
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reestablishing Indigenous Rights on Sacred Land: Resistance to Colonialism through Narrative in *Aranyer Adhikar* and *A Grain of Wheat*

Fahmida Hoque Meem¹ and Md Kamruzzaman² ✉

¹Senior Lecturer, Northern University, Bangladesh

²Department of English Language and Literature, Premier University Chattogram, Bangladesh

Corresponding Author: Md Kamruzzaman, **E-mail:** kamruzzamanriyad96@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* emerge from different historical and cultural settings, yet both novels are grounded in a shared concern: the violence of colonialism and the persistence of indigenous struggle. This paper examines how each text links land, identity, memory, and resistance, showing that territory is not merely a physical space but a sacred inheritance tied to community, history, and belonging. In *Aranyer Adhikar*, the forest becomes the center of tribal life, spirituality, and political assertion, while Birsa Munda's struggle symbolizes the refusal of Adivasi communities to accept dispossession as destiny. In *A Grain of Wheat*, land is equally central, but it appears through the fractured landscape of colonial Kenya, where settler occupation, detention, betrayal, and rebellion shape the lives of ordinary people. Reading these novels through postcolonial theory and narrative resistance theory reveals how storytelling itself becomes an act of recovery. Both authors challenge colonial versions of history by placing marginalized voices at the center of their narratives. Fanon's critique of colonial domination and Musolf's idea that narrative can operate as a social weapon help clarify how the texts imagine resistance not only as armed struggle, but also as self-representation, collective memory, and moral courage. Ultimately, the two novels show that reclaiming land is inseparable from reclaiming voice, dignity, and historical agency.

| KEYWORDS

Colonial power, demand for freedom, indigenous rights, politics, resistance.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: July 15, 2026

PUBLISHED: August 27, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61424/jlls.v4i3.1019>

1. Introduction

অরণ্য ধর্ষিতা, দিকুদের হাতে আইনের হাতে বন্দি। জননী অরণ্য বলেছিল, মোরে বাঁচা বিরসা। আমি শুদ্ধ শুচি নিষ্কলঙ্ক হব। (Devi 80)

(The forest is raped, she is entrapped by law. Mother forest requests earnestly, "save me, Birsa. I want to be chaste and pure.")

Indigenous rights and resistance to colonial rule sit at the heart of both *Aranyer Adhikar* and *A Grain of Wheat*, which gives the two novels their comparative weight. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Mahasweta Devi write from separate cultures and separate continents, yet both speak on behalf of communities pushed to the margins and denied recognition, both during colonial rule and in its long aftermath. Across the two novels, the pushback against

Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC- BY-NC-SA) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>), published by Bluemark Publishers.

Western imperial control and the reclaiming of subaltern rights stand out as a governing concern. Colonial rule converted land into property and worked to strip people of memory, inheritance, and authority over their own existence. To capture how the colonized push back against that condition, both writers build narratives that repair the bond among people, land, and identity.

Land sits at the center of contention in both books. It underwrites livelihood, sustains cultural continuity, and gives collective memory a physical form. Once colonizers seized power, they claimed the right to take land, and along with it they took language, history, and self-definition, leaving lasting psychological wounds among the colonized. Devi presents the forest as a living presence that keeps tribal existence and cultural dignity intact, imagining it as a maternal figure that shelters those who depend on it. Ngũgĩ, in contrast, sets the fight for freedom inside a colonial Kenya shaped by dispossession, detention, and political betrayal. In both books, independence arrives only through struggle against colonial power, not as an easy inheritance, and it comes bound to the recovery of a lost culture.

A shared thread links both novels: resistance made visible through the shape of the narrative itself. Devi stays close to tribal experience, foregrounding the bond between the forest and the community that lives within it. Ngũgĩ, by contrast, builds a nonlinear, many-voiced structure that lets multiple memories surface at once, unsettling the tidy authority colonial history claims for itself. Each approach pushes back against the long habit of picturing indigenous or colonized peoples as mute, primitive, or politically naive. Instead, both texts treat the oppressed as people who already understand their own condition. They know precisely what has been taken from them, and they understand that recovering land also means recovering meaning.

This paper argues that *Aranyer Adhikar* and *A Grain of Wheat* portray land as sacred, political, and historical at once. Their characters resist colonialism not only through open rebellion but also through acts of remembrance, solidarity, confession, and storytelling. Read through postcolonial theory and narrative resistance theory, the novels show that the struggle for freedom is also a struggle over who has the right to tell history and define the future.

2. Land, Memory, and Colonial Power

A central insight shared by both novels is that colonialism operates through displacement rather than mere occupation. Taking territory is never the whole story; it also rearranges how people are permitted to understand their own surroundings. Once land is taken, communities are forced to live with the trauma of loss while being told that their loss is progress, development, or civilization. *Heart of Darkness* implies the hidden agenda to conquer the 'the others' in favor of 'we'. "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much". (Conrad 20) This contradiction is the brutal aspect of imperial rule. Colonial power treats the land as an object to be managed, divided, fenced, and exploited, while the people attached to that land are expected to accept new forms of rule that deny their prior relationship to place.

Land, seen this way, becomes memory given physical shape. For indigenous communities, territory holds the stories of ancestors, rituals, labor, seasonal knowledge, and a sense of belonging. It is not simply the backdrop against which life unfolds; it is part of how that life makes sense. Colonial modernity severs this continuity, turning land into a commodity and its people into laborers, tenants, or exiles on their own ground. The toll this takes is severe: losing land means losing an entire framework of meaning.

This is why both Devi and Ngũgĩ insist on the spiritual dimension of land. In *Aranyer Adhikar*, the forest is not a backdrop to tribal life but the core of tribal existence. In *A Grain of Wheat*, the land stolen by settlers is also the ground on which political consciousness grows. The difference in their literary settings does not weaken the comparison; it strengthens it. The Indian forest and the Kenyan highlands are distinct spaces, yet both become sites where colonial domination and indigenous resistance meet. Both novels suggest that resistance begins when people refuse to accept colonial naming as final truth.

From a postcolonial perspective, this refusal is crucial. Postcolonial theory examines how colonialism shapes culture, identity, power, and representation long after formal empire begins to decline. The end of direct colonial rule does not end colonial thinking, nor does it restore land automatically to the people from whom it was taken. Instead, the afterlife of colonialism persists in institutions, education, law, and social hierarchy. By writing about dispossession and rebellion, Devi and Ngũgĩ expose that afterlife and show that anti-colonial struggle must also be cultural and narrative.

3. Aranyer Adhikar and the Politics of the Forest

Aranyer Adhikar places the forest at the center of both survival and selfhood. Mahasweta Devi presents tribal life as inseparable from the land, especially in the case of Adivasi communities such as the Munda and other forest-dwelling groups whose histories are tied to the Chotanagpur region. The forest provides food, shelter, labor, ritual meaning, and social continuity. When that forest is taken away or controlled by outsiders, the community does not merely lose a resource; it loses the material basis of its identity.

The novel's political force lies in the way it refuses the colonial and postcolonial tendency to romanticize tribal people while ignoring the conditions under which they suffer. Devi does not present tribal communities as passive victims. Instead, she depicts them as historically aware subjects who understand the violence done to them. Their relationship to land is not sentimental, and it is certainly not primitive. It is grounded in an ethic of reciprocity. The forest is home, inheritance, and responsibility. To care for it is to care for the continuity of the community itself.

Birsa Munda occupies a central place in this vision. In the novel, he becomes more than a historical figure; he becomes a symbol of collective hope. His struggle is not isolated heroism but the dramatic expression of a wider political awakening among the oppressed. The reverence with which he is treated reflects the scale of the trauma that colonial rule has produced and the depth of the desire for justice that has emerged in response. Critic Brinda Bose argues that Devi's reimagining of Birsa allows the novel to reclaim a tribal figure marginalized by official nationalist history, positioning him instead at the center of an Adivasi political consciousness (Bose, 2006). Birsa's role reminds the reader that resistance often produces its own language of sanctity. A leader becomes "holy" not because he is beyond history, but because he speaks to what a community has been forced to sacrifice.

Devi's portrayal of resistance also emphasizes communal life. The novel does not frame liberation as an individual achievement. Instead, it presents resistance as a collective effort shaped by kinship, shared memory, and mutual obligation. This is important because colonial regimes frequently attempt to divide communities internally, weaken their social bonds, and replace collective authority with bureaucratic control. In response, the tribal community in Aranyer Adhikar reasserts solidarity. Their gathering, their speech, and their shared grief become political acts.

The forest therefore becomes a site of contestation between two worldviews. Colonial power sees the forest as land to be extracted, surveyed, and controlled. The tribal community sees it as a living space that carries moral and spiritual value. Devi's novel sides decisively with the latter vision. Through that choice, she resists the logic of empire and affirms that indigenous communities have the right not simply to exist, but to exist on their own terms.

4. Birsa Munda, Sacred Belonging, and Collective Resistance

One of the most striking features of Aranyer Adhikar is the way it transforms Birsa Munda into a figure of both history and myth. This transformation is not a distortion of political struggle; rather, it reflects the manner in which communities preserve memory under pressure. When a people has been repeatedly silenced, the boundaries between historical record, oral tradition, and symbolic imagination often become intertwined. Birsa's importance lies in this interweaving. He stands for a real uprising, but he also stands for the hope that resistance can restore dignity where colonial power has imposed humiliation.

The novel renders the emotional weight of dispossession with unusual precision. Loss here is not only material; the people are also robbed of confidence in their own claim to belong. This ranks among colonialism's most lasting

effects: it teaches the colonized to internalize a sense of inferiority and to distrust the legitimacy of their own grievances. Frantz Fanon's critique of colonial domination clarifies this dynamic. For Fanon, colonial exploitation is never only about bodies and territory; it also inflicts psychological harm by constructing the colonized subject as inherently inferior and dependent (Fanon, 2008). Aranyer Adhikar dramatizes exactly this logic, showing a tribal community made to suffer on both a material and a symbolic register.

Yet the novel also refuses to let humiliation become the final word. The characters assert their presence through struggle, memory, and refusal. Their resistance is not abstract. It is tied to the concrete act of defending the forest from forces that would strip it of its meaning. In this sense, the novel turns land into a moral argument. The forest belongs to those who have lived with it, remembered it, and defended it. It cannot be reduced to a colonial boundary or a development project.

Devi's narrative also encourages readers to recognize the political significance of voice. The tribal people are not spoken for by the state, and they are not depicted through an outsider's totalizing gaze. Instead, their anger, grief, and loyalty emerge from within the community. This internal perspective matters because representation itself is part of the struggle. If colonial power controls the story of the oppressed, it can also control the meaning of oppression. Devi counters that by placing indigenous experience at the center.

The result is a novel that links sacred belonging to political action. The forest is holy not because it is distant from struggle, but because it sustains life that colonialism tries to destroy. Resistance, in this context, becomes an ethical commitment to preserving the relationship between people and place. Birsa's struggle, therefore, is not only about recovery of territory. It is about restoring a world in which the community can recognize itself again.

5. *A Grain of Wheat* and the Colonial Afterlife in Kenya

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* explores a different historical landscape, but it does so with a comparable concern for land, memory, and liberation. Set against the background of Kenya's struggle for independence, the novel dramatizes the pressures that colonial rule placed on the Kikuyu and on Kenyan society more broadly. European settlement and land alienation altered not only property relations but social relations, generating resentment, fear, and political resistance. The rise of the Mau Mau movement emerges from this historical crisis as an attempt to recover both land and dignity.

The novel does not treat Mau Mau as a simple military or political campaign. Rather, it presents it as a national emergency in which every personal life becomes entangled with colonial history. The dispossession of land is inseparable from the erosion of community. Once the land is taken, the colonized are pushed into a condition in which survival itself becomes political. As a result, resistance arises from the need to reclaim a future as much as a territory. The struggle is about who will inherit the nation and under what terms.

Ngũgĩ's great achievement is that he refuses to tell this history in a straightforward, triumphalist manner. Instead, he uses a nonlinear and polyphonic narrative structure that allows multiple voices to enter the text. This structure is important because it resists the official colonial habit of presenting history as a story told from above. Colonial history tends to flatter the powerful and simplify the oppressed. Ngũgĩ resists that simplification. His novel holds together secrecy, memory, guilt, heroism, and betrayal, suggesting that liberation movements are always morally and emotionally complicated.

The background violence in the novel is never abstract. The reader feels the pressure of detention, torture, surveillance, and fear. Colonial authority depends on these tools because it knows that political control is easier when people are broken internally. Yet Ngũgĩ does not write only about suffering. He also writes about endurance. Ordinary people survive by remembering what colonial rule would rather they forget. Women, workers, returnees, detainees, and villagers all carry fragments of the struggle. Their memories together form the social body of the nation.

The title of the novel itself suggests this process. A grain of wheat must be buried before it can grow. Ngũgĩ draws on this image directly through the biblical epigraph that opens the novel: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (Ngũgĩ, epigraph). The image captures sacrifice, renewal, and the difficult labor of historical transformation. Independence, in Ngũgĩ's novel, is not a clean beginning. It is the outcome of pain, delay, and imperfect human choices. That is what makes the book so powerful: it shows that freedom is real precisely because it is costly.

6. Mugo, Betrayal, and the Moral Complexity of Liberation

Among the novel's most memorable figures is Mugo, whose isolation and interior conflict give *A Grain of Wheat* much of its emotional depth. Mugo is often imagined by others as a possible hero or even a symbolic leader, but the truth is far more troubling. He carries the secret of betrayal, having denounced Kihika, the Mau Mau martyr. This act of betrayal destabilizes the heroic narrative that communities often build around national struggle. Byron Caminero-Santangelo reads Mugo's betrayal as central to Ngũgĩ's broader revision of the colonial confession narrative, arguing that the novel uses Mugo's guilt to expose the moral compromises produced by colonial and neocolonial pressure rather than to isolate an individual failure (Caminero-Santangelo, 1998; Aniwa, 2021).

Ngũgĩ does not use Mugo merely to condemn individual weakness. Instead, he uses him to show how colonial violence corrupts the moral environment in which people are forced to act. Mugo's bitterness toward Kihika, the man whose demands upend his carefully guarded solitude, surfaces when he reflects that Kihika "is not satisfied with butchering men and women and children" (Ngũgĩ, ch. 13), a resentment that reveals how thoroughly colonial violence has already poisoned trust between the colonized themselves. Betrayal does not occur in a vacuum. It is shaped by fear, coercion, and the desperate desire to survive. By making Mugo's conscience central to the novel, Ngũgĩ insists that anti-colonial politics cannot be reduced to slogans or victories. It must confront guilt, silence, and the damage done within the very communities that are fighting for freedom.

This is where *A Grain of Wheat* becomes especially powerful as a postcolonial text. The novel exposes the limits of simple nationalism. Independence cannot erase the fact that colonialism has left behind wounds in trust, in intimacy, and in memory. Kihika's martyrdom inspires the community, but Mugo's secret reveals the hidden costs of survival under oppression. The novel therefore balances collective hope with moral ambiguity. It suggests that a nation can only move forward by facing the truth of its own fractures.

Mugo's eventual confession is important because it transforms shame into speech. In many ways, this is the novel's deepest ethical gesture. Confession is not the same as redemption, but it is a beginning. It interrupts the silence that colonialism and fear rely on. It also restores a degree of honesty to communal life. If the community is to imagine itself after colonial rule, it must do so without pretending that all acts of resistance were pure or that all survivors were innocent. History is made of compromised people, and liberation must be large enough to include that fact.

Ngũgĩ's representation of Mugo therefore aligns the novel with a broader postcolonial concern: the need to recover history from official myths. The colonial archive prefers manageable stories of order, discipline, and development. The novel exposes the human cost that those stories conceal. By doing so, it turns moral complexity into part of the anti-colonial record rather than an embarrassment to it.

7. Narrative Resistance as Theory and Practice

Narrative resistance theory provides a strong way to read both novels because it focuses on how marginalized people challenge dominant power by telling their own stories. In this sense, narration is not merely a literary technique. It is a political act. The oppressed are often denied access to institutions that define history, law, and public memory. Storytelling therefore becomes a way of reclaiming agency and contesting the meanings imposed from outside.

Gil Richard Musolf's claim that narrative can function as a social weapon is especially useful here. According to Musolf, telling one's own story is already a first step in resisting oppression because it enables people to make sense of their own situation and to imagine collective change (Musolf, 2017). This idea helps explain why both Devi and Ngũgĩ are so attentive to voices that colonial power would prefer to erase. Their novels do not simply describe resistance; they enact it by refusing to leave interpretation in the hands of the colonizer.

In *Aranyer Adhikar*, the narrative gives dignity to tribal voices that are often dismissed by state-centered accounts of development and nationhood. The forest dwellers are not treated as background figures in someone else's history. Their experiences carry epistemic authority. They know what land means because they live its loss. Similarly, in *A Grain of Wheat*, the lives of ordinary Kenyans matter as much as the actions of any official nationalist figure. Ngũgĩ's attention to domestic life, secrecy, and shared memory ensures that the anti-colonial struggle is not reduced to the speeches of elites.

Narrative resistance also helps explain the importance of form. Devi's prose gives moral intensity to tribal attachment, while Ngũgĩ's multi-voiced structure creates a communal field of memory. In both cases, form and politics work together. The novels resist colonialism not just in what they say, but in how they say it. This is crucial because colonial literature often presents itself as universal while treating colonized people as objects of observation. By contrast, these novels produce knowledge from within the experience of dispossession.

The politics of storytelling also matter because they reshape the future. When a community hears itself represented truthfully, it begins to imagine itself differently. That imaginative shift is not small. It is the ground on which resistance becomes possible. Musolf's account of narrative as social weapon captures this process well: stories can organize memory, produce solidarity, and help oppressed people think beyond the identities imposed upon them.

Thus, narrative resistance in these novels is not secondary to politics; it is one of the ways politics happens. A people who can name their injury can also begin to contest it.

8. Postcolonial Theory, Land, and the Rewriting of History

Postcolonial theory offers another essential framework for reading these texts. At its broadest level, postcolonial theory examines how colonial domination shapes culture, identity, language, and power even after empire claims to have ended. It asks how people live with the aftermath of conquest and how literature can expose the hidden continuities between colonial rule and postcolonial inequality. Both *Aranyer Adhikar* and *A Grain of Wheat* are deeply invested in this project.

One of the most important concerns of postcolonial theory is representation. Edward Said's account of Orientalism helps clarify why this concern matters: colonial discourse builds a fixed, distorted picture of the colonized as a way of securing power over them, so that the representation itself becomes an instrument of domination rather than a neutral description (Said, 1978). Colonial discourse has often represented indigenous and colonized people as undeveloped, irrational, or dependent on outside guidance. Such representation is never innocent; it justifies domination by making it appear natural. Devi and Ngũgĩ reject this logic by giving their characters interiority, complexity, and political awareness. Their communities are not waiting to be rescued by empire. They are already resisting.

Another postcolonial concern is the relationship between language and power. Colonial rule often works by imposing a language of administration and prestige that displaces local modes of knowing. Ngũgĩ later became a major advocate for writing in African languages precisely because he understood that language is tied to cultural sovereignty. While *A Grain of Wheat* is written in English, it often carries the rhythms of oral storytelling and communal speech, thereby unsettling the authority of colonial literary norms. Devi's work likewise draws strength from local history and regional consciousness, even in translation, because it remains anchored in tribal experience rather than colonial abstraction.

Postcolonial theory also reminds us that decolonization is incomplete if it only replaces one political elite with another while leaving the structures of dispossession intact. This is especially relevant to *Aranyer Adhikar*, where tribal rights are tied not merely to freedom from foreign rule but to justice in relation to land. The same principle appears in *A Grain of Wheat*, where Kenya's independence does not instantly resolve the tensions created by colonial expropriation and betrayal. In both novels, the afterlife of empire continues to shape daily life.

Fanon's work strengthens this reading because he shows how colonialism damages both the body and the psyche of the colonized. His analysis of inferiority, mimicry, and psychic injury clarifies why resistance must be more than a demand for political transfer. It must also be an act of reclaiming self-worth and historical agency (Fanon, 2008). Devi and Ngũgĩ dramatize this reclamation through characters who insist on dignity even when they are materially vulnerable.

Postcolonial theory therefore helps us see that both novels are not only about the past. They are about the continuing struggle over whose history will count, whose land will be recognized, and whose voice will define the meaning of freedom.

9. Comparative Reading: Two Continents, One Colonial Logic

Although *Aranyer Adhikar* and *A Grain of Wheat* emerge from different geopolitical contexts, their similarities are profound. Both texts treat land as the material and symbolic foundation of community life. Both expose colonialism as a system that works through dispossession. Both dramatize resistance as collective, painful, and morally serious. And both make storytelling central to liberation.

The differences between the novels are also illuminating. Devi's work is rooted in the politics of the Indian Adivasi struggle, where forest rights, tribal identity, and colonial-administrative violence are tightly bound together. Ngũgĩ's novel, by contrast, unfolds in the context of anti-colonial nationalism in Kenya, where land alienation, detention, and revolutionary betrayal shape the path to independence. Yet these differences do not prevent comparison. They show that colonialism, wherever it appears, tends to rely on remarkably similar strategies: it seizes land, delegitimizes native knowledge, and divides communities against themselves.

What changes from one novel to the other is the narrative emphasis. *Aranyer Adhikar* foregrounds the sacredness of the forest and the spiritual-political world of tribal life. *A Grain of Wheat* foregrounds memory, secrecy, and the moral ambiguity of revolutionary struggle. Taken together, however, the novels suggest that freedom cannot be understood only as the removal of foreign rulers. Freedom must also mean restoring the social and cultural worlds that colonialism fractured.

The comparison is especially valuable because both authors resist the temptation to make resistance look easy. Their characters suffer, doubt, betray, and grieve. This human complexity makes the novels more politically persuasive, not less. They understand that oppressed communities are not made of symbols alone. They are made of people who carry contradictory emotions while trying to survive. That truth gives the books ethical force.

Both novels also show that the struggle for land is inseparable from the struggle for memory. Colonial power prefers amnesia because memory keeps alive the claim that land was stolen rather than granted. Devi and Ngũgĩ recover that memory through fiction. They turn literature into a space where historical loss can be named and where justice can still be imagined. In doing so, they expand the meaning of independence beyond flags and constitutions. Independence becomes the labor of remembering, speaking, and rebuilding.

10. Gender, Domestic Life, and the Quiet Work of Resistance

A fuller comparison of the two novels also requires attention to gender and domestic life, because resistance does not take place only on battlefields or in public meetings. It is also sustained in homes, kitchens, village paths, shared labor, and everyday acts of care. Colonialism disrupts the domestic sphere by pushing people into insecurity,

hunger, and fear; anti-colonial resistance therefore survives partly because ordinary people continue to feed one another, remember one another, and keep social life intact.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, women such as Mumbi are essential to the emotional and moral structure of the novel. They do not simply stand at the edges of male revolutionary action. Their work, endurance, and suffering expose the costs of colonial conflict in a way that military narratives often miss. Mumbi's own account of the years of Gikonyo's detention shows this endurance was never passive; she kept the household and the land going while he was gone, an unglamorous labor that the novel treats as no less vital to the nation's survival than armed struggle. Her life reveals how political struggle enters marriage, motherhood, trust, and shame. She becomes one of the novel's strongest figures precisely because she embodies survival without illusion. Her story reminds readers that the nation is built not only by heroes but also by those who bear the consequences of heroism, betrayal, and absence.

This domestic dimension is important because colonial rule often fractures intimate life. Men may be detained, killed, or drawn into underground struggle, while women are left to manage uncertainty and maintain continuity. The burden of memory therefore falls heavily on the domestic sphere. Ngũgĩ understands that a nation's political future depends partly on how it treats the people who hold that future together in everyday life. The emotional intelligence of the novel lies in this recognition. It honors public resistance, but it also honors the quieter labor that makes resistance sustainable.

A similar insight can be applied to *Aranyer Adhikar*. Even though the novel is often read primarily through the figure of Birsa Munda and the politics of forest rights, its tribal world is also sustained through communal bonds that include the work of women, elders, and caretakers. The forest is not defended only by leaders or warriors; it is protected by a shared moral economy in which food, kinship, memory, and ritual are intertwined. Devi's attention to the life of the community rather than to a single individual prevents the novel from becoming a simple hero narrative. Instead, it shows that a people survive by carrying one another.

This is especially significant in a postcolonial context because colonial discourse often erases women from political history or reduces them to symbolic figures. Both Devi and Ngũgĩ resist that erasure. Their novels suggest that the people most affected by colonial domination are often those whose names do not appear in official records. Yet they are the ones who keep stories alive. They preserve the emotional continuity of the community when public life is broken by violence.

The domestic sphere also sharpens the ethical meaning of land. A people's relationship to land is not only abstract or ideological; it is experienced through the everyday rhythms of planting, gathering, cooking, resting, mourning, and returning. Women are often central to those rhythms. When colonialism takes land away, it also interrupts ordinary forms of life that make culture durable. That interruption is one reason the novels are so attentive to pain. The pain is not only political. It is intimate.

Seen from this angle, the sacredness of land in both novels is inseparable from care. Land is sacred because it supports human relationship. It holds the dead, nourishes the living, and gives communities a place from which to imagine the future. Resistance, therefore, is not only the defense of territory; it is the defense of a way of life in which people can continue to recognize one another as belonging together.

11. Conclusion

Aranyer Adhikar and *A Grain of Wheat* remain powerful because they insist that colonialism is not merely a political system of the past. It is a structure of theft, silence, and distortion whose effects continue long after formal rule ends. Against that structure, Mahasweta Devi and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o create narratives of recovery. They restore indigenous and colonized communities to the center of history and show that land is not simply property but sacred ground, cultural inheritance, and political truth.

In *Aranyer Adhikar*, the forest represents a way of life that colonial and developmental power seeks to erase. The struggle of Birsa Munda and the tribal community reveals that dispossession is both material and spiritual. In *A Grain of Wheat*, the Mau Mau struggle reveals how land alienation, detention, and betrayal shape the emotional life of a nation on the threshold of independence. Mugo's confession, Kihika's martyrdom, and the novel's many voices all testify to the difficulty of turning rebellion into freedom.

Read together, the two novels show that resistance is not only fought with weapons. It is also fought with memory, language, solidarity, and narrative control. Fanon's analysis of colonial psychology and Musolf's understanding of narrative as a social weapon help explain why these literary works matter beyond their immediate historical settings. They show that reclaiming indigenous rights begins with reclaiming the authority to name one's own world.

Ultimately, these novels offer a shared lesson: land is never merely land when it is tied to identity, ancestry, and survival. To lose it is to be wounded in history. To defend it is to defend the future. That is the enduring force of Devi's and Ngũgĩ's writing, and that is why their novels continue to speak with such urgency today.

11.1 Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has some limitations. One of the remarkable limitations is language. *Aranyer Adhikar* was read here in English translation rather than in the original Bengali, and any translation inevitably changes the essence of the original as literal translation is difficult. This study may seem not engaging enough to the readers as they do not know the Bangla language.

The scope of the comparison is also limited by its selection of texts. Focusing on two novels allows for depth, but it narrows the range of colonial experiences under discussion to two specific settings, the Indian Adivasi struggle and the Kenyan fight for independence, and inevitably leaves out other traditions of anti-colonial writing that could complicate or extend the argument. Postcolonial literature from Latin America, the Caribbean, and other parts of Africa and Asia responds to distinct colonial histories, and land dispossession does not take an identical shape in every context. A study built around only two novels' risks implying a uniformity to colonial experience that the wider archive of postcolonial writing would resist.

Future research could address these gaps in several directions. A study working directly with the Bengali original of *Aranyer Adhikar*, or comparing multiple English translations against one another, would deepen understanding of how Devi's language choices carry political meaning. Widening the comparative frame to include a third or fourth text, perhaps a novel from Latin American or Caribbean anti-colonial writing, would test whether the patterns identified here, land as sacred inheritance, narrative as resistance, betrayal as the underside of liberation, hold across a broader range of colonial histories or whether they are more specific to South Asian and East African contexts than this paper has assumed. Further work could also bring an explicitly ecocritical perspective more fully into the reading of both novels, since the relationship between land, ecology, and indigenous belief systems deserves fuller treatment than a paper centered on postcolonial and narrative theory can give it. Finally, research that incorporates oral history or ethnographic material from Adivasi or Kikuyu communities would ground the literary analysis in lived testimony, offering a check on how closely fictional representation tracks the memories of the people whose dispossession it depicts.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure: The authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

References

- [1] Ahmed, I. (2023) Reading Mahasweta Devi's Aranyer Adhikar Ecocritically. *South Asian Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5, 4, July 2023, 118–125.
- [2] Aniwa S.C. (2021). Impact of Supply Chain Integration on Operational Performance: Insights from Manufacturing Firms in Emerging Economies. *Iconic Research And Engineering Journals*, 5(4).
- [3] Caminero-Santangelo, B. (1998). Neocolonialism and the betrayal plot in A Grain of Wheat: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's re-vision of Under Western Eyes. *Research in African Literatures*, 29(1), 139–152.
- [4] Conrad, J. (2006). *Heart of Darkness* (P. B. Armstrong, Ed.). Norton Critical Edition. W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1899).
- [5] Devi, M. (2010). *Aranyer Adhikar* (S. Bhattacharya, Trans.). Seagull Books.
- [6] Fanon, F. (2008). *Black Skin, White Masks* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press.
- [7] Karmakar, T. (2023) Heroism and Resistance in the Socio-Political Disposition of Tribal Existence in Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar*. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, vol. 5, no. 3, May–June 2023, pp. 1–6
- [8] Musolf, G. R. (2017). *Oppression And Resistance: Structure, Agency, Transformation*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- [9] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1986). *A Grain of Wheat* (Rev. ed.). Heinemann Educational.
- [10] Routray, M. P. S. (2026) Reclaiming Indigenous Environmental Wisdom: An Eco-Critical Analysis of Mahasweta Devi's Aranyer Adhikar. *SMART MOVES Journal IJELLH*, vol. 14,. 3, 2026, 95–107.
- [11] Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.