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Voicing freedom: the meaning of Uhuru in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*

Ailsa Hemphill

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* is set in Kenya in 1963, the year the country became independent from the British. It depicts both colonisers and colonised, and explores the workings of power both before and after independence, unsettling the notion that gaining independence can be equated with gaining freedom. Drawing from the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin's concerns about the dangers of conflating status with freedom, this article reflects on the workings of colonial and neo-colonial power in the novel. There are parallels between the coloniser/colonised dynamics of *A Grain of Wheat* and those of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as in both texts the language of freedom is used ambiguously to the benefit of the coloniser. Ngũgĩ's novel demonstrates that a nation may be declared free in a way which in fact works to conceal the lack of freedom of its people, and that voicing freedom in a negative as opposed to a positive sense exposes the violation of fundamental freedoms.

> It is only the universal craving for status and understanding, further confounded by being identified with the notion of social self-direction, where the self to be liberated is no longer the individual but the 'social whole', that makes it possible for men, while submitting to… authority… to claim that this in some sense liberates them.[1]
>
> *- Isaiah Berlin*

Novelist, playwright and activist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was born in 1938 when his native Kenya was under British rule, and he lived as an adolescent through the Mau Mau War of Independence (1952-1962). His third novel *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) marked a transformation in the ideological focus of his writing, as he came to centre on the collective rather than the individual. He has described this novel as simultaneously 'a celebration of independence' and a warning about those pitfalls of national consciousness cautioned against by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).[2] It paints a troubled and ambiguous picture of freedom, or Uhuru[3], in the wake of Kenyan independence in 1963 as the narrative is haunted by ghosts of the colonial past that refuse to go away, and illustrates how the dangers of nationalism which Fanon wrote about can be an upshot of conflating the search for freedom with the search for status, or social unity. In this article I aim to show, following the arguments of the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin, that the novel calls for freedom to be distinguished from unity and

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[1] I. Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969), 158.
[2] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London, 1993), 3.
[3] 'Uhuru': Swahili for 'freedom'.

to be conceived of in a negative, rather than positive, sense. While both colonial and neo-colonial powers use the language of positive freedom in ways which obscure and distract from the absence of the people's most basic freedoms, it is through expressing and understanding freedom as a negative concept that this absence can be unmasked. Also in accordance with Berlin, the novel supports a sort of value pluralism, as it shows that a balance must be struck between freedom and unity – between Uhuru and Umoja[4] – in Kenya's fight for independence. It is through recognition of this balance that freedom can be voiced in a meaningful way.

Isaiah Berlin first gave his lecture 'Two Concepts of Liberty' four years before Kenya 'regained her Uhuru from the British,'[5] at a time when he perceived that at no previous point in modern history had 'so large a number of human beings, both in East and West… had their notions, and indeed their lives, so deeply altered, and in some cases violently upset, by fanatically held social and political doctrines.'[6] He identified within Western political philosophy an 'open war… being fought between two systems of ideas,'[7] each of which yield disparate and conflicting answers to 'the central question of politics—the question of obedience and coercion.'[8] This divergence, according to Berlin, is the result of two different concepts of freedom or liberty: negative liberty (or 'freedom from') and positive liberty (or 'freedom to').[9] The first of these is involved in the answer to the question: 'What is the area within which the subject—a person or a group of persons—is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?'[10] The latter, in contrast, is involved in the answer to the question: 'What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?'[11] Negative freedom comprises only the sphere in which a person is not coerced, where there are no external constraints. Positive freedom, on the other hand, concerns the sphere in which one is one's own master, where one is liberated not only from external oppression, but from internal 'spiritual slavery, or slavery to nature.'[12] This is the idea of freedom associated with Enlightenment philosophers like Spinoza, Kant and Rousseau; it involves not only overcoming domination

[4]'Umoja': Swahili for 'unity'.
[5] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (London, 2002), 199.
[6] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 119.
[7] *Ibid*., 121.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] Gerald MacCallum has influentially disputed that two different concepts of freedom can be distinguished in this way, arguing instead that "freedom is always both freedom from something and freedom to do or become something". See G.C. MacCallum, Jr., 'Negative and Positive Freedom', *The Philosophical Review*, 76.3, (1967), 319. However, for the purposes of this essay, which aims to show how the language of freedom can be used to obscure a fundamental lack of it, Berlin's distinction is a useful one.
[10] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 121-2.
[11] *Ibid*., 122.
[12] *Ibid*., 132.

by others but overcoming one's own 'unbridled passions.'[13] The real self is 'identified with reason,'[14] and it is the realisation of this higher self – through liberation from one's baser, 'empirical' or 'heteronomous'[15] self – which constitutes freedom in the fullest sense. It is this latter, positive concept of freedom which Berlin cautions against, as it inevitably involves recognising the expertise of those who are "more rational" than others, and subsequently threatens a descent into tyranny**.** When freedom becomes equated with realising the rational self, there arises a justification in coercing recalcitrant persons to follow their 'latent rational will'[16]: to use Rousseau's renowned oxymoronic maxim, they may be 'forced to be free.'[17]

John Thompson, the British administrator of Thabai in *A Grain of Wheat*, is party to this Western school of thought that lionises reason. This is apparent when he is pleasantly surprised upon encountering two African students who in dress, speech and intellect are 'no different from the British'[18]:

> Where was the irrationality, inconsistency and superstition so characteristic of the African and Oriental races? They had been replaced by the three principles basic to the Western mind: i.e. the principle of Reason, of Order and of Measure.[19]

To be English[20], for Thompson, is 'basically an attitude of mind'.[21] The British mind is a rational mind, and a rational mind knows what is best, thus the growth of the British Empire – the beacon of reason – is 'the development of a great moral idea.'[22] His vision of 'the just ordering of human society' requires that all Africans be educated in accordance with the British tradition. Here Ngũgĩ's British colonist echoes the thoughts of the enlightened tyrant that Berlin warns against: 'they would not resist me if they were as rational and as wise as I and understood their interests as I do.'[23] Thompson is 'influenced by the French policy of Assimilation'[24]; however he sees it as a mistake to assimilate 'only the educated few'.[25] Instead he advocates a more comprehensive approach, as even 'the peasant in Asia and Africa must be included in this moral scheme for rehabilitation.'[26] His ideology is thus one of all-

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[13] *Ibid*.
[14] *Ibid*.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 133.
[17] J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Available: <http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon_01.htm> [Accessed: 5/12/12], Book 1, Chapter 7
[18] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 52.
[19] *Ibid*.
[20] John Thompson uses "English" and "British" interchangeably.
[21] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, p. 53
[22] *Ibid*., p. 52
[23] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 133.
[24] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 53.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] *Ibid*.

inclusive paternalism; Ngũgĩ presents this character as the archetypal colonialist who represents his 'inhumanity in the form of virtuous activity.'[27] As Patrick Williams notes, 'John Thompson signifies colonial power's readiness to slip from the hegemonic mode (getting Africans to believe in British culture, and adopt it willingly) to the coercive mode (beating them when they are unwilling).'[28] The self-titled 'man with destiny'[29] lurches down the same slippery slope from paternalism to despotism which Berlin saw as the 'devastating effects'[30] of much Western philosophy.

As Thomas Cartelli notes, John Thompson's 'initial conception of Africans as both different and unequal expressly echoes Prospero's insistence on Caliban's incapacity to master civil behaviour in *The Tempest*.'[31] Thompson fleshes out his 'great moral idea' in a manuscript entitled 'PROSPERO IN AFRICA',[32] drawing a link between his own paternalistic ideology and that of Prospero. Shakespeare's colonist character describes his slave, Caliban, as:

> A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
> Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains
> Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost[33]

For Prospero, Caliban will always be a slave to nature whether or not he is a slave to man. It is his view of the native as a barely human 'freckled whelp, hag born'[34] that allows him to couch his dominion over him as paternalism, as 'pains/Humanely taken'. Like John Thompson, Prospero slips from this paternalism to force, as he advances from treating Caliban with 'kindness' to 'stripes' [35] in the face of his obstinacy.

In *Moving the Centre: The Cultural Struggle for Freedom* (1993), Ngũgĩ acknowledges that Shakespeare gave to Caliban 'the capacity or voice to say 'no'.'[36] However, despite having great 'energy of protest and self affirmation,'[37] Caliban ultimately says "yes" to being a slave to a master, albeit not his original master. Despite his fierce wish that 'All the infections that the sun sucks up/ From bogs, fens, flats, on Prosper fall,'[38] it takes only a taste of the drunken

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[27] T. Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare: National formations, postcolonial appropriations* (London, 1999), 97.
[28] P. Williams, *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o* (Manchester, 1998), 67.
[29] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 52.
[30] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 119.
[31] Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare*, 91.
[32] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 53.
[33] W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Cambridge, 2002), IV.i.188-190.
[34] *Ibid*., I.ii.283.
[35] *Ibid*., I.ii.345.
[36] Ngũgĩ, *Moving the Centre*, 15.
[37] *Ibid*., 17.
[38] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, II.ii.1-2.

butler Stephano's 'celestial liquor'[39] for him to declare this other migrant to the island 'a brave god'[40] who he will kneel to. In an act of defiance against the 'tyrant'[41] Prospero, Caliban switches his allegiance to this new 'wondrous man'[42] who offers rewards for his labours, joyfully singing:

> No more dams I'll make for fish,
> Nor fetch in firing
> At requiring,
> Nor scrape trencher, nor wash dish,
> Ban, ban, Ca-caliban
> Has a new master – get a new man
> Freedom, high-day, high-day freedom, freedom high-day, freedom.[43]

In the face of Stephano and the jester Trinculo repeatedly calling him a 'monster' and 'moon-calf',[44] echoing Prospero's epithets 'born devil' and 'hag-seed',[45] Caliban jubilantly pronounces his loyalty to his 'new master' Stephano. It is with a sense of triumph – indeed with the 'energy of protest and self affirmation' that Ngũgĩ attributes to him – that Caliban conflates liberty with slavery, 'high-day freedom' with having a 'new master'. As Berlin discerns, the 'triumph of despotism is to force the slaves to declare themselves free,'[46] and this is exactly what Caliban does in replacing Prospero with his parodic surrogate Stephano. Parallels may be drawn here with Fanon's warnings against those nationalist parties who, in a newly independent and 'free' state, 'mobilise the people with slogans of independence, and for the rest leave it to future events.'[47] Here Shakespeare's islander is mobilised with an idea of freedom which is in reality no different from slavery; in the same way the 'empty shell'[48] of national consciousness allows the national middle class to assume the oppressive role previously played by the colonial power, and neo-colonial power is able to take shape under the banner of the nation's freedom. In *The Tempest*, the master/slave relationship is not overturned, but simply replaced. A similar warning is present in *A Grain of Wheat*: the people are mobilised with slogans of Uhuru, and yet this masks the fact that dominance and inequality still prevail in independent Kenya. It is for this reason that the novel calls for conceiving of freedom negatively, in a way which categorically shows the oppressed to be less free than the oppressors. Only in this way can a declaration of freedom be meaningful.

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[39] *Ibid*., II.ii.99.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] *Ibid*., II.ii.139.
[42] *Ibid*., II.ii.140.
[43] Ibid., II.ii.156-162
[44] Ibid., II.ii.
[45] Ibid., IV.i.188; I.ii.365.
[46] Berlin, 'Two concepts of liberty', 165.
[47] F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington (London, 2001), 121.
[48] *Ibid*., 119.

On the day of independence in *A Grain of Wheat*, the Uhuru celebrations are tinged with a feeling of unease. Though John Thompson has now resigned 'to get away before Uhuru,'[49] even after the Union Jack is quickly lowered a minute before midnight on 12 December 1963, there is still talk of 'seeing the ghosts of the colonial past… haunting Independent Kenya.'[50] At the same time as crowds gather in Nairobi stadium to cheer the new National Anthem and the flying of the new Kenya flag, there is a sense in the village of Thabai that people are 'waiting,'[51] like 'a woman torn between fear and joy during birth motions'.[52] It is General R., elected to speak at Rung'ei market place in lieu of the people's hero Mugo, who the crowd turn to in apprehension. The General himself is, however, in a state of agitation as he is disturbed by an apparition of the 'mocking face of the Reverend Jackson,'[53] a black man who preached against Mau Mau in churches, and he is aware that marching the streets around them is the King's African Army, 'the very colonial forces who had been doing on the battlefield what Jackson was doing in the churches.'[54] The Uhuru celebrations – and, accordingly, the notion of Uhuru itself – are thus haunted, disturbed by phantoms and remnants of the colonial yesterday.

The chapter which begins with the statement 'Kenya regained her Uhuru from the British on 12 December 1963'[55] very quickly calls into question whether Uhuru can be placed so neatly and objectively in terms of linear history. Indeed, *A Grain of Wheat* as a whole defies simple linear history. The narrative is multi-dimensional, as stories unfold into other stories, and throughout the novel ghosts and spirits continually appear as disruptive forces that disturb a simply chronological conception of independence following the departure of the colonial power, of freedom following the end of domination. It is this problem of colonial ghosts which leads Anne McClintock to object to the term 'post-colonial', viewing it as 'prematurely celebratory.'[56] According to McClintock the term rehearses the 'Enlightenment trope of sequential, "linear progress"', reorienting the world 'around a singular, binary opposition: the colonial as opposed to the post-colonial.'[57] The notion of the post-colonial is 'haunted by the… figure of linear "development".'[58] In the same way, the notion of Uhuru is haunted by apparitions from the past which disturb a picture of linear progress. *A Grain of Wheat* presents a challenge to understanding history in terms of chronological progression, disputing

[49] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 55.
[50] *Ibid*., 216.
[51] *Ibid*., 199.
[52] *Ibid*.
[53] *Ibid*., 218.
[54] *Ibid*., 216.
[55] *Ibid*., 199.
[56] A. McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism" *Social Text*, No. 31/32 (1992), 88.
[57] *Ibid*., 85.
[58] *Ibid*.

the idea that Uhuru could be absent one day then wholly regained the next. Colonial phantoms throughout the novel, from the dead agricultural officer Mr Rogers who 'haunts the railway station,'[59] to the grey-haired Dr Lynd who flits 'around the compound… a solitary being, like a ghost,'[60] and the three spectres faced by Karanja as he stands on the train platform, serve as a constant reminder that there are still oppressive forces at work, that Kenya has not yet fully 'regained her Uhuru'.

The novel's ghosts are like the 'untimely spectres'[61] described by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1993); however, unlike Derrida's phantoms that 'one must not chase away but sort out, critique, keep close by, and allow to come back'[62], Ngũgĩ's novel seems to offer up hope of new beginnings in the exorcism of the ghosts of the colonial past. In order for this exorcism to occur, it appears that the notion of Uhuru must be re-examined and redefined, its perimeter circumscribed so as not to allow any colonial ghosts back in. It is in light of this that the enigmatic yet emotive way in which General R. appropriates the term 'Uhuru' in his speech is problematic. On the day of independence, he attempts to articulate history in terms of 'sequential, "linear" progress', to give weight to the importance of the celebrations as he stands before the crowds at Nairobi proclaiming:

> I know even now this war is not ended. We get Uhuru today. But what is the meaning of 'Uhuru'? It is contained in the name of our movement: Land and Freedom. Let the Party that now leads the country rededicate itself to all the ideals for which our people gave up their lives.[63]

As Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean making a political speech.'[64] The General's assertion that 'the war is not ended' seems to directly contradict his following proclamation 'We get Uhuru today,' so that the question 'what is the meaning of Uhuru?' resonates unanswered through the novel. Contained in his speech are the empty slogans warned against by Fanon; this is testified to by the Warui's later feeling when he looks back on the day of independence, as he describes it as 'like warm water in the mouth of a thirsty man.'[65] Ngũgĩ's novel is mindful of the reality of the history of the post-colonial state in Kenya as 'one in which peasants and workers grow poorer, where women are exploited, and where the national cultures are trampled upon by a

[59] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 33.
[60] *Ibid*., p. 44
[61] J. Derrida, 'Specters of Marx' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, (ed.) V.B. Leitch, 2nd edn., (London, 2010), 1743.
[62] Derrida, 'Specters of Marx', 1743.
[63] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 217.
[64] Fanon, *The Wretched Earth*, 159.
[65] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 237.

powerless bourgeoisie;'[66] thus it is significant that both the villagers Wambui and Warui remark that they have not seen General R. since he spoke at the meeting and, sitting alone in her hut, Wambui is 'lost in a solid consciousness of a terrible anti-climax to her activities in the fight for freedom.'[67] She evokes the solitary voice of Yeats's 'Meditations in a Time of Civil War' (1928) who, from the 'empty house of the stare,'[68] laments, 'We are closed in, and the key is turned/On our uncertainty'.[69] Both Yeats's empty house and the hut in the village are comfortless places in the wake of a fight for freedom which 'fed the heart on fantasies'[70], as the villagers contemplate the same task of survival ahead of them as before, involving 'the market tomorrow, and fields to dig and cultivate,'[71] and 'children to look after',[72] it is clear that the General has proclaimed an illusory Uhuru, and freedom has not been gained in any real sense.

According to Fanon, in order to eschew the pitfalls of national consciousness, the masses must be educated politically, which – unlike John Thompson's project of instilling Western principles or the General's project of making a clear-cut split between 'heroes' and 'traitors and collaborators with the colonial enemy'[73] – is 'to make the totality of the nation a reality to each citizen. It is to make the history of the nation part of the personal experience to each of its citizens.'[74] The crowd at Rung'ei are not, however, ignorant of their history, as they talk of 'land alienation, Waiyaki, Harry Thuku, taxation, conscription of labour into the white-man's land, the break with the missions, and, oh, the terrible thirst and hunger for education.'[75] Ngũgĩ does not present the people of Kenya as the national counterpart to Caliban, who happily offers to lick the shoe of his new master who promises not to let him 'suffer indignity'.[76] It is thus all the more poignant that the General fails to capture their hopes in his speech. *A Grain of Wheat* is not a warning against national consciousness in itself, but rather a call for a national consciousness which is, in Fanon's words, 'the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people.'[77] It is Mugo's confession that puts an end to the meeting, as the celebrated hero's emergence as a traitor calls into question

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[66] J.A. Ogude, 'Ngugi's Concept of History and the Post-Colonial Discourses in Kenya', *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 31.1 (1997), 94.
[67] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 239.
[68] W.B. Yeats, 'Meditations in a Time of Civil War', *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Kent, 1994), 173.
[69] Yeats, 'Meditations in a Time of Civil War', 173.
[70] *Ibid.*,174.
[71] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 238.
[72] *Ibid*.
[73] *Ibid*., 217.
[74] Fanon, *The Wretched Earth*, 161.
[75] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 214.
[76] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, III.ii.32.
[77] Fanon, *The Wretched Earth*, 119.

the people's sense of unity, and they leave dispirited, 'away in different directions.'[78] With a salient swiftness, the national consciousness that General R attempts to summon with his talk of Uhuru and 'the heroic tradition of resistance of our people'[79] seems nothing more that the 'empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been'[80].

The importance of unity is a crucial theme in the novel, and it is the character of Mugo, the loner and hermit who has betrayed the hero Kihika to the authorities, who serves to demonstrate how individual freedom must at times be forfeited in order to preserve a united front. Abdulrazak Gurnah argues that although Mugo insists on freedom to live as he chooses, 'in the argument of the novel to live alone is a pathology, and to live in a community, especially one as historically oppressed as this, requires a sacrifice of those needs.'[81] When Mugo hears Uhuru songs, every word carries 'a piercing irony'[82] for him; the songs of freedom shame him because he has placed his own personal freedom above the needs of the community. Berlin's value pluralism, which recognises the need for trade-offs between values like freedom and solidarity, was in part formulated on the basis of those 'oppressed classes or nationalities'[83] who do not demand 'simply unhampered liberty of action for their members.'[84] Rather, what is wanted is:

> simply recognition (of their class or nation, or colour or race) as an independent source of human activity, as an entity with a will of its own, intending to act in accordance with it… and not to be ruled, educated, guided, with however light a hand, as being not quite fully human, and therefore not quite fully free.[85]

For the subjugated nation, freedom entails unity and unity entails freedom; these are two interrelated yet separate ideals and a balance must be struck between them. Indeed, in *Moving the Centre*, Ngũgĩ recalls being a student singing, 'Uhuru cha cha cha… Umoja cha cha cha…' in anticipation of the creation of an East African federation.[86] It is both Uhuru and Umoja which represent important ideals for Ngũgĩ, and this is salient in *A Grain of Wheat*.

The paradox of colonial languages, which Ngũgĩ discusses in his 1986 book *Decolonising the Mind* (his 'farewell to English as a vehicle'[87] for his writing) requires a negotiation of the

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[78] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 219.
[79] *Ibid*., 217.
[80] Fanon, *The Wretched Earth*, 119.
[81] A. Gurnah, 'Introduction' in *A Grain of Wheat* (London, 2002), xi-xii.
[82] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 231.
[83] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 156.
[84] *Ibid*.
[85] *Ibid*., 156-7.
[86] Ngũgĩ, *Moving the Centre*, 168.
[87] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth, 2004), xiv.

competing pulls of Uhuru and Umoja: the language of the colonisers becomes 'the common language with which to present a nationalist front against white oppressors,'[88] while at the same time constituting an oppressive Eurocentric force on the native culture. As Aimé Césaire affirms, cultural dominance is dangerous as great possibilities are wiped out in 'societies drained of their essences, cultures trampled underfoot.'[89] In other words, cultural and linguistic domination is a violation of freedom. This is illustrated in *The Tempest*, as when Miranda endows Caliban's 'purposes/With words,'[90] her thought that she has bestowed him with the freedom *to* express himself obscures her violation of his freedom *from* cultural dominance. This again serves as an example of where freedom is understood positively (as freedom *to*), it can become indistinguishable from self-realization. Part of Berlin's value pluralism, the view that 'the ends of men are many,'[91] means that freedom as one of these ends must be understood in the negative sense, as freedom from interference from others. He argues that positive freedom, in its focus on the realisation of the self, entails a danger of understanding the social whole in terms of a self which is to be liberated, and this 'makes it possible for men, while submitting to the authority of oligarchs or dictators, to claim that this in some sense liberates them.'[92] When General R. announces '[w]e get Uhuru today,' he is really making a claim about a social status, rather than a claim about freedom, and in doing so obscures the reality that in many ways the people are not yet free. Freedom must thus be understood negatively, as circumscribing a realm which is free from interference from others, in order to make sense of it and to exorcise Uhuru – as distinct from Umoja – of its oppressive colonial ghosts.

Ngũgĩ believes that 'Children are the future of any society,'[93] and thus *A Grain of Wheat* ends with Gikonyo's decision to 'carve a woman big – big with child.'[94] The novel thus closes on a note of hope: a hope for a new generation who may sing songs of freedom without irony, who will be driven not by any empty and haunted slogans of Uhuru, but with a determination to both inculcate solidarity in the community and end the violation of fundamental freedoms.

[88] Ngũgĩ *Decolonising the Mind*, 7.
[89] A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. J. Pinkham (London, 1972), 6.
[90] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.ii.357-358.
[91] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 169.
[92] *Ibid*., 158.
[93] Ngũgĩ, *Moving the Centre*, 76.
[94] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 243.

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