

# From Halcyon to Turbulence: A Study on Human Betrayal in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood*

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**Abstract:** - The study aims at exploring the impact of colonialism and neo colonialism captured by Ngugi in his novels *Petals of Blood* through a thematic analysis of betrayal. The study also attempts to excavate Ngugi's strong nationalist vision of a Socialistic Kenya by expressing his desire for a social upheaval. Neo colonialism is the new kind of colonization taking place in a new and different way which paralyses the economic, political and cultural growth of a decolonized nation. It has been believed that Kenya would achieve its nationalist vision after its independence. But to his dismay Ngugi realized that post independent Kenya is driven by corruption, socio – political, economic exploitation and disillusionment cast mostly on the peasants and the working community by the political leaders who have emerged since independence. Neo colonial Kenya is led by the representatives of former colonial masters and other foreign interests affecting the country's growth and development. The novel *Petals of Blood* illustrates the social, economic, political and cultural effects of neo colonialism in the neo colonial Kenya which is now ruled by the Black elite who perpetuates economic inequality and social injustice. The study concludes in expressing Ngugi's fervent desire of social upheaval in Kenya marking a practicable path to change.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (formerly James Ngugi) is a Kenyan novelist, dramatist and an essayist who formerly wrote in English and now writes in Gikuyu. He makes an unflinching attempt to make peasants and the worker community of his country aware of their social status and the importance of their toil in the neo colonial Kenya.

*Petals of Blood* brings out the drawbacks of colonialism and neo colonialism in Kenya through the exploration of the theme of betrayal. Colonialism has had its harsh effects on the lives of the individuals. As a result characters involve in the act of a private betrayal or public betrayal. The impact of revolution is so intensive that they are deprived of their benevolence and are compelled to betray individuals leading to the betrayal of the whole society by stepping into the shoes of the imperialist power. The individual betrayal leads to the betrayal of the communities which in turn leads to a national betrayal perpetuating neo colonialism.

In *Petals of Blood* (1977), Ngugi carries forward the theme of betrayal by indicting the wealthy landowners as well as the politicians who capitalize on the miseries of others, thereby perpetuating economic inequality and social injustice. The novel is a vivid portrayal of the despoliation 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 degradation.

*Petals of Blood* unravels the heart-rending tragedy of the lives of four main characters Munira, Abdulla, Wanja and Karega. It depicts the dislocation and disorientation of once proud Ilmorog community struggling against the indignities of the malignant and vicious urban elite public officers.

The New Ilmorog is a tangle of bewildered and disoriented lives engulfed by the inhuman nature of bourgeois 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 marginalized due to the economic and political betrayal of the power elite. Ilmorog was rich with its oral traditions and was one of the greatest natural beauties in the world. As time passed by Ilmorog was conquered by European settlers and colonialists who exploited it and even after independence it continued to remain as a ravished economically. The natives hoped for the best to happen after the independence but they were disillusioned of their hopes and dreams. This disappointment triggered them to fight to bring back their glorious past.

The socio-economic betrayal of Old Ilmorog in the novel can clearly be seen from Munira's first visit to the drought - ridden Ilmorog village to reopen the school. His marriage to a pagan woman Wanjiru makes him judge himself as a failure. He tries to overcome his failure and to find something new. To find out his own way of life he escapes to the drought – ridden Ilmorog where only a few peasants were seen frequently coming to the

bar owned by Abdulla and where children attended school very rarely in a haphazard manner.

In Ilmorog, Munira decides to isolate himself from the society and arranges a busy schedule for him. He hardly ventures back home and if at all he happens to go, he hardly ever stays more than a night. Munira senses an environment of impoverishment, neglect and decay. Munira is then socially and politically betrayed by Nderi wa Kimeria. Being the member of the power elite, Nderi wa Riera is only concerned of his votes. He deliberately ignores the social and economic needs of the community and acts as social plague. His responsibility towards the reconstruction of the village is very limited.

Munira's own private betrayal was only to witness the discrepancies of neo colonialism. When he meets Karega, he appoints him as a teacher who is much interested in social activities. He has a desire to raise Ilmorog from its impoverished condition. Urbanization has been taking a toll upon the main characters one by one.

Wanja has been experiencing the impact of the exploitative power in Ilmorog in the form of guilt. Her dreams of building a joyous life are shattered. She experiences a series of ironic reversals as she pursues her quest. As a school girl, she gets seduced by Kimeria, an elderly man who abandons her when she becomes pregnant. Wanja throws her new-born child into a drain and lives with the guilt of her act. She comes to Ilmorog to find peace. Abdulla, a Mau Mau freedom fighter supports her by relieving her pains, "I know what it is to carry a live wound. And I am not talking of this leg stump. Stay in Ilmorog. Let us face what you call this hole together" (77).

Another person to be affected the most is Abdulla. He has been a brave freedom fighter of the Mau Mau revolt and has lost a leg in the revolt. The rewards of the independence he expected do not come his way. Dissatisfied and unhappy of the Kenyatta government's betrayal of the Mau Mau rebellion, Abdulla inspires the village to fight against the neglect of Nderi and the Kenyan neo colonial government. Nderi and the fake system had betrayed and alienated them. Even the isolated Munira accepts the effects of the journey: As Ngugi states in *Decolonizing the mind*, "Without the soil, without land, without nature there is no human community. Unlike the beast that merely adapts itself to its habitation, man through the labour process, acts on the natural environment" (7). Abdulla provides the spiritual unity to the journey to Nairobi.

He also attempts to provoke the villagers to turn against the intruders. He accuses Munira, Abdulla and Karega for being rebellious and also responsible for Ilmorog to have 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).

Ngugi in the next part of the novel shows some sense of hope to the people revealing the success of the journey towards Nairobi. There comes transformation and a new hope that leads to a good harvest. The Ilmorog community celebrates this occasion with their ancient songs and dance.

Towards the end of the novel Ngugi brings out the brutal and deteriorating effects of neo colonialism. The Trans-African Highway, another mark of urbanization which is built bifurcating the village wipes out the old priest Mwathi's place to the ground. More than development, the Highway that has been built reveals the social and economic exploitation of the multi-national companies. As the construction goes on, Abdulla and Wanja begin a new life by selling meat and drinks to the visitors. Their business crashes down again and petty shopkeepers are evicted.

Economically and politically the village is usurped by the power of the corrupted officials. The peasants are alienated as they have to lose their land and end up being homeless. Power and wealth come to the hands of the power hungry public officials. Women have become vulnerable victims to the predatory sex hungry bourgeoisie in a neo colonial society. In the name of development, they deceive the entire community by further alienating the peasants from their land. The innocent villagers of Ilmorog are the little flowers that are prevented from seeing the light by the huge tree symbolizing the neo colonial process.

Urbanization and modernization lead to the deterioration of traditional values in New Ilmorog. The public officials capitalize on the miseries of the peasants and worker communities in Ilmorog. The national betrayal and negligence of the corrupted power officials have alienated the worker communities from their own land affecting the lives of the poor people. Karega, who works as teacher ends up being a rebel. Abdulla loses his shop and ends up being an orange seller on the road side. Wanja ends up being a prostitute in the New Ilmorog and Munira gets into drinking and ends up being a religious fanatic burning Wanja's whore house. The tentacles of the elite in power have ravished the state of the Ilmorog community by depriving its natives of enjoying any benefits in their own land.

#### WORKS CITED

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