

Dispossession and Resistance: The Impact of Colonialism on Indigenous Communities in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*

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Abstract: Ngugi Wa Thiong' o is a great Indigenous writer who voices out for his community through his writings. All his writings reflect the pains, and sufferings of his community during Pre-Colonialism, colonialism and post-colonialism. *Petals of Blood* is one of the best works of Ngugi that portrays the impact of colonialism on the lives of indigenous people and the government. It presents a vivid interpretation of social and economic problems in Kenya after its independence through the four major characters – Wanja, Munira, Abdulla and Karega. These characters were highly affected by the swift transformation of Kenya towards modernity, the impact of the Mau-Mau rebellion and the exploitation of workers and peasants in Kenya. This article aims to do a theoretical analysis of the novel *Petals of Blood* in the light of postcolonialism. It brings forth the impact of colonialism in the lives of central characters and their resistance to it.

Keywords: Pre-colonialism, Colonialism, Post-colonialism, resistance, Indigenous community

Introduction:

Ngugi Wa Thiong' o is a born laureate with inherent potentials to write volumes of realistic happenings against the background of tribal scenario and landscape involving common people of his tribe to strengthen the bonds of commitment for a cause. He is no doubt, a creative writer, expressionist, novelist, artist of higher form of integration of wisdom and caliber, that he dedicated his assets to the advocacy of certain beliefs and establishments related to the development of his community. His predicament for his nation is clear through a thorough reading of his literary writings of all forms that he has gifted to this world and his profoundness in trying to bring unison amongst the contemporary writers of time is seen as a conviction in his articulation. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has been an exceptional writer and expressionist in the form of writing which is classically African like any other predecessor or contemporary writers is vibrantly created by him and is perfectly realized by the readers of his fiction.

Colonialism is an agonizing experience to the native people, facing oppression and being subjugated to alien influences. The traumatic dimensions of life and living as a colony had left behind a lasting impression to people of the mid-18th and 19th centuries leading to relevance to existence and survival resisting the harshness of the situation. Inner conflicts within the tribes with civil disharmony, dissatisfaction and losing their originality made Ngugi ponder on the need to upraise his sentiments and existentialism to fight for rights of expression. Post-colonial trauma, violence, suppression and challenges were the lessons learnt to work hard towards establishment of negation to existing situation. Ngugi's novels are a replica of colonial and post-colonial violence after independence and written with a difference to assess the depth of trauma faced by the people.

It is realistic to refer the thought of Ngugi in his well known writing; 'I will marry when I want' has made a poetic reference to the condition of the colonial past and how the people had to accept such a treatise. He has aptly narrated that,

Religion is not the same thing as God. When the British imperialists came here in 1895, all the missionaries of all the churches held the Bible in the left hand, and the gun in the right hand.

While further he reflects a parallel identity saying, The white man wanted us to be drunk with religion while he, in the mean time, Was mapping and grabbing our land.



And starting factories and businesses on our sweat (*I Will Marry When I Want*, pg. 56-57)

Coming in of the British has brought a new living form and a life of paradox. Even the Christian missionaries, who came into the nation on the pretext of serving the poor and the needy, turned to be imperialistic as they held Bible in the left hand with a gun in the right as referred by Ngugi. This is the truth of colonial impact in all the nations colonized by the British. Entering on the pretext of developing the nation and taking the reins of ruling as legitimate rulers of the nations creating fear and agony to the innocent native people irked Ngugi and all his writing showed opposition to such an existence and expressed resistance. He enforces the toil and sweat of the natives as a means of survival in the hands of the foreign power. The individuality and native sensibilities were getting hampered which made Ngugi think for a liberation for his nation and his people. The means of liberation was through his writings which became the passive form of resistance and to show agitation to the atrocities exerted by the imperialistic supremacy.

In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o the concept of imperialism and its consequences is referred by him as below: "Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today. It could even lead to holocaust." 'Decolonizing the mind'. These lines are assertions of the happenings of time.

The *Petals of Blood* is a blatant deliberation of a highly political fiction. Ngugi could not accept the thoughtlessness of his people getting drowned in alcohol and becoming alcoholics, just to escape the overt political principles of the colonial powers. Ngugi is a patriotic semblance filled with post-colonial disillusionment and thereby depicting snit-colonial sentiments in his writings. Political unrest with the advent of British into Kenya is the main thematic discourse of '*Petals of Blood*'.

This research article is a profound work on the concept of indigenous voices as seen in the novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the eminent contemporary Kenyan post-colonial writer. His writings are acclaimed pieces of post-colonial interpretations that add impetus to the power of force and mental agility being expressed by the writers as well as the nationalist freedom fighters against the British rule of the yesteryears.

Literature Review:

Evan M. Mwangi et al.'s research article "The Gendered Politics of Untranslated Language and Aporia in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*" (2004) focuses how Ngugi wa Thiong'o expresses the cultural identity through his vivid use of untranslated Gikuyu and the effects of colonialism in his novel *Petals of Blood*. Stanley Ordu et al.'s research article "Symbolic characters and class struggles in Ngugi's wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*" (2022) examines the economic and social struggles of the Kenyan people through the character of Munira, Karega, Abdulla, and Wanja who faced traumatic past and an uncertain future. These characters were the replica of broader socio-economic challenges faced by the Kenyan people. B. Roos et. al. in his research article "Re-Historicizing the Conflicted Figure of Woman in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*" (2002) analyses the female characters in the novel *Petals of Blood*. He closely examines character of Wanja, who serves as a symbol of potential and resilient African women, who is portrayed as a mother, nurture and a business woman in this novel. Her character is designed to defy the traditional gender roles and exhibit substantial agency and power. The research article "How Ngugi wa Thiong'o Shifted from Class Analysis to a Neo-Colonialist Perspective" (1994) written by J. Gugler analyses the shift in the writing of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In his third novel Ngugi presents the betrayals of independence and patterns of exploitations through various characters in Neo-Colonial perspective. Ahmad Jasim Mohammad Alazzawi in his research article entitled "A Feminist Perspective in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Novel *Petal of Blood*" (2018) analyses the women characters of the novel *Petals of Blood*. They are the victims of both patriarchal society as well as colonialism through the characters of Wanja and Nyakinyua. They struggled hard against oppression, colonialism and exploitation of the Kenyan society. A. Chakraborty et al.'s article "The Polemics of Class, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*" (2016) highlights Ngugi's presentation of



economic impoverishment of Non-elites, power structure of capitalism and the link between the National and International bourgeoisie that existed in Post-Independence Kenya. C. Uwasomba et al.'s article "The Politics of Resistance and Liberation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*" (2006) presents Ngugi Wa Thiango's perspectives on Kenya's walk towards independence and selfhood. He further examines how Thiong'o portrays the impact of colonialism i.e. neo-colonialism that exist in the way of life of the Kenyan people in these novels.

Impact of Colonialism on Indigenous Community:

You should know that this world is not our home and we should be preparing them and ourselves for the next one. Don't worry, I myself have never belonged to this world ... even to Limuru ... May be Ilmorog ... for a change. (POB, p. 4)

Words uttered deep from heart elucidating the pangs of suffering of the colonial period is the rendition of the fiction, 'Petal of Blood'. The title befits the content of the storyline and surprising to cohere to the fact that this title was unconsciously coined by a small boy when Munira as a teacher of a school asked his small students to talk about the colours of flowers and one of the boys called out loud "*Petals of Blood*" to denote colour 'Red'. Ngugi was a stylish writer with genuine thoughts of his reality that he could fix the title of his book as a casual affair, which turned to be the striking verse line of the fiction. It stood for all disturbances, agony with disillusionment and dissatisfied living standards of the Kenyan natives. Ngugi takes the story as a purpose to convey a meaning interaction of the life and reality of the people during the colonial rule.

The fiction, '*Petals of Blood*' stands as a narrative gesture to express the mind flux of natives of post colonial living form along with their discontentment over the establishment of post-colonial regime. The effectiveness of the fiction has in its backdrop the lingering efficacy of the rebellion 'Mau, Mau' that was an unforgettable happening in the lives of Kenyans. All through the story the protagonist Wariinga and the female counterpart Wanja along with Abdulla and Karega counter one another throwing incidental relevance with one another and getting trap to malicious outcomes yet continuing with audacity of their existence to stand on their point of view, which adds credence to their existence till the end of the fiction. Finally getting to a level of enlightenment of the story for which they are involved to exhibit the struggle of pre and post colonialism. The four parts of '*Petals of Blood*' talk about the societal impacts and the generative consequences faced by the natives in terms of their dwelling and letting-be of their sustenance. The unique rendition of Ngugi in terms with old Ilmorog and its transformation into new Ilmorog with capitalist motives flows through the entire narration of '*Petals of Blood*'.

'*Petals of Blood*' talks about the treachery of the post-colonial regime against the native indigenous people whose ideals of anti-colonial struggle were tampered and stigmatized. Yet united, the colonized natives strived hard to achieve their liberation and the independence they were waiting for a long period of time. Most fictions of Ngugi were of this conditional status and filled with angst of the timely exodus faced. The agitations done by the natives, made a waste difference in '*Petals of Blood*' as it involved the principles of communism and socialism against the capitalist bourgeois society.

Those who had taken part in the 'Mau, Mau' revolt are the expressionists of the story. As a sample to cohere the life of Abdulla, the handicapped friend of Munira happens to be a merchant feels disappointment of the revolt of 'Mau, Mau' as his desire was not fulfilled. His intention to take revenge for his friend who was a revolutionary and was betrayed by the governance brought agony into the thoughts of Abdulla. Taking the female character Wanja into the deliberation leads to many multi-dimensions of narration who happens to be a runaway from a broken family. Yet knowledgeable and street smart in her attitude and dealing in the society that makes a character of form and content of the fiction '*Petals of Blood*'. She gets to know of the past from her grandmother and realizes the fact that two generations of revolutionary intensity that made her loose her home grounds and stability to living standards.

Unfortunately, she led a wayward life and could not establish her standards to lead a normal life of a native woman. She was tossed in the vagaries of existence because of the colonial powers in her native land. In the words of Moses Isegawa, the Ugandan Novelist on reading the fiction '*Petals of Blood*' says, "Wanja, like Kenya itself, has to fight to stay alive and destruction is never too far away". The boldness of Wanjia is the symbol of valiant struggle and has a share of glory to the freedom struggle in the fiction. Worthy fact to accept of this fiction is that Wanjia stood by with her grandmother Nyakinyua in determining the futurity of Kenya.

Most important male character of the fiction is Munira, being a conservative compassionate teacher could mould young minds of his students making them be aware of all possible interactions with nature of the environment of their tribe. The positive truth of reality is enforced into the thoughts of students by Munira that he teaches values of human living to initiate worthy living in their tribes. As days flowed by, Munira became a philosophical preacher with wide acceptance to existence amongst the corrupt governance of the colonial and post-colonial rules. However, his presence is felt throughout the narration of the storyline by Ngugi. It is evident with this quote that life in colonial Kenya as well as in post-colonial Kenya, survival was not smooth. In relevance to Munira, he is shown as a middle class individual who embodies middle class society with their struggles and vacillation of hardships faced seeking rights for existence. Further, in this fiction, '*Petals of Blood*' is analogous with a migrant character Karega who is contemporary to the sentiments of Munira.

Karega is a supplement to Munira and is more an agitated character in contrast to passive philosophical entity of Munira. Karega takes all applicability to the historical reference of 'Mau Mau' and for him it is considered highly practical, ethical and holy. Karega has been very exact in his outburst to preserve the integrity of the natives and simultaneously fight for the rights of existences through his opposition brought to concern here from the fiction, '*Petals of Blood*'. The utterance of Karega depicts the imagery of life of Kenya:

Her voice only agitated images set in motion by her revelation. Imperialism: capitalism: landlords: earthworms. A system that bred hordes of round-bellied jiggers and bedbugs with parasitism and cannibalism as the highest goal in society; this system and its profiteering gods and its ministering angels had hounded his mother to her grave. These parasites would always demand the sacrifice of blood from the working masses... The system and its gods and its angels had to be fought consciously, consistently and resolutely by all the working people. (POB, p. 96)

These lines are an effective resolute thought on the circumstances that existed during the post-colonial advent that Ngugi had observed and has made awareness to the audience through his character, Karega's narration.

Ngugi brings to concern the fact that such a deprivation of individual possession of land by native tribes is sure to cause agony to his people and stresses the fact that such an ambience is sure to give rise to capitalist approach where the rich and the mighty would possess the land and making others work for their living. Ngugi through the protagonist Munira suggests, 'the white man first took the land, then the goats and cows, saying these were hut taxes or fines after every armed clash, and only later did he capture the youth to work on the land.

In '*Petals of Blood*' in illustrative analysis of the characters that play a pivotal role in the narration stand to testify the radical and subversive stances of the people in general. Taking to concern the female characters, Nyakinyua and Wanjia who happen to be related as grandmother and granddaughter work parallel in thoughts to create a condition of mutiny within the clan to surface their agony. It is interesting to know of the existence of 'Old Ilmorog' and the creation of 'New Ilmorog' and the way the grandmother and granddaughter work to unify the thoughts of their people to realize the way they are cheated by the governmental officials. Both of them are pictured as bold, out-spoken and courageous women of their tribe.

Wanjia, the beautiful young woman, is a highly notorious character bold and expressive that she took to oddities in her livelihood, reconciled to goodness later, being hurt through the insincere folk of her tribe, and nevertheless stood strong in her fight for liberty. Ngugi depicts her as a barmaid who hangs around all types of people in all

courage echoing her inner self as integrity of womanhood trying hard to be chaste and not losing her chastity. She undergoes many instant seditious circumstances, caught a trap to ominous men but does not succumb to their fancies. She transcends the contempt of men, at times taking away their money in their dozy state in order to transform her to be a more vibrant scintillating personality hoping that all men turn to look at her. She wished to modernize her by all means and wanted to capitalize the weakness of men in her Ilmorog, unmindful of anything that might come in her way. Eventually she is accused of a murder but tries to escape the tenure.

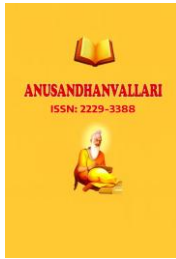
The eventual culmination of this narrative is that she dreamt of being an entrepreneur working along with her grandma but could not suffice the stance due to bureaucracy involved to dismantle her dream mission. Another saddening happening in her life was the atrocity of a senior chieftain like personnel, very wealthy mean person who forced his power on her and impregnated her. It was a bitter shock but overcame the challenge by discarding the child and moved forward in her might. She worked along with Abdulla for her sustenance and learnt many values of patriotic sensibilities from Abdulla, a lame yet a powerful force of Ilmorog. Homi.K. Bhabha's interpretation of post colonial concepts is the concern that adds more assertion to the existing circumstance of Ilmorog of Kenya. He as a post-colonial critic who talks about hybrid identity existing in the colonized lands of the macrocosm and the awareness of a new system inter woven with the elements of interest of the colonizer that in turn has brought a transformation in the life of the colonized leading to challenging situational conditions that check upon the authenticity of their traditional values. People of the colonized lands had to validate their norms to sustain their essentialist cultural identity which was at risk. Bhabha's experimental awareness on observation of critical happenings of every colonized land is a significant, relevant and consequential relevance of the present time. His analysis can be applied to Ilmorog of Kenya and in the lines taken for reference on such a concept from '*Petals of Blood*' says,

There were several Ilmorogs. One was the residential area of the farm managers, County Council officials, public service officers, the managers of Barclays, Standard and African Economic Banks, and other servants of state and money power. This was called Cape Town. The other—called New Jerusalem—was a shanty town of migrant and floating workers, the unemployed, the prostitutes and small traders in tin and scrap metal. (POB, p. 333).

'*Petals of Blood*' carries a message of social awareness of the post colonial rule with the negativity of existence that seems to be in dominance at the present and in continuum to the rule of colonizers with the intentional mode of creating challenges to hamper the normal livelihood of the natives of the tribes of Kenya. He talks about the aftermath of Kenyan independence and its consequences on the natives. The resistance shown by the tribe over the negative alternatives chosen by their own leaders initiated a reign of opposition from the beginning until the end of the storyline. The four uncommon pivotal characters work towards modernization of their Ilmorog and in the consequence had to meet lots of setbacks with traitors around them to mislead them in their nationalist spirits. The friendship woven in animosity between Munira and Karega flows down the lane of the narratives yet being together they strive for the upliftment of the society to which they belong. The love-hate relationship between the Munira, Wanja and Karega is a wildfire circumstance patterned by Ngugi to show the misplaced choice of values between the three. Through these characters, Ngugi gracefully presents the impact of colonialism and their resisters towards it as an indigenous community.

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