

# A Reading of Ngugi WA Thiong'o's Stand Points on Food Security in Post-Independent Africa: A Case of *Petals of blood*

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to interrogate Ngugi wa Thiong'o's stance on food security. This paper is cognizant of the fact that the question of food security has dogged many postcolonial African countries and Kenya in particular. Like other authors, Ngugi uses diverse techniques to create fictional universes that reflect realities in human societies. Ilmorog, is Ngugi's microcosm. Ngugi paints the beauty and great history of this village before colonialism and neo-colonialism take center stage. The village is going through ravages of drought and resultant famine which are attributed to depletion of natural resources as a consequence of exploitation by capitalist neo-colonialists in league with former colonial masters. The main objectives of this study are to identify causes of food shortage as envisioned in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, discuss the ramifications of such shortages and examine possible solutions. The findings will be significant in providing suggestions for enhancing food security. Review of related literature will be done focusing on periodicals that address drought and food shortage that have been prevalent in Kenya. The research will be library based. Data collected will be qualitative. It will be collected by intensive reading of the text in question. The paper will employ Marxist Theory to underscore Ngugi's stand on food security in post independent Kenya. Being a Marxist, he identifies with the masses. He advocates for collective sacrifice, compromise, complementarity, consciousness and unity of the masses in order to oust the selfish bourgeois adversary. For Ngugi, the solution to food shortage is within the reach of the victims of exploitation.

**Key words:** food security, stand points, post independent

## I. INTRODUCTION

Longman Contemporary English Dictionary defines "security" as a condition of not being threatened, especially physically, psychologically, emotionally, or financially. Food security therefore implies a situation in which people are not threatened physically, psychologically, emotionally, or financially because there is adequate food. Food in this context refers to crops and animals and their products. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that Food Security is achieved "When all people, at all times have physical and economic access to adequate/ sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". Food security therefore is not the availability of any single commodity; such as maize in the Kenyan context. Neither does it imply just availability but must be accessible in terms of affordability in adequate quantities, containing essential nutrients.

According to Kiome (2009), Food security at macro level implies that adequate supplies of food are available through domestic production or through imports to meet the consumption needs of all people in a country. At the micro level (household and individual), food security depends on a number of factors which are related to various forms of entitlements to income and food processing assets, as well as the links between domestic and external markets. Food security is not just a supply issue but also a function of income and purchasing power, hence its relationship to poverty. He mentions four dimensions of food security that determine the level at which a community is placed in relation to vulnerability to hunger: food availability, food accessibility, stability and utilization.

Kiome (2009) argues that less than 50% of Sub-Saharan African countries have levels of malnutrition under 30% and only three of them are under 10% (Gabon, Namibia and Nigeria). Despite economic growth and food availability, some countries still display increasing malnutrition, as measured by the prevalence of stunted growth among children (e.g in Mali).

There is a sense of pride and tranquility when the economic activity that generates food for a people is thriving and vice versa. Ngugi captures this beautiful scenario of Ilmorog as it was before colonial disruption:

Ilmorog, the scene of the unfolding of this drama had not always been a small cluster of mud huts lived in only by old men and women and children and occasional visits from wandering herdsmen. 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 (120).

Reports in periodicals capture the current bleak picture that is contradictory to the one captured by Ngugi above. According to Seymour (2018), the Earth's intact forests are shrinking ever faster. For Francis Seymour, a senior distinguished fellow at World Research Institute, degradation of intact forest represents global tragedy as we are systematically destroying a crucial foundation of climatic stability. Forests are the only safe natural reserves and affordable infrastructure we have for capturing and storing carbon.

Esipisu& Oriedo (2018) reported about erratic weather hitting farmers hard. Years ago, that the rains would start from March to May for the long season and October to December for the shorter spell was as sure as the sun rising from the East and setting in the West. Today however, the weather has become too erratic for any correct prediction and these changes are hitting both livestock and crop farmers harder. Scientists have confidence that global temperature will continue to go up for decades to come due to greenhouse gases produced by human activities.

Kairu (2019) reported that there would be no rain this season. He therefore advised Kenyans to brace themselves for scarcity for water for drinking, sanitation, industrial use and power generation. The period has also experienced high daytime and night time temperatures. Because of this, the stage appears all set for profiteers to make a killing from the looming food crisis as a war of words erupts between government officials and entrepreneurs. Agriculture minister, Mwangi Kiunjuri insists the country has more than enough maize in its stores but millers, crafty government bureaucrats and some business men say the stock is far much less than claimed. And thus unfolds a script that has become an annual ritual, and which shadowy figures use to mint millions of shillings overnight at the expense of starving Kenyans.

According to Wafula (2019), approximately one million Kenyans are faced with starvation as millers and farmers hoard maize. Some are stockpiling in anticipation of increased prices due to an impending shortage. Millers have petitioned the government to allow for importation of maize to cushion against the biting shortage of the commodity that has resulted in skyrocketing prices setting the stage for an increase in flour prices.

From the recent reports above, one thing leads to another. It begins with destruction of vegetation which interferes with the climate. When the climate is interfered with, there is poor production of crops and livestock. Capitalists take advantage of this lack and exploit the citizens by selling food at exorbitant prices. This paper focuses on Food Security in post-independent African countries. It seeks to interrogate causes, ramifications and solutions to food insecurity in a bid to enhance food security and universal healthcare for sustainable development.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by Marxist Theory. Marxism borrows from the guiding principles of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marx was influenced by a number of thinkers including German philosophers Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel and political economists Adams Smith and David Ricardo. Marxism emerged and sought to understand the relations between the literary text and the social world. It recognizes that literature is a process and that the social world involves contexts of production and those of reception.

Marxist theory, drawn from the economic, social, and political theories of the late 19th century economist Karl Marx is among the most popular, influential, and controversial theories of literature currently practiced throughout the academic world.

For Marxism, getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, the media, and soon. Thus, economics is the base on which the superstructure of social/political/ideological realities is built. Economic power therefore always includes social and political power as well, which is why many Marxists today refer to socioeconomic class, rather than economic class, when talking about the class structure.

From a Marxist perspective, differences in socioeconomic class divide people in ways that are much more significant than differences in religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. For the real battle lines are drawn, to put the matter simply, between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” between the bourgeoisie—those who control the world’s natural, economic, and human resources—and the proletariat, the majority of the global population who live in substandard conditions and who have always performed the manual labor like mining, factory work and farm labor. Unfortunately, those in the proletariat are often the last to recognize this fact; they usually permit differences in religion, race, ethnicity, or gender to separate them into warring factions that accomplish little or no social change. Few Marxists today believe, as Marx did, that the proletariat will one day spontaneously develop the class consciousness needed to rise up in violent revolution against their oppressors and create a classless society.

For Marxism, an ideology is a belief system, and all belief systems are products of cultural conditioning. For example, capitalism, communism, Marxism, patriotism, religion, ethical systems and humanism are all ideologies and not all ideologies are equally productive or desirable. Undesirable ideologies promote repressive political agendas and, in order to ensure their acceptance among the citizenry, pass themselves off as natural ways of seeing the world instead of acknowledging themselves as ideologies.

Marxism, a non-repressive ideology works to make us constantly aware of all the ways in which we are products of material/historical circumstances and of the repressive ideologies that serve to blind us to this fact in order to keep us subservient to the ruling power system. Although Marxist theorists differ in their estimation of the degree to which we are “programmed” by ideology, all agree that the most successful ideologies are not recognized as ideologies but are thought to be natural ways of seeing the world by the people who subscribe to them. To cite one simple example, the middle class tends to resent the poor because so much middle-class tax money goes to government programs to help the poor. However, the middle class fails to realize two important socioeconomic realities: (1) that it is the wealthy in positions

of power who decide who pays the most taxes and how the money will be spent (in other words, it is the wealthy who make the middle class support the poor), and (2) that the poor receive but a small portion of the funds because so much of it goes into the pockets of the wealthy who control the social services and the middle-class employees who administer them. An example is given of the economic situation in America. What is the ideology that blinds the middle class to the socioeconomic inequities in contemporary America? In large part, the middle class is blinded by their belief in the American dream, which tells them that financial success is simply the product of initiative and hard work. Therefore, if some people are poor, it is because they are shiftless and lazy. Marxist analysis reveals that the American dream is an ideology, a belief system, not an innate or natural way of seeing the world. And like all ideologies that support the socioeconomic inequities of capitalist countries, that is, countries in which the means of production (natural, financial, and human resources) are privately owned and in which those who own them inevitably become the dominant class, the American dream blinds them to the enormities of its own failure, past and present like the genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans.

In other words, the success of the American dream—the acquisition of a wealthy lifestyle for a few, rests on the misery of the many. And it is the power of ideology, of the belief in the naturalness and fairness of this dream that has blinded many to the harsh realities it masks.

Patriotism is an ideology that keeps poor people fighting wars against poor people from other countries (one way or another, sufficient money can generally keep one out of the armed forces during war time or, at least, out of the combat units) while the rich on both sides rake in the profits of war-time economy. Because patriotism leads the poor to see themselves as members of a nation, separate from other nations, rather than as members of a worldwide oppressed class opposed to all privileged classes including those from their own country, it prevents the poor from banding together to improve their condition globally.

The fact that literature grows out of and reflects real material/historical conditions creates at least two possibilities of interest to Marxist critics. The literary work might tend to reinforce in the reader the ideologies it embodies, or invite the reader to criticize the ideologies it represents.

Ngugi in his text captures a socially stratified society in which the proletariat are exploited by the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie are responsible for the prevalent food insecurity crisis in Kenya.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey research design through which the researcher obtained data from close reading of the primary text, *Petals of Blood*. The research was library based and it used a secondary source. The researcher used purposive

sampling. The text was selected because it is set in post-independent Africa and addresses the issue of food security. Primary and secondary data was examined and analyzed in line with the objectives of the study. Through content analysis, a comprehensive synthesis and interpretation of data gathered from the reading of the primary text and secondary sources was undertaken in a bid to compile a comprehensive final study. This involved analyzing the primary text which comprises qualitative data. The researcher used content and thematic analysis. Content analysis involves keen scrutiny of literary tools the author employs to embed themes or meanings into separate elements that make up the totality of a literary piece. Thematic analysis entails focusing on themes related to the research objectives and developing a coding scheme based on samples of data collected. These findings were then analyzed in relation to the postulations of Marxist Theory. Conclusions and recommendations were finally drawn.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### *Causes of Food Insecurity*

Ngugi WA Thiong'o uses Ilmorog as an allegory of a postcolonial society typifying disillusionment inherent in societies formerly colonized. He captures colonial legacies that characterize victims of colonialism such as neo-colonialism, capitalist exploitation, classicism, patriarchy and poverty. Poverty dehumanizes and this dehumanization peaks when survival of victims is threatened by lack of food. This is a situation the postcolonial writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o addresses in *Petals of Blood*. This paper focuses on Ngugi's stand points on food security in post-independent African countries. Ania Loomba cited in Singler Gillian (2015) defines colonialism as the conquest and control of other people's lands and goods. She notes that Western colonialism is marked by the restructuring of economies and social systems, creating a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries. She argues that while Western colonialism can be broken into many different categories, they have two commonalities: violence and capitalism. Anne MacClintock cited in Singler (2015) affirms that European imperialism was from the outset, a violent encounter with pre-existing hierarchies of power that took shape not as the unfolding of its own inner destiny, but untidy, opportunistic interference with other regimes of power. Colonialism therefore is responsible for destroying socioeconomic and political systems already in place in African countries.

According to Bill Ashcroft et al (1995), Postcolonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination and independence has not solved this problem. The development of new elites within independent societies, often buttressed by neocolonial institutions, the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations, the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invaser

societies-all these testify to the fact that post colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. Food insecurity is attributed to colonial interference. Ilmorog is an epitome of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation. Natural vegetation is exploited by capitalists during the construction of the railway. Trees are cut leaving the land bare, thus interfering with natural water cycle which in turn interferes with productivity. Kiome (2009) avers that droughts, floods, and human conflicts and land degradation are responsible for food insecurity. For him, drought cycles seem to have shortened to every 2-3 years instead of 5-7 years in the past. The effect of climate change and global warming is posing great danger to agricultural productivity.

A main character in the text, Wanja, remarks about the village: "Why should anybody end up in this hole of a place? Look at the women scratching the earth. Look at them. What do they get in return? What did we call by the name of harvest. A few grains of maize" (75).

For Ngugi, among the causes of food insecurity is interference with and exploitation of natural vegetation by capitalist elites who work in league with neo-colonial institutions. Before colonialism, land was productive and properly harnessed.

You forget that in those days the land was not for buying. It was for use. It was also plenty, you need not have beaten one yard over and over again. The land was covered with forests. The trees called rain. They also cast a shadow on the land. But the forest was eaten by the railway. You remember they used to come for wood as far as here-to feed the iron thing. But then those were Europeans (82).

He thus apportions blame to investors who interfere and deplete natural vegetation and therefore inadequate food production in this society can be evidently attributed to mishandling of vegetation leading to drought and unproductivity.

Ngugi's other stand point is that inadequate labor contributes to food shortage. In the context of *Petals of Blood*, several factors contribute to inadequate labor. For one, young people are compelled by poor economic conditions and hard life in rural areas and opt for relocation to urban centers to look for jobs to cater for basic needs:

'We have been losing our sons to the cities. 'Oh yes. Agreed Ruoro and coughed to clear his throat. I don't understand young men these days. In our time we were compelled to work for those oppressing foreigners. And even then, after earning enough to pay tax or fines, we would run back to our shambas. Now take my son...I even don't know where they are. One went to work in Nairobi, another in Kisumu, another in Mombasa, and they hardly ever come back. Only one who occasionally comes to see his wife wambui, and even he hardly he stays a day' (82).

During colonial times, men were forced to work on the farms of colonial masters leaving only their wives to work on their farms. During First World War, native men were forced to

carry food and guns for soldiers who were to fight in the war. African men were compelled to fight in the Second World War. Consequently, labor on their farms was inadequate since work meant to be done by husbands and wives was done by wives alone. This adversely affected agricultural production and other economic tasks:

There was my man too, remember. He was among the batch that carried food and guns for white people to fight it out among themselves...Some were taken to work on European farms while the white men went to war. Imagine that: taken to keep the white man's shambas alive while theirs fell into neglect and waste! For a woman alone can never do all the work on the farm. How could she grow sugar cane, yams, sweet potatoes which used to be man's domain? How break new ground? And how could she smith, make chains, pull wires, make beehives, wicker work for barns? All that and do her share of the work (213).

Poverty and inadequacy of land leads to food insecurity. According to Kiome (2009), the economic review of agriculture 2007 indicates that 51% of the Kenyan population lack access to adequate food. This inaccessibility to food is closely linked to poverty which stands at 46%. Expedience of land is summed up in the words of Waweru's father, "And now the red stranger has started taking our lands in Tigon and other places. You know how we have struggled to get these lands, and even harder, this wealth. If he takes our land: Where shall we cultivate miriyo? Where graze the cattle?" (89). Land is livelihood. For Ngugi, colonialists came set to overthrow using the Bible, the coin and the gun. At this point, "the native was grazing cattle, dreaming of warriorship, of making the soil yield to the power of his hands, slowly mixing the magic and work bending nature's laws to his collective will and intentions" (88). This picture is unsettled by capitalist individualism that beckons ambitious natives bent on profiteering from Christianity. Waweru and his father had been driven from their family land in Murang'a by powerful mbari lords and wealthy houses who could buy more potent magic and other protective powers. In Kiambu, they had to start all over again with his grandfather having to work his way up from a ndungata on yet another powerful family's land to the time he got a few goats to strike out on his own. Waweru had seen all this and he hoped that when he grew up, he too would acquire even more potent magic and create an even more powerful house. Waweru later joins the church and becomes Ezekieli, working in league with colonialists to exploit natives by alienating their land via taxation strategy:

Rewards were there: a proof of God's nodding response. With a mixture of tinkling coins and trickery of the pen and the law he was able to buy whole lands from some of the declining mbari lords and clans and also from individuals who need money to pay their expected dues to the new Caesar. Such were those who did not want to turn into workers on European settlers' lands, then the only means of securing coins needed by Caesar. They sold their lands bit by bit to those like Waweru who could get the coins through bringing more souls



to Christ. In the end they joined the very laboring clan they were trying to avoid by the sale of their land and property. For the Caesar went on making more and more demands (90).

Thus, natives were reduced to being poor squatters. They therefore lacked a source of livelihood. To make ends meet, they had to hire themselves out to richer people to earn a living, for example, Miriamu spends all the days of her life working on Ezekieli's lands. Thus, class stratification comes into the picture- the haves and the have-nots.

You are right about the shortage of land. I remember the words of my youngest son before he left for the city. It was soon after a harvest like the ones we have had these past two years. He said, 'I have labored on this land for a year. My nails are broken. But look at the yield. It mocks the strength in these arms. Tell me father, when the tax gatherer comes around, what shall I give him? When I go to Ruwaini and see nice clothes, where shall I get the coins to give the shopkeeper? I must go to the city and try my future there: like my brothers (86).

Egocentric and egotistical political class takes advantage of hapless masses and exploit them for personal gain and self preservation. The masses are exploited by coercion and tricks to give to government agents the little that is in their possession hence intensifying their poverty. This is money purported to be for development projects like water or taxes. In the context of *Petals of Blood*, government tax officers accompanied by gun-carrying Askaris are sent to villages to collect tax from villagers. They are such a threat that on hearing about their arrival, all men vanish into the plains. It is so ironical that the government should send messengers to coerce villagers to give their last coins when starvation is looming instead of intervening by sending solutions to alleviate the problem. Only false promises are made. At this very moment, the situation is aggravated by Nderi wa Riera, a member of parliament for Ilmorog. He sends two men to the village in the pretext that they inform villagers about a new Kiama-kamwene Cultural Organization (KCO) which would bring unity between the rich and the poor and bring cultural harmony to all regions. The people of Ilmorog were to ready themselves to go to Gatundu to sing and have tea. One of the messengers explained about how their hard-won property and accumulation of sweat was threatened by another tribe. Each man and woman was expected to carry twelve shillings and fifty cents. The Organization the Member of Parliament forms is meant to enhance tribalism in the society, preserve his position and be used to exploit the masses for personal gain. Nyakinyua's response to the man indicates the dire need and priority of villagers as opposed to what they were being told:

And now Nyakinyua seemed possessed: 'You too, if you have ears, listen: you are worse than a tax gatherer. Twelve shillings and fifty cents! From which hole are we to dig up the money? Why should we pay to sing? Go back and tell them this: here we need water not songs. We need food. We need our sons back to help this land grow' (85).

Nderi wa Riera additionally manipulates Munira and his staff to go to tea at Gatundu. To their shame and disappointment some are tricked and coerced to take oaths to protect the wealth of a few wealthy elites in power. Nderi is the beneficiary of the twelve shillings and fifty cents that is collected from people who go to tea. He later invests the money for personal gain. Marxist theory is averse to ideologies such as those being propagated by KCO as introduced by the Member of Parliament, Nderi wa Riera. Ideologies are seen as systems of false consciousness, as conspiracies of the ruling class, as ideas which legitimate the power of particular groups and systems of beliefs and values necessary for functioning of society. KCO was actually Nderi's brainchild intended to benefit him and exploit masses:

The Mass Tea Party had almost been a hundred percent successful but for the outcry from a few misguided voices in parliament, the church and the student of the University. There was also the foreign press which in their naivety thought this Tea Party was another Mau Mau. Under the emotions of the period, it would have been very difficult to explain to the Western press that this was a different thing altogether-that it was not against progressive co-operation and active economic partnership with imperialism. He, Nderi wa Riera was convinced that Africa could only be respected when it had its own Rockefellers, its Hughes, Fords, Krupps, Mitsubshis...KCO would serve the interests of the wealthy locals and foreign partners to create similar giants (186).

For Ngugi, ignorance causes food shortage. He suggests that modern challenges require modern solutions. The drought crises and resultant famine is a new eventuality in Ilmorog which is a consequence of destruction of forests. Before this destruction, crops grew well and there was no threat of drought. The current drought challenge in Ilmorog is a new phenomenon and elderly villagers attribute it to the presence of Abdulla's donkey in the village. To allay drought therefore, they plan to beat the donkey and when it is about to die, they drive it out of the village so that it takes with it the misfortune and casts it to other people. This decision is however revoked by youngsters who have acquired modern education and when they give their opinions, they actually carry the day and resolve the crisis:

But perhaps the teachers of our children might have a modern cure for an old illness...A donkey has no influence on the weather. No animal or man can change a law of nature. But people can use laws of nature. The magic we should be getting is this: the one which will make this land so yield in times of rain that we can keep aside a few grains for when it shines. We want the magic that will make our cows yield so much milk that we shall have enough to drink and exchange the rest for things we cannot grow here. That magic is in our hands. Tomorrow when it rains: we should be asking the soil: what food, what offering does it need so that it will yield more...The labor of our hands is the magic and the wealth that will change our world and end all droughts from our earth (115).

*Ramifications of Food Insecurity*

Ramifications of food insecurity in postcolonial Africa are far reaching. Ngugi highlights some in *Petals of Blood*. There is risk of starvation in that people cannot survive without food. Munira reminisces the epic journey to the city by Ilmorog villagers to seek help from their Member of Parliament when they were on the verge of starvation after a long drought that threatened the lives of people and animals:

Even now, so many years after the event, he wrote, I can once again feel the dryness of the skin, the blazing sun, the dying animals that provided us with meat, and above us, soaring in the clear sky, the hawks and vultures which, satiated with meat of dead antelopes, warthogs and elands, waited for time and sun to deliver them human skins and blood (118).

While Karega is teaching, a pupil, Muriuki, collapses due to hunger. Several animals die in Ilmorog due to prolonged drought.

Food insecurity causes psychological torture as a result of desperation. Adequate food gives surety and confidence to people. Without adequate food, people are unsure of what the future holds. When drought intensifies in Ilmorog and animals begin dying, people undergo mental torment to an extent that some cry out of anguish. This seen in Nyakinyua's words, "Ruoro's goat died last night, Nyakinyua explained. "And he cried". We looked at one another because a grown man's tears can only portend ill. But we knew he could not help it, and we sat with him as at awake" (110).

Food shortage causes migration. There is a general feeling of restlessness in a place where starvation is looming and people will try to look for better residences. Villages are no longer homely. A contrast is made between the character of Wanja and other women when the weather is friendly and when there is drought. During the time of good weather, Wanja helps her grandmother and other women with farm work as they chat animatedly. After harvesting of maize it is noted that the harvest is poor followed by months of no rain. With little to do in the fields, every body's nerves seemed affected by the dust and the searing sun and people would often quarrel for nothing. At this moment, Wanja's eyes seemed to be turned more and more away from Ilmorog. "Sometimes she would turn her restlessness against the village and flay it and the conditions with merciless fun and mockery. Why should anybody end up in this hole of a place? Look at the women scratching the earth. Look at them. What do they get in return? (74)

Later, she wakes up very early and leaves Ilmorog. Herdsmen have to keep moving from one place to another to save their cattle from starvation:

By the end of April, it still had not rained. Cows and goats and sheep were skeletons: most herdsmen had anyway moved across the plains in search of fairer and kindlier climes wherein to shelter. They hoped that May would bring rain.

But by mid-May which was the last hope for rains which would save them, two cows died (110).

Food security implies wealth. Without food, economy of a people is greatly affected-there is poverty. It is not possible for people to go for higher needs when they are unable to meet basic needs. It is evident that products of each occupation could be used as a basis for exchange on the market, "Money or food or clothing: any of these would do as a basis of exchange" (17). Lack of food therefore implies lack of basis for exchange. When the harvest in Ilmorog is so poor, the traders who usually came and bought the produce to take away to the cities this time did not appear. Therefore no commercial exchange takes place and the people remain poor.

There is a lot of pride evident among members of two groups –crop growers and animal keepers about their occupation as they debate about the supremacy of each occupation:

He liked it especially when the herdsmen from the plains came to Abdulla's store. They would plant their spears outside and drink and talk about cows and make jokes about those who lived like moles, digging the soil. The peasant farmers of Ilmorog were, though they were worried and anxious about the lateness of rain, would hold themselves ready to defend themselves and their calling. Then a heated debate would follow between the tillers and the herdsmen as to which was more important: animals or crops. Cattle were wealth-the only wealth. Was it not the ambition of every real man, especially before the white man came to possess cows and goats? A man without a goat would often plant fields and fields of sweet potatoes, vines, millet or yams, sugarcane or bananas. In the end, he would try to sell this for a goat-one kid even... Wealth was in the soil and the crops worked by a man's hands. Didn't they know the saying that wealth was sweat on one's hands? (18).

Each group is quite confident that its occupation is what brings wealth. Therefore when the weather interferes with these occupations, economy of these people is adversely affected.

Servitude is among ramifications of food shortage. Poor economic conditions, compel people to hire themselves out. This is a hand to mouth kind of life characterized by exploitation and suffering:

Karega's father and his two wives had left Limuru in the '20's. They had lived as squatters on different European farms providing free labor in return for some grazing and cultivation rights on settlers' lands. They would be given a piece of land in the bush: they would clear it and after a year they would be driven off and shown other virgin lands to clear for the European landlord. Thus they had moved from one landlord to the next until they ended in Elburgon. By this time, there goats were depleted either through death, or fines, through forced sales 'to prevent the passing on of ticks and other diseases' and they turned solely to working full-time on settlers' farms for wages (58).

It is this kind of life that Miriamu, Karega's mother leads. After running away from her abusive husband, she goes to Limuru where she begs for cultivation rights from Munira's father. She serves on this farm for the rest of her life even after her master wants to take advantage of her because she has no option given that she has children to sustain.

Ngugi offers several suggestions for food security in post-independent African *Petals of Blood*. For him, 'the magic is in our hands' (114). Being a Marxist he advocates for men and women coming together to overthrow capitalist bourgeoisie class that is responsible for exploitation of the masses and natural resources like forests. He depicts a society that is stratified. We have the haves and the have-nots. Capitalists in this society are in league with former colonialists to benefit themselves at the expense of the masses. These are politicians like Nderi wa Riera, civil servants like Chui, religious leaders like Ezekiel Waweru and others in powerful positions in society like Kimeria who take advantage of their positions and power to exploit the natural resources and the poor masses. Ilmorog as the microcosm of society is where Ngugi convenes the masses for action. He brings here his main characters who have suffered exploitation just as the village itself has suffered. Trees are depleted during construction of the railway and later due to construction of the road. Villagers in Ilmorog are disillusioned due to drought and hunger as a result of deforestation. Munira, Karega, Wanja and Abdulla have suffered in different ways due to betrayal and exploitation. The drought and famine crises in Ilmorog trigger mass action.

When Nderi wa Riera sends messengers to Ilmorog to inform villagers about the Kiama Kamwene Organization, how they are supposed to pay twelve shillings and fifty cents and go to Gatundu to sing and take tea, women confront them. It is evident that they have developed consciousness and they are ready to fight against capitalist exploitation:

At this, the women led by Nyakinyua started making a noise: did he mean they had to pay in order to go and sing and drink tea? ... 'you too if you have ears, listen: you are worse than a tax gatherer. Twelve shillings and fifty cents! From what hole are we to dig up the money? Why should we pay to sing? Go back and tell them this: here we need water, not songs. We need food. We need our sons back to help this land grow... You mean some of you have already made enough wealth while we scratch the earth?'

'Is that the wealth they want to steal from us?'

'Good for them if they are as poor as we are'

'Yes, yes. What can they steal from us?'

'One year's harvest'

'Our drought and dust'

'If someone can steal away this dust and this drought-that would be a blessing.'

'Here we live with our neighbors, the herdsmen. What quarrels have amongst yourselves out there?'

The women had taken over the whole show, and they seemed to be enjoying it. Someone started making threatening loud cries. There was slight commotion.

'Let us pull out their penises and see if they are really men,' one woman shouted.

Fat stomach and his companion, Insect, backed a little, trying to keep dignity, but at the women's words, they started running across the school compound toward their Land rover, the menacing voices of women behind them (112).

The climax of consciousness is evident when the Ilmorog community in one accord decides to trek to the city to confront their Member of parliament, Nderi wa Riera to have him intervene in their drought predicament: 'The trek to the city had attracted many people carried on the waves of hope and promises, and had woken a feeling that the crisis was a community crisis needing a communal response' (123). 'They must go and confront that which had been the cause of their empty granaries, that which had sapped their energies, and caused their weakness' (116). The trek to the city is no walk in the park. It is a long tedious journey that has brought together young children, youth and the elderly. It therefore entails a lot of sacrifice and compromise for this group to undertake such a feat. Nyakinyua talks about the importance of operating as a unit in this task. The power of unity is evident in the words if Karega as he converses with Wanja along the way:

'But the past few days my heart bled because so many men and women and children were willing to join us. I was even more touched by the songs of hope that we sang...'

'Why should we fail though? We are now going as a community. The voice of the community is truly the voice of God. And who is an MP? Isn't he the people's voice in the ruling house? He cannot ignore us. He cannot refuse to hear us.

'You have a touching faith in people. This is may be a good thing' (126).

Ngugi's objective for mass action is that the masses liberate themselves from exploitation by the bourgeoisie class and access what is rightfully theirs. This is summed up in Nyakinyua's words:

You have been to school. You and this small one here are the teachers of our children. What do you tell them? That we were always like this and will always be like this? And you my daughter, have you not seen more than you dare tell? What about Abdulla here? What other secrets does he hide in that stump of a leg? Going away generation...but they will one day return to the knowledge of themselves and then the kingdom of God and of men will be theirs (212).

*Remedies for Food Insecurity*

To have food security, Ngugi suggests that the society should acquire knowledge and embrace modern approaches. The author campaigns against ignorance. When drought intensifies in Ilmorog, elders think of sacrificing Abdulla's donkey, the stranger in their midst which to them has aggravated the drought situation. Traditionally, the donkey is supposed to be beaten and driven to a far off land where it would take the problem. This causes contention in their midst. An elder however suggests, 'but perhaps the teachers of our children might have a modern cure for an old illness' (114). In response to this, Karega elaborates on the need to apply modern technology to reap more food:

A donkey has no influence on the weather. No animal or man can change a law of nature. But people can use the laws of nature. The magic we should be getting is this: the one which will make this land so yield in times of rain that we can keep aside a few grains for when it shines. We want the magic that will make our cows yield so much milk that we shall have enough to drink and exchange the rest for things we cannot grow here. The magic is in our hands. Tomorrow when it rains: we should be asking the soil: what food, what offering does it need so that it will yield more (114-115).

For Ngugi, ignorant masses are vulnerable to exploitation. Some people in Ilmorog for instance do not know what an MP is. Obviously therefore, they do not understand his role. That is why politicians take advantage of their ignorance to exploit them:

Who was their MP? A heated exchange would follow. Some could not remember his name. They had heard of him during the last elections. He had visited the area to ask to be given votes. He had made several promises. He had even collected two shillings from every household in his constituency for a Harambee water project, and a ranching scheme. But they had hardly seen him since. Nderi wa Riera-aa, that was the name, somebody remembered. What was an MP? A new type of government agent? But why had he needed votes? (18)

We discover later that the MP invests the money he collected from his constituents thus taking advantage of their ignorance.

The main characters like Munira, Wanja, Karega find a reason to celebrate when Joseph is enrolled in school. This is because they cherish education. Education guarantees knowledge which is responsible for liberation. Once the boy is enrolled, Abdulla no longer treats Joseph as a slave. The drought challenge brings to the fore the value of education. Characters who have been to school like Karega suggest a viable solution of trekking to the city to confront the MP. Educational prospects of these same characters are however nipped in the bud due to injustices in the society.

Another solution to Food shortage according to Ngugi is hard work. Karega Says, 'Let us rather look to ourselves to see what we can do to save us from the drought. The labor of our hands is the magic and the wealth that will change the world

and end all droughts from our earth' (115). The beauty of work is captured in the excitement that engulfs the people of Ilmorog during rain seasons:

At the beginning of April it started raining. The eyes of the elders beamed with expectation of new life over Ilmorog: their wrinkled faces seemed to stretch and tighten with sinews of energy. Everybody was busy about the fields. Muturi, Njuguna, Ruoro and Njogu: even these, for a time, would not come by Abdulla's shop for they were tired out after the day's involvement with planting or walking their cows and goats in muddy fields (20).

Munira too gets infected by this mood of work around the village and makes children sing about the dignity of work:

Cows are wealth  
Work is wealth  
Goats are wealth  
Work is health  
Crops are wealth  
Work is health  
Money is wealth  
Work is health  
God the Almighty Giver  
God Bringer of rains! (115)

There is a lot of emphasis laid on the importance of work and severally Nyakinyua laments the fact that youth have moved away to cities leaving villages with no one to work on the farms. This leads to underdevelopment of villages and food shortage. 'Then they sent for our young our young men. They went on swallowing our youth. Ours is only to bear in order for the city to take... They have continued to entice our youth away... that is why Ilmorog must go there now and see this Ndamathia that only takes (115).

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current food situation in Kenya calls for urgent intervention. Food is inadequate and can therefore not sustain its population. Ironically, natural resources are still being destroyed by capitalists. This affects the weather adversely resulting in poor food production. In conclusion, factors that contribute to food shortage are ignorance, poverty, inadequate labor, inadequate land and selfish leadership. Inadequate food has far-reaching ramifications. These are starvation, servitude, migration, poverty and psychological torture. For Ngugi, remedies for food shortage are acquisition of knowledge and application of modern techniques to farming, consciousness of the masses to deal with capitalistic and selfish leadership who exploit the masses and hard work.



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