting with their community members. Indeed, this is exactly why the white settlers have purposefully sown division within the black community, hoping all the while that no one will have the nerve to sacrifice him- or herself for the greater good.

Troubled by Nyokabi's points, Ngotho slaps her across the face, at which point Njoroge jumps up and stands between them. After advancing upon his son for a moment, Ngotho mumbles in anger and walks out of the hut, leaving his family members in tears. That night, Njoroge feels lonely and depressed, wishing he could be with Mwihaki. In an attempt to console himself, he speaks to God, asking if the "strike will be a success." Waiting for an answer, he falls asleep.

Ngũgĩ has already established that Ngotho's family is quite close. As such, readers understand how alarming it is that they suddenly find themselves at odds with one another. When Ngotho slaps Nyokabi, it becomes clear that the difficulties of living under the oppressive influence of the white settlers are beginning to tear the family apart, though this is, of course, no excuse for Ngotho to resort to violence.

CHAPTER 7

At the beginning of the next school year, Njoroge and Mwihaki learn that they've both passed their exams, meaning they can continue their education. Joyously, they run home together, holding hands until they break off and go to their own houses. When Mwihaki enters her home, though, she finds her mother and siblings in a somber huddle. "I've always said that your father will end up by being murdered!" her mother shouts, and when Mwihaki asks what has happened, she receives no answer. Meanwhile, Njoroge comes home and finds his mother distraught. "It's the strike!" she says, and he suddenly remembers that the strike was supposed to start on that day.

In this scene, Ngũgĩ juxtaposes Njoroge and Mwihaki's starry-eyed and optimistic hope for the future with the bleak reality of their circumstances. Although he hasn't yet revealed the disaster that has come to pass, it's clear that Njoroge and Mwihaki's success in school will pale in comparison to whatever has happened.

"Many people had gone to the meeting that was being held on the first day of the strike," Ngũgĩ writes, indicating that Ngotho was in attendance. First, Kiarie spoke, urging his listeners to strike in order to resist the exploitative white settlers. "Remember," he says, "this must be a peaceful strike. We must get more pay. Because right is on our side we shall triumph. If today, you're hit, don't hit back…" At this point, a white police officer accompanies Jacobo to the front of the crowd. "It was only when Jacobo had begun to speak and was urging people to go back to work and not to listen to some people from Nairobi who had nothing to lose if people lost their jobs that Ngotho understood," Ngũgĩ explains. "Jacobo, the richest man in all the land around, had been brought to pacify the people."

When Ngũgĩ says that Jacobo has "been brought to pacify the people," he means that the white settlers have recruited him to keep his fellow Kenyans from going on strike. As such, it becomes clear that Jacobo has sided with the settlers, ultimately betraying his own people because he is—like the settlers themselves—a rich man. Of course, he is only rich because the settlers have allowed him to grow pyrethrum as a way of creating inequality amongst black people, but he clearly doesn't take this into account.

Listening to Jacobo, Ngotho grows angry. Jacobo, he determines, is a "traitor," a man who has betrayed his people. "He became the physical personification of the long years of waiting and suffering," Ngũgĩ notes. Before he knows what he's doing, Ngotho stands and advances upon Jacobo. "All of a sudden, as if led by Ngotho, the crowd rose and rushed toward Jacobo," Ngũgĩ writes. Suddenly, chaos overtakes the meeting, as police officers use tear gas and shoot guns into the crowd. His courage quickly failing him, Ngotho runs through the crowd without knowing where he's going. A police officer hits him in the face with a baton, though Ngotho continues to run until, finally free of the mob, he falls to the ground and loses consciousness. Before long, his fellow villagers find him and take him home.

It's worth keeping in mind that Ngotho has recently been shamed by Boro for failing to take action when the white settlers took the family's land. This is perhaps why he responds to Jacobo's betrayal with such an impulsive thirst for revenge—he has, after all, been thinking lately about how he must uphold his honor and fulfill his role as the family's protector. Unfortunately, though, he completely ignores Kiarie's call for a peaceful form of resistance. In turn, he invites chaos and mayhem. What's more, by attacking Jacobo, he plays directly into the hands of the white settlers, who actively want to sow division within the black community.

In the aftermath of this incident, Njoroge and his family members wonder how Jacobo got involved with the white settlers in the first place. "Few knew that to the government and the settlers around, Jacobo, being a rich man, had a lot of influence on the people," Ngũgĩ writes, suggesting that Jacobo "impressed" his importance on "the local white community, including Mr. Howlands, who had not taken him seriously until the hour of need." Indeed, when the time came, police officers had called upon Jacobo, who "could not have refused" their offer.

In this moment, Ngũgĩ confirms once and for all that the white settlers are all too eager to use Jacobo to create discord and division amongst Kenyans. Contrary to what Jacobo might think, people like Mr. Howlands don't respect him or care about him at all, except for the fact that they can manipulate him into weakening his own community's ability to rise up as a unified group.

In the days following the bloody encounter, everyone is abuzz with opinions about what happened. "I would have done the same thing," says a man at the barber's. "It would have been all right if it had been a white man, but a black man—like you and me! It shows that we black people will never be united. There must always be a traitor in our midst." Turning their attention more specifically to Jacobo and Ngotho, the patrons of the barbershop lament what has happened, saying, "It's sad what has happened to Ngotho. He has been told to leave Jacobo's land." In response, a man says, "But Jacobo found him there when he bought **the land** from the previous owner." Seeing a police officer approaching, the group disbands. "By now many people knew that the strike had failed," Ngũgĩ notes.

The barber's shop is perhaps one of the only places where a true sense of unity abounds. As the customers get their hair cut, they speak openly about what has happened in their community, keenly assessing that the heart of the problem is that Kenyans are not "united." This division, they understand, leads to nothing but violence and tragedy, as evidenced by the fact that Ngotho's dispute with Jacobo has forced him and his family to find a new place to live.

Having been kicked off Jacobo's **land**, Ngotho and his family are "given a place to build by Nganga," who takes pity on the family despite the fact that Kamau never liked him. Still, though, this kindness doesn't make this period any easier for Njoroge and his family, since they need money to build new huts. Furthermore, the fees for Njoroge's school have increased, and Mwihaki has left for a girls' boarding school far from town. On his third day in school, Njoroge is sent home because he doesn't have enough money, and so he spends his time praying and trying to figure out how he will achieve his academic goals. Thankfully, Kamau has recently received a raise, and so he gives his brother his extra earnings. In conjunction with money that Kori lends him, Njoroge is able to return to school.

The fact that Kamau is the one who ends up enabling Njoroge to return to school justifies his previous commitment to becoming a carpenter. Although Njoroge tried hard to convince his brother to quit his apprenticeship and go to school, Kamau refused, upholding that it was important for him to learn a trade and earn money so that he could help support Njoroge's education. Now that he actually is supporting Njoroge, readers see that Kamau was serious when he said that Njoroge's education is for the entire family, as he clearly believes in the importance of Njoroge's schooling enough to pay for it himself.

INTERLUDE

Two and a half years later, a "disillusioned government official" stands on a hill and looks out at Nairobi. Speaking with another person who remains unidentified, he says that he "did not know that this would come to be." The other person asks him if he saw "the signs," but he upholds that he didn't, saying, "We tried our best." Walking away, he says, "And to think of all we did for them." One last time, he looks out at Nairobi, "the dumb city he and others of his kind had helped to create."

Although Ngũgĩ never clarifies the details of this conversation, it likely takes place in the future, when Kenya has finally won its independence from colonial rule. As this unnamed "disillusioned government official" surveys Nairobi, he bitterly acts as if he and his white colleagues have been working for the benefit of Kenya, when in reality they have clearly been taking advantage of the country and its people. This is the only moment in Weep Not, Child *that hints at the end of colonial rule, though it's worth noting that the passage is so vague and short that it's difficult to definitively say whether or not Ngũgĩ is truly providing insight into Kenya's independence, which came in 1963, a year before the novel was published (but a year after it was written, if Ngũgĩ's signature at the end of the book is accurate).*

"One night people heard that Jomo and all the leaders of the land were arrested," Ngũgĩ writes. No one can quite believe this terrible news. "They want to leave the people without a leader," a man says at the barbershop. Njoroge, for his part, is upset to hear that Jomo has been captured, since he has always dreamed of meeting him. He once had a chance to see him in the marketplace when Jomo came for a meeting arranged by "Kenya African Union," but there were too many people in the crowd for Njoroge to lay eyes on the revered figure. Since then, he has looked forward to seeing him in the future. Now, though, Jomo has been arrested, and Njoroge doesn't know if he'll ever get the chance to lay eyes on him.

Throughout the first half of the novel, Njoroge's sense of hope blossoms as he invests himself in the idea of a beautiful new future. With the capture of Jomo Kenyatta, though, the book begins a downward turn, sloping into pessimism and hopelessness, since Jomo himself is a symbol of freedom and progress for people like Njoroge. When he's detained, then, Njoroge is disappointed by the idea that he may never see him in person. Having said that, Njoroge still has much to hope for, including his own education. As such, it's clear his optimism won't simply vanish, though this is perhaps the first time he's had cause to doubt the future.

CHAPTER 8

Njoroge listens to his classmates tell stories about Dedan Kimathi, the leader of the African Freedom Army (otherwise known as the Mau Mau). Impressed by stories about Kimathi's ability to evade and confound white police officers, Njoroge wonders where his fellow students learn such stories. Regardless, he believes that Kimathi is indeed a powerful person, as even his father and Kamau speak highly of the man. In the years since the incident between Jacobo and Ngotho, Jacobo has been made a chief by the white settlers, who have given him two armed guards to protect him from guerilla fighters. As for Mr. Howlands, he is now the District Officer, meaning that he works closely with Jacobo.

It is perhaps because Jomo Kenyatta has been imprisoned that Njoroge and his classmates turn their attention to Dedan Kimathi, the leader of a militant group called the Mau Mau that fights against colonial oppression in Kenya. Indeed, the Mau Mau provide Kenyans with hope for the future, though stories of Kimathi's outlaw tactics hint at the dangerous side of this group of fighters. Still, it's unsurprising that people are beginning to embrace militant leaders, considering that people like Jacobo and Mr. Howlands have assumed militaristic positions themselves.

Njoroge now attends a new school because the local institutions have been closed by the government. As such, he has to walk five miles each day, meaning that he often comes home after dark. One night, he enters Njeri's hut and senses tension. Before he asks what's wrong, though, he sees that Boro has come home. "Do you think he is safe?" Njeri asks Boro, interrupting Njoroge as he greets his brother. "I don't know," Boro answers, referring to the fact that Kori has been captured by white settlers. Apparently, Boro was also captured but managed to escape. As Boro relates this tale, he breaks down, but Kori suddenly bursts into the hut and demands water and food. After a moment, he explains that he escaped by jumping out of the back of a moving truck and wandering for days. "They said you were terrorists," he says to Boro.

The fact that Boro and Kori were captured by white settlers—and deemed "terrorists"—suggests that they have joined the Mau Mau, though Ngũgĩ doesn't state this outright. Still, though, it's clear these young men are involved in something clandestine, most likely trying to take action against the oppressive white settlers. This is significant, considering what Boro has said in the past to his father, whom he believes isn't proactive enough in his efforts to protect the family or his people. In turn, readers see that Boro is taking matters into his own hands.

Overcome by what has happened to her sons, Njeri says, "Why do they oppress the black people?" In response, Kori says that the white settlers want to "oppress people" before Jomo's trial, since "they know he'll win the case." As the family discusses the situation, Ngotho sits quietly in the corner. "Ngotho was changing," Ngũgĩ notes. "Soon after the strike Boro quarreled much with the old man. He accused him of having spoilt everything by his rash action in spite of Kiarie's warning." Going on, Ngũgĩ explains that Ngotho has "diminished in stature" because of his son's harsh criticism, often "submitting unflinchingly to his son." Because of this, Boro recently tried to get Ngotho to take the Mau Mau oath, but Ngotho refused.

Using Ngotho's miscalculation at the strike meeting as leverage, Boro tries to convince his father to take the Mau Mau oath. In turn, he reveals that he has in fact joined this militant group, confirming that he wants to take revenge on the white settlers. Despite his shame and regret, though, Ngotho manages to resist his son's pressure, an indication that he doesn't believe in violent uprisings, though he inadvertently instigated one himself by attacking Jacobo.

CHAPTER 9

Everyone in Njoroge's village believes that if Jomo doesn't win his trial, the "black people of Kenya" will have lost everything. Indeed, they feel as if "black folk [are] on trial." At school, the boys talk about what will happen, and when one boy says that his father told him Jomo won't win, another says, "Your father is a homeguard. The homeguards with their white masters. They are as bad as Mau Mau." In response, another boy interjects, upholding that the Mau Mau aren't bad because they're fighting against the white settlers. "Is it bad to fight for one's **land**?" he asks. "But they cut black men's throats," responds another boy. "Those killed are the traitors! Black white settlers," says the boy advocating for the Mau Mau.

The word "homeguard" refers to people who have sided with the colonial government to fight the Mau Mau. Jacobo, for instance, is a homeguard. As Njoroge's classmates talk about these matters, they make it clear that Kenyans are more divided than ever, since some have become homeguards while others have joined the Mau Mau. There are also people like Ngotho, who detest the white settlers and colonial rule but haven't joined the Mau Mau because they don't want to be part of a violent revolution. Unfortunately, such people now find themselves torn between opposing factions.

That night, news reaches Njoroge's village that Jomo has lost his trial. Kori explains that the entire hearing was rigged, and Ngotho becomes afraid of the fact that Jacobo—who hates his family—is the "most powerful man in the land." Sooner or later, he thinks, he will "retaliate." These days, Ngotho feels as if the prophecy about his **land** will never come true. "Perhaps he had blundered in going on strike," Ngũgĩ writes. "For he had now lost every contact with his ancestral land." At the same time, he recognizes that he had no choice but to go on strike. "He had not wanted to be accused by a son anymore," Ngũgĩ explains, "because when a man was accused by the eyes of his son who had been to war and had witnessed the death of a brother, he felt guilty."

When Jomo loses his trial—meaning that the colonial government will continue to imprison him—Ngotho worries what will happen to his own family now that there's no hope of a strong leader like Jomo coming to the rescue. As such, he reflects upon his situation, regretting the fact that he attacked Jacobo. At the same time, he cuts himself some slack by recognizing that he did what he did because Boro had made him feel guilty for his previous "inaction." In turn, Ngũgĩ shows readers that guilt often drives people to carry out rash deeds.

Discussing Jomo's loss late at night, Njeri loses her temper. "The white man makes a law or a rule," she says. "Through that rule or law or whatever you may call it, he takes away **the land** and then imposes many laws on the people concerning that land and many other things, all without people agreeing first as in the old days of the tribe." Njoroge, for his part, is shocked to hear Njeri speak so passionately. "All white people stick together," Boro interjects. "But we black people are very divided. And because they stick together, they've imprisoned Jomo, the only hope we had. Now they'll make us slaves. They took us to their wars and they killed all that was of value to us…" Boro suddenly stands and shouts, "Never! never! Black people must rise up and fight."

Once again, Ngũgĩ emphasizes the extent to which the Kenyan people are divided. In this instance, Njeri is the one to articulate the nature of this division, pointing out that "all white people stick together" but that "black people are very divided," which is why it is so difficult to rise up against colonialist rule. Indeed, the white settlers understand this, too, so they have "imprisoned Jomo," who was the only person who might have successfully unified Kenyans and helped them resist the settlers.

CHAPTER 10

Sitting in his office in the newly built police quarters, Mr. Howlands looks out the window and thinks about his past, wondering if there is perhaps "no escape" now from the present. First and foremost, he is troubled by the fact that his position as District Officer resembles the military service he hated so much as a young man. Thinking this way, he considers how much he detests working for England, the very country that took his son from him by forcing him into the war. There is, however, nothing he can do. Indeed, he cannot turn to God, since he isn't religious. "There was only one god for him," Ngũgĩ writes, "and that was the farm he had created, the land he had tamed. And who were these Mau Mau who were now claiming that **land**, his god?" This is the reason he became district officer: to protect his farm.

Although Mr. Howlands's devotion to his farm may at first seem admirable, it's worth comparing his approach to the land with Ngotho's. Indeed, both men seem to have a spiritual connection with the same plot of earth, but Ngotho's bond has nothing to do with ownership or dominion. Rather, Ngotho simply wants to tend the land so that future generations can live off of its bounty. Howlands, on the other hand, believes that he has "created" the land and sees it as something over which he has total control, fashioning himself into a godlike figure. In turn, it's easy to see that his connection with the farm isn't actually spiritual, but egocentric and vain.

"Did they want to drive him back to England, the forgotten land?" Mr. Howlands wonders. "Who were black men and Mau Mau anyway, he asked for the thousandth time. Mere savages!" He didn't used to think this way—hardly stopping to consider black Kenyans at all except as part of his farm itself—but now he bears a grudge against people like Ngotho. "Yes, he would wring from every single man the last drop till they had all be reduced to nothingness, till he had won a victory for his god," Ngũgĩ writes. "The Mau Mau had come to symbolize all that which he had tried to put aside in life. To conquer it would give him a spiritual satisfaction, the same sort of satisfaction he had got from the conquest of his **land**."

Mr. Howlands is obsessed with "conquest." Not only does he want to assert total control over his land—which doesn't even rightfully belong to him—he also wants to subjugate the very people he stole that land from in the first place. As such, readers see that, although he doesn't identify with England, he perfectly embodies the colonial impulse toward conquest and dominion that England itself perpetuates throughout the world.

Jacobo knocks on Mr. Howlands's door and tells him he needs to speak with him. Mr. Howlands, for his part, is brusque, since he hates Jacobo (because he thinks of him as a "savage"). Nonetheless, he allows the man into his office, and Jacobo tells him that Ngotho is a "very terrible man" who has taken "oaths." "What has he done?" Howlands asks, and Jacobo says that he believes his sons—and particularly Boro—"are bringing trouble in the village." As such, he suggests that they arrest Boro and Kori because this would make it easier to "keep an eye on" Ngotho, who Jacobo upholds "may be the real leader of Mau Mau." "All right," replies Howlands. "Just keep an eye on the sons. Arrest them for anything—curfew, tax, you know what."

At this point in Weep Not, Child, *the feud between Ngotho and Jacobo begins to intensify, as Jacobo actively seeks revenge against Ngotho's family. Unfortunately, Mr. Howlands also has a fraught history with Ngotho, who encouraged his farmworkers to strike. As a result, the two men conspire to use their power to spite not only Ngotho, but his sons, too.*

Late that night, Ngotho sits in Nyokabi's hut. Eventually, Kori and Njeri retire to Njeri's hut, and as they do so, police officers tell them to "halt." Ngotho hears this happen but can't bring himself to go to his son and wife's aid. "They have taken them away," Nyokabi sobs when it's all over. "Yeees…" Ngotho replies, feeling humiliated for doing nothing. "Was he a man any longer, he who had watched his wife and son taken away because of breaking the curfew without a word of protest?" Ngũgĩ writes. "Was this cowardice? It was cowardice, cowardice of the worst sort." "I know it is Jacobo," he says, and when Boro comes home and hears the news, he yells, "And *you* again did nothing?" before rushing out of the hut.

Once again, Ngotho is ashamed by his inability to stand up for his family. It's worth noting that he's a rather complex character, considering that he fluctuates so severely between action and inaction. Indeed, he fails to do anything when the white settlers take away his ancestral land, but then he attacks Jacobo for siding with the colonialists. The next time he has a chance to prove himself, though, he again does nothing. As such, it seems that his courage comes from this cycle. In other words, each time he fails to prove himself, he feels so guilty that he does something drastic the next time he has an opportunity. In this way, readers intuit that he will most likely exhibit some grand display of courage in the near future, though it remains a mystery what this might look like.

Because breaking curfew isn't a serious infraction, Njeri is released after her family pays a fine. Kori, however, is not. Instead, he's sent to a detention camp "without trial." Despite this outcome, Jacobo is disappointed, since the person he truly wants to capture is Boro. Nevertheless, he doesn't "lose hope." Meanwhile, Ngotho wallows in guilt, and Njoroge is sure that "if a child hit [him], he would probably submit."

As Jacobo continues to scheme—hoping to take revenge on Ngotho's family by capturing Boro, too—Ngotho wallows in guilt and shame. Indeed, he is so dispirited and embarrassed that even Njoroge, who is occupied with school, notices that his father has become submissive. In turn, readers understand that the next time Ngotho has the chance to defend his honor, he will most likely do so. After all, he is a man who is often driven to action by guilt.

When Njoroge goes to school one day, he and his classmates discover a note demanding that the headmaster close the institution. If he doesn't, the note says, the Mau Mau will decapitate him along with forty students. When Njoroge brings news of this home to Nyokabi, she tells him not to attend school anymore. However, Kamau says otherwise later that night: "You'll be foolish to leave school. The letter may not be genuine. Besides do you really think you'll be safer at home? I tell you there's no safety anywhere. There's no hiding in this naked land." Because of this, Njoroge remains in school.

Whether or not the letter to Njoroge's school is really from the Mau Mau, it's evident that the current political and cultural climate in Kenya has become so tense and divided that even schoolchildren are feeling the immediate effects. Nonetheless, Kamau once again demonstrates his unwavering belief in the value of education, ultimately encouraging his brother to stay in school despite the fact that this is a dangerous decision. In this way, he suggests that attaining an education is worth risking one's life.

CHAPTER 11

After Kori is arrested, things only get worse. "No one could tell when he might be arrested for breaking the curfew," Ngũgĩ writes, explaining that it becomes too dangerous to even walk across a courtyard after dark. "It was said that some European soldiers were catching people at night, and having taken them to the forest would release them and ask them to find their way back home. But when their backs were turned they would be shot dead in cold blood. The next day this would be announced as a victory over Mau Mau," Ngũgĩ notes. Njoroge, for his part, lives in fear of an attack at school, but he doesn't let this shake his concentration. He is only one year away from taking the exam that will determine whether or not he'll go to secondary school.

Ngũgĩ begins this chapter by showing readers just how bad the situation between the white settlers and the rest of Kenya has gotten. Indeed, the colonialists are murdering people in order to manipulate public opinion against the Mau Mau. In turn, readers see once again how hard the white settlers are trying to sow discord and division amongst Kenyans so that they can't unite and advocate for themselves as a cohesive whole.

Mwihaki has been away at boarding school, but even when she's home on break, Njoroge avoids her. "How could he have met her when her father and his were enemies in public?" he wonders. Unfortunately, avoiding her makes him lonely, so he goes one day to visit Kamau, who tells him that the barber and five other men were abducted in the middle of the night and shot in the forest. One of them, he says, was Nganga. When Njoroge asks if the white settlers are responsible for this, Kamau replies, "Who can tell these days who kills who?" This unsettles Njoroge, who wonders if the barber and Nganga were part of the Mau Mau. "Would his home be next?" he thinks. "Boro was said to have gone to the forest. Njoroge shuddered to think about it."

Once again, readers see the damaging effects of division on the Kenyan community, as Njoroge finds himself unable to even spend time with Mwihaki because of the turmoil that has taken place between their fathers. What's more, Njoroge is forced to worry about his own safety, since Boro is part of the Mau Mau, meaning that their family might be targeted.

Two days later, Njoroge encounters Mwihaki on the road. "I'm so lonely here," she admits, and though he knows it's a bad idea, he feels obligated to invite her to meet him the following Sunday. When she asks where, he decides that the church would be the most "suitable place," and they agree to walk there together. When Sunday finally comes, they walk in silence, each one painfully aware of the tension between their fathers but unwilling to bring it up. As for Mwihaki, she doesn't know what to think about the entire ordeal, but she assumes her father must be in the right.

Despite their differences, Mwihaki and Njoroge manage to spend time together without bringing up all of the hate and vengeance that has taken place between their two families. More than anything, this is a testament to their willingness to focus on the positive, as they are both bound by their hope for the future and by their investment in education, which lends them a sense of connection instead of opposition or antagonism.

In church, Njoroge is surprised to find Isaka, who delivers a Bible passage about war and calamity, upholding that trouble is coming. "*But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved*," he reads before delivering the final line: "This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled…" In the aftermath of his words, Njoroge and Mwihaki feel as if "darkness" has "fallen into the building." Afterwards, they walk and talk about the service. "Do you think what he said was true?" Mwihaki asks, and Njoroge insists that all of what Isaka said will surely come to pass. This upsets Mwihaki so much that, when they reach her house, she begs him to come inside. And when Njoroge begins to protest, she says, "I know. It's because father is chief"—a line that makes Njoroge feel so guilty that he follows her inside.

As previously established, Njoroge invests himself in religion in the same way that he invests himself in education, ultimately believing that both might help him make progress in life. This is why he unflinchingly accepts what Isaka preaches, untroubled by the idea that "darkness" and calamity are sure to descend upon the land. Mwihaki, on the other hand, is somewhat less invested in the hope of a better future, and this is why she's upset by Isaka's words about calamity and destruction, for she is less optimistic than Njoroge about what's to come.

Inside, Njoroge observes the European style of Mwihaki's house. As he looks at pictures on the wall, Jacobo appears behind him and asks, "How's school?" "'Tis all right," Njoroge replies, beginning a stilted conversation about his studies. "I hope you do well," Jacobo says after a moment. "It is such as you who must work hard and rebuild our country." And although this stirs something inside of him—a sense of pride at the idea of rebuilding the country—his excitement quickly dies when he looks quickly at the guards flanking Jacobo. "Their red jerseys reminded him of the dead barber," Ngũgĩ writes.

The fact that Jacobo offers encouraging words to Njoroge suggests that he—like Njoroge's own father—believes in the value of education. This investment in Kenya's youth and in academics, it seems, is something that even enemies can agree upon. Nevertheless, this shared worldview doesn't make up for the fact that Jacobo and Ngotho are foes, and this is why Njoroge finds himself incapable of ignoring the armed guards at Jacobo's side.

After Njoroge speaks with Jacobo, he and Mwihaki go outside, where Mwihaki lies on the grass while Njoroge sits beside her. Once again, they talk about the horrifying things Isaka said in church, and Mwihaki rehashes how frightened she is of the idea of violence and calamity. She then tells him that what truly worries her is her father. "He used to be so kind and gentle, especially with me. He annoyed me sometimes of course but that was nothing. […] But now he is uncommunicative. The gun and the pistol he carries make him a stranger to me," she says, adding that she hates to think about whether or not Jacobo has killed a person. With this, she breaks into tears.

The reason that Mwihaki is less optimistic about the future might have something to do with the fact that she has seen firsthand how violence has changed her father. Having witnessed Jacobo go from being "kind and gentle" to "uncommunicative" and darkly violent, she understands the gravity of the current cultural and political landscape, knowing how much the turmoil between the settlers and the Mau Mau can alter a person for the worse.

When Mwihaki stops crying, Njoroge eventually tells her that he believes things will get better. "Peace shall come to this land!" he says, and when she asks if he really believes this, he says, "Yes. Sunshine always follows a dark night. We sleep knowing and trusting that the sun will rise tomorrow." However, Mwihaki laughs at this, saying she'd rather "think of today," at which point she puts her hand on Njoroge's neck and shakes him, saying, "Suppose you and I go from here so that we come back when the dark night is over…" After thinking for a moment, though, Njoroge says he couldn't possibly leave behind his family. Nevertheless, he promises to come see her when she next returns from boarding school.

With very little to invest herself in, Mwihaki tries to put her faith in the present instead of fantasizing about the future. While this is perhaps a jaded way of thinking, it's worth noting that Mwihaki hasn't lost all hope, as she clearly still believes in the value of love. This is why she proposes that she and Njoroge elope: she wants to honor her feelings for him instead of living in a context that forces her to avoid him as if he's her enemy. However, because Njoroge has retained his somewhat idealistic ideas about the power of education and religion, he is unwilling to give up on his original plans to become educated and uplift his family.

CHAPTER 12

"Mr. Howlands felt a certain gratifying pleasure," Ngũgĩ writes. "The machine he had set in motion was working. The blacks were destroying the blacks. They would destroy themselves to the end." Thinking this way, Howlands considers the fact that the few Kenyans who don't kill one another will eventually "be satisfied with the reservation the white man ha[s] set aside for them." This satisfies him immensely—so much, in fact, that he no longer dreams about returning to the life of a farmer. Indeed, after several years of working as a District Officer, he has come to relish "reduc[ing] the blacks to obedience."

As Mr. Howlands thinks about how much he likes forcing Kenyans to "destroy" one another, he confirms that the white settlers actively want to keep the people they're oppressing divided. And because Mr. Howlands has always been someone who thoroughly enjoys "conquest"—as previously made clear by how he approaches farming—it's no surprise that he has come to like his position as a District Officer in an oppressive government body.

For quite some time now, Mr. Howlands has fantasized about killing Ngotho, whom he sees as his "foe." However, he has decided to wait, since he wants it to be the "crowning glory of his career before his triumphal return to farming life." As such, he waylays all of Jacobo's attempts to arrest Ngotho. When Jacobo arrives in his office one day, then, he assumes he simply wants to try once more to convince him to capture Ngotho. However, he's surprised to hear that someone has delivered a threatening note to his (Jacobo's) home. "STOP YOUR MURDEROUS ACTIVITES. OR ELSE WE SHALL COME FOR YOUR HEAD. THIS IS OUR *LAST* WARNING," it reads.

Once again, Ngũgĩ demonstrates the seemingly endless cycle of violence and retribution that circles between the white settlers, the Mau Mau, and the people torn between both groups. In this moment, even Jacobo feels the divisive effects of colonialization, as he's forced to contend with threats from fellow Kenyans because he has sided with people like Howlands.

Angry that Jacobo didn't bring this to his attention earlier (there have been two more notes since this one), Howlands asks who he thinks sent this message. Jacobo tells him he thinks Ngotho is behind it, since Njoroge recently came into his house. Taking in this information, Howlands tells Jacobo that he can have more guards and that he should move when the new homeguard post is finished.

The fact that Jacobo blames Ngotho for the note shows yet again how badly he wants to take revenge upon his former neighbor. Unfortunately, he uses Njoroge's friendship with Mwihaki against the family, thereby demonstrating how difficult—and dangerous, even—it is to maintain relationships under divided cultural conditions.

Walking to a "Christian gathering" one morning, Njoroge carries a Bible and strides alongside a group singing religious songs. As he walks, he thinks about how he misses Mwihaki, whom he saw quite frequently during the most recent holiday break. Just before they last parted, she told him she knew he'd do well on his exams—exams that will determine whether or not he can continue his education. "Stop!" a voice calls out, ripping Njoroge from his thoughts. Looking up, he sees a white officer holding a gun. Suddenly, he realizes the woods are full of these officers, who force Njoroge and his fellow Christians to squat and hand over their documents. Unfortunately, Isaka—who is also in the group of Christians—has forgotten his papers at home, and though the officers let everyone else go, they keep him. Moments later, Njoroge hears a gunshot and knows Isaka has died.

Isaka's death symbolizes the gradual deterioration of Njoroge's sense of hope. After all, religion—like education—is something Njoroge clings to in order to maintain his optimism in the possibility of a better future. Since Isaka is a figure who has factored heavily into both Njoroge's educational and religious experiences, his sudden and unjust death hints at the fact that schoolwork and Christian worship are perhaps incapable of sustaining Njoroge in the face of cultural division and senseless violence.

Meanwhile, Boro has a conversation with a Mau Mau lieutenant while sitting in a new hideout in the forest. When the lieutenant asks if he believes in anything, he says, "No. Nothing. Except revenge." When the lieutenant asks if he cares about recapturing **the land**, Boro replies, "The lost land will come back to us maybe. But I've lost too many of those whom I loved for land to mean much to me. It would be a cheap victory." Boro is now a "leader of the other freedom fighters" because of his "daredevil" spirit. "The ripe hour of his youth had been spent in bloodshed in the big war," Ngũgĩ notes. "This was the only thing he could do efficiently." Although he used to tell himself that he was fighting for freedom, he now understands that his mission is one of "revenge."

At this point in the novel, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that violence has become for Boro an end in and of itself. Rather than killing people as a way of achieving something (like recapturing "lost land"), he now cares only about "revenge." This, Ngũgĩ suggests, is because the violence he experienced in World War II has rendered him unable to do anything but kill. In this way, Ngũgĩ intimates that violence is self-perpetuating and all-consuming.

Pressing on, the Mau Mau lieutenant asks Boro if he believes in freedom. "An illusion," Boro replies. "What freedom is there for you and me?" At a loss, the lieutenant asks why Boro fights, if not for **the land** or for freedom. "To kill," Boro states. "Unless you kill, you'll be killed. So you go on killing and destroying. It's a law of nature. The white man too fights and kills with gas, bombs, and everything." He then states that Jacobo "must die," along with Mr. Howlands.

The end of Boro's conversation with the Mau Mau lieutenant solidifies the idea that violence has become—for him, at least—an end in and of itself. The only thing he cares about, he admits, is killing, especially when this helps him take revenge on people like Jacobo and Mr. Howlands.

CHAPTER 13

Njoroge passes his exam and is admitted to a mission school. Mwihaki also passes, but doesn't receive high enough marks to go to such a school. Instead, she is admitted to "a teacher training school a few miles" away. Before Njoroge leaves, he visits Mwihaki, who is upset about not getting into the mission school. Trying to make her feel better, Njoroge tells her that their country has "great need" of them, but she expresses doubt. "The country is so dark now," she says. "The sun will rise tomorrow," he assures her.

Njoroge's faith in the value of education is still evident in the way he devotes himself to his studies with unflinching optimism. Mwihaki, on the other hand, no longer feels as confident about her situation, since she didn't test into the missionary school and thus can't necessarily invest herself in the vision of upward mobility.

"You are always talking about tomorrow, tomorrow," Mwihaki says. "You are always talking about the country and the people. What is tomorrow? And what are *the People* and *the Country* to you?" Seeing how upset she is, Njoroge says, "Don't be angry, Mwihaki. [...] You and I can only put faith in hope. Just stop for a moment, Mwihaki, and imagine. If you knew that all your days life will always be like this with blood flowing daily and men dying in the forest, while others daily cry for mercy; if you knew even for one moment that this would go on forever, then life would be meaningless unless bloodshed and death were a meaning. Surely this darkness and terror will not go on forever." This soothes Mwihaki, who puts her head in Njoroge's lap and listens to him speak optimistically about the future until the sun starts to set.

When Njoroge says that he and Mwihaki must put their "faith in hope," he solidifies the notion that hope itself requires great optimism and resolve. Under this interpretation, one must actively work toward remaining hopeful, especially in the trying circumstances in which Njoroge and Mwihaki exist. And though this mindset might seem unspeakably difficult to maintain, Njoroge points out that there is no other alternative—after all, resigning to the bleak reality of Kenya's violence would mean accepting "bloodshed" in the same apathetic and twisted way that people like Boro have adopted.

CHAPTER 14

Njoroge enjoys his time at the missionary school, reveling in the fact that he's living out his lifelong goal to become fully educated. One day, his program has a soccer game against a group of boys from a nearby school for Europeans. While watching the game, Njoroge spots a familiar boy in the crowd and talks to him, saying he recognizes him. After a moment, he realizes he's speaking to Stephen Howlands, and the two boys walk away from the soccer game to talk. Avoiding any mention of their fathers, Stephen admits that he used to want badly to play with Njoroge and his brothers but that he was always too afraid. In turn, Njoroge tells him that he too was afraid of Stephen.

Njoroge and Stephen's friendly encounter shows readers that people who are supposedly enemies can still find ways to connect if only they allow themselves to put aside their differences. Just because Njoroge and Stephen's fathers are at odds with one another does not mean they themselves have to behave maliciously. What's more, when Stephen admits that he used to be afraid of Njoroge, readers will remember that Njoroge also used to fear Stephen. In turn, Ngũgĩ demonstrates that divisions and rifts between people often have to do with unfounded or unreasonable assumptions.

CHAPTER 15

One Monday during the third term of Njoroge's school year, he is pulled out of class by armed officers and whisked away to a homeguard outpost known as the "House of Pain," where a guard interrogates him harshly before smacking him in the face when he claims to have never taken the Mau Mau oath. "Do you know Boro?" the guard demands. "Where is he?" When Njoroge says he doesn't know where his brother is, the guards take him out of the room, and he passes out from their beating.

Finally, Boro's involvement with the Mau Mau has caught up to Njoroge. Although his entire family supports his educational pursuits, the feud between Ngotho (and Boro) and Jacobo is now interfering with his ability to work toward the better future he so intensely clings to. As such, readers once again see the harmful effects of division and violence.

Later that night, Njoroge awakes to the sound of a woman screaming and wonders if it's one of his mothers. Certain he's going to die, he's hauled into an interrogation room the following day and asked again if he has taken the Mau Mau oath. At one point during the questioning, he realizes that Mr. Howlands is also there, watching him. Advancing upon Njoroge, the white man says, "Who murdered Jacobo?" When Njoroge is unable to answer, Mr. Howlands grabs Njoroge's testicles and puts a pair of pincers against his scrotum, saying, "You'll be castrated like your father. Tell us. Who really sent you to collect information in Jacobo's house about…?" Njoroge doesn't listen to the rest of the sentence. "You know your father says he murdered Jacobo," Howlands says. He then watches as the boy passes out from pain, collapsing on the floor.

During this scene, Ngũgĩ reveals that Jacobo has been killed. Considering the fact that Boro has recently stated his desire to murder both Jacobo and Howlands, he's most likely the one who committed the crime. As such, readers see once again that Njoroge is suffering because of his family members' unquenchable thirst for revenge. On another note, the fact that Howlands has castrated Ngotho mirrors Ngotho's obsession with pride and shame. Indeed, his castration represents his own macho insecurities about his inability to protect his family.

Shortly thereafter, Ngotho himself wakes up but can't tell if it's daytime or nighttime. The wounds from his castration are so sore that he can hardly move positions. "In spite of his pain, however, he never regretted the death of Jacobo," Ngũgĩ writes. "In fact, immediately after Jacobo's death, Ngotho felt grateful." However, he soon heard that Kamau had been arrested as a suspect in the murder. "For a day and a half he had remained irresolute," Ngũgĩ explains. "But at night he knew what to do." Summoning his courage, Ngotho walked directly to Howlands's office and said that *he* was the one who killed Jacobo, and even after extreme torture, he refused to change his story.

Ngũgĩ has already established that Ngotho alternates between inaction and action. Indeed, he is often motivated to do something bold after having failed to stand up for himself or his family on a previous occasion. Wanting to prove himself after having let guards arrest Njeri and Kori for breaking curfew, he marches to Howlands's house and confesses to a crime he didn't commit. In turn, it once again becomes clear that he lets notions of pride and honor (or guilt and shame) guide his decisions.

CHAPTER 16

Njoroge sits with his mothers and looks at his father, who opens his eyes for the first time since returning from detainment. "You are here…" Ngotho says to Njoroge. "You come from school," he says, and Njoroge lies by saying, "Yes, Father." However, Ngotho then says that Njoroge must have come to "laugh" at him. "Don't say that, Father," Njoroge replies. "We owe you everything." His father then tells him not to ask if he killed Jacobo, and after rambling for a moment, he says, "I am glad you are acquiring learning. Get all of it. They dare not touch you."

Once again, Ngotho's fear of shame comes to the forefront of the novel, as he assumes that Njoroge has come to "laugh" at him. In turn, Ngũgĩ shows readers the extent to which this man is disappointed in himself for failing to protect his family before everything got so out of hand. Unable to do anything to help Njoroge now that he's been so badly injured by the white settlers, Ngotho expresses how happy he is that his son is getting an "education," which he believes will serve as a kind of protection.

As Ngotho laments the fact that Boro left because he discovered that he was a useless father, Boro himself appears in the entrance of the hut. "Forgive me, Father—I didn't know—Oh, I thought—" Boro stammers. He then says that he "had to fight" and that he "can't stay." These words suddenly rouse Ngotho, who for a moment resembles the person he used to be: "firm, commanding—the centre of his household." "You must," he tells his son. "No, Father. Just forgive me," Boro replies. In response, Ngotho struggles to sit up in bed and puts his hand on Boro's head. "All right," he says. "Fight well. […] Peace to you all—[…] Njoroge look…look to your—moth—" With this, Ngotho dies, and Boro races out of the hut, saying, "I should have come earlier…"

When Boro says, "Just forgive me," readers see that he desperately needs his father's approval, despite the fact that he criticizes Ngotho so frequently. What's more, the fact that he refuses to "stay"—instead retreating to the woods to continue fighting for the Mau Mau—indicates once again that he cannot escape the violent life he has entered. Although it would be more courageous to stay with his family and help them survive these tumultuous times, Boro tells himself that he needs to "fight." This, it seems, is the only way he knows how to respond to hardship.

CHAPTER 17

Five months after Ngotho's death, Njoroge takes a job working for an Indian in the marketplace. As he tries to sell dresses, he is acutely aware of the fact that the customers all know his family's tragic story. He's also aware that they know Boro snuck into Mr. Howlands's house and killed him. "Put up your hands," Boro said to the surprised white man, who had been spending the evening getting drunk and considering the fact that when he tortured Njoroge he saw in the boy's eyes a kind of hope for the future that reminded him of the zeal he himself had as a young man, before World War I ruined his life.

Readers can reasonably assume that Boro went to Mr. Howlands's house directly after watching his father die. As such, Ngũgĩ once again demonstrates the fact that Boro cannot extricate himself from his violent life, ultimately murdering Mr. Howlands as a way of coping with Ngotho's death. What's more, it's worth noting that Mr. Howlands recognized a sense of hope in Njoroge's eyes when he tortured him. This is important to bear in mind as the novel works toward a conclusion, since the strength of Njoroge's optimism is a subject of increasing concern.

"I killed Jacobo," Boro told Mr. Howlands as he pointed the gun. "He betrayed black people. Together, you killed many sons of the land. You raped our women. And finally, you killed my father. Have you anything to say in your defence?" As he spoke, his voice was "flat," absent any "colour of hatred, anger, or triumph." When Mr. Howlands failed to provide an excuse for himself, Boro accused Mr. Howlands of stealing his family's **land**. "This is my land," replied Mr. Howlands, and Boro shoots him to death. "Boro rushed out," Ngũgĩ writes. "He felt nothing—no triumph. He had done his duty. Outside, he fired desperately at the police homeguards who barred his way. But at last he gave up. Now for the first time he felt exultant."

The fact that Boro doesn't feel anything when he kills Mr. Howlands is yet another indication that violence and revenge have become almost reflexive for him. Indeed, it seems he has lost sight of why he's even murdering Howlands and is simply going through the motions. When he's captured, though, he feels a surge of happiness, ultimately suggesting that he's relieved to have finally broken out of his life of destruction, despite the fact that this will no doubt come at the cost of his own life.

Barring certain specific details, everyone in town knows this story about how Boro killed Mr. Howlands. As such, Njoroge has trouble interacting with the customers in the market, whom all whisper about him and cast him pitying looks. Because of this, he fails to perform well as a salesman and is eventually fired. "All right," he says, walking out of the shop when his boss lets him go. "And he all at once wished that he had been a child and Mwihaki was near him so he could pour out all his troubles to her," Ngũgĩ writes. "And he knew that he had to see her."

Unsurprisingly, Njoroge is embarrassed to be seen in the markets. After all, he has spent most of his life proudly dreaming about himself as a great intellectual leader who will one day uplift the community. Now that he no longer goes to school, though, he's forced to confront his humiliation as fellow Kenyans gossip about his family members. Simply put, Njoroge no longer has anything to invest himself in, which is why he decides to see Mwihaki, clearly wanting to find comfort and hope in their relationship.

CHAPTER 18

Mwihaki accepts Njoroge's invitation to meet—delivered through a note—and feels guilty about the fact that she has agreed to see him. He is, after all, part of the family that killed her father. Nonetheless, she wants to see him because "at the very height of the crisis in her family the words that had most comforted were those that Njoroge had spoken to her." In fact, she even repeated his phrase to her mother, saying, "The sun will rise tomorrow."

Although Mwihaki used to be the one who questioned Njoroge's optimism, she now clearly wants to embody the kind of hope he used to set forth about the future. What she doesn't know, though, is that he no longer holds tight to the idea of improving himself through education or religion. As such, it seems likely that they will find themselves—or their worldviews—at odds with one another.

When Njoroge finally sees Mwihaki, he notices she seems to have "hardened" and "grown into a woman." As for Mwihaki, when she looks at Njoroge, she sees "frustration and despair and bewilderment in his eyes," but she resolves not to pity him. "Mwihaki," he begins, "it is strange that you and I should meet under these circumstances. I have known you for all those years when I was young and foolish and thought of what I could do for my family, my village, and the country. I have now lost all—my education, my faith, and my family. It's only now that I do realise how much you had meant to me and how you took an interest in my progress. Because of this it makes it all the more painful what my people have done to you." Saying this, he apologizes for what has happened.

Njoroge is in a difficult position, since he wants to invest himself in his relationship with a person whom his family has wronged. As such, he tries to make an appeal to her kindness while simultaneously apologizing for the fact that Boro killed her father. This, of course, is a rather impossible relational dynamic to navigate. That Njoroge even tries to reconnect with Mwihaki under these circumstances is an indication of how badly he feels he needs her. After all, he says that he has lost his "education," "faith," and "family." The only thing left that might give him hope, then, is his relationship with Mwihaki.


After listening to Njoroge, Mwihaki expresses her doubt that he knew nothing about Boro's plans to kill Jacobo. "Mwihaki, I don't want to pretend that I would have warned you if I had known about it," he admits. "But I assure you that I am deeply sorry. Please accept what I am telling you, for I love you." This thoroughly rattles her, and Njoroge sees her begin to "soften." "I have no hope left but for you, for now I know that my tomorrow was an illusion," he says. "I am sorry for having thought ill of you," she says after a moment, but he insists that he is the one who should "take on the guilt." Reaching out, he holds her hand, and she begins to cry. And though she doesn't want to "lose control," she also doesn't want him to stop holding her hand.

When Njoroge says, "I have no hope left but for you, for now I know that my tomorrow was an illusion," he suggests that his optimism about the future was never anything more than a naïve, idealistic worldview. This is bleak, considering how invested he used to be in his education. The fact that he believes that success and upward mobility are mere "illusion[s]" emphasizes the extent to which division and violence can lead to complete and utter disillusionment, even for people who are highly motivated and optimistic.

"Don't! Don't!" Mwihaki says, thinking she must "stop him before he [goes] very far." "Mwihaki, dear, I love you. Save me if you want. Without you I am lost," Njoroge says. He then tells her that they can elope, like she once suggested. "No!" she says. "You must save *me*, please Njoroge. I love you." She then covers her face and weeps, and Njoroge begins talking about running away together to Uganda, but she cuts him off, saying that running away is "too easy." "We are no longer children," she says. "We better wait. You told me that the sun will rise tomorrow. I think you were right." Taken aback, he tells her, "All that was a dream. We can only live today," to which she responds, "Yes. But we have a duty." Falling to the ground, Njoroge suddenly feels as if he is "all alone" in the world.

Whereas Njoroge once refused to run away with Mwihaki because he couldn't bear the idea of giving up on his desire to educate himself and—in doing so—uplift his community, now Mwihaki is the one who believes she has a "duty" to her country. Njoroge, on the other hand, has become so disillusioned about the future that he believes he can only invest himself in "today." In turn, Ngũgĩ underlines the fact that these lovers have dealt with hardship differently, each one coping in his or her own way with the calamities ravaging Kenya.


The next day, Njoroge leaves his mothers in the hut and walks along the road, eventually coming to the place in the woods where he declared his love to Mwihaki. Sitting on a rock, he takes a cord out of his pocket and waits for darkness. When the sun finally goes down, he walks to a tree he's been eyeing since Ngotho died, and prepares a noose. Then, suddenly, he hears Nyokabi's voice on the road. "Njoroge!" she calls, her voice "full of anxiety." Pausing, he listens for some time before giving up and walking out to the road. "Mother," he says, feeling a "strange relief." Nyokabi, for her part, does not ask him what he was doing, but instead says, "I am here."

The fact that Njoroge is considering suicide—even if he decides in this scene not to go through with it—emphasizes just how disillusioned he has become in the aftermath of what happened between his and Mwihaki's families. Without his father, academic career, religious devotion, and relationship with Mwihaki, he fails to find any reason to stay alive—that is, until Nyokabi calls him back to the road, forcing him to focus on the people who are still in his life who care about him.

"Let's go home," Nyokabi says. As Njoroge walks, he thinks about how he has "failed her" and about Ngotho's last words, which instructed him to "look after the women." What's more, he feels as if he has failed Mwihaki, who asked him "to wait for a new day." On the way home, Njoroge comes upon Njeri, who was also looking for him, and he feels "the guilt of a man who ha[s] avoided his responsibility for which he ha[s] prepared himself since childhood." As he approaches home, a voice in his head says, "*You are a coward. You have always been a coward. Why didn't you do it?*" In response, he says aloud, "Why didn't I do it?" "*Because you are a coward*," the voice replies. "Yes," he whispers. "I am a coward." With this, he runs home and "open[s] the door for his two mothers."

After Njoroge decides not to kill himself, he feels ashamed about the fact that he has failed to accomplish what he always imagined he would accomplish in life: securing an education. Indeed, this is the "responsibility" he has been "prepar[ing] himself" for "since childhood." In fact, he is so ashamed about his inability to finish school that he thinks he's a "coward" for not ending his life. However, he eventually decides to accept the notion that he's a "coward." Unlike his father, who was motivated to act by feelings of guilt and shame, Njoroge embraces the idea that he is a "coward," and instead of dwelling on this notion, he focuses on what he still has in life: his two mothers. As such, he rushes ahead and "open[s] the door" for them, investing himself in "today" as best he can.


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