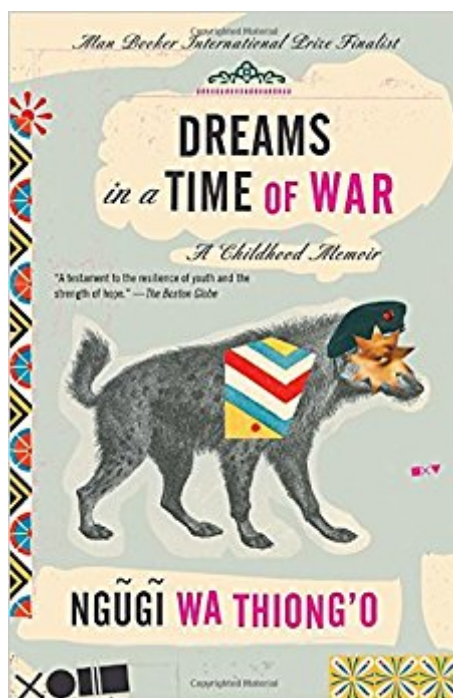


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# Dreams In A Time Of War: A Childhood Memoir



## Synopsis

Born in 1938 in rural Kenya, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o came of age in the shadow of World War II, amidst the terrible bloodshed in the war between the Mau Mau and the British. The son of a man whose four wives bore him more than a score of children, young Ngũgĩ displayed what was then considered a bizarre thirst for learning, yet it was unimaginable that he would grow up to become a world-renowned novelist, playwright, and critic. *In Dreams in a Time of War*, Ngũgĩ deftly etches a bygone era, bearing witness to the social and political vicissitudes of life under colonialism and war. Speaking to the human right to dream even in the worst of times, this rich memoir of an African childhood abounds in delicate and powerful subtleties and complexities that are movingly told.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Celebrated African author and activist Thiong'o tells no ordinary coming-of-age tale. The fifth child of his father's third wife—one of an extended family whose collective experiences range from rural farming and carpentry to WWII rifleman—Ngugi skillfully recounts the challenges and calamities of growing up in British-occupied Kenya. Born in 1938, he recalls a boyhood framed by his pursuit of education (he had a unspoken pact with his mother to always do his best) and by his developing awareness of nationalist politics. Through teachers and local storytellers he hears of such world figures as Winston Churchill, Jomo Kenyatta, and Jesse Owens; at home he eventually discovers that within his own family there are both Mau Mau rebels and colonial sympathizers.

Tensions between tradition and modernity, a theme Ngugi explored in his first novel, 1964's *Weep Not Child*), become apparent in his fascination with the Old Testament and Christianity, and his fear when he is interrogated by military authorities. For readers, sequential time surrenders to a sense of narrative and an engaging humanity. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

When Ngugi is accepted into an elite high school in Kenya, worried about where to get a pair of shoes, his brother is a Mau Mau guerrilla in the mountains. The world-renowned Kenyan writer looks back at his growing up in the 1950s in this crisp, clearly told memoir, which evokes the rising African nationalism of the era in all its conflict and complexity. The many fans of Ngugi's fiction will feel the truth of the young man's viewpoint and applaud his blasting of stereotypes about the country the whites had "discovered." Marcus Garvey is Ngugi's inspiration, both for his sense of self-reliance and for his ideas about nationalism versus the missionary and colonial projects, "which always assumed the fragility of the African mind." He remembers "settler newspapers that portray terrorist massacre "without rhyme or reason" while the freedom fighters have no media to voice their side. A fascinating look at twentieth-century African history, but also a moving intellectual odyssey in which Ngugi learns to revere both modernity and tradition but to reserve a healthy skepticism of both. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of Kenya's most famous writers. Over the years, I've read a few of his novels -- *The River Between* (1965), *Petals of Blood* (1977), and the masterful *Wizard of the Crow* (2006). Both of the earlier two novels are set against the backdrop of the Mau Mau rebellion, an uprising against the British colonial government by Kenyans - mostly Kikuyus - in the 1950s. *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir*, tells the story of Thiong'o's early life, through the mid-1950s when he was admitted to high school. As with several of Thiong'o's novels, this story also takes place against the backdrop of Mau Mau. It's a fascinating account, and it balances the personal with the political. On the personal side, Thiong'o tells of growing up in a polygamous household and of his mother's efforts to get him to school. His mother and father split when he was a child, and he becomes the scribe to his maternal grandfather. He gives an account -- the first I've read -- of going through the circumcision ceremony, the rite of passage that makes

him a man. At the same time, he describes the political excitement and tension of the time. In the course of Mau Mau, his uncle goes to the mountains to fight, and Thiong'o himself is detained by colonial police on the way home from a religious meeting. The political and the personal intersect repeatedly. With little access to newspapers - and those filtered by colonial authorities - he and his friends rely on semi-informed and highly creative informants: "Ngandi, like some of his audience, has to read between the lines of the settler-owned newspapers and government radio. But he enriches what he gleans here and there with rich creative interpretation." Still, as Thiong'o underlines, "Perhaps it is myth as much as fact that keeps dreams alive in times of war." This is a beautiful homage to a mother's commitment to education, as well as a view to growing up in a time of great political upheaval. I listened to the unabridged audiobook, narrated by Hakeem Kae-Kazim. I highly recommend the book, the audiobook, and Thiong'o's other work, especially Wizard of the Crow.

Ngugi grows up rural Kenya in the years 1934--1950. He lives in a family where his mom, one of the five wives of his dad, is at some point rejected by his dad. Ngugi loves reading and learning; despite all the difficulties of the situation--poverty, war, colonialism, and racism--he manages to go to school. Despite the harsh conditions, the support that people can provide each others with make the apparently impossible dreams happen. "That was my first lesson in the virtue of resistance, that right and justice can empower the weak."

Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir by Ngugi wa'Thiong'o describes his childhood and coming of age in Kenya in the 1940's and 1950's. It is a really touching story of a young boy's thirst for knowledge and clearly provides the perspective of a native of Kenya. Ngugi describes what life was like for him growing up in Kenya in a polygamous family. His father had four wives and many children. Ngugi's mother was the third wife and Ngugi lived in her hut with his full siblings. The wives formed close relationships with each other as did the children. Early in life, Ngugi made a solemn promise to his mother to attend school and to his best possible if she would make the sacrifices necessary for him to go to school. This book really presents what life was like for Ngugi through the innocence of a child's eyes. We learn about who his friends were and what he did for fun. We also discover his heartbreak and travails when his father divorced his mother and she returned to live with her father. We begin to see the unfairness of the colonial rule when Ngugi's brother returns to Kenya after fighting in Burma in World War II and these former soldiers are not given equal treatment or justly credited or rewarded for their assistance. Dreams in a Time of War describes the

beginnings of what is commonly termed the Mau Mau Rebellion through a child's eyes and the confusion of having members of his family on different sides during the rebellion. This was an enlightening read for me and I appreciated being able to see this through the innocence of a child.

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