

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

## THE DOCUMENTATION OF POSTCOLONIAL REALITY OF KENYA IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S SELECT NOVELS

MD AJMAUL ANSARI

Research Scholar (PhD), Department of English

Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, UP, India

Email: [ansariajmaul@gmail.com](mailto:ansariajmaul@gmail.com)



### ABSTRACT

Being a postcolonial writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938- ) poses vehement protests against the political and cultural exploitation of the Kenyan natives by the Neo-colonial agents through his writing. Post - colonial Africa undergoes political disillusionment and social corruption to a great extent. The post-independent Kenya is ravaged with social corruption, autocracy, foreign-controlled economy, injustice, among others. Independent Kenya is not too different from the colonial era itself. The only difference that is visible to the Kenyan nationals is that their white colonial masters have very tacitly metamorphosed into their own natives, the bourgeoisie, who have taken control over their own native land on behalf of the neocolonial white masters. The bourgeoisie exploit the native people in the same manner as the colonial master used to do. Therefore, the native people's dream to have a completely free nation gets shattered. In the present study, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's two novels *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* will be closely analyzed to show independent Kenya being still exploited by the neocolonial white masters and the native people's suffering from identity crisis.

**Keywords:** Colonial; Postcolonial; Corruption; Autocracy; Native; Master; Exploitation; Identity.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938- ) is a revolutionary writer who talks about colonial politics of the white masters that ravaged pre independent Kenya and has been ravaging post independent Kenya itself. His literary works deal with how the white got control over pre independent Kenya and has been ruling independent Kenya through neocolonial strategies. Ngugi's two works *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* selected for the present study will show how the neocolonial white masters are still ( after independence) enjoying power in Kenya by employing colonial strategies and how the native Kenyans are constantly suffering from identity crisis in present independent Kenya.

At the launching of *Petals of Blood* in July 1977, Ngugi subtly explains his motive for writing the book:

...I came to realize that Kenya was poor... because the wealth produced by Kenya ended in developing the western world.... Their aid, loans, and investment capital that they gloat about are simply a chemical catalyst that sets in motion the whole process of expropriation of Kenya's wealth, with, of course, a few leftovers for the 'lucky' few.... (Thiong'o 1981:96-97)

*Petals of Blood* (1977) set in the postcolonial Kenya presents a grim picture of the native land. The novel testifies to the fact that although Kenya is free from the foreign control, the tradition of suppression and

oppression still goes on in the native land which is ironically executed by the native bourgeoisie working for the white masters. The haves are pupils armed with the colonizer's trinity: the guns, the Bible, the coin. They have been able to perpetuate their autocracy by dipping their hands in the blood of anybody who oppose them. It is so because they possess powerful imperialist allies in America, Europe, Japan and they use a whitewashed version in which the heroes (native rebels) are presented as villains and villains (bourgeoisie) heroes. The elevation of money to the status of religion results in all problems in present Kenya. The novel largely deals with the skepticism of change after Kenya's freedom from the British Empire and strictly questions to what extent free Kenya merely emulates and subsequently perpetuates the oppression and suppression found during its time as a colony of the White.

In the very beginning of the novel, we get acquainted with the four protagonists namely Munira, Karega, Abdullah and Wanja. Ilmorog, the native land, has been a place of negligence, oppression and suppression. The wretched of the earth's children are deprived of education. Even the classrooms of Ilmorog are dilapidated. Teachers are bound to leave the schools as these schools lack in basic infrastructure. The bourgeoisie, who control the economy of the land, intentionally do not provide the schools with basic amenities so that the children of the have nots remain uneducated and they can be used as bonded labors who will be a major source to grow their economy. The pathetic condition of the school is well manifested in the following words: "The school itself was a four-roomed barrack with broken mud walls, a tin roof with gaping holes and more spiders' webs and the wings and heads of dead flies. Was it any wonder that teachers ran away at the first glance?" (Thiong'o 1977:7).

The situation of Kenya is so grim that Abdulla is forced to consider whether Kenya is really free from the White or not. He says: "I can't speak for everybody- but it seems that there is still enthusiasm and a belief that we can all do something to make our independence real..." (Thiong'o 1977:12). The wretched of the earth

have been exploited by the bourgeoisie. They were promised by the capitalist class that they would be financially helped as they were taking their resource in the forms of wood and charcoal to feed the machines in the city which would boom the market. But they were deceived as the controllers of national economy, after fulfilling their self interests, totally forgot them. Railway line was set up to carry the stuffs from the forest of the native land of Ilmorog and after meeting their needs the bourgeoisie removed railway line from there where now exists unproductive road standing as a symbol of exploitation.

It is true that the white colonizers have left Kenya but the tradition of colonialism still goes on in Kenya in new form that is neocolonialism. Here the difference is that now the natives are being oppressed and suppressed by the bourgeoisie, the agents of the white. The people of Ilmorog have elected an MP who is their representative. An MP is a person who is legally authorized to take care of the people who belong to his constituency. But here the MP has been an exploiter instead of becoming a savior of his people. The money earned from the seasonal harvests is taken away by the government agents. Each year new taxes are levied on the peasants and all their produce go to the hands of the government officials in the form of taxes. Police men are used as a tool to terrorize the peasants to extort as much money as they can. This is not new to the peasants of Ilmorog; they have been undergoing this pathetic situation since the colonization by the white. The grim situation of present Kenya is well expressed in the words of Munira: "But they of Ilmorog... they now would have to find a way of avoiding those taxes... Politics! Couldn't one escape from these things" (Thiong'o 1977:23).

Ilmorog stands for the exploitation by the bourgeoisie. The people of Ilmorog are deprived of the basic necessities of life. They are not allowed to participate in political and economic affairs of the nation. They have been reduced to mere beggars of Ilmorog. As the agriculture does not prove to be profitable, the young children of the have nots move to the city with a prospect to earn a handsome amount of money. But they do not come back to

their native land as they are used as bonded labours. The dignity and emotion of the people of Ilmorog have been reduced to mere a commodity as they have been used only as a money producing machine. The grief and groan of the people of Ilmorog finds a fine expression in the words of Nyakinyua: "They ate our forests. What did they give us in return? Then they sent for our young men. They went on swallowing our youth" (Thiong'o 1977:138).

The Bible has been a tool to subjugate the mind and soul of the Africans. While the Africans are busy with quarreling among the different communities, the big companies are taking advantage of this tussle and collecting priceless resources of the native land. How the white masters are befooling the native people finds a vivid expression in the words of Karega, "They used the Bible to steal the souls and minds...while big companies are busy collecting gold and silver and diamonds, and while we fight among ourselves saying I am a Kuke, I am a Luo, I am a Luhya, I am a Somali..." (Thiong'o 1977:283)

The native people have been prisoners in their own native land. They can not do whatever they want to do. They are regulated by the bourgeoisie as directed by the white neocolonial super power. They have been the victims of injustice and inequality. They have been reduced to mere beggars in their own native land. They have been continuously toiling but they are not given their dues. Their way of living is being determined by the white people sitting in distant land of New York and London. The native people's frustration with the present pathetic condition of Kenya is well-expressed in the words of Karega, "in a world where a man who has never set foot on this land can sit in a New York or London office and determine what I shall eat, read, think, do, only because he sits on a heap of billions taken from the world's poor, in such a world, we are all prostituted." (Thiong'o 1977:286)

To quote Coke and Okenimpke *Petals of Blood* is an:

...an expose of the nature of capitalism, of the insensitivity, callousness, and insatiable ambition of those who control vested interests in order to gain power and wealth, impoverishing the misery and suffering on

the majority. (Cook and Okenimpke 1983:90)

*Matigari* another novel by Ngugi documents exploitation of the natives by the burgeoise and the white masters in post independent Kenya. Matigari, the protagonist, is the mouthpiece to expose the follies and vices going on in present Kenya. Colonialism is still present in Kenya in new guise that is neocolonialism. It is true that the white have left Kenya but their ownership is still present in Kenya as they are in collusion with the native burgeoise.

*Matigari* deals with the story of a man who has survived the war of freedom. He buries his AK 47 under a fig tree as his country is free now . He comes out of his abode with a expectation to lead a peaceful and respectful life, but his expectation gets shattered as pre -colonial affair are still going on in independent Kenya. He is surprised to see that his house has been occupied by the settler William. He expresses his grief by saying, "you see, I built the house with my own hands. But settler Williams slept in it and I would sleep outside on the veranda" (Thiong'o 1987:21). Matigari's homelessness is symbolic of the fact how common masses of Kenya are undergoing identity crisis even in post independent Kenya.

Corruption, fear, misery are some of the troubles undergone by the common natives of Kenya. Kenya is dry as produces produced by the workers are taken away by the white and they are leaving the native land empty handed. The white have employed the local burgeoise to befool the common people so that they can easily exploit the native workers thereby they can accumulate the wealth of the native land leaving the native to their fate of misery. The trauma that the native people are undergoing is well- expressed in the words of one of the detainees of the police station, "That is very true, .... Our country is truly as dry as this concrete floor. Our leaders have hearts as cold as that of Pharaoh. Or even colder than those of the colonialists. They cannot hear the cry of the people." (Thiong'o 1977:53)

The ruling government is in collusion with the white masters. They are helping the white to exploit their own native land because of their self interest.

There are some people like Matigari who are raising voice against the autocratic government and presence of foreign companies in the native land. But these people are leveled as terrorists and put behind bar so that they cannot enlighten the mind of the common people to stand against the autocracy of the ruling government and the white settlers who are making the native land hollow. To quote Ngugi, "...the neo-colonial state is the negation of Africa's progress and development. The defeat of imperialism and neo-colonialism and hence the liberation of natural and human resources across the entire productive forces of the nation, would be the beginning of Africa's real progress and development"(Thiong'o 1987:103)

Matigari is in search of truth and justice. He encounters injustice everywhere. People from all walks of life, old women, students, teachers, traders are all victims of ongoing suppression and oppression. In a public meeting he asks the minister of truth and justice as to where to find truth and justice. On asking so he is arrested and locked up in a mental hospital. The minister passes this order as he is in collusion with the capitalist bourgeoisie who team up with the western businessmen to exploit Kenyan resources. That there is a strong bond between the ruling party and private companies in post independent Kenya gets evident from the fact when the Anglo-American leather and plastic company gives donations to His Excellency Ole Excellency.

Matigari's determination to liberate his nation from the clutches of the bourgeoisie and the white businessmen in a violent manner very aptly recalls Frantz Fanon's ideology: "The starving peasants, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms." (Fanon 1967:47)

*Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* both very aptly document the postcolonial reality of Kenya. These two novels show how much the white have been political to continue their regime in free Kenya. The binary of the have and the have nots is still rampant in post independent Kenya. Kenya is free but the natives of Kenya cannot go by their will.

Their regulation by the bourgeoisie and the white leads them to going for a quest for identity.

#### Works Cited

- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Books, 1967.
- Okenimpe, Cook and. Ngugi wa Thiong'o: *An Exploration of His Writings*. London: Heinemann, 1983.
- Thiong'o, wa Ngugi. *Decolonising the Mind*. Workington: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matigari*. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Petals of Blood*. London: Penguin Books, 1977.