

SEEKING JUSTICE AGAINST NEO-COLONIALISM THROUGH RESISTANCE: EXAMPLES FROM NGUGI'S *MATIGARI*

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Abstract

*Numerous instances bound of the severe injustices occasioned by the neo-colonial leadership styles of contemporary African political heads. Consequently, neo-colonialism is perceived to be a continuation of the economic model of colonialism after the colonized territories have attained political independence. This paper evaluates Ngugi's *Matigari* to decipher how neo-colonialism precepts still plague the African people under the mask of paternalism. The paper discovers that Ngugi's *Matigari* is a protest against the oppressive tendencies in Africa and a call for Africans to seek justice against internal political domination so as to liberate the neo-colonized African society. The conclusion in this paper is that neo-colonialism is a way of expanding the colonizer's dominance so as to utilize the resources of their colonies for the Western regional gains, thus, there is every essence to protest in demand for justice against neo-colonial reigns in African states at every instance as demonstrated by Ngugi's authorial creativity.*

Keywords: Justice, Resistance, Decoloniality, colonialism, neo-colonialism.

Introduction

Neo-colonialism, which is a creation of colonialism, is a destructive force that shapes not only the political futures of the countries involved but also the identities of colonised people. Literature written by neo-colonized people often includes attempts to articulate more empowered identities and an attitude towards reclaiming lost cultures. This culminates into what is referred to as Postcolonial literature. Many post-colonial writers write in English and focus on common themes such as the emigration, national identity, and allegiance. According to Vasil Vajrushev, "neocolonialism is a colonial policy by the imperialist powers with new hidden mechanisms in order to reinforce capitalism, maximize profit and maintain the economic, political, ideological and military influences of colonial times" (30). A first official definition of neo-colonialism was provided by the all-African people's conference in 1961 resolution on Neo-colonialism, defining it as the survival of the colonial system in spite of formal recognition of political independence in emerging countries that became victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military, or technical means.

Neo-colonialism seen as a continuation of the economic model of colonialism after a colonized territory has achieved formal political independence. This concept was applied most commonly to Africa in the latter half of the twentieth century. European countries had colonized most of the continent in the late nineteenth century, instituting a system of economic exploitation in which African raw materials, particularly cash crops and minerals were expropriated and exported to the sole benefit of the colonizing power. The idea of neo-colonialism however, suggests that when European powers granted nominal political independence to colonies in the decades after World War II, they indirectly continued to control the economies of the new African counties.

Ngugi's *Matigari* is a call for Africans to seek for justice against internal political domination so as to liberate the neo-colonized African society. Neo-colonialism still plagues African people under the mask of uninterrupted paternalism and the fashionable globalization policy which has aroused mixed reactions that some regard as a blessing while others are convinced that it is simply the old game of colonial domination in disguise. Kwame Nkrumah in his forward to *Not Yet Uhuru*, observes that "although political independence is a noble achievement in the struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism, its effectiveness is superficial unless economic and cultural independence is also achieved" (21). This goes to indicate that before independence, African political leaders are seen to generally embody the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, these political leaders are seen to be far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people. This culminates into the continuous oppression by local elites of many African countries asserting that neo-colonialism still plagues independent African counties to the detriment of their citizens. This paper discusses Ngugi's *Matigari*, to show how the characters react against neo-colonialism to seek justice against political system of Kenya so as to suggest ways and strategies of liberating the neo-colonized African society.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored under the premise of Decoloniality Theory. Decoloniality theory seeks to understand the persistence of coloniality, not just in the legacies of imperialism but in the very organisation of the world. Decoloniality strives for the liberation of the colonized through the decentring of the colonial matrix of power. It entails a mode of critique which combats the perceived universalism of coloniality and its associated systems. Catherine Walsh defines decoloniality as a system which "seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence,

analysis and thought” (qtd. in Quijano, 343). Walsh's definition further explains decoloniality as an ongoing and evolving process. Decoloniality is also not just anti-colonialism, it is more than just a reaction or response to coloniality, and it is not merely its opposite. Instead, decoloniality and decolonial thinking seek to identify the systems of knowledge and thought to think beyond the colonial framework. What this means is that the theory is an effort to think relationally outside of the categories, hierarchies and binaries of coloniality.

According to Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni in “Decoloniality as the Future of Africa”, decolonialism is focused on re-birthing humanity from racial hierarchization and uneven power relations which has existed since the colonial days. (489). Maldonado-Torres also sees decoloniality as the “... the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the representation of racial, gender, and geopolitical hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world struggles” (33). According to Sylvia Wynter, decoloniality as a theory is premised on three concepts of analysis viz: coloniality of power – which helps in investigating into how the current global political hegemony was constructed, constituted, and configured; the coloniality of knowledge - which focuses on understanding how endogenous and indigenous knowledge have been pushed to what became understood as 'the barbarian margin society'; and the coloniality of being - which gestures into the pertinent questions of the making of modern subjectivities and into issues of human ontology (257). In this regard, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has greatly enriched the decoloniality archive with arguments such as *Decolonising the Mind* – which speaks to the urgency of dealing with epistemicides and linguisticide; *Moving the Centre* which addresses the problem of Euro-North American centrism; *Re-Membering* which talks about uniting a dismembered and fragmented continent and *Globaletics* which gestures towards post-racial liberality as the home of new

humanity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 493). All of these concentrates on envisioning a new African humanity living in free, united, peaceful and prosperous Africa.

Obviously, for the purpose of this paper, decoloniality is pitched against neo-colonialism to seek to unmask, unveil, and reveal that coloniality has remained an underside of modernity that co-existed against the desires of independent progress, fraternity, and liberty of the African identity. Thus it is used in this context as a particular kind of critical theory which seeks to disentangle former colonised parts of the world from any form of coloniality.

Synopsis of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari*

Matigari is a story of a man, a former Mau Mau fighter, who returns from fighting the colonialists in the forest. He buries his AK-47 and sword, and girds himself with a belt of peace then sets out to look for his family and home. He comes back to his locale which is unnamed but clearly a reflection of Kenya, to take possession of what he had fought for. Using the name Matigari Ma Nijiruungi, "the patriots who survived the bullets", he joins up with a worker by name Ngaruro, a prostitute Guthera, and an orphan Muruiki to confront Settler Williams and John Boy, demanding the house he built. He finds out that those who did not fight for the land have actually taken over not just the land but his house, property and everything he worked for, leaving him nothing. Once he commences his search, it becomes clear that his home and family are ambiguous: it becomes the search for justice and truth. He is disappointed during his search because of what has become of his homeland and how the masses continue to be under the oppression of neo-colonial oppression. He is humiliated by the police and government and so he resorts to arms. He vows never to allow John Boy to sleep in his house nor to allow the new government to continue oppressing the people. Thus, he decides to put off the belt of peace and vows to wage war on the oppressors of his people. With his new spirit of war, Matigari goes into action by inciting a strike at the factory which later destroys John Boy's house with a

fire and leads the on-looking mob to burn all other houses and cars belonging to government ministers. The police give up on Matigari, but when his Excellence Ole Excellence promises a reward to whoever finds Matigari, a search begins. Matigari, Guthera and Muriuuki head for the Mugumo tree where his weapons of warfare are, but they are caught by the police dogs. Muriuuki manages to escape and gets to the Mugumo where he recovers the weapons buried there by Matigari. Matigari and Guthera struggle to rescue themselves from the police, with Guthera shot in the leg. They finally manage to rescue themselves as they jump into the river. However, the mysterious thing is that Matigari and Guthera are neither spotted dead nor alive as their end becomes a mystery.

The Quest for Justice against Neo-Colonialism through Resistance in Ngugi's *Matigari*

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's writings have over the decades revolved around this modern postcolonial concept of resistance against colonialism or any form of it that is left off as a result of the conquest. He uses the history of colonization to throw light on the African past and, in the course, edify and conscientize Africans of their historical consciousness. He has successfully brought to fore the atrocities and injustices that bedevil post-independent African states, throwing light on the effects of these injustices on the people generally.

It is pathetic to note that the decadent societies portrayed by Ngugi in *Matigari* exist in reality, thus, Ngugi is suggesting that Africans should not succumb to their glum state but to rise up and shake off the effects of post colonialism in neo-colonial edicts for justice. Recently, Africans have lost their lives through animosities by their fellow African leaders. 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 *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" (7). The statement is typical of all military governments and is a strategy of neo-colonialists to perpetuate their misdeeds against the people. Ngugi depicts the Kenyan peasants and workers as deeply aware of the ignominious effects of neo-colonial exploitation, and as dedicated in their opposition. His projection of the peoples' resistance to colonialism and neo-colonial exploitation in Kenya is woven around the historical theme of the Mau Mau, a movement which the Gikuyu peasants precipitated into a protracted revolt in order to obtain justice and regain their freedom to retrieve their usurped land.

There is a tendency among African politicians to become corrupt once they get into power and that they become more corrupt as they become more powerful. From a moral and intellectual point of view when those who take on the mantle of leadership after independence behave like the oppressors, against whom the masses struggle, there is the need for the people to form an alliance to create a resistance against such the neo-colonial leadership. This is because independence in itself is a necessary condition for development but not a sufficient one since politicians tend to turn same to institutions of personal gain. Development comes from having selfless leaders; leaders who look beyond their belly and hear the groaning of the masses; leaders who have vision for the betterment of the country rather than for their own interests. From the passage, it is clear that the

new government is not a democratic government, but dictatorial. We can argue therefore that no freedom or liberation has been attained by the people Ngugi portrayed in *Matigari*.

Justice and liberation is attained when the people are said to be truly free and in control of all the tools or instruments of their physical, economic, political, cultural and psychological being. According to Gustavo Gutierrez, liberation expresses the aspirations of the oppressed peoples and social classes emphasizing the conflicting aspects of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes. Thus, in the text *Matigari* Ngugi clearly shows that in the place of the liberation that the nationalists fought for is neo-colonialism in all its manifestations: oppression, exploitation, social abuse and injustice. The people fight for freedom from imperial domination, only to come under black bourgeoisie domination. Ngugi helps us to understand this by creating in *Matigari* a search motif. Matigari is in search of his family, truth and justice, and Settler William, but he is also being searched for by the police and people of his country. Matigari takes it upon himself to search for truth and justice but finds none. The indication here is that colonialism is not completely abolished but has been merely replaced with neo-colonialism.

Ngugi in *Matigari* uses literary creativity geared towards garnering the people's revolt and resistance against neocolonialism. The novel is filled with songs, poems, and slogans, which are used as tools for propaganda. The songs are tools the masses employ to confront the government. They see Matigari as a hero and thus compose a song in praise of him: "Show me the way to a man whose name is Matigari ma Njiruungi, Who stamps his feet to the rhythm of bells, and the bullets jingle. And the bullets jingle" (71). This song indicates Matigari's ability to conquer. Through the song it is obvious that the absence of justice and the presence of oppression by the neo-colonial powers of the political class. Matigari asks for the

whereabouts of truth and justice using a song or a poem, but he is merely told, by the Minister of Truth and Justice, to stop speaking in parables (113). Earlier the Minister promises to speak “the plain truth” (101), and his discomfort with Matigari's parable suggests a suspicion of his ability to maintain political control through unjustified means. It is through the songs of Matigari that it becomes obvious that the Minister's language is politically ill-powerful; especially that his decrees become laws immediately they are voiced: “His decision is just and true. It is now law” (118). The law that the voice of the Minister becomes imprint in his administration the opportunity to exercise cruelty in neo-colonial precepts.

The name “Matigari” means “the patriots who survived the bullets or the patriots who survived the liberation war” (20). These semantic representation of the name becomes symbolic as it inevitability represents resistance. Through the character of Ngaruro it becomes obvious that “Patriots are those who went to the forest to fight for freedom” (20). Through the name 'Matigari' Ngugi is able to demonstrate the people's desire for freedom, the need to oust the neocolonialists and the need for a new government. A patriot is said to be a person who loves his country and fights the enemy to protect it. Thus, by suggesting the name 'Matigari', Ngugi clearly shows that resistance against leadership is necessary as efforts to bring about the needed and change. Another instance of resistance in *Matigari* can be seen when Matigari wrestles with Settler Williams in the mountains:

You know that the fire of freedom was first lit in the forests and mountains,' Ngaruro explained. 'That is true,' Matigari said. These children were too young to know. Take me, for example. Settler Williams and I spent many years in those mountains you see over there, hunting one another down through groves, caves, rivers, ditches, plains, everywhere. I would sometimes catch sight of him in the distance, but by the time I was ready to fire, he had disappeared in the bush, and he would be swallowed by

the darkness of the forest. 'At times he would push me into a corner, but by the time he fired, I had already ducked... And so, day after day, week after week, month after month, many years rolled past. Neither of us was prepared to surrender. (20)

The wrestling between Matigari and Settler Williams is as a result of Matigari's belief in rebelling and waging resistance against neocolonialists to bring justice, hope and transformation to his society. Matigari believes that to overthrow Settler Williams is the only way to regain his house and thus, he goes into the forest to fight Williams. The house Matigari built and intends to repossess is now in the hands of John Boy and Robert Williams and the administration of the country is now in the hands of the black bourgeoisie and not the freedom fighters. He thus vows never to allow John Boy to sleep in the house. At first he believes in peace and so approaches John with words alone. When this fails he employs force. He realises that one cannot defeat the enemy with arms or words alone. And with that, he plunges into the forest to retrieve his weapons to fight John Boy and Williams, thus: "Since last night, I have now learned a new lesson-or, rather, learned a new and an old lesson. The enemy can never be driven out by words alone, no matter how sound the argument. Nor can the enemy be driven out by force alone. But words of truth and justice, fully backed by armed power, will certainly drive the enemy out" (138). This scenario indicates the presence of resistance in bringing about the expected change.

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" (131). Matigari thus destroys John Boy's house and mobilises the crowd to burn the properties of the government. Ngugi through the character Matigari urges the oppressed people to resist and fight against new capitalism visible in the neo-colonial clothing preached by

the heirs of colonialists. He invites the exploited people to unite for efficient productiveness in order to meet their needs of shelter, clothes, and food. Ngugi a Marxist seems to want to make his past his future: he would revive social and cultural structures of the past as a reality of the future, and what he calls for to accomplish this is a present resistance that will stir up a revolution not to achieve something new but to restore an ideal pre-colonial state that he, at least, takes to have been of original peace, harmony, justice, and goodness. Due to Matigari's mission or persuasion, the workers agree to resist, and struggle to fight against the neocolonial exploitation. Following Matigari's footsteps, the Leader of the workers successfully convince others alleging that "[f]oreign exploiters and their local servants must now pack up their bags and go. The patriots, Matigari Manjiruungi, are back, and the workers agree with Matigari's call he who sows must be the one who reaps! We refuse to be the pot that cooks but never eats food!" (60). This inspiration or agitation as portrayed in the novel, shows how a hibernated people gradually grew into accepting Matigari's ideology of bringing justice and truth by uniting to create a formidable resistance against the elements that terrorize their daily lives.

The postcolonial concept termed neo-colonialism is difficult to overcome unless the people are to fight against it as it is expressed by the characters in *Matigari* as follows: "It would have been better if it had clearly rained or clearly shone better, any of that than this uncertain weather, yes, better if it were hot or cold, rather than lukewarm like this" (89). In the above sense Matigari functions as the beautiful one who comes back from the bush and queries the healthiness of the neo-colonial situation, captured in the heading of the second part of the novel "Seeker of Truth and Justice". As a prophet who tries to reinvigorate the spirit from the days of Mau Mau, Matigari represents these ideas of resistance against oppression. Due to his commitment, finally, Matigari is perceived as a freedom fighter by the society, especially in proletariat's view. Matigari realizes that words

alone cannot bring real or radical change for the benefit of the society. For this reason, mass mobilization of armed struggle he suggests, must be taken as a strategy to overthrow the dictatorial leadership. Ngugi in *Matigari* realizes that there is a neo-colonial state which imposes silence on the population as a whole. It is to break this silence that he creates hopeful and visionary persons who believes in unity named Matigari to fight against the legacy of imperialism - under neo-colonialism.

Therefore, the struggle for liberation is a slogan that should be voiced in every contemporary African society. Matigari stands for seeking truth and justice to unite his people to stand for the truth and resist the lies brought forward by government. Pro-government propagandist continue to preach to the people not to believe Matigari's ideology:

Let us now forget that such people as Matigari Ma Njiruungi ever existed. Let us with one accord like loyal patriots; agree that Matigari Ma Njiruungi was just a bad dream. That bit of history was just a bad dream, a nightmare in fact. We have qualified professors here who can write new history for us...I want you, together with our visitors from USA, Britain, West Germany and France to witness how the law works in a country under Christian democracy...for instance I am the minister of truth and justice, but even I must abide by the law...the teacher and the student will be detained without trial. The court cannot allow educated people to mislead the public with Marxist doctrines and communistic teachings. (118)

In spite of the fact that the Ministry of Justice and Truth repeatedly preaches to people to trust their regime, the people seem to realize the betrayal of neo-colonialism and decide to stand united with Matigari to resist the evils perpetrated by government. Their resistance against the dictatorial leadership burst into a victory song. The people begin to discuss Matigari's good image for his country and long for the 'home' Matigari

searches for. Matigari's home appears to represent unity, love, and power. 'Home' has a connotation that goes even further than that of immediate family and a place to live. 'Home' comes to mean their country and also becomes the life they knew before colonization. This is reflected the assertion thus: "...cast your fears away, for we are not alone! Our patriots are still living: the products of our labour should come back to us who produce the wealth of this country...Who are the owners of this country? And the crowd answered in one voice we are! We, the workers and peasants!" (I74),

Another strategy Ngugi employs in knitting together the postcolonial concept of Resistance in *Matigari* is through the use of language. Language is often a central question in post-colonial studies, during colonization, colonizers usually imposed their language on to the people they colonized, forbidding natives to speak their mother tongues. Ngugi in his *Decolonizing the Mind* explains that African writers need to embrace their native tongues in their art so as to get cultural justice and freedom. This is in a bid to emphasize that the local language is an integral part of conveying the protest against the imperia experience. Thus, through *Matigari*, Ngugi resists the imposition of the colonisers' language which takes precedence in most British colonies. The title 'Matigari' itself is derived is his native Gikuyu language which gains victory for that part of the African tradition. The title itself and the narrative style could be taken as an entry point to show the author paradigm shift from English to his African roots. By this creative adaptability of the indigenous cultural background, Ngugi calls on African authors to see the need to create a literature that conveys the true African experience which serves the purpose of protest against colonial and neo-colonial oppression against the African traditional customary identity. This is why he (Ngugi) creates the character of Matigari with the qualities of a Messiah to rebel against neo-colonialism and decolonize both the mind and the soul of African. This is indicated in the passage thus:

The house is mine because I built it. The land is mine too because I tilled it with these hands. The industries are mine because my labour built and worked in them. I shall never stop struggling for all the products of my sweat. I shed blood and I did not shed it in vain. One day the land will return to the tiller and the wealth of our land to those who produce it. Poverty and sorrow shall be banished from our land! (124)

By the use of expressions 'struggling' and 'return', Ngugi re-emphasizes the protagonist's protracted commitment to abolish neo-colonialism with great, brave and heroic resistance to attain justice. He warns colonialists and neo-colonialists alike in the plot to leave his country and to also return the people's property in the spirit of fairness and justice. He also cautions the imperialists and neo-colonialists saying that:

...you, imperialist, and you servant Boy-with all your other lackeys, ministers and leaders of the police force, the army and the courts, the prisons and the administration-your days are numbered! I shall come back tomorrow. We are the patriots who survived Matigari Ma Njiruungi, and many more of us are being born each day. Jon Boy, you shall not keep in my house again. It's either you or me and the future belongs to me! (124).

In this cautionary broadcast, Matigari is hopeful of rebuilding his lost country. He achieves this by gradually persuading the society by creating awareness about the existence of the precepts of neo-colonialism which he observes consistently hinders the country's development. He arouses in the people the will and power to unite and resist this new-fangled form of colonialism when he says that: "the builder builds a house, the one who watched while it was built, moves into it. The builder sleeps in the open air. The tailor makes clothes, the one who does not even know how to thread a needle wears clothes...The workers produce goods. Foreigners and parasites dispose of them. The

worker is left empty handed. So where are truth and justice on this earth?" (113). The Character of Matigari in the above assertion, has successfully absorbed the masses into his radical quest for justice and his daring resistance of the government of the supposed independent country.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, as an African literary and political figure, through this novel, proposes the idea that the former colonized African nations need to be aware of the potential risk of becoming the victims of neo-colonialism. He verifies this theoretical argument concerning the surfacing of the local elites in the postcolonial period in his novel *Matigari*. For instance, Boy Junior and the Minister for Justice and Truth are the embodiment of the local elites who take on the responsibility of maintaining colonization after being raised by the colonial education both abroad and in the country. Their attitudes toward their native society confirms the fact that the local elites become so alienated from their cultural particularities that they cannot conceal their admiration for the Western lifestyles and methods in the political scene. Their manners and decisions regarding their native citizens become so severe and brutal against their fellow Africans that they order even unimpeachable people to be put into prison so as to affirm their authority and despotism. By means of these characters, Ngugi asserts the idea that these native elites pose threats for those nations that have just gained their independence notwithstanding that they are not wary of this danger.

Conclusion

Ngugi's *Matigari* is discovered in this paper to be a direct protest to the pathetic situation in most African countries, where former colonies are only politically independent but economically dependent. *Matigari* exposes the postcolonial concept of resistance as a mobilisation tool for the masses. Through the character of Matigari, the call for to resist the domination of Africa by the local elites, who are only a means to an end for the colonizer is sounded. Neo-colonization is a way to expand

colonizer's dominance and utilize the resources of their colonies for the Western regions. As it is reflected in *Matigari*, neo-colonialism in its modern and covert nature gives its victims a false sense of security, freedom of economic prosperity through veiled philosophies of expressions such as globalization, free markets, judiciary independence, human rights, democracy, good governance, free press and the likes. To tackle neo-colonialism Ngugi portrays strong characters that fight for liberation. He creates psycho-active intellectuals such as Matigari, Ngaruro and Guthera who are committed in sacrificing their lives for the sake of truth and justice.

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