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Fanonism and Constructive Violence in *Petals of Blood*

English

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ABSTRACT The 1977 novel Petals of Blood by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o deals with the independent Kenya where the neocolonialism was taking place of the colonial rulers and the struggle even rise in the remote obscure village, Ilmorog. The novel at first demonstrates the disillusionment; about the loss of the ideal of independence and the destruction of hope; about betrayal and hypocrisy and about the triumph of corruption over humanity. Ngugi believes that imperialism, the power of dead capital, in its neocolonial clothes will not be able to destroy the fighting culture of the African peasantry and working class. This paper will attempt to present Ngugi's suggested way of redemption through violence as a constructive force to correct the neocolonialist society echoing the view of Fanon, who considers there is no other way than violence for the decolonization and this is rather a cleansing force for colonized people which redeem their inferiority complex.

Introduction

Violence to protest the injustice and oppressive social order is constructive violence. Ngugi' Wa Thiongo's novel offers a searing condemnation of Kenyan ruling elites who exploits workers and peasants and also offers vital and inexorable disapproval of neo-colonialist institutions- Christianity, politicians, schools, business, banks, landlords and even the highways. *Petals of Blood* also demonstrate the importance of collective action to empower ordinary people to resist oppression. Ngugi declared that violence is justified to resist this oppressive social order, which echoes the views of Franz Fanon. According to Fanonism, violence is a constructive force. Especially the colonized countries have no other way for decolonization other than violence. Kenya has a long history of struggle as well as violence until the 'Uhuru' (independence) in 1963. Even after the independence Kenya fights with the same situation holding different slogans. The novel *Petals of Blood* contains the Struggle of four protagonists Munira, Abdullah, Wanja and Karega at their disillusion about the neo-colonial world of independent Kenya.

Fanonism

In *Wretched of the Earth,* Fanon presents the vision of violence as a constructive force. He says, "National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, common wealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" and " The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it". (Fanon, 1985, p. 27-28). "The development of violence among the colonized people will be proportionate to the violence exercised by the threatened colonial regime" (p. 69) but the native's violence unifies the people. It frees the natives from inferiority complex from his despair and inaction. It works like a "cleansing force" for an individual.

Ngugi and Constructive Violence

Violence in order to change an individual, unjust social order is not savagery; it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust oppressive social order is criminal, and diminishes man"-Ngugi declares in a review of Majdalany's state of emergency, in 1963. It provides the point of view of Ngugi towards violence as a constructive force and his attitude is quite positive alike Fanon. He also believes that, "Imperialism, the power of dead capital, in its neo-colonial clothes will not be able to destroy the fighting culture of African peasantry and working class for the simple reason that this culture is a product and a reflection of real life struggles going on in Africa today". (p. xvii)

Kenyan History of Violence

The coast of Kenya has been exposed to outside influences for centuries, intruders' treasure hunting started in the early eleventh century and the conflict with the natives was the seed of further violence. The Indonesians, the Arabs, the Portuguese and Omani Arabs came to trade and halt during the next four centuries. The first Europeans entered the East Africa after the sixteenth century, as explorers and traders. It was not until the late 1800s that settlers began moving inland Kenya. In Nairobi, Tigoni and Limuru the Europeans were taking the land from the indigenous Bantu peoples, Kikuyuu. Thus struggle for land started and through the colonial years the British settlers and administrators put an administration of violence and oppression into place. The early fighting for freedom was led by Waiyaki Wa Hiinga and others in late nineteenth century. The real fight for independence began in 1950s; Dedan, Kmathi, L'Ouverture, Ole Masai, Chaka, Mathenge, Turner and other great leaders began a movement of Mau Mau. This was an armed struggle waged by Gikuyu peasantry against the British colonial forces (Maughan, 1985, p.20). Ngugi was very much influenced by Mau Mau. It was a war that touched the popular imagination and was forever to change the fate of Kenya and many other countries under British rule. For the first time the peasants, the wretched of the earth, were taking the war to a highly sophisticated country with a long military history, (p, xi). This situation continued up to 1963 when Kenya was finally independent.

Constructive Violence in *Petals of Blood*

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi's 1977 novel, he is searching for a political strategy to successfully end "The Whole Thing"- global monopoly capitalism of which Africa is constituent part. (Dorn,1999). In this novel, the Kenya Ngugi writes about, the Kenya that nobody can take away from him, is the 'Kenya of working class of all nationalities and their heroic struggle against domination by nature and other humans over the centuries.'

Here we see the face of Kenya whose face is reflected in Ilmorog, the center of action for the novel. Ngugi chooses a barren, drought stricken part of Kenya where neo-colonialism put the interests of foreigners and abandons the people who had suffered and died for the land. Thus capitalism was burying Ilmorog and putting a new Ilmorog in its place. The people reached to a point of no return and raised the protagonists to resist the destruction.

The Protagonists Concerning Violence

Petals of Blood is so bloody deep and detailed that by the time it ends nobody cares for the fate of the three petty preys, Krupps, Rockfellers and Delameres, or whether it was Wanja, Karega, Munira or Abdullah who has killed them.

Wanja, the extra ordinary struggling female character, like Kenya itself, has to fight to stay alive and for whom destruction is never too far away. Being humiliated by the society and the hostility of the world, she allows herself to turn cruel like the surroundings. She described the reality of neocolonial situation in a plain formula- "You eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you". She questioned, has Kimeria sinned less than her, why is she the only sufferer. She stroked his head with the punga before the arson. According to Fanon this is individual freedom and it will calm and clean her burning heart.

Abdullah, the introvert Mau Mau fighter, was totally betrayed by the country he fought for. The independent Kenya failed to rehabilitate the one legged fighter who sacrificed his family and land for the country. The unsung hero had the ability to rehabilitate himself, but the same person Kimeria, who betrayed his friend during Mau Mau, involved with the spoil of his business, his earning. By killing Kimeria he wanted to avenge the death of his friend, Ndinguri and save Wanja from his claws. He reserved his manhood by this act of violence.

Karega, the man of many wanderings, devotes himself to the unity of workers and helps the trade union. He opposed Wanja's philosophy and kept searching for a lost innocence, hope and faith. He believed one could not prevent violence by being one of the violators. He was sure that there must be other way to a 'new world'.

Munira the 'man of God' was also haunted by the need to breakout from the situation, the passive "spectator of life" he wanted a connection that prompt him do something. Even taking personal revenge by dismissing Karega, was a step to prove the activity to himself. Finally inspired by a divine feeling, he too desired to establish a 'secular new world'. He wanted to save Karega from the fatal embrace of Wanja. He decided to burn the 'Sunshine Lodge', the place of prostitution. It was also a common place for Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo, the neocolonial agents. The act was a repetition of his early life, throwing the sin, the corruption into the fire.

Conclusion

In this novel, Ngugi finally exposed some optimism by means of constructive violence. All the protagonists actively take part or provide silent support in the violent act of purification. After the arson, Wanja's pregnancy, Joseph's school rebellion, Karega's fate in renewed strikes and protests in Ilmorog, the future generation with the spirit of purification and courage from the parents involved in freedom fighting and social revolution, will be born to restore the serenity. Constructive violence, like arson will burn down the corrupted, rotten society and there is a hope and promise for the rebirth of a new Kenya.

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