

DISPLACEMENT AND THE COMPLACENCY OF THE AFRICAN ARISTOCRATS IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *MATIGARI*: AN ARCHETYPAL READING

By

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Abstract

As terrorism erodes the ethnic cohesion of most African states in very harsh and subtle manner, the need to identify these approaches becomes urgent. It is an obvious fact that recent extremist attacks especially in Africa unveils an undertone of displacement resulting sometimes in ethnic cleansing. A study of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's 1986 fiction, *Matigari* first released in Gikuyu language as *Matigari Ma Njiruungi* and the relevance of the represented archetypes in these works using the Archetypal Criticism, are the foci of this study. This work intends to expound the identity, displacement and land archetypes which are central to the sociocultural composition of the African continent; as well as call attention to the backdrop of calculated attacks targeted at disheveling Nigeria as a leeway to penetrate other nation. The era of neocolonialism in the African polity, especially in Nigeria and Kenya, has aided and still aids attacks by violent non-state actors. A textual analysis research approach will provide the basis for analyzing the thoroughly the text under study, in order to establish the urgency of a collective responsibility to ward off activities of violent non-state actors from the African terrain once and for all.

Keywords: Displacement, Archetypes, Justice, Truth, Kenyan Aristocrats

Introduction

He tried to visualize his home. In his mind's eye, he could see the hedges and the rich fields so clearly. Just another climb, the final climb, and then he would be home – his home on top of the hill! (Ngugi, 1987, p. 5).

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Matigari's melancholic mood as he returns to his heritage leaves no doubt of his determination to recover his home from which he was displaced a long time before his return. For him, the displacement of his people remains a spite on his valour and the most important aspect of his people's lives that must be reversed. It is for this reason, according to Ngugi (1987) that, "An irresistible urge to go and just peep at his house gnawed at him, but he fought against it. He had made up his mind. He would first go in search of his people; at least first find out where they lived, what they ate and drank and what they wore." (p. 6). Matigari's desire represents the collective will of his people, seen from the eyes of his young friend, Muriuki thus: "He recalled the night of the workers' strike. And suddenly, he seemed to hear the workers' voices, the voices of the peasants, the voices of the students and of other patriots of all the different nationalities of the land, singing in harmony: Victory shall be ours! ..." (Ngugi, p. 175).

Expounding the archetype of displacement typifying the socio-political situation of the African continent, this work illuminates the fictional and factual menace inundating the region which faces possible extinction within the next century or so, if not combated collectively by the African states. This work is an attempt to address the convolutions threatening the preservation of the African region as aggravated by capitalism and imperialism which typifies African leadership; and the extremity of foreign religious beliefs which sweeps across Africa in the form of terrorism.

Although Ngugi's 1985 novel is set in an unknown location, he fulfilled the responsibility of a historical novelist in giving "... a truthful picture of the age he describes and to establish a historical context." (Nnolim, 2006, p. 185). *Matigari* raised uncontrolled controversy in Kenya on its release; especially as the state had adopted a one-party system against which Kenyans revolted as they yearned for opposition. A radio announcement reverberates this situation in these words, "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." (Ngugi, p. 7). The narrative describes the despicable condition in which neocolonialism throws the post-independent Kenya as represented by this summation: "... There is only one party in the country. Why do the students want another party? His Excellency Ole Excellence said that the students should all be satisfied with one party – the ruling party." (Ngugi, p. 83).

The novel, which was written initially as *Matigari ma Njiruungi*; a Gikuyu expression literally means, "... the patriots who survived the bullets – the

patriots who survived the liberation war, and their political offspring.” (Ngugi, p. 20), narrates the return of Matigari. Notably, Matigari fought for Uhuru of the imaginary country, and lived in the forests and the mountains for many years. He returns after Uhuru to establish peace, by burying his armoury in the fields under a mugumo tree. He returns to meet the post-independent Kenya in total disarray, with children sleeping in wreckages of cars, and picking items from garbage heaps. He comes in contact with a teenage boy, Muruiki who becomes his escort.

In the same vein, he meets Ngaruro wa Kibiro leader the workers and peasants in a company owned by Settler William’s son and John Boy’s son too. Ngaruro and Muruiki share drinks with Matigari at a pub, where Matigari shares his mission with the two. The story of Matigari portrays the mythoi which hold sway among the Gikuyus, immediately after Uhuru. It is one way to single out the return of one of the patriots who survived the bullets. Ngugi’s novel, *Matigari* must be read as an allegory which is presented with the mysterious which typifies magical realism.

The scourge of displacement and ethnic cleansing which existed during the colonial epoch in most African and Latin-American nations has persisted even till this day. Particularly in Africa, the process of exploiting African has led to certain policies and incitements which led to the displacement of many Africans from their ancestral geographical locations/inheritances and the extermination of certain ethnic groups. Colonialism and religion as abstract entities has remained the undoing of most African nations; and at the backdrop of this known entities lies the conundrum which explains the displacement and ethnic cleansing that has swept across the black continent for almost a century and still counting.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o writes in his realistic fiction, *Matigari* almost two decades ago. Rodney (1972) rightly observes that, indeed, religion plays a negative or a positive role being a part of the superstructure of the society. Unfortunately, religion which according to Mande and Buba (2018), citing Bamisaye (1990) refers to efforts by man to reconcile with the cosmic forces which is believed by the believer to have negative and positive influence on his or her fate, is no longer viewed as such owing to recent happenings orchestrated in the name of religion. (p. 237). These have been grouped as violent non-state actor who operate under the auspices of religion to perpetrate bloodletting on innocent citizens. The campaigns of these vicious non-state actors comprise the crux of the dynamics responsible for the displacements and ethnic cleansing that grip Nigeria and Kenya.

Nigeria, like Kenya has experienced its own portion of terrorism, displacement and ethnic cleansing stemming from the pre-colonial and colonial period between the 18th and 19th centuries by Europe especially, Britain till the present scourge of religiosity which has erupted in many forms, especially terrorism – all of which overawes the Nigerian nation as we speak. It is no gainsaying that during the slave trade, African communities were instigated to wage wars amongst each other in order to raid for slaves which were eventually sold to the European slave traders. Able-bodied men and women, who were usually captured during such raids were mostly, shipped across the African borders as slaves to work in plantations and other menial jobs. Sieff (2018) avows that, "For over 200 years, powerful kings in what is now the country of Benin captured and sold slaves to Portuguese, French, and British merchants. The slaves were usually men, women and children from rival tribes – gagged and jammed into boats bound for Brazil, Haiti and the United States." In fact, the Osu caste system in Igboland has been traced to people dedicated to deities because of their defiance and refusal to submit to the decisions of the heads of their communities or their kings. (Ugobude, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Archetypes represent dominant themes in the form of character-type, idea, symbol, pattern or occurrence in a narrative. In a study Devika (2016) accentuates that, "Archetype denotes recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, themes, and images which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams and even social rituals. Such recurrent items result from elemental and universal patterns in the human psyche." Similarly, a study by Britannica affirms that archetype denotes a 'primordial' picture, character or type of situations which recurs in a narrative to which extent it is considered universal.

Every culture recognize certain ideas, symbols or patterns; although there are archetypes which cut across all cultures irrespective of time; for example, love, war, hero, quest, journey, death, birth, rivalry, trickster, etc, all of which are sometimes, associated with myths and mythology. These archetypes are the basis of Carl Jung's Archetypal critical theory which will be employed in the analysis of this study.

Archetypal criticism also, known as mythological criticism because of its association with myths and mythology denoting a universal pattern, is a theory which guides the analysis of a text using the archetypal content as seen in myths and mythology. By Mythological criticism, a piece of text is mostly influenced by

the myths associated with the origin of such text. Archetypal or Mythological criticism draws from Carl G. Jung's theory of the collective subconscious.

Devika further affirms that the Archetypal literary criticism construes literature using archetypes in myths and mythology in the form of character types, symbols and images which recur in the narrative. *Matigari* the novel, which incidentally is the name of the protagonist, tells the tale of a man who wanders everywhere in his quest for social justice. The prevailing archetypes in Ngugi's novel include quest, justice, and displacement.

It is against this background that it could be surmised that the position of Afolayan (2015) is apt as he posits thus: "Ngugi had relied on the extant autochthonous mythical material which foregrounds the essence of quest and search." (p. 59). The significance of land across all Ngugi's works representing the sentiments of Kenyans in particular, and the African region in general, dignifies the archetypes of identity and displacement which account for the displacement, and further, ethnic cleansing which Ngugi decries. Although Ngugi's *Matigari* is set in an unnamed country, or fixed time and, the thematic content embraces the daily living of many countries especially in Africa.

The protagonist, Matigari, becomes the savior or hero figure which is awaited, a secondary archetype central to this study, in his society to champion the revolution of freedom from every form of corruption, injustice, falsehood, and debauchery. The protagonist, Matigari launches his savior attribute by a search for truth and justice, like the Christians' Jesus Christ preached repentance, truth and justice among the gentiles at the beginning of his evangelical ministry. Matigari who was a member of the Kenyan freedom fighters, buries his arm under the 'huge mugumo, a fig tree, right in the middle of a cluster of other trees' (Ngugi, pp. 3-4); and puts on an evangelical cloak hoping to establish repentance and restitution to his people who were greatly displaced, including himself.

The savior archetype can be said to have been borrowed from the biblical myth; even in the Greek society where literature evolves from, and usually pays the ultimate prize whether salvation happens or not. Therefore, Matigari like most saviors, agonizes while asking for better. He follows the three paths of the savior – first, is Commitment as he sues for peace, and goes about dissipating this ideology to others in the same condition; second, is the quest as he realizes that the ideology he is selling is inconsequential as the conditions are getting from bad to worse, and he begins to seek truth and justice; and thirdly, is Revolution when he is unable to get answers to he takes up arm to enforce the change that his questions are unable to provide. Gakwandi (1977) attests that,

"The cult of heroes is an important phenomenon in the newly independent countries of Africa and recurs again and again as a theme in many novels ..." (p. 110). This is an obtainable trend that the limit to which suffering can be withstood is seeking armed uprising.

Methodology

The textual analysis method is employed in the examination of the work. The artistic context of *Matigari* was described and interpreted, and this enables the garnering of the literary values that the book reveals. Although this is the most important method in literary studies, the textual analysis method is not applied in this study to be only preoccupied with Ngugi's motive; but also, as Caulfield (2020) highlights "... explores potentially unintended connections between different texts, asks what a text reveals about the context in which it was written, or seeks to analyze a classic text in a new and unexpected way." Caulfield also, emphasizes that textual analysis concentrates on the unintended and intended elements of the text with which researchers appreciate and expound the meaning of the texts. In a nutshell, the structure, content and other literary elements of *Matigari* will be interpreted using textual analysis.

Displacement and Land Exploitation: The Deal Breaker in Ngugi's World

Matigari, the protagonist of the work under study returns to his land with a reformed mindset; in furtherance of the celebration of Uhuru ushering in peace that had eluded his country with the onset of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army agitation. More importantly, Matigari's notion of peace as denoting restoration is significant to comprehending the fierce conflict that happens as the narrative progresses, depicted in his avowal thus: "Instead, I have now girded myself with a belt of peace. I shall go back to my house and rebuild my home" (Ngugi, p. 5).

The relevance of the archetypes of displacement, peace and justice which the protagonist offers at the beginning of the novel remains germane to the illumination of their significance to the theme of displacement and ethnic cleansing decried by Ngugi's portrayal in this work. The displacement of children even from the most sordid details, is represented by the officials who collect money from children so they can have access to the rubbish site (Ngugi, p. 12). Finally, Matigari's struggle empowers children to fight to regain their lost heritage as Muruiku continues the fight after the disappearance of Matigari and Guthera, by the end of the novel.

Matigari begins to search for truth and justice when he discovers that independence did not change anything from when the struggle went on. People's lands and homes were still confiscated; the most militant villains being Settler Williams' son, Robert Williams; and John Boy Snr's son, John Boy Jnr. It is at this point that Matigari is presented as a tragic hero whose destruction is hinged on his idealist disposition which drives the plot of this novel from the beginning till the end.

This paper seeks to establish the Escapist theory which Ngugi embraces in his idea of a post-independence Kenya. For the people of Matigari's unnamed country, their displacements must entail the displacement of all the white settlers especially, John Boy Junior, the son of John Boy who had displaced Matigari and sent him to the forest, and also, the displacement of the "comprador tycoons" must take place. This decision propels the arson on private properties that takes place. (166-169). As John Boy Junior's house burnt, there is jubilation even among the children who are ready to loot the house. Unfortunately, the prayer of the Kenyan elite for the workers and peasants to remain ignorant, and keep praising the sizes of their pockets loses its potency. (Ngugi, 1982, p. 117).

Ngugi questions the relevance of struggles and the rewards associated with revolutionary trends. This study is an attempt to mirror the paradoxes reflected in the literary twist embedded in Ngugi's late fictions and their relevance to the Kenyan nation in particular, and African in general. A worse whodunit is the Minister of Truth and Justice whose ironic portfolio falls short of the expectation of what his responsibilities entail. Using an exaggerated conviction of who Matigari is known to be by the people, Ngugi lampoons the government of the unknown country who also refer to Matigari as many individuals and not just one man, as the Voice of Truth announces thus:

... The government has announced that the public should be wary of some terrorists who are walking about the country claiming to be Matigari ma Njiruungi. The government has said that all freedom fighters returned from the mountains the day the independence flag was hoisted. We are all freedom fighters. Those spreading such rumours are out to disrupt the peace, like the soldiers who mutinied ... (Ngugi, 1987, p. 83).

Embracing formal education which promised a bigger future in the affairs of Kenya did not yield the much expected privilege, as portrayed in the summation thus:

While being deprived of their land, the Kikuyus focused their attention on education, only to find themselves once more at odds with the colonial

government, which, with the aim of promoting agricultural and vocational training, limited African education to the primary level and prohibited the use of English as the medium of instruction. The Kikuyus, however, preferred liberal, humanistic secondary education because it permitted access to civil service jobs and, more important, because English was the language of technology and power. They reasoned, quite accurately, that mastery of English was crucial for their nationalistic aspirations. The Kikuyus responded by mercilessly taxing themselves in order to build their own schools, only to have them shut down repeatedly by the government. This struggle continued until the outbreak of the Mau Mau war, when all Kikuyu schools were closed for several years. (Mambrol, 2019)

For Ngugi and indeed, all other Kenyan youth who enroll in Alliance High School, the safety which education brought cannot be overemphasized, "The stone buildings ... seemed a veritable fortress ..." (Ngugi, 2013, p. 10). Even young Njoroge's mind held a similar belief, as he ruminates thus: "I think Jacobo is as rich as Mr Howlands because he got education. And that's why each takes his children to school because of course, they have learnt the value of it" (Ngugi, 1964, p. 4). The actual aim of the education offered are hidden in these words, "These schools inspired two almost contradictory educational visions: the notion of self-reliance and the aim of producing civic-minded blacks who would work within the parameters of the existing racial state. Alliance was set up with this animating spirit." (Ngugi, 2013, p. 10).

Kenyan Government: An African Scourge

Ngugi presents an unnamed country, Matigari's homeland made of two groups of people:

... the imperialists and their retinue of messengers, overseers, police and military. The ruling party were these messengers, and they had control over the government, the laws, and the gunmen in boots ... On the other hand, there was the camp of the working people, with their values, their culture and their history." (Ngugi, 1987, p.161)

Matigari confronts the Minister by accusing his government of corruption and oppression of the people. The Minister engages Matigari and declares him mad and sentencing him to a mental facility, along with the leader of the workers and peasant, Ngaruro. While in the mental facility, Matigari decides to abandon the route of pacifism and embrace a voice. The people chant protest songs during a meeting with government officers, who enforce harsher laws to intimidate their agitations.

The inefficient leadership bequeathed to the African leaders by the colonial administration at independence remains the scourge which has aggravated the unfortunate situation of most African states, especially Nigeria and Kenya. *Matigari* is a head-on attack on capitalism which dispossessed Kenyans of their soil, vegetation and businesses. Including their voices and freedom. Undeniably, it is no gainsaying thus:

For the masses in many African countries, the postcolonial 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. For these black masses therefore, the dream of freedom after independence is simply a mirage. (Afolayan, 2015, p. 61)

Although Ngugi in the beginning of the novel, declares that the events happen in an imaginary story, and permits the reader to choose the period of time and place, However, "The publication of *Matigari ma Njiruungi* caused such a furor in Kenya that authorities briefly believed that *Matigari* was a real person and launched a search for him." Consequently, a special broadcast affirms this anxiety:

... A special announcement ... The government has announced that the public should be wary of some terrorists who are walking about the country claiming to be *Matigari ma Njiruungi*. The government has said that all freedom fighters returned from the mountains the day the independence flag was hoisted. We are all freedom fighters. Those spreading such rumours are out to disrupt the peace, like the soldiers who mutinied ... (Ngugi, p. 83)

The government of *Matigari's* unnamed country demonstrates its desperation to hold up the displacement of the people by the white settlers at all costs; therefore, His Excellency Ole Excellence places a prize of Five Thousand Pounds to any soldier or policeman who can bring *Matigari* by all means (Ngugi, pp. 169 & 170). This comes with a thorough consideration of similarity in the names, language and events in the novel which coincide with real events in Kenya and in Ngugi's personal life. Therefore, it is easy to relate with *Matigari's* first instinct to bury his arms under the mugumo tree on his return from the forests and hills as an experience which Ngugi later refers in his non-fiction of his biological brother thus:

Good Wallace spent the next couple of days trying to reconnect with his remaining comrades, in vain ... The choice was between accepting a heroic

death or giving up for the hope of fighting another day. He chose the latter. Burying his gun under a Mugumo tree, he crossed rivers and walked through forests slopes and coffee plantations all the way to Chief Karuga's family homestead, near Banana Hills, quite a distance." (Ngugi, 2013, pp. 82-83)

For the most, Matigari asked a gazillion times "Tell me, my people! Where in this country can one find truth and justice?" (Ngugi, 1987, p. 82). His quest is unending but when it becomes obvious that the displacement cannot be revoked, Matigari's mindset corroborates the declaration of other citizens, "Everything that belongs to these slaves must burn! ...Their coffee must burn! ... Their tea must burn ..." (Ngugi, p.167). The people at the meeting sing protest songs, which are then outlawed by the Minister. The government passes harsher laws to suppress dissent. While at the mental hospital, Matigari decides the time for pacifism is over. He must fight. Kenyans have always had the affinity to business and plantation ownerships, but after Uhuru with the collaboration of the ex-colonialists, their mode of business becomes exploitative, and the greed of explosive profits.

Rather than enjoy freedom and considerate lifestyle, the Kenyan aristocrats who take over power extort the workers and peasants with little or no pay, confiscating their lands and plantations. The Kenyan elite class remains relentless in exploiting the workers and peasants as demonstrated by the statement of Kihaahu wa Gatheeca:

... If you build shanties like those and then rent them out to workers and peasants, that, I assure you, is where the fat lies ... That's why I'm grateful to the masses of the Kenyan people . For their blindness, their ignorance, their inability to demand their rights are what enable us, the clan of man-eaters, to feed on their sweat without their asking us too many awkward questions. (Ngugi, 1982, pp. 116-117)

Obviously, "... the Kenyan society is always governed by the lopsided relationship that puts the Kenyan native on the receiving end and at the verge of total loss of physical possessions and identity" (Afolayan, 2015, p. 60). Many of the peasants were thrown out of their homes, lands and farms and were forced to sleep in the cold and work on their own farms with little or no wages. This culminated in widespread hunger, disillusionment and psychological revolution which Ngugi depicts using this novel.

Matigari returns hoping to gain everything that is his, but finds that the situation after Uhuru is even worse, as he witnesses not only, the children of the settlers displacing him in his home, but also, the extortion of children by the police and the rubbish collectors and the scrambling of dirt by Kenyan children

who "... had stuffed their mouths with rotten tomatoes, while others were busy cleaning bones with their teeth, hoping to find a scrap of meat still clinging to them" (Ngugi, p.12). Matigari discovers that everyone has been displaced and misdirected attacks has become the order of the day under the watch of the Kenyan aristocrats. Ngugi (2013) through the narrator laments thus:

The ruling party ... had control over the government, the laws and the gunmen in boots. The ideas and the culture and the history they cultivated in the land were those singing glory to the role of carrying messages ... On the other hand, there was the camp of the working people, with their values, their culture and their history. The ruling party of messengers was trying to imprison the real history of the working people behind bars and in detention camps. (p.161)

It is against the Gikuyu myth that Matigari, Ngugi's hero, and Guthera lay their lives as part of the rituals which gives credence to the Gikuyu myth, in order to possess Matigari's house and farm from the foreigners who confiscated it. The instruction of God to Gikuyu is so revered that traditional Kenyans are ready to be imprisoned or gunned down with bullets rather than forfeit their lands. Matigari amidst all threats is bent on reclaiming his house and his farms, and he pays the ultimate price with his new friend, Guthera.

Matigari's passion to fight occupies him for the longest, "... he was inspired by the depth of Guthera's and Muriuki's commitment to him. He thought of Guthera. He thinks of Muriuki. Their agony had become his agony; their suffering, his suffering." (Ngugi, p. 88). For him, Uhuru should mean a restoration to status quo. Uhuru should mean a hand over of Kenyans' lands, farms/plantations, rights etc., back to Kenyans. In response to what he perceives to be the ideal, he buries his arms under a mugumo tree, and braces himself with a belt of peace as he walks into his country which is unnamed. But Matigari returns to find that Uhuru is only on paper, yet the old order of possession is still very much practiced. A fight to finish, even in the face of threat, Matigari is not ready to surrender his heritage (Ngugi, p. 165).

Conclusion

Through the novel, Ngugi establishes a voice that is unmistakable and strong. This affirms Gakwandi's avowal that "The African novel has developed as a response to the far-reaching social revolution of the twentieth century on the continent." (1980, p. 129). Matigari is a war against displacement based on Fabulism. The novel lampoons the ideology of peace which inspires the protagonist, Matigari to return to his nativeland after spending many years in the mountains having

combated Settler Rowland Williams and his boy, John Boy who occupied his house and land. The widespread supernatural description of Matigari becomes an opium that sustains the people during the period of displacement and economic deprivation, providing an escapist route for them to survive the times. The people are found gathered in different places, "People were so absorbed in the extraordinary tales of Matigari that they often forgot to drink their tea or eat their food." (Ngugi, p. 74). Kenya, through *Matigari*, speaks the mind of the African continent in general, who are at the verge of rising in unity to scream against neocolonialism and undemocratic governorship, and the governments and the African elite class have come to terms with this reality, "But we shouldn't be complacent or imagine that the masses will always be foolish ..." (1982, p. 117). Conclusively, this study echoes the declaration of a web publication thus:

A genuine solution to Kenya's crisis must address the twin problems of democratic rights, now desecrated by the rigging scandal; and of human rights, now destroyed by ethnic cleansing and the internal displacement of thousands." (Granta, 2015)

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