

Ngugi And Post Colonial Africa: History, Politics And Morality In *Petals Of Blood* And *Matigari*

Cecilia Addei, Cynthia Osei, Felicia Annin

ABSTRACT: Life in post - colonial Africa is characterised by a great deal of political disillusionment and social corruption. The post-independence era of Africa is bedevilled with social corruption, autocracy, foreign-dominated economy, as well as the betrayal of human ideals among others. For the masses in many African countries, the post colonial era did not offer them anything too different from the colonial era itself. The only difference, however, is that their white colonial masters have simply metamorphosed into their own natives, the elite few, who have assumed control. In other words it is a period of change of batons where white colonial masters have given way, after independence, to black masters lording it over their fellow black men. To these black masses therefore, the dream of freedom after independence is simply a mirage. African writers can simply not ignore what they see around them and since works of literature are often inspired by contemporary issues, they began to write and the novel therefore, became a vehicle of strong social and political satire. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is among such writers whose works are characterised by an unmistakable note of criticism against perceived unacceptable social practices. In his two novels that have been used for this study, Ngugi has tried to chronicle the events that took place in his country, Kenya after independence.

Index Terms: history, politics, morality, post-colonial, post-independence

1 Introduction

Like all good African writers, Ngugi tries, as faithfully as possible, to present the Kenyan society to us as he has known it. Thus "weep not child", his first novel, "dramatizes the events of the Mau Mau emerging in Kenya in the nineteen fifties". The *River Between*, his second published novel, though the first to be written "is set against the background of the clash between the Kikuyus of Kenya and the missionaries in the thirties". A *Grain of Wheat*, his third novel, deals with the various levels of betrayal during the Mau Mau emergency and the uncertainty of the people as they brace themselves to reap the fruits of their nearly won "freedom"; and *Petals of Blood*, his fourth novel, is a dramatization and condemnation of the ruthless capitalist exploitation of the masses by those in privileged positions in independent and "free" Kenya. Ngugi's pre-occupation in his novels revolves around five main issues-politics, economics, culture, land, history and the role of the church in the Kenyan struggle for independence. In Ngugi's view the missionary and the colonial administrator are brothers who fight for the same objective. The assertion is so because Ngugi sees that the church plays an important role in enslaving the souls of Kenyans by robbing them of their culture just as colonialism robs them of their land and other material possessions. It is true that Ngugi advocates a true and an all embracing independence for Kenya in particular, and for Africa in general in his literary works however, he foresees no difference between the colonial and post. Nicholas Brown, commenting the meaning of Ngugi's play, *The Trial of Dedan* has two meanings:

The celebration of a revolutionary past and the call to utopia through a revolutionary future. Brown states that, "The allegorical double meaning of the play depends on the elision of the difference between the colonial and post colonial" (Brown, 1999:60). Additionally, the novelist is equally concerned about the system of governance that will ensure that every individual in Kenya enjoys the fruit of a true and complete independence. Ngugi does not support capitalism as the system of governance suitable for Kenya and for Africa in general. This justifies why he makes the following observation in his *Homecoming* essays that:

Literature is of course primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and the values governing human relationships. Who nobody has passed through the major cities of Europe and America, where capitalism is in full bloom, can ever wish the same fate in Africa – as far as human relationships are concerned. He can not have failed to see the abject poverty, the mood and psychological degradation, and the cultural impoverishment of large masses of the population - amidst plenty and luxury enjoyed by so few. (Ngugi, 1970: xvii)

Ngugi believes strongly in the preservation and promotion of African cultural values. To him, culture is not static and must be maintained at all cost even when it is evidently clear that some aspects of it are reasonably outmoded. His conscious awareness in the dynamic nature of culture suggests an explanation to his assertion in an article entitled *Towards a National Culture*:

Culture in its broadest sense is a way of life fashioned by people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their art, their sciences and all their social institutions, including their system of beliefs and rituals. In the course ... but we must bear in mind that they are derived from a people's way of life and will change as the way of life is altered (Ngugi, 1970:4).

- Cecilia Addei
Centre for Communication and Entrepreneurship Skills (CENCES), University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), Ghana.
- Cynthia Osei
Department of Liberal Studies, Kumasi Polytechnic, Ghana
- Felicia Annin
Department of General Education, Valley View University, Ghana.

History is a living issue in both *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari*. The history of post-independence Kenya is given so much prominence in the novel. This paper aims at examining how Ngugi, through his writings, throws light on post-colonial independent Kenya bringing out some forms of injustices in the society; a society where there is unfair distribution of the national cake and where the people do not have the right to know how wealth is produced in their country, who controls it, and who benefits from the wealth so produced. To do this, two of his novels, namely, *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* have been selected for discussion.

2 Discussion

Ngugi's fourth novel, *Petals of Blood*, like his first three novels, *The River Between*, *Weep Not Child*, and *A Grain of Wheat*, is set in Kenya. It is not set in early colonial Kenya or during the struggle for the independence of Kenya. It is rather set in post independence Kenya, at Ilmorog, a town which is presented as a remote village at the beginning of the novel and which is converted from a worn out village to a glistening, neon-lighted new town. As a matter of fact, compared to other Kenyan towns – Nairobi, Thika, Kisumu and Nakuru among others, Ilmorog is symbolic of what the modernising process, the sway of development capitalism, becomes as Ngugi apprehends it.

Within only ten years ... how time galloped he thought - Ilmorog peasants had been displaced from the land: some had joined the army of workers; others were semi-workers with one foot in a plot of land and one foot in a factory, while others became petty traders... and behind it all, as a monument to the changes, was the Trans-African Road and the two-storied building of the African Economic Bank Limited (p. 302)

The novel tells the story of an arson that occurs at New Ilmorog in which three lives are lost. Chief Inspector Godfrey of the Kenyan Police Force conducts an investigation into the murder of Kimeria, Chui and Mzigo in New Ilmorog and at the Sunshine Lodge. Each of the three victims of the arson is a businessman with huge investments in New Ilmorog. Each has been linked in various ways, sometimes in a manner that they do not know, with the four main suspects of the murder. The four suspects are Munira, Abdullah, Wanja and Karega. At the end of the story which in fact is the beginning, Wanja is in a hospital as Inspector Godfrey conducts this investigation in order to find the murderer among Abdullah, Munira and Karega. Each of these three characters, as the inspector rightly suspects, has a very good justification to murder Kimeria, Chui and Mzigo. As the inquiry into the arson unfolds, the lives of the principal participants are revealed and the unusual pattern of interrelationship between the characters emerges through flashback and introspection which are expertly and thematically tied up to the inquiry. As a typical work by Ngugi, *Petals of Blood* explores themes like the value of western education, the meaning of Christian faith and the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism on the lives of Kenyans as well as the disillusionment in post-independent Kenyan rulers. *Matigari*, like Ngugi's earlier works is a mirror reflection of post-independence Kenya. *Matigari* is one of the products of Ngugi's days in exile (England and US). The novel seeks to draw the attention of society to certain ills or evils that eat into the fabric of the post-colonial Kenyan society. *Matigari* is a memorable satire on the betrayal of human ideals

and on the bitter experience of post-independence African society in general and Kenya in particular. The hero in *Matigari* poses questions which Kenyans dare not ask under the oppressive rule of the then president Daniel Arap Moi. People talked about this character just like the way the soap opera fans do. By 1987, intelligence reports had it that a man named Matigari was roaming the whole country making demands about Truth and Justice. An order was issued for his arrest but it was discovered with utmost surprise and shock that, Matigari was only a fictional hero in a book of the same name. The novel was therefore "arrested" and banned in the land of Kenya in 1987, just a year after its publication. *Matigari* tells the story of a man who has survived the war of freedom and who comes out of the bush buries his AK47 under a fig tree (mugumo) and girds himself with a strip of bark from the tree as a symbol of peace. After this, he goes in search of his family to rebuild his home and start a new life and a peaceful future. He however, finds life in the newly independent state very far from his dreams. The usual colonial "business" was continuing very much as it did before. Using the name Matigari ma Nijurungi (the patriots who survived the bullets), and having been acquainted with a prostitute, (Guthera), a worker (Ngaruro wa Kiriro) and an orphan (Muriuki), he confronts the sons of those he had fought, demanding the house he had built with his sweat. He is thrown into jail where he meets a drunkard, a peasant farmer, a student, a teacher, a thief and the "vagrant". At the police cells, they tell one another their stories before escaping somewhat mysteriously and miraculously. As rumours about him spread, Matigari goes in search of Truth and Justice which he finds still absent in the lives of Kenyans who are ruled by corruption, fear and misery. In his search for Truth and Justice, he comes across people from all walks of life, old women, students, teachers, traders, priests, etc. Finally, at a public meeting, he asks the Minister of Truth and Justice and his "parrots" where Truth and Justice can be found. He is, however, arrested and locked up in a mental hospital. The novel rises towards a climax as Matigari realises that words alone cannot defeat the enemy. He then vows to use his buried weapons to achieve his true liberation. He takes off his 'belt of peace' and tramples upon it, remembering that "justice for the oppressed comes from a sharpened spear" (p.131) He escapes from the hospital and is tracked down by dogs and policemen. He eventually disappears, leaving his weapons and his words to those among the next generation who would take up the struggle. Although *Matigari* was written in Gikuyu and modelled on a traditional Gikuyu tale, it could be set anywhere in post-independence Africa. This is because it serves as a mirror, showing the true picture of life in post colonial African countries. Both *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* tell the history of the ruthless capitalist exploitation of the masses by those in privileged positions in independent and "free" Kenya. In his attempt to portray the atrocities of post independent Kenya Ngugi uses the experiences of the principal characters among the masses to represent the plight of the masses in general. Such experiences include those suffered by principal characters like Munira, Karega, Abdullah and Wanja and also Guthera, Matigari, Naruro wa Kiriro, the worker and Muriuki (the orphan) in *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* respectively. Similarly, Ngugi uses the deeds and misdeeds of the privileged few to chronicle the injustices of those in authority. Principal characters like Nderi wa Riera, the Member of Parliament for Ilmorog, Chui, Mzigo and Hawkins Kimeria in *Petals of Blood*

and then Williams junior, John Boy junior, Minister of Truth and Justice and his colleagues. Ministers in *Matigari* represent those in authority and the capitalist bourgeoisie who team up with Western businessmen to suck Kenya of her resources. In both novels Ngugi records instances of corruption and capitalist exploitation of the masses by those in authority through fair and foul means. Chui, Mzigo and Hawkins Kimeria are portrayed as powerful businessmen / entrepreneurs and capitalist exploiters who displace genuine but small businessmen like Abdullah and Wanja and deprive peasants of their lands. For instance we read about Wanja and Abdullah's thriving and prosperous business; about the extensions they are able to make to Abdullah's shop to sell Theng'eta and roasted goat meat to all who flock to Ilmorog to see the grounded plane. Their businesses flourish as they add more extensions so that they have a shop, butchery, a bar, a beer hall and some rooms where those in need can spend the night for a fee. Their dreams are short lived and are soon shattered with the threat by the local authority to auction Nyakinyua's (Wanja's grandmother) land. Wanja has to redeem her family land by all means and she does so at a great cost. She and Abdullah sell their new jointly owned building to none other than Mzigo, one of the capitalist exploiters and she uses her part of the proceeds to redeem the land. Again, the right to brew Theng'eta drink, a drink Wanja and Abdullah have popularized, is taken away from them; and we soon learn that on the orders of the Chiri County Council the license has been given once again to Mzigo and those who matter in the new scheme of things because they can manipulate the council to satisfy their whims and caprices. In the capitalist ethos of post independence Kenya, human values are perverted. Indeed, the exploitation and insatiable acquisition of wealth by the top few at the expense of the masses are a countrywide problem. For example Abdullah's effort to remain in business proves futile as he cannot cope with the aggressive and rigorous competition. It is indeed capitalist exploitation in that the few rich in authority employ various means to take the few possessions of the poor which they add to their already full baskets of possessions. Like a greater percentage of the masses, he descends to the lowest rung of the social ladder – he falls from a prosperous, genuine businessman to a drunken wretch now inhabiting a room in a mud walled barrack of a house. From the supermarket nearby, the workers take things on credit and do not pay in time and his stock consequently decreases so he reduces to a seller of sheepskins and fruits by the way side. He is reduced to almost a beggar. He is well known as a drunkard and seller of sheepskins and oranges. He tells Karega that they have been forced to demolish their old homes: “and now look at the place they have brought us to ...” (p.283) Abdullah comments on his situation as the situation of the poor masses. He says:

... all ways , for the poor go one way one way traffic: to more poverty and misery. Poverty is sin. But imagine. the poor who are held responsible for the sin that is poverty and so they are punished for it by being sent to hell. Hell to hell ...(p.284).

Ngugi comments further on the kind of accommodation enjoyed by the likes of Abdullah, an illustration of exploitation at the hands of government officials.

Occasionally, the Town Council has a clean-up, burn down campaign ... but surprisingly...
It is the shanties put up by the unemployed ...
Which get razed to the ground ...some County Councillors and officials were allocated them ...
Free ... and then sold them for more than fifty
Thousand shillings to others who rent them out to
Women petty traders ...(p.282)

A similar exploitation is presented in *Matigari* as Matigari narrates his experience with his white master, Williams, to us. We are informed about how Matigari labours only for his boss, Williams, to reap and enjoy the fruits of his labour. It is Matigari who toils to put up a house but Matigari has to sleep outside while his white boss, Williams sleeps in the house. Independent Kenya has got its scale of values miserably distorted and this Ngugi presents to us through the actions and inactions of Kenyan police. Ngugi brings to the fore the helplessness of the poor masses at the hands of the Kenyan police and those in authority; a helplessness which sometimes invariably constitutes sexual harassment. By the characterisation of some of the females Ngugi describes the helplessness of the masses, especially females at the hands of the Kenyan police and those in authority. In many cases the treatment constitutes sexual harassment. For instance, in *Matigari*, during Guthera's father's arrest and detention in police custody, the police officer in charge proposes a compromise so that her father would be freed.

My superiors do not know about this yet we can settle this matter between us here and now. Give me your purity ... you are carrying your father's life between your legs (p.35).

Guthera vehemently refuses to compromise. She prays fervently to God, her heavenly father, for a way out. Eventually, her father is killed. It is as a result of this bitter experience with the police officer that Guthera now has her eleventh commandment which is her personal philosophy. Her eleventh commandment according to her is: “I will never go to bed with a policeman” (p.37). Ngugi further reveals to us the corrupt nature of post-independent Kenya police both in character and attitude and goes ahead to demonstrate how helpless the masses are under the authority of the police. This is seen when Guthera finds herself at the mercy of the police officer from whom she has been trying to hide.

A crowd of people stood around Guthera, watching the policeman unleash terror on the woman. She was kneeling on the ground the dog would leap towards her, but each time its muzzle came close to her eyes, the policeman who held the lead restrained it. Guthera's wrapper lay on the ground. Each time she stood up to retreat, the dog jumped at her, barking and growling as though it smelled blood. Some people laughed, seeming to find the spectacle highly entertaining. A gush of urine rushed down her legs; she was staring death in the face (p.30).

This incident shows the extent to which the Kenyan police can go in their attempt to have their own way. Nobody protests in any way against this ruthless action by the police but rather allow themselves to be “trodden ... by these beasts ... [and]

hide themselves behind a cloak of silence” (p.31). Another incident which buttresses the point that the police take undue advantage of the blacks especially the helpless women is brought to the fore when Matigari is arrested and detained in police custody. This happens after Matigari has boldly and courageously rescued Guthera from her encounter with the policeman and his dog. Guthera, upon learning of Matigari's arrest and subsequent detention seems to have no option than to break her eleventh commandment by sleeping with the police officer so as to have Matigari released from police custody. Such ruthlessness is however not limited to the police alone, for in *Petals of Blood*, the masses in Kenya suffer similar predicament from those in authority. We are told that Wanja, even as a school girl, is seduced by a married man, who turns out to be the dishonourable Hawkins Kimeria. At a point in time the people of Ilmorog suffer the efforts of long drought and being unable to stand the deprivation decide to let the government hear of their plight and consequently come to their aid. They decide to contact the government through their member of Parliament (M.P.), Nderi Wa Riera.

This place has an M.P. We ... elected him to
Parliament to represent all the ... constituency.
Let us send a strong delegation of men, women
And children to the big city ... we shall see the MP ...
The government is bound to send us help ...
Otherwise the drought might swallow us all (p.113)

Again, during the epic journey, when the delegation from Ilmorog goes to present its petition to Nderi Wa Riera their MP, Joseph falls ill and we find Wanja, Karega and Ngugumu, the old man, seeking assistance from a house on Blue Hill where some men tie their hands behind them and further lock them up in darkness. The only way out is for Wanja to once again sleep with Hawkins Kimeria. She yields to Kimeria's demands because she fears her refusal would end in Joseph's death and the mission might fail and she would be blamed by all. In another development, we see Wanja, like any other black Kenyan woman, in her quest for money to put food on her table being forced by a German to sleep with his dog. Another revelation which Ngugi gives about the situation of the blacks, especially their young women is that they are invariably forced into prostitution by economic hardships. We read in *Matigari* that after Guthera refuses to give in to the police officer's compromise, she pleads with the priest who only reads the Ten Commandments to her. Eventually, her father is killed. She has her siblings to take care of but where is the wherewithal to do so? She has no option left to her but to walk the streets. Ngugi further presents people in authority and therefore in responsible positions as being irresponsible who have more or less betrayed the cause for which they are put in such positions of authority. Nderi Wa Riera, Member of Parliament for Ilmorog is portrayed as an irresponsible MP and he is symbolic of other MPs who are equally irresponsible. Nderi Wa Riera visits his constituency only when he is soliciting for votes during elections. He is also fraudulent. He collects money from some members of his constituency to use for a Harambee water projects which never materializes rather he shamelessly uses the money to secure a loan for his selfish gains. Like other MPs, Nderi wa Riera misuses his privileged position to amass wealth for himself at the expense of the peasant workers. For instance, he uses the money he collects for water as severity for further loans with which he buys

shares in companies and invests in land, in housing and in small business. He owns a number of plots and premises in Mombasa, Molinde and Watamu. Like other MPs, he has been given shares in several tourist resorts all along the coast. In fact, Nderi wa Riera, Chui, Mzigo and Hawkins Kimeria are presented as enemies of the people as they are always preoccupied with searching for new ways of exploiting the poor masses to enrich themselves. Unscrupulous as they are, they gamble away the country's money in casinos. Nderi, Kimeira and Mzigo are the brains behind the Kiama – Kamwene Cultural Organisation (KCO), an organization ostensibly formed to bring unity between the rich and the poor and bring cultural harmony to all the regions. However, this turns out to be a means of extorting money from the people to further the acquisitive and fraudulent interests of the organizers. Nderi wa Riera's words below sum up his evil and fraudulent intentions:

The following day he issued a statement promising to explore the possibilities of opening up the area for tourism; and of securing loans for people in Ilmorog – but only for true Ilmorogians, not outsiders sent there by his political enemies to make capital out of the natural disasters – to develop their shambus. He would soon launch a giant financial project – Ilmorog (KCO) investment and holdings Ltd – as a quick means of developing the area. Ilmorog would never be the same ... (p.187).

It is natural in a capitalist milieu to eliminate those who champion the cause of the poor and Nderi Wa Riera is again symbolic of the vindictiveness of those in authority who will not hesitate to eliminate by fair or foul means any suspected enemies. This explains why Nderi sees the lawyer as an enemy because he gets Munira, Karega and Abdullah acquitted. In fact, in Nderi's view Munira, Karega and Abdullah are merely “front men”, his real enemy is the lawyer. The lawyer is consequently killed and it is obvious Nderi gets him eliminated. For Ngugi tells us thus:

The lawyer was the brain behind it all. The lawyer was the enemy. He was the Enemy of KCO and progress. Even if it took him ten years, Nderi would surely have the lawyer eliminated. He would ask his henchmen to open a “file” for the lawyer in their minds (p.187)

After African countries gained their independence from their colonial masters, one would have expected a happy life in African societies but this is not so. Africans have rather made life unbearable for one another through their selfish desires. Another example of the bitter experience of post-independent Kenya or Africa for that matter, portrayed by Ngugi in his novels; both *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* is the brutal oppression of freedom and the merciless exploitation of the people. In *Matigari* Ngugi presents a politically tensed atmosphere in which the opposition party is banned and all gatherings of more than five people are banned by a decree of “His Excellency Ole Excellence”

Government bans the opposition party ...His Excellency Ole excellence has said that this is a people's government ...The people do not want opposition parties, as they only cause disorder in the

country ... (p.7)

The statement above is very typical of all military governments and is also a very useful strategy of neo-colonialists to perpetuate their existence. Per the statement, it is an offence punishable by law for any gathering of five or more since it is seen as being detrimental to the people's government. There is therefore no freedom of association. Ngugi also paints a realistic picture of the deplorable state of factory workers as well as the inhuman attitudes of employers towards employees as depicted by the descriptions below:

the factory building itself was inside a wall of metal sheeting, while barbed wire fenced the workers' quarters like prison ... the guard sat on a stool. He wore a khaki uniform and a red "fez" with a black tassel on the jacket. On the jacket were the words, "Guard, company property". At his feet was a tin with charcoal ... He was roasting sweet potatoes ... (p.10)

Yet situation on the abuse of human rights is well illustrated by Matigari's experience at the prison cells where we are given series of reports of oppression of human freedom. Among the inmates is a student who has also been arrested for asking the provincial commissioner about the running of the country since independence while a teacher is accused of teaching marxism in school. The drunkard has also been arrested for simply being drunk; and of course Matigari has been incarcerated for his search of truth and justice. Indeed all the prison inmates have a common disgust for the situation in which they find themselves and they blame no one but their African leaders. According to them:

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 (p.53).

The peasant farmer agrees with all these and also says:

It is true that our present leaders have no mercy. First they arrest us for no reason at all, then they bring us to a cell with no toilet facilities (p.55)

The worker further laments about how his strength has been sapped and his skin withered as he has worked at the factory all his life. He only hopes for nothing more than a clock as a "thank you" for long and loyal services; an old age without pension. During the meeting of the Minister of Truth and Justice and the striking workers, Ngugi further paints a realistic picture of the deplorable state of factory workers as well as the inhuman attitudes of employers towards employees. The issue of divided trade unions in most post-independent African societies, including Kenya, is tactfully shown by Ngugi through the workers' strike. The Anglo-American leather and plastic work, decides to sack all workers who went on strike and employ those who spend their time queuing for work. At the meeting, the Minister of Truth and Justice also orders the company to take all the workers with the exception of the ring leaders who he promised will be dealt with. During this same meeting of the Minister of Truth and Justice and the striking workers, the minister invites questions from the workers but ironically whoever asks a question is thrown into jail. Indeed the minister sums up his own attitude in his own words during

this meeting with the workers when he openly proclaims:

This Karl Marx has made these students and teachers crazy ... it is those who teach marxism in other words communism who spoil the students and our workers. That is why they should be detained without trial. (p106)

The strong bond between the ruling party and the private companies which exist in most post-independent African societies is also portrayed in the novel, *Matigari*. His Excellency Ole Excellency as well as his ruling party gets personal share donations from the Anglo-American leather and plastic company. In *Petals of Blood*, the treatment meted out to the workers of all categories constitutes abuse of human rights. Among the agricultural plantation workers, for instance, Ngugi portrays, exploitation at its worst where a hundred shillings is paid for a whole family's labour. In another instance, Karega is dismissed when he is caught in his attempt to mobilize the plantation workers. The same fate of exploitation is suffered by workers at another place or work, Macmullan Sugar works, where some peasants are driven off their land and those left are advised to stop growing food crops and grow sugar, which the company buys at prices it thinks fit. It follows therefore that, the workers live miserable lives and are unable to send their children to school. However, trade unions which are expected to serve the interest of the poor worker fail to function due to the very composition of the leadership of such unions. In Karega's words: ...the trouble with trade unions is that:

too often they are led by businessmen ... employers. How can an employer lead that which is fighting against employers? You cannot serve the interest of capital and labour at the same time. You cannot serve two opposed masters ... one master loses ... in this case labour ... The work ... the heat ... crumbs from the table ... (p. 288).

The effects of the social injustices like corruption, exploitation and capitalism are several and quite far reaching. The betrayal of human ideas is such one effort. To a very large extent, the theme of betrayal of human ideals is echoed in both novels. The issue of streetism, which is symbolic of such betrayal, is vividly portrayed in these works. In *Matigari*, for example, children who are supposed to be in the comfort of their homes with their parents, are rather seen at the "green" market, battling it out with the dogs, vultures, rats, and other scavengers for pieces of leather, patches of cloth, rotten tomatoes and even bones. Children, who are naturally lovers of sweets, do not hesitate to stuff their mouths with all kinds of sweets. The picture is however, different for the children at the "green market" whose mouths are stuffed not with sweets but rather with rotten tomatoes.

Each child now carried a small bundle or bits of thread, papers, plastic sheets, pipes and patches of cloth. ... some of the children had stuffed their mouths with rotten tomatoes, while others were busy cleaning bones with their teeth, hoping to find a scrap of meat (p. 12).

It is quite disappointing to learn that these children do not only eat from the rubbish dump, but they also sleep in wrecked cars for shelter. According to Muriuku, the orphan:

Each one of us has his own house
Mine is a Mercedes-Benz ...(p.16)

Human ideals are betrayed to such an extent that the plight of the children as discussed above does not attract anybody's sympathy but rather serves a fertile ground for further exploitation, corruption and betrayal. Ngugi presents to us, through a conversation between Matigari and Muriuku, the orphan, that in spite of their miserable situation, policemen collect "council tax" from them before they are allowed onto the rubbish dump. True to Muriuku's words Matigari finds the policemen, the tractor driver and the two men who have already collected the "council tax" from the children in conference behind a bush, apparently sharing their booty. Indeed, these adults simply rob the children of their "gains". Muriuku tells Matigari that:

When they see that they have found things like shoes, belts, pieces of leather or cloth in good condition, they pretend to be angry at us ... adults, people like you or others ... (p.13).

It is ironical that adults who should act responsibly by driving children away from danger rather drive them into it in order to profit from them. Another example of such betrayal is that the respect for the elderly which is supposed to be a societal norm has now turned otherwise. For instance, when the children first see Matigari around their "residence" he is recognized as an intruder and possibly an enemy so the children show no respect for him but rather pelt him with stones while adults look on unconcerned. A further illustration of a betrayal of cultural ideals is seen in the immoral lifestyles of those in authority. In *Petals of Blood* Wanja's brothel (Sunshine Lodge) is patronized by both "big men" and "small men" where she has hired young girls for the job.

... I have various types of men. Some prefer short ones, rude ones, tough ones, a different nationality ...I have them all (p.91)

People in authority, symbolized by Chui, Mzigo and Hawkins Kimeria who are expected to be responsibly married are all part of the clientele at Sunshine Lodge. In Wanja's words:

... Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria ... I go with all of them now ... I play them against one another...it is easy because I only receive them by appointment ... they pay for it ... They pay for their rivalry to possess me ...Each wants to make me his sole woman ...(p.293).

Sexual promiscuity is not limited to only the men but also to the women who are neck-deep into it. In *Matigari*, for instance, the wife of the Minister of Truth and Justice is used to portray this trait among high ranking women; when she is found stark naked in the bush with her own chauffeur; the same minister's wife who preaches on radio against prostitution and adultery. The injustices in the Kenyan society ultimately have some negative effects on the masses. Women, for instance are mostly reduced to prostitutes since they cannot cope with the

hardships that come their way. Wanja whose business has collapsed and has no money to invest anywhere is left with no alternative than to go back to prostitution. Her philosophy of life has now changed. Indeed her role here demonstrates post colonial Kenya. Wanja says:

As for me, it's a game ... of money ... you eat or you are eaten ... And now I can go anywhere ... even to their most expensive clubs ... they are proud to be seen with me ...even for one night ... and they pay for it...

I have to be hard ... it is the only way...the only way ... Look at Abdullah ... reduced to a fruit seller, oranges ... sheepskins ...No, I will never return to the hard times ... Never ... Never (p.293-294).

Wanja has hardened towards everyone for that is the demands of the times; even to Munira. Munira's first time at Wanja's brothel even at Wanja's own invitation is a full proof of this change:

... no free things in Kenya. A hundred shillings on the table if you want high-class treatment ... This is new Kenya. You want it you pay for it, for the bed and the light and my time and the drink I shall later give you and the breakfast tomorrow. And all for a hundred shillings. For you. Because of old times. For others it will be more expensive. (p.279)

Munira as well as the reader may be shocked but Wanja isn't. Everything is mercenary and so artificial, devoid of all natural feelings; so mechanical. Indeed, '... this world ... this Kenya ... this Africa knows only one law. You eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you'. (p.291) Guthera faces a similar situation after her father's death. She has her siblings to take care of but does not have the means. She pleads with the priest and the other Christians in the church who only referred to her as "a terrorist's child" (p.36). Finally, she has no option than to "walk the streets" so as to be able to get money to take care of herself and her siblings, even then:

... she could not earn enough to send them to school or to a place where they could learn useful skills ... (p.37)

Those other women who cannot be like Wanja and Guthera (prostitutes) find themselves doing menial jobs like bar maids and then as farm hands on the tea, coffee and cotton plantations. Such women toil endlessly for the few whites and black leaders like Robert Williams and John Boy Jnr. Abdullah, and other men like him, are reduced to "nothing". We see him descend from a prosperous businessman to selling oranges and sheepskin. Matigari also realises that he cannot possibly achieve his goal with the belt of peace around his waist and must therefore go back to the tree where he has buried his weapons to retrieve them. In spite of their apparent miserable situation Ngugi is suggesting that the masses should not resign themselves to such a fate. In other words, there is a clarion call by Ngugi for the masses to rise above their situations. In *Matigari*, this is demonstrated by Guthera's decision to help Matigari to trace his family and his people.

This decision comes after Guthera has been saved by Matigari from the police man and his dog and it is a way of showing her appreciation to him. Ultimately, it is a decision to stand for and support the truth because Matigari's mission is simply to look for truth and justice. Guthera's resolve is based on her thoughts thus:

... Throughout their conversation she had been wondering how she could express her gratitude for what he had done for her. Now was the chance, and she seized it ... I will go with him, support him until he finally finds his people. (p.39)

Guthera is resolute and in her attempt to protect the truth, stays by Matigari's side to the end; even when it becomes quite dangerous for her to do so. Matigari cautions her to go back in order that he can go and recover his weapons from under the mugumo tree after which he can claim his house and other property. But Guthera insists on going with him, even if it will cost her her life.

I will come too, ... one can die only once, and it is better to die in pursuit of what is right, ... from now on, I want to be among the vanguard I shall never be left behind again (p.139 – 140).

Guthera's words above represent the view of some of the blacks especially that of the leadership and entire membership of trade unions who know the truth and will pursue it no matter what it takes. Ngugi further reiterates this view when he remarks through Guthera that majority of the masses have hitherto been compelled into acts which are against their wills and which they will never do again now that they know the truth. Guthera confesses to Matigari and Muriuki thus;

What I really want to say is that most of the things I have been doing so far have not sprung from my being able to choose. ... I have never done anything which came from free choice. I've been moved here and there by time and place (p.140).

Guthera concludes her speech on the note that she is now a woman of substance who does things on her own free will and who has decided to support a just and worthy cause. In *Petals of Blood*, Wanja becomes revengeful and decides to retaliate. Perhaps Ngugi is hinting at the fact that the masses are tired and fed up with the autocratic leaders and are perhaps ready to revolt. Her intention is to retaliate against Chui, Mzigo and Hawkins Kimeria; of the latter she says inside her: "one day you will pay for this, she said inside her, one day you will pay for this" (p.154) She accomplishes her mission when she hits and kills Kimeria with a panga she is holding just before she faints in the scene of the arson. The entire scene which unfortunately leads to the arson is an attempt at vengeance on the part of Wanja, to be meted out to Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria. In Wanja's words concerning Kimeria "He must die" (p. 157) and he eventually dies at Wanja's hands. Ngugi uses this episode as a way of getting even with the perpetrators of the injustices of post colonial Kenya. Ngugi expertly achieves his goal of unveiling the atrocities of independent Kenya by a skilful blending and manipulation of a wide variety of literary devices including dialogue, allusion, irony and flashback. In both *Matigari* and *Petals of Blood* Ngugi uses allusions in his

presentations. This is a reference to a person, thing, event, situation or an aspect of culture and this may be drawn from literature, myth, history or the bible. In these novels however, Ngugi uses mostly biblical allusions. In *Petals of Blood*, the story is divided into four parts. Part one is called "walking", part two: "toward Bethlehem", part three: "to be born" and part four "again, laluta continua". These names are reminiscent of the bible version of the second coming of Christ. Again, these names are a reflection of W.B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming".

...surely the second coming is at hand... line 10
...slouches towards Bethlehem to be born. Line 22

Similarly, there are a number of references to the mission, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in *Matigari* including the following.

Do you mean to say he is the one prophesied about (p.81) Jesus Christ, the lord who would bring the new Jerusalem here on earth (p.156). And when the time for the supper came he took the bread and after breaking it said: "this is my body (p.57). Suddenly, lightning flashed and a peal of thunder rent the sky (p.174).

Also Matigari's escape from prison with the others is a perfect enactment of the biblical story about an angel who opened the prison gates for Apostle Paul and others to escape. There is also frequent use of the name angel "Gabriel" in *Matigari*. Through these biblical allusions, Ngugi projects the eponymous hero Matigari, as a powerful force, seeking the redemption of the oppressed just like Jesus Christ did. Interior monologue is another device by means of which Ngugi discusses the social, economic and political injustices that have bedevilled post-independent Kenya. In *Petals of Blood*, for instance, Karega ponders over the changing fortunes of the peasants, workers, semi-workers, criminals and prostitutes, now struggling to eke out a precarious living and unable to face the competition offered by the more organised big scale production. Some of whom have lost their lives in the process. Karega wonders:

... for what was the point of a world in which one could only be clean by wiping his dirt and shit and urine on others? A world in which one could only be healthy by making others carry one's leprosy? A world in which one could only be saintly and moral and upright by prostituting others? Why, anyway, should the victims of a few people's cleanliness and health and saintless and wealth be expected to always accept their lot? ... (p.303).

In *Matigari* several examples of interior monologue are seen in the narrative one of which is illustrated when Guthera wonders how she can return Matigari's kindness after he had rescued her from the humiliating experience with the policemen and their dog. She ponders thus:

Gurthera contemplated the question for a while. Throughout their conversation, she had been wondering how she could express her gratitude ... (p.39).

Both novels reveal Ngugi's special liking for the past and he uses flashback as a technique to bring the past into the present. His use of flashback demonstrates the significance of the interpretation of the past and the present. Ngugi, like Achebe, has the historical sense. The present is important, but so is the past, for the past is necessary for the interpretation of the present. Indeed *Petals of Blood* is cast in the form of a flashback set within the frame of an existential present moment and hence the novel does not necessarily follow a chronological sequence. Ngugi uses flashback to fill the reader in on important happenings which take place before the present time, in both novels.

3 Conclusion

By means of various literary devices Ngugi successfully brings to the fore atrocities and injustices that bedevil post-independence Kenya, throwing *Petals of Blood* light on the effects of such injustices on the masses. At the backdrop, however, Ngugi is suggesting to the masses not to succumb to their miserable situation but to rise up and shake off the effects of post colonialism. It is pathetic to note that the decadent societies portrayed by Ngugi in and *Matigari* exist in real life. In recent times, Africans have lost their lives through animosities. The Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda are typical examples of societies who have lost their value for human ideals through the quest for power. For instance, there a number of power drunk African leaders who do not want to wield power but rather want to hang on to power. Today, thousands of human skulls stare in the faces of visitors at the museum built in Rwanda in remembrance of such human bestiality. Like *Matigari*, these skulls seem to pose the question: 'where can one find truth and justice in the land?'

4 References

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