Redemptive Violence and the Struggle for Justice in Postcolonial African Literature

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Abstract

Violence remains a persistent feature of human society and is frequently reflected in postcolonial African literature. Many African states contribute to this cycle and continue to sustain socioeconomic inequalities, oppression, and dehumanisation, hence normalising state violence. The postcolonial African state, with its claim to exclusive power over its citizens, operates under the belief that "the state is always right," although the law itself perpetuates violence. Existing studies on violence in African literature largely focus on colonial brutality, state repression, or the psychological impact of violence. However, scholarly attention has not sufficiently examined redemptive violence as an artistic and ideological strategy through which African writers re-imagine justice, resistance, and collective liberation. Grounded in Frantz Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence, this study analyses how selected African novelists employ narrative techniques and characterisation to reframe violence as a redemptive response to oppression. The analysis reveals that Redemptive Violence, though disruptive, ultimately seeks to restore justice and freedom. The study contends that redemptive violence is not an act of savagery but a justified response to systemic crimes against the oppressed. It further identifies colonialism and neo-colonialism, imprisonment, militarism, strike actions and armed rebellion as recurring motifs in framing redemptive violence in African literature, showing how violence can serve as a tool for resistance and eventual liberation from structural injustice and violence.
Keywords: *Injustice*, *liberation, Oppression, Perpetrator, Resistance, Revolutionary Violence*

Background to the study

Hamby (2017) suggests four principal elements that constitute violence. He states that it must be intentional**,** unwanted**,** nonessential**,** and harmful**.** Although definitions differ across disciplines, both the American Psychological Association (APA) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) emphasise that violence encompasses physical, psychological, and even symbolic forms of harm. Generally speaking, violence extends beyond overt physical aggression to include psychological abuse, coercive control, threats, intimidation, and the destruction of property. In its wider sense,

violence denotes any act deliberately intended to inflict physical or psychological injury, thereby incorporating a wide range of harmful behaviours.

Violence, as a socio-historical phenomenon, has shaped human societies from ancient times to the present day, influencing the progress of political structures, social relations, and cultural identities. Michel (2024, p. 546) underscores its centrality to global politics, especially within the domains of international relations and systemic dehumanisation. The notion of sovereignty is particularly entangled with violence, given that the modern state's claim to authority is often underwritten by its monopoly over the legitimate use of force. As a result, political violence becomes an inherent feature of state power.

Vesco et al. (2025) further contend that violence, most especially war, can also function as a mechanism through which state authority is contested or destabilised. In the same vein, Duong (2020) argues that the relationship between politics and violence is enduring and structural, even in democratic states that employ both overt and subtle forms of violence to regulate, discipline, and control their populations.

These dynamics are especially pronounced in postcolonial African states, where the ideology that *"the state is always right"* is deeply rooted in colonial administrative legacies. Colonial governance structures, predicated on the principle of *might is right*, were designed to suppress dissent and consolidate the state's monopoly on violence. In contemporary African societies, the remnants of these formations persist in entrenched socio-economic inequalities, systemic oppression, and widespread human suffering.

This austere reality necessitates the exploration of alternative modes of social and political engagement capable of challenging and transforming these oppressive structures. As Duong (2020) suggests, such engagements can serve as avenues for individual and collective liberation from dystopian conditions. Within the context of this study, this alternative response is examined through the lens of Redemptive Violence (RV), a conceptual framework that interrogates the potential of violence to facilitate resistance, justice, and the reconfiguration of oppressive power relations.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the abundance of scholarly work on violence in African literature, most studies focus on its destructive, traumatic, or repressive dimensions, emphasising state brutality, colonial repression, or postcolonial dictatorship. What remains inadequately explored is how African

writers conceptualise violence as a redemptive, transformative, and justified response to systemic injustice. The ideological basis, literary representation, and socio-political implications of redemptive violence, particularly within Fanonian and Marxist frameworks, have not been fully examined, especially in relation to African narratives. This gap creates an incomplete understanding of how African literature negotiates the ethics of resistance and the liberation struggle. Therefore, a scholarly examination of redemptive violence as an artistic tool for reclaiming justice and dismantling oppressive structures is both timely and necessary.

Aim and significance of the study

The main aim of this study is to critically examine how postcolonial African novelists conceptualise and represent redemptive violence as a transformative and justified response to systemic oppression, drawing on Fanonian and Marxist theoretical frameworks. The study seeks to investigate how narrative strategies, character construction, and socio-political contexts shape literary portrayals of violence as a tool for reclaiming justice, restoring human dignity, and fostering collective liberation in postcolonial African societies.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the increasing discourse on violence, justice, and resistance in African literary scholarship. By foregrounding the notion of redemptive violence, this research shifts away from conventional interpretations that treat violence solely as a pathological or socially disruptive force. Instead, it highlights its potential as an instrument of political awakening and socio-cultural transformation within contexts marked by colonial legacies, neo-colonial governance, and established inequalities.

Furthermore, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how African writers engage with violence as both a philosophical and aesthetic class that exposes the contradictions of postcolonial governance while simultaneously offering visions of renewed social possibility. In doing this, the research deepens critical conversations on liberation struggles, human resilience, and the ethics of resistance, thereby offering valuable insights for scholars of literature, cultural studies, political theory, and postcolonial studies.

Finally, this study is significant because it repositions African literature as a vital site for theorising justice, agency, and collective emancipation. By examining redemptive violence as a literary and ideological construct, the research underscores the role of literature in shaping broader intellectual debates on the legitimacy of resistance and the quest for a more equitable social order.

Specific objectives

The Objectives of the paper are to:

i. Interrogate the conceptual and ideological foundations of redemptive violence within Fanonian, Marxist, and postcolonial theoretical discourses.
ii. Analyse how selected African novelists employ narrative techniques, motifs, and characterisation to frame violence as redemptive rather than merely destructive.
iii. Examine the socio-political conditions, such as colonialism, neo-colonialism, militarism, class inequality, and economic exploitation that give rise to redemptive violence in African literary texts.
iv. Explore the ways African writers depict collective resistance, class struggle, and revolutionary movements as instruments of reclaiming justice and subverting oppressive structures.

Research Questions

i. What ideological and theoretical principles underpin the concept of redemptive violence in postcolonial African literature, particularly within Fanonian and Marxist traditions?
ii. How do selected African novelists use narrative strategies and characterisation to represent violence as a redemptive and transformative force?
iii. Which socio-political conditions and historical realities, such as colonial domination, class stratification, state repression, or economic exploitation, give rise to redemptive violence in the texts under study?
iv. In what ways do African literary texts portray collective heroism, mass resistance, and revolutionary struggles as mechanisms for challenging and dismantling oppressive structures?

Frantz Fanon's Theory of Revolutionary Violence

Frantz Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence provides a foundational way for understanding how violence functions as a transformative and redemptive means within postcolonial African literature. Writing amidst anti-colonial struggles in Africa and the Caribbean, Fanon situates violence at the very core of the colonial encounter. Fanon (1963) argues that colonialism is "a systematised negation of the other" maintained through continuous force, military domination, economic exploitation, and psychological subjugation. Violence, therefore, is not incidental to

colonial rule. It is its defining structure; a growing force that governs social relations and produces the conditions of dispossession, humiliation, and dehumanisation experienced daily by the oppressed subject.

Fanon (1963) asserts that since colonial domination is inherently violent, decolonisation cannot occur through negotiation, appeals to morality, or social reform. The structure of 'decolonisation' therefore requires a radical and complete overturn of the colonial order. Revolutionary violence becomes the necessary mechanism through which the colonised regain agency, destroy oppressive structures, and reconstitute their humanity. This praxis is simultaneously material and symbolic. It dismantles the institutions of domination while also healing the psychological fractures induced by racial hierarchy and systemic humiliation. Within this transformative process, violence serves as a restorative act that enables the colonised to transition from passivity to self-determination.

Fanon is rather critical in his approach; he does not romanticise or glorify violence. He remains highly aware of its moral ambiguities and potential dangers, including the risk of reproducing new hierarchies or precipitating post-independence authoritarian regimes. Yet he insists that under conditions where all avenues for peaceful redress are systematically foreclosed, violence acquires a certain historical inevitability (Fanon, 1963; Rabaka, 2010). It becomes the only means through which the oppressed respond to the colonial system of oppression. Revolutionary violence is therefore a historically situated act of reclamation rather than wanton brutality.

Another central dimension of Fanon's theory is the emphasis on collective action. Decolonisation is, for Fanon, the work of the people. It is a mass movement that transforms sectionalised individuals into a collective political consciousness. Gibson (2003) posits that through struggle, the colonised forge solidarity, develop political awareness, and reconstruct social identity. This collective orientation aligns Fanon with Marxist theories of class struggle, even as he extends Marxism by foregrounding race, cultural alienation, and the psychological dimensions of oppression. As scholars such as Rabaka (2010) observe, Fanon's synthesis of Marxist materialism with decolonial psychology provides a more expansive framework for understanding how both economic exploitation and racialised dehumanisation fuel revolutionary activity.

In applying Fanon's theory to postcolonial African literature, the concept of violence emerges not as a subjective act but as a historically grounded response to systemic lack. Literary depictions of uprisings, insurgency, or symbolic defiance often reflect the structural conditions that Fanon describes, namely, colonial legacies, neo-colonial governance, class stratification, or state

repression (Mbembe, 2001). Fanon's framework allows us a sophisticated but rather subtle reading that interprets such violence as a redemptive act through which characters reclaim dignity, challenge oppressive systems, and imagine new forms of collective possibility.

In the context of this study, Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence offers a robust intellectual scaffold for analysing redemptive violence in African fiction. It explains how acts of rebellion within literary narratives can be understood as restorative gestures aimed at recovering psychic wholeness and asserting social justice marked by historical brutality. Fanon's emphasis on psychological restoration, collective mobilisation, and the transformative potential of resistance provides a compelling lens through which this study examines how African writers grapple with the complex interplay between violence, justice, and liberation. Fanon's framework not only clarifies the ideological foundations of redemptive violence but also shapes a critical methodology capable of interrogating its ethical tensions and socio-political implications across diverse postcolonial texts.

Review of related literature

Redemptive Violence

The concept of Redemptive Violence (RV) has its historical roots in imperial cultures, where ancient kings and rulers believed that maintaining order required perpetual warfare and the violent suppression of their subjects. The idea of 'might is right' dominated the era then, with powerful figures using violence to control the masses. This early form of redemptive violence was a tool for maintaining the status quo, ensuring that the elite, the kings, aristocrats, and the emperors retained their hold on power. The people were indoctrinated to believe that peace could only be maintained through violence, and thus, violence became the state's primary method of governance. With time, the history of redemptive violence, according to Duong (2017).

Stretches back at least to the Wars of Religion, but the French Revolution adapted it into a vocabulary of extralegal popular agency. It would henceforth become a persistent feature of revolutionary politics across the ideological spectrum and in the 21st century (p. 786).

The state operates under the cover of the rule of law, to give the state absolute sovereignty without citizen agency, with "The early modern European theory of the state's monopoly on legitimate violence" acting under the pretence to "secured and maintained... peace... prosperity, and the security" for the citizens. (Vogler & Markell, 2003, p. 7).

However, the concept of redemptive violence has evolved, particularly in the context of African literature. Originally, it is an archetypal plot in literary theory, as articulated by Walter Wink in *The Powers That Be*. Redemptive violence was criticised for perpetuating oppressive power structures. However, Wink (1998) argued that violence is never redemptive, especially when it upholds unjust systems. Marxist literary theorists redefined the concept of redemptive violence, particularly in the context of apartheid South Africa. There are calls for redemptive violence to be used as a legitimate response by the oppressed against their oppressors in the context of apartheid, South Africa, thus positioning it as a tool for revolutionary transformation rather than a mechanism of oppression. Nwagbara (2011, p.118) noted that "During the apartheid years in South Africa, violence was used as a tool by the white minority for advancement of racial segregation, social inequality and class oppression" this led to the return violence from the black, as such, violence was used by the blacks to demand for justice, equality and fair treatment in South Africa. This returned violence, according to Fraser and Hutchings (2020, p.117), is necessary since it is "provoked" by the sense of immediate injustice in the innocent oppressed to correct the ugly situations. This reimagining of redemptive violence emphasises 'collectivism', where individuals act as part of a larger system seeking collective liberation. Beaumont (2020) points out that "redemptive violence here is understood as those systems of thought and action that see violence as an essential, necessary and redeemable" (p. 186).

However, the postcolonial African states often label some revolutionary individuals or groups of individuals as rebels, terrorists, or anarchists, particularly when their activities challenge the oppressive regimes (Celeb. 2017). These are individuals who fight for the freedom of their people against what they perceive as corrupt or sectional governments, embodying the characters frequently portrayed in African novels. Revolutionary writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Festus Iyayi, Sembene Ousmane and other contemporary African writers write to resist certain oppressive structures in their novels. Aside from the revolutionary writers, African literary genres are typically protest literature in general. This explains why Agho (2020) observers about African writers that no matter how "diversified the contextual matters handled by the writers in the different genres of the literature, the defining character of pessimism or protest always triumphs whether or not the writers are critical realists or revolutionary writers" (p. 24). He argues further that writing in Africa is a social obligation to write down the societal values and challenge the ills of power "towards the redemption of the society" (p. 24). Hence, these revolutionary writers create characters that

resist oppression and struggle towards revolutionary change in their literature. These characters are often branded as anarchists due to their resistance to the status quo, but their struggles reflect a broader fight for freedom from internal or external oppression (Cederman et al, 2015).

According to Duong (2020, p. 1), violence was not a source or symptom of anarchy. It was its solution. Rather than something sublimated, as men escaped nature into society, violence saved society from dissolution. Redemptive violence, as depicted in African literature, is a response to the state's unjust violence. It is seen as a necessary tool for restructuring and reshaping the socio-economic and political life of a nation. While violence is inherently destructive, this study argues that redemptive violence, when used as a means to achieve collective freedom, is justifiable. It is not self-centred violence but rather a mechanism aimed at attaining social justice and liberation. This study examines how selected African writers portray RV in their works, positioning it as a positive force in the fight against oppression. It is believed that "the only way to overcome oppressive forces permanently is to get rid of them," perhaps through the use of violence and force. Hence, to be free from violence necessitates the use of violence in return (Miller, 2021, p. 61).

Marxism, though had its peak during the African revolutionary struggles of the 1970s through the early 1990s, informs the ideology of redemptive violence. Marxist philosophy critiques capitalist societies, which dehumanise and exploit the working class, creating class distinctions that lead to social unrest. Marx (1992) argued that revolution is inevitable in states where the proletariat is oppressed and dehumanised. This socialist revolution, which Marx envisioned as the only path to freedom for the working class, is akin to the concept of RV discussed in this study. Violence becomes redemptive when it is directed towards the collective good and aimed at overthrowing oppressive systems. Redemptive violence also questions the existing social order by articulating a revolutionary option. In societies where class distinctions fuel hostility and exploitation, RV is often the only viable response for the oppressed.

In societies where the proletariat faces tyranny, corruption, economic exploitation, and poverty, revolution becomes the only means of achieving justice. Violence becomes redemptive when it addresses collective problems and demands collective responsibility. (Agho, 2018) describes RV as "restorative violence," a force used by the oppressed to reclaim their humanity, drawing on Frantz Fanon's work on decolonisation.

Fanon argued that violence is sometimes necessary to break free from the psychological and physical chains of colonialism and oppression. Ngugi wa Thiong'o also justifies positive violence,

stating that violence used to change an intolerable social order is not savagery but a means of purifying humanity. (Fraser, 2017) Similarly, argues that class struggle is inevitable and necessary to dismantle systems that exploit the weak and the poor. RV embraces the concept of the "plurimental hero," where multiple individuals unite to fight against a common enemy, rather than the "mono-mental hero," which emphasises individual achievements. This shift in focus reflects the collective nature of RV, which seeks to liberate entire communities rather than just individual actors.

In African literature, RV challenges the capitalist structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression. The capitalist system, as Marx argued, dehumanises the working class and creates a cycle of exploitation that inevitably leads to social crises. RV, in this context, becomes a tool for dismantling capitalist structures and advocating for a more equitable social order. It is not just a response to individual oppression but a broader critique of societal systems that marginalise and exploit large segments of the population.

The characters in African novels are often revolutionary figures fighting against corrupt regimes, exploitative systems, and external or internal oppression. These figures, though labelled as anarchists or rebels by the state, represent the struggle for freedom and justice. The study examines how African novelists like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Festus Iyayi, and Sembene Ousmane portray these revolutionary characters and the roles of the RV in their quests for liberation (Joseph, 2017).

Ultimately, RV is a form of violence that is justified when it seeks to overthrow oppressive regimes and achieve collective freedom. It is not motivated by selfish desires but by the need to address systemic injustices that affect entire populations. This study contends that RV, when used in this context, is a legitimate response to the violence perpetrated by the state. Through an analysis of African novels, this study explores how writers depict RV as a necessary tool for achieving social and political liberation, while also critiquing the oppressive systems that perpetuate violence against the masses (Hudis, 2012).

Hence, RV in African literature is framed as a revolutionary force that challenges the capitalist and oppressive systems which dominate postcolonial African states. It is a tool for achieving justice and liberation, particularly for the working class and marginalised populations who suffer under exploitative regimes. The concept of RV, as examined in this study, serves as a reminder that violence, though destructive, can be a powerful force for change when used to address collective injustices. This study critically analyses how African novelists portray RV, offering insights into

the broader implications of violence as a means of achieving freedom in postcolonial societies. Elliott (2013) argues that violent riots by the rabble are not irrational outbursts but represent a redemptive, autonomous political gesture against late capitalism. He views these riots as a fight for recognition, exposing systemic inequality, and theorises them as catalysts for transformative change within capitalist society. This aligns with Benjamin's (2007) divine violence and the concept of revolutionary violence. Like divine violence, redemptive violence does not aim to overthrow the political system; instead, it serves as a political tool through which the masses—the rabble—engage in collective action against the oppressive "state apparatus" that threatens their existence.

Exploring Redemptive Violence in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child*

There are four factors identified in this paper that characterise Redemptive Violence RV within the context of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child*. First is the concept of class distinction. The second is the concept that favours collective heroism as opposed to monolithic or messianic heroism. The third factor is the African experiences under capitalist colonial exploiters. The last one is the union resistance and armed struggle.

This study argues in the first place that RV is deeply rooted in class distinction using "Marxist Fanonism" or rather Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence. By implication, the oppression and the exploitation of the lower-class majority by the upper class usually trigger a reaction which afterwards is often violent. *Weep Not Child* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a historical class struggle between the white capitalist and the exploited Kenyan peasants. Marxist Fanonism to Reiland Rubaka (2010) exposes the evil contribution of the capitalist economic system of imperialism towards the social and political life of African society. This form of economic system, Rubaka explains, 'condemns' many Africans to a perpetual subjugation and exploitation, leaving the African resources and manpower under the control of the capitalist. This capitalist economic system not only exploits African resources and labour, but also perpetually keeps the African society away from notable growth and development (p. 148).

The novel *Weep Not Child* centres on the class conflicts between the white landlord (Howland) and the black natives, represented by Ngotho and the family, who are kept perpetually in a poor condition and who are impoverished by the alienation they suffer at the hands of their landlords (the white settlers). Ngotho, for instance, is a poor peasant who suffers in silence for years and is forced to till the land of his ancestors for the gain of Mr Howland. Hence, he is alienated from his

production as a worker. This alienation is degrading, inhuman and a form of slavery perpetuated by the colonist against colonial Africa, which makes the victim resort to violent revolution. Mbah (2014) posits that "class struggle and revolutionary pressures are associated with class societies and class society includes struggle of class opposites in whatever forms or way" (p. 15). The community painted by Ngugi in *Weep Not Child,* for example, is indeed a class society, where a socioeconomic gap exists between the poor peasants and the rich landowners.

Look at Howlands. He is not employed by anybody. Yet he is very rich and happy. It's because he has land. Or look at Jacobo. He's like that because he has land… Boro has no land. He could not get employment. (wa Thiong'o, 1976:41)

The society in the novel is in layers such that the white settlers stay at the upper part of the economic ladder, and the few blacks who own land, like Nganga the carpenter, and especially Jacobo, find themselves in the middle class. Others, like Ngotho and family, find themselves at the lower section of the economic ladder. Land is used as a yardstick in the determination of an individual's wealth in that community. "Any man who has land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted as rich." (wa Thiong'o, 1976: 19). Of course, Ngotho and other members of his household have no land. Besides, Mr Howland, the white settler, turns Ngotho into a labourer with a low wage on the land of his ancestors. Class distinction also shows in the ways the Indian traders treat the black and the white customers. "And if you went to buy in a shop and a white man found you, the Indian would stop selling to you and, trembling all over, would begin to serve him." (wa Thiong'o 1976, p. 7).

There is also the idea of separate amenities and the poor state of the black infrastructure. Fanon (1963) noticed that "the zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed" (p. 30). wa Thiong'o particularly describes where Kori works - Green Hotel. Kori is the son of Njeri, Ngotho's eldest wife. An African tea shop called Green Hotel. Green Hotel happens to be filthy, full of buzzing flies, while the stench of decay hung in the air like a heavy cloud. (wa Thiong'o, 1976, p. 22) wa Thiong'o paints a polarised Gikuyu community where the majority indigenous Africans are miserably poor and the white minorities are comfortably controlling the means of production, swimming in affluence and leisure on the sweat and labour of the former. The white man uses the black as a labourer on his farm and in his homestead. For instance, Howland's wife, Suzannah, has savants who tend to her and whom she often treats unfairly and sacks at will. "She beats and sacks servant after servant." (wa Thiong'o,

1976, p. 31). Wa Thiong'o, in the novel, also explains that the houses lived in by the blacks and the whites are different. While the whites live in very exotic houses, the blacks live in shabby houses. wa Thiong'o describes the houses: "Mr Howland's house. It was huge and imposing. It was grander than the one that belonged to Mihaki's father." (wa Thiong'o, 1976, p. 36)

Agho Jude (2018) explores the class conflict that led to the rise of the "proletarian" novel in Africa. He uses Ngugi's novel for the purpose and concludes that it takes a radical solution, which is the use of mass revolt to attain the state of what he refers to as 'dictatorship of the proletariat class'. Mbah (2014 therefore, argues that:

The basis of the struggle between the two classes is the control of the state so as to determine social policies, especially the authoritative allocation of values and scarce resources. While the oppressed class agitates for a new social order that ensures fairly equitable distribution of resources, the bourgeois class preoccupies itself with maintaining its class advantage, by extension, the structural inequality. Since the ruling class does not willingly surrender power (in other words, not prepared to commit class suicide), it has to be compelled to do so through intense struggle and/or violence. Such agitations and struggles result in class conflicts. This class struggle may lead to the overthrow of the ruling class or compel it to embark on reforms such as an increase in wages, welfare, bonuses, political liberties, democratic participation in industrial affairs, etc. (Bangura 1985:39 as quoted in Mbah, 2014: 16)

Ngugi creates in these novels characters among the impoverished members of the society who use collective energy and wage war against the oppressor to achieve the collective goal of freedom. This brings us to the second factor that characterises Redemptive Violence (RV), which is the concept that favours collective heroism as opposed to monolithic or messianic heroism. As such, the idea of a single hero or *messianism* is jettisoned in favour of collective heroism. In this situation, there is a unifying factor that brings the people together, even though it is often the initiation of a particular character who spurs the rest of the masses into action. One thing remains: the fact that they are altogether objects of oppression and have come to realise the need to form a formidable force to achieve the aim of removing their 'capitalist' oppressor. According to Fanon (1963), in this situation, "individualism is the first thing to disappear" (p. 37). To this end, it is often blurred to categorically point to a particular character as the hero in such a struggle for freedom. According to Agho (2018)

Apart from centering their plot on simple folks, usually peasants and members of the working class, they also democratise the concept of heroism by censuring messianic tendencies and favouring collective heroism. Such novels embody major revolutions usually orchestrated by the working class against the oppression of its members by the oppressor or bourgeois class and work towards the redemption of the victims of the oppression by granting them victory at the end of the struggle. (p. 3)

I argue in the second instance here that RV is a collective struggle towards a collective redemption of the oppressed. For instance, in Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*, almost all the characters who are oppressed in one form or another display their loyalty towards regaining the lost land. Besides, each suffers the aftermath of the struggle in a way. Ngotho, Njoroge's father, not only loses his job but is tortured to death. Njoroge's education suffers a setback aside from the fact that he is tortured for a crime he did not commit. Jomo loses the trial and is imprisoned. Kamau is imprisoned for life. Boro, who is the real leader of the Mau Mau movement, continues to live in the forest.

Like Njoroge, Ngotho is portrayed as the main hero of the novel. The story is woven around Njoroge for his prominent role in the novel. We can equally claim that the story is more about the life of Ngotho than even his son. Ngotho seems to be at the centre of the violence in the sense that the climax of violence in the novel found its source in Ngotho's challenge by his son. At that juncture, Ngugi shows him as the hero in the novel, as the front runner in the strike action, which later degenerates into physical violence. Besides, Ngotho is the first to be tortured for the murder of Jacobo. Thus, after the arrest of his other son (Kamu) in connection with the murder of Jacobo, Ngotho heroically:

Offer(s) his old tooth that had failed to bite deep into anything. But Ngotho could never tell where he had found the courage to walk into the D.O.'s office and admit that he had killed Jacobo. It was a confession that had shocked the whole village, and Ngotho had now for days been tortured in all manner of ways (wa Thiong'o, 1976, p. 119)

Mention is made of Dedan Kimathi, who is believed to have spurred his people to fight for freedom. His name was used as a threat to the white police and Jacobo. The whites are sent secret letters that bear the name of Dedan Kimathi. "You see, he had written a letter to the police station at Nyeri. "I, Dedan Kimathi, leader of the African Freedom Army, will come to visit you at 10.30 a.m. on Sunday*"* (wa Thiong'o, 1976, p. 68).

At another point in the novel, Jomo is also suggested as the messiah- the hero of the people of Kikuyu, who has come to deliver his people from the hands of the white oppressors. "There is a man sent from God whose name was Jomo. He was the black Moses empowered by God to tell the white Pharaoh,' Let my people go! (wa Thiong'o, 1976, p. 58). Ngugi compares Jomo in the novel with the Biblical Moses, who delivered the Israelites from the hands of Pharaoh. 'Boro called him the black Moses in the Bible?" (wa Thiong'o, 1976, p. 43). "He could still remember a meeting in the marketplace by K.A.U… K.A.U. is the society of black people who wanted Wiyathi and the return of the stolen land. The society also wanted bigger salaries for black people and the abolition of colour bar" (wa Thiong'o, 1976, p. 64). Here, Ngugi refers to Jomo Kenyatta as a leader who became a hero among the black people of Kenya for his struggle for the freedom of his people. The idea of the pluralistic hero was further reinforced and resolved with the argument that ensues among the students in the school, as posited by Ngugi, as to whether Kimathi or Jomo is the hero. The third factor I use in the explanation of RV is colonialism. Colonialism plays a vital role towards revolutionary movements in Africa. It can therefore be argued that colonialism spurred up reactions and ultimately violence, which is described in this paper as Redemptive Violence (RV) in Africans. It is therefore very important to note that colonialism no doubt played a unique role not only in planting violence in African society but also in legitimising it by encouraging the African elite to perpetrate, in the same vein, the violence used by their oppressor. In the novel, the British government, represented by the character of Howlands, for instance, takes over the land and uses the original African owners as labourers with very low wages in *Weep Not Child*. This is the case of Ngotho and his family. Ngotho, like other black Kenyans, are treated by the white settlers as a slave on their ancestral land. The unfortunate developments in the novel - the war, unemployment, strike action, the killings and the armed struggle- have their root in colonialism. Colonialism, therefore, comes with despair, which led to a series of frustrations and eventual violent revolution. Agho Jude (2018) explains that Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Weep Not Child* concentrates on colonial Kenya, especially the emergency period before the dawn of the era of independence, and extends the class conflict barely hinted at in the novel.

Mostly Boro and Kori, Ngotho's sons, confront the colonial operatives and their African collaborators in the person of Jacobo over the vexed issues of land ownership and agitations over decolonisation. Howlands, the white landowner and later the District Colonial Officer in the novel, epitomises the brute force of colonialism. (wa Thiong'o, 1976, p. 4)

Weep Not Child, therefore, gives a fair historical account of colonial Kenya as well as the rift that resulted from the black revolt and the eventual militant struggle of the Gikuyi towards the redemption of the people from the colonial subjugation, oppression and enslavement. Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* proves to be a typical revolutionary novel that largely condemns the activities of the colonial government in Kenya to bring about decolonisation. He, therefore, castigates the colonial structure that suppresses the potential of characters like Ngotho, Njoroge, Boro, the Barber, Ngaga and others.

Colonialism itself is seen as violence against the colonised African society. It "provides a platform for Africans to collectively agitate for their rights; a precursor to the Mau Mau revolutionary group that …later confronted colonialism and the colonial government in Kenya in pitched battles to bring about decolonisation" (Agho, 2018)

The fourth factor considered in the discussion of RV in the context of this research is the union resistance and armed struggle**.** This underlines the growth of violence in a higher momentum as seen further in *Weep Not Child*- the strike action is followed by the violent beating of Jacobo by Ngotho, and then the murder of Jacobo, and later the armed struggle, Mau Mau. Ngugi, for instance, created in *Weep Not Child* characters like Ngotho, Jomo and Boro. "Indeed, Ngugi seems to be suggestive of the idea that armed struggle needs to complement trade union resistance when he brings into the novel the revolutionary intervention of the Mau Mau uprising after the strike action by the workers to ask for increased salary fails to create the desired effect and reaction from the white settlers represented by Howlands.

War returnees regroup to form a band of guerrilla fighters set to confront the colonial operatives in pitched battles. This is an amplification of the Kiamu group in the earlier novel, which, as stated earlier, was precursory to the emergence of the Mau Mau revolutionary group. Boro personifies the soul of the people's revolt against colonialism in this novel. To show Ngugi's endorsement of the activities of the guerrilla fighters, the group at the end of the novel succeeds in exterminating the district colonial officer, Mr Howlands, as well as his African collaborator, Jacobo; thus, paving the way for the achievement of independence, which is shown in graphical details in the next novel, *A Grain of Wheat*. Ngugi's endorsement of violence as a viable means of attaining decolonisation, which is the fulcrum of the operations of the Mau Mau group in the novel, pays off ... (Mbah, 2014, p. 15)

Fanon (1963) believes that the colonial reign usually repressed the emotional sensitivity of the native for some time, but not for so long. He assumed that violence is kept on the surface of the skin of the native black, like an open wound, which causes irritation and violent reactions. Its similitude can also be likened to a time bomb ready to explode at the slightest provocation. Thus, the exploited peasant in the long run only finds out that his liberation and freedom depend on the use of all possible solutions at his disposal. And as such, his conscious mind is stirred by the subconscious reality of colonial violence. It is hence justified to say that colonial violence is confronted by greater violence since the oppressor is not ready to compromise his hegemony for peace. (p. 44-48).

Looking beyond the "Strike": A paradigm towards Redemption in Ousmane Sembene's God's Bits of Wood

Scholars like Sikiru Ogundokun (2014), Adeniyi (2017) and others see the works of Sembene as typically revolutionary, singled out against the European capitalists. Ogundokun (2014) sees the oppressed in Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* as well-organised and united; as such, they become the tool for "social transformation", especially from the colonial imperialists (p. 72). He, therefore, sees all social, political and economic revolts in Sembene's novels as symbols of revolutionary actions of the oppressed society against imperialist hegemony. Adeniyi Emanuel (2017) examines "the sordidness of classism, alienated labour, *commodification* or *thingification* of the underclass and other bourgeois tensions" in the text of Ousmane Sembene. He, however, underplays the use of revolution as the only way of ending the oppression of the lower class. Adeniyi, therefore, "advocates (for) economic revivalism through the exploration of the opportunities offered by the communal mode of production" (p. 55). He also considers the poetic ingenuity of Sembene and Ngugi, and comes to the conclusion that the two writers engage in "*intertextual dialogism*" or "*dialogic intertextuality"* as several tropes, imageries, signs and symbols were shared in their works.

However, and more importantly, this research corroborates the works of Ogundokun (2014) more than any other one as it relates to the concept of Redemptive Violence (RV) put forward by this research towards total freedom from the hands of the oppressor. The role of the woman cannot be underplayed in the struggle for freedom, as explored by Mooka (2016) and Jive Lubbungu (2020). Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* is a total demonstration of the accord of all and sundry, especially the oppressed (educated, illiterates, the old and the young) in their collective struggle against their

exploitation, rather than being considered as a struggle of womenfolk against the old order of being subordinates to men.

Here, Sembene Ousmane's *Gods Bits of Wood* is read beyond political ideology. The novel is examined using the paradigm of strike. In doing this, critical attention is paid to the concept of strike as an important trope towards redemption. Strike actions in this novel are recognised as a form of violence engendered specifically towards the freedom of the classless members of society, or in a more relative term, the oppressed, from the pangs of the capitalist oligarchy and the oppressors. Strike actions in this novel serve as a mechanism as well as a necessary tool in achieving freedom for the downtrodden, especially the working class in society.

Throughout the narrative, strike actions continue to be a recurring trope for a successful resistance towards the liberty of the societies in question. It is therefore imperative to discuss the composition of the strike as it appears in the novel. Hence, looking beyond the strike, the violence (riot and death) in the text is assumed to be an economic reaction more than a political reaction against the capitalist state. Among other things, the text emphasises class solidarity as a major component of a strike if successful resistance is to be achieved.

Here, there is the presentation of certain theoretical concepts in a bid to better understand the fundamental nature and functions of Redemptive Violence (RV) as an ideology towards economic and political emancipation of individuals in the state. As such, some concepts are proposed and are presented in this section as components of a successful strike. These components are likened to Masood Raja's (2011) "Anatomy of strike", which are "necessary preconditions for successful resistance in the neoliberal regime of high capital" (p. 424). Class solidarity, education or information, gender inclusion (gender reconfiguration), Rhetoric, and consultation are identified as concepts that characterised a successful strike as a tool for resistance towards redemption of the state as seen in Osman Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood*.

Ousmane Sembene, in *God's Bits of Wood,* suggests that class solidarity is a major component of a successful strike. Raja (2011) believes that reading Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* as a solidarity *ideologeme* creates a powerful model of resistance against oppressive government. Throughout the narration, more people continue to join the strike, which starts from the city of Thies- "the riot had spread through all of Thies. Other men had come from the market to help the workers" (Sembene,1962, p. 23).

The second component theorised in this research work for an effective strike towards successful resistance is gender inclusion or gender reconfiguration. Gender inclusion or gender reconfiguration is as important as class solidarity- if successful resistance would be achieved using the strike as a trope towards sustainable redemption. Adeniyi (2011) explains that the role of women cannot be overemphasised in the victory recorded in Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood*. He notes that "Beyond providing active support and serving as the intellectual force driving the strike, women in the novel…break the patriarchal barriers and sexist ordering of African society to become leaders and revolutionary voice" (62).

From the reading of Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood*, rhetoric is theorised as another important and effective element of a successful strike towards vibrant and pro-active resistance, which, after all, yields a physical, social and economic transformation as well as total redemption as seen in the novel. Ousmane Sembene explores rhetoric as a vital ingredient in the hands of the striking workers (the peasants) as they struggle for justice and the dignity of their labour. Characters like Bakayoko, Ramatoulaye and others use rhetoric effectively through emotional appeals, collective identity and social responsibility of the ordinary working class – the peasants (219). For instance, during Diara's trial, Tiamako uses what can be referred to as 'rhetoric of emphasis' to remind other characters about the need to fight and free their colleagues who are being imprisoned by the colonial rulers for embarking on strikes. He says: "But let no one forget that while we are talking here, many of our comrades are in prisons" (p. 91). Proverb or figurative use of expression is another form of rhetoric used especially by the older characters, like Fa Keita and others in the novel.

Waiting for redemption: The trope of imprisonment in *Waiting for an Angel*

The trope of Imprisonment in *Waiting for an Angel* explores the theme of confinement, both physical and psychological, as a central element in the narrative. The characters face literal imprisonment, representing the oppressive political regime, while also grappling with metaphorical imprisonment, symbolising their social, mental, and emotional struggles. This trope highlights how the characters' desires for freedom, justice, and self-expression are stifled by external forces, reflecting the broader societal constraints within which they live. Ultimately, the trope of imprisonment underscores the characters' yearning for liberation and change. It portrays a pervasive atmosphere of surveillance and control where individuals are monitored and even intimidated by the security apparatuses. All these restrictions and limitations restrict and limit the

ability of individuals like Lomba, Kela, Joshua, James and others to freely organise, communicate or engage in any social, political or viable economic activities without the fear of being apprehended.

Agho and Atere (2020) observe that "The history of governance in Nigeria has shown that governance, either by military or civilian administration, is faced with deception and self-centeredness" (p. 12). There is also the general feeling of insecurity and restriction that characterised the military regime of General Sani Abacha. It was a situation where all citizens experience a continuous subjugation (Rapoport and Weinberg, 2020). Some were even killed. Ken Saro Wiwa, for instance, was killed; Dele Giwa was silenced, and Abiola was imprisoned. This feeling of being imprisoned is expressed by Kela when he laments that, "We are living under siege… They hold us cowed with guns… They do it by holding guns to our heads.

However, in the face of restriction and oppression, Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* is a conscious call for resistance. Habila portrays characters who defiantly confronted political oppression and societal injustice, even though most of them paid dearly for it. Dele Giwa, the editor of the News Watch and Ken Saro Wiwa were killed, and Lomba was imprisoned. Resistance in *Waiting for an Angel* comes in various forms, which include: journalistic resistance, artistic resistance, political activism, etc. Journalistic resistance is the use of official news writing to expose the evils of a repressive government. Lomb, for instance, used his journalistic experience to uncover the truth despite the risks posed by the military regime through the narration. Lomba challenged the tyrannical rule. He covered a protest which led to his imprisonment.

Artistic resistance is the form of resistance that comes in the form of creative writing, such as poetry. Even in prison, Lomba's creative writing gives voice to individuals like Superintendent Muftau, who uses Lomba's poem to capture the heart of Janice, his love (Rapoport and Weinberg, 2022). Lomba's poems serve as a reflection of his inner tumult and longing for freedom. In the prison, prisoners were not even allowed any freedom. As such, Lomba's creative writing in the form of poetry in prison is a symbolic deviance against censorship.

Political activism is a normal form of resistance identified in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*. For instance, the students and others are involved in protests, civil disobedience, demonstrations and riots. All these are symbolic acts of deviance portrayed by Habila, which underscore Habila's characters' resistance against subjugation and restrictions of life (Pehrson et al, 2019). The protests

and demonstrations are sincere gestures towards 'conspiracy' or solidarity to challenge and question the military capitalist in Habila's work.

The trope of imprisonment, therefore, is a powerful literary motif which portrays the harsh realities of military oppression. On the other hand, the trope of resistance celebrates the courage of individuals and the collective struggle for redemption and justice even in the face of death. Hence, the society awaits its freedom from corruption, nepotism, and tyranny (perhaps from the Angel of death) that will finally liberate them from the hands of oppressors or take away the oppressors from their midst (Panstars, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the persistent presence of violence in human society, particularly within the context of contemporary African literature. It reveals how African states, through socioeconomic inequalities, oppression, and dehumanisation, contribute to a cycle of violence. The research demonstrates that African novelists utilise RV as an alternative literary response to violence and political injustice. Redemptive violence, as depicted in African literature, is framed not as a barbaric or senseless act but as a legitimate response to confront systems of exploitation and injustice. The study shows how violence, while disruptive, is often a necessary means of seeking justice and freedom for the oppressed. By analysing key works, the study further identifies colonialism, neo-colonialism, imprisonment and strike actions as recurring motifs that shape the portrayal of redemptive violence. These themes are central in understanding how violence in African literature becomes a tool for resistance and eventual liberation from the oppressive structures of power.

Ultimately, this contributes to a broader understanding of redemptive violence in African literature, asserting that it is not an act of savagery, but a reclaiming of justice in the face of systemic crimes against marginalised populations.

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