

MORTAL PERFDY OF MUNIRA IN NGUGI WA THIONGO'S *PETALS OF BLOOD*

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Abstract

The study shows a vivid portrayal of the theft of rural peace and dignity of the community of Ilmorog during the process of its transformation from a rural village to a new industrial Ilmorog as a result of the urban greed and poverty and a bitter critique of Kenyan neo colonialism by bringing to light the social and economic effects of capitalism through the character Munira in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood*.

Petals of Blood is the first of Ngugi's novels written after *A Grain of Wheat* about the post independent Kenya. In *Petals of Blood*, he transmits the wealthy landowners as well as the politicians who capitalise on the miseries of others, continuing their economic inequality and social injustice.

Petals of Blood unties the painful tragedy of the lives of four main characters Munira, Abdulla, Wanja and Karega by showing the interruption and confusion of once proud Ilmorog community struggling against the urban public officers Chui, Mzigo, Kimeria, Nderiwa Riera and their fellows Nairobi.

The novel refers to the corruption and greed of Kenya's political, economic and social choice after the struggle for freedom from British rule. The colonisers have not returned the wealth of the land to its people but spread the social prejudice and economic dissimilarity that were a feature of colonial oppression.

The novel deals with the fictional agricultural village Ilmorog dealing with the lives of the four main characters Munira, Abdulla, Wanja and Karega, The New Ilmorog is a knot of confused and disordered lives engulfed by the public officials like Kimeria, Chui, Nderi wa Riera and the like who embody the vices of capitalism. The new Ilmorog has been a land where the natives are disregarded due to the economic and political betrayal of the power choice.

The Chief Inspector Godfrey of the Kenyan Police Force investigates the principal suspecting Munira, Abdulla, Wanja and Karega, the four main characters in the novel into the murder of three men; Kimeria, Chui and

Mzigo, the public officers and businessmen with their investments in New Ilmorog. Ngugi unleashes the lives of the four main characters and the strange pattern of interrelationships between the characters bring out the ill effects of capitalist Kenya.

The village of Ilmorog had once been a thriving place which had its days of glory founded by a brave herdsman, Ndemi who began cultivation of the lands:

It had had its days of glory: thriving villages with a huge population of sturdy peasants who had tamed nature's forests and, breaking the soil between their fingers, had brought forth every type of crop to nourish the sons and daughters of men. How they toiled together, clearing the wilderness, cultivating, planting: how they all fervently prayed for rain and deliverance in times of drought and pestilence! And at harvest times they would gather in groups, according to ages, and dance from village to village, spilling into Ilmorog plains, hymning praises to their founders (120).

Ilmorog was rich with its oral traditions and was one of the greatest natural beauties in the world, "plains are themselves part of that Great Rift that formed a natural highway joining Kenya to the land of the Sphinx and to the legendary waters of the River Jordan in Palestine" (68). Ilmorog was then conquered by European settlers and colonialists who misused it and even after independence it continued to remain as a overcome, isolated ghost of its former self. The natives hoped for the best to happen after the independence but they were disillusioned of their

hopes and dreams. This disappointment prompted them to fight to bring back their glorious past. The socio-economic betrayal of Old Ilmorog in the novel can be seen from Munira's first visit to the drought - ridden Ilmorog village to reopen the school. Munira is the son of a wealthy and pious worker, Ezekiel uses Christianity to prosper by converting the innocent villagers. Growing up with the wealthy father, brothers and sisters made a fair entry into the middle classes he was never happy and also expelled for joining the strike at Siriana School Munira is considered a failure by others. His marriage to a pagan woman Wanjiri, makes him judge himself a failure. He tries to overcome his failure and to find something new.

In Ilmorog, Munira decides to isolate himself from the society and arranged a busy schedule for him. "Classes all day; a walk to the ridge; then a stroll to Abdulla's place [a small bar]" (19). Like Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*, he consciously chose to stay away from all reality. He hardly ventures back home and if at all he happens to go, he hardly ever stays more than a night. At his very arrival to Ilmorog, Munira senses an environment of poverty, neglect and decay. The social and political betrayal by NderiwaKimeria is well revealed to Munira. Being the member of the power elite, Nderi wa Riera is only concerned of his votes providing fake promises to the community to win their votes. He never turns up to understand the real plight of a poverty-ridden village like Ilmorog or rather tries to come up with means to raise the village from its present situation. He ignores the needs of the community and acts as social plague through his cunning and hollow speech. Cook and Okenimpke call him, "Ngugi's prototype of the new politician, conforming to the egocentric assumptions of the power group without questioning its ethics or seeking to reform the system" (93). As an outsider, Munira is at first mocked at by the village folks. His efforts to reconstruct the old school are seen as absurd: "He would go away with the wind, said the elderly folk: had there not been others before him? Who would settle in this wasteland except those without" (5). Despite his early difficulty in Ilmorog, Munira discovers the source of the betrayal of the community by its poverty. Urban seems to be a chief source of the betrayal of the attraction of Nairobi who forced the young to abandon their families. As an old woman complains Munira:

Our young men and women have left us. The glittering metal has called them. They go, and the young women only return now and then to deposit newborn with their grandmothers already aged with scratching this earth for a morsel of life. They say:

there in the city there is room for only one... our employers, they don't want babies about the tiny rooms in tiny yards (7).

Munira doesn't seem to interfere with anything that doesn't benefit him. This selfish attitude is seen in his teaching as well. Though Munira seems to stay indifferent into all the happenings in the community, he is aware of the anxiety happening in the village and the cause behind it. His responsibility towards the reconstruction of the village is very limited. He is hesitant to put his heart and soul to renovate the dry and ruined village. He is seen as a self-conceited fellow wishing to remain within the comfort zone. Like Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*, Munira seems to stay comfortable in the protection, where he would not have to make any social commitment. This is an act of private betrayal of Munira for being indifferent to the changes in the society.

Munira's own private betrayal was only witness the differences of imperialism. His only interest is found in refining the atmosphere of the village. When he meets Karega, he appoints him as a teacher. Incidentally, Karega happens to be a person much interested in social activities. He has a desire to raise Ilmorog from its poor condition.

Munira become unresponsive to the hardship of others, but fails to take care of himself and slowly drifts into bad habits that bring him disgrace. His hesitancy to care for himself is an act of self - denial or self - betrayal. Urbanisation has been taking a toll upon the main characters one by one. For Munira, it's the beginning of a painful ten-year process of self-discovery which is distorted by religious fantasies. The MP accuses Munira, Abdulla and Karega for being rebellious and also responsible for Ilmorog to become an Island of underdevelopment. " an island of underdevelopment which being sucked thin and dry was itself left standing, a grotesque image of peasant life" (184).

Munira through his social alienation and uncertainty is able to understand symptoms of the exploitation through urbanization that is happening in Ilmorog in its transformation to the New Ilmorog. "The New Ilmorog of one or two flickering neon-lights; of bars, lodgings, groceries, permanent sales, and bottled Theng'eta; of robberies, strike, lockouts, murders and attempted murders; of prowling prostitutes in cheap night clubs; of police stations, police raids, police cells" (190).

The village is seized by the power of the corrupted officials. The peasants are alienated from their land losing their ownership of the land. They end up being homeless.

Power and wealth come to the hands of the power hungry public officials. The innocent villagers of Ilmorog are the little flowers prevented from seeing the light by the huge tree symbolising the neo colonial process.

References

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