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Review of *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir*.

By Wa'Thiong'o Ngugi. New York: Anchor Books, 2011. ISBN-13: 978-1846553776

Born in 1938 to a family of the peasantry in rural Kenya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o aged through World War II and the Mau Mau War of Independence during a historical period of establishing a European Kenyan state. Through his dreams in a time of war, young wa Thiong'o desired a passion for learning specifically in literature and theater, while he often recited poems and obtained roles in his high school plays. Wa Thiong'o primarily received his education in Kamandura and Manguu European schools and universities where he would become a playwright and novelist, often criticizing the social and political modifications as a witness to British colonial rule. As a human rights activist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses his childhood memoir to display a testament to the resilience and stubbornness of a clash in cultures, education, and altercations within his Kenyan homestead. Nevertheless, speaking to pursue your dreams in the worse times of war, for believing in yourself is more important than seeking the validity of others.

Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, conveys a consistent theme of faith during British colonial rule and acts of violence amongst the Kenyan people. At the beginning of the memoir, wa Thiong'o emphasizes the importance of education and expresses his gratitude to his brother, Kabae, for sparking his desire to learn and receive his teaching. However, throughout the memoir, he acknowledged the barriers to receiving an education which was deemed impossible for a family of his socioeconomic background. Promising to keep the pact that he created with his mother, wa Thiong'o consistently expresses

his gratitude throughout the book to indicate the sacrifices of his mother's marketplace earnings. His mother uses her funds to pay for his uniform, tuition, and extracurricular activity fees to send her son to school. For example, "I could not bring myself to break the pact regarding the school that I had made with Mother. I could not abandon my dreams. The train would have to pass me by!" (78) When his mother offers him and his little brother a train ride to visit relatives, wa Thiong'o declines the offer, feeling his commitment to his mother could be tainted.

Through the process of "indirect rule" by the British colonial power, wa Thiong'o contrasted the theme of modernity and western influences against the foundation of traditional practices in his Kenyan home. In earlier chapters of the memoir, the author describes his father as a patriarchal figurehead who received his wealth through cattle and practiced polygamy. Wa Thiong'o's father referred to himself as a "modern man" due to his decision to adopt the urban style of dressing and branched outside of the usual to find work away from his home. He often referred to Lord reverend Stanley Kahahu as the "modern man", because Lord Kahahu adopted new technologies, practiced monogamy, wore westernized clothing styles, and stressed the importance of education beyond the means of traditional Kenyan reading and writing. To highlight the negative impact of the British, the author explores the difference between tradition and modernity at Kamandura and Manguo schools. "The white settler community wanted 'skilled' African labor, not learned African minds" (114). Wa Thiong'o believed that Kamandura acquired a reputation for colonial practices that subjugated and prepared children to obtain subservient roles, demonstrating Western influences. He uses examples of circumcision and how British missionaries forced Kenyan teachers and schools to denounce the act. The author continues to describe Manguo as a school of community, performance, and change that reflects the traditional values of education (115). Without maintaining biases, wa Thiong'o notes

the positive influences that the British had on Kamandura, stating that they provided basic literacy, medical care, and technical skills. Nevertheless, realizing that the long-term effects resulted in conversion and measured deeply through one's culture, new practices, and values.

While Ngugi wa Thiong'o explores colonialism and the unequal treatment of Kenyan people in *Dreams in a Time of War*, he uses his own personal and uplifting stories, which underlines his use of ethos. The author focuses heavily on the adventures he shares with his younger brother and his love for listening to his mother's and sibling's portrayal of historical events and traditional ancestral tales. The methodology of this book often alternates between politics, social history, and personal experiences, which displays his influence on historical insights learned from his friend Ngandi, who teaches him about the injustice system of colonial rule. The author flows between personal experiences and political understanding, giving the audience a clear view of what is happening in Kenya under British control and how the causes of war share an emotional connection with his experiences. For wa Thiong'o, the experiences of war, told by Ngandi, blend fact, and fiction, which for him "keeps dreams alive even in times of war" (195)—demonstrating that Ngugi continues to hang onto his hope and faith through the hardships of colonial rule. Throughout the text, Ngugi notes his father's beliefs about the importance of individuality between himself, his siblings, and his four mothers, yet maintaining a patriarchal-dominated household. wa Thiong'o states that each wife was given their private huts, jobs, and land to hold their cattle. However, the four mothers contributed to a variety of personalities in polygamy that catered to the belief that women must take care of their husbands and children.

Primarily, the violence of colonial rule impacted wa Thiong'o life and became increasingly evident in the last half of *Dreams in a Time of War*. In the earlier stages of Ngugi

wa Thiong'o's life, colonialism does not affect the narration about his family and obtaining his education. Still, in the last third of the memoir, colonization underlines the effects of indirect rule in a highly unjust society. The overall purpose of *Dreams in a Time of War* calls attention to the symbolic impact of Kenya's dismantled political systems, education, and adverse effects on African families of low socioeconomic status, causing the influence of westernized beliefs to interrupt the standards of Kenya's traditional values.

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Jahnyiah Davis is from Perry, Georgia and is a sophomore pursuing a B.A in History with a focus on African American medical history. She is a McNair scholar and currently researching medical practices conducted on African Americans at Central State Hospital from 1890-1930.