

The enslaved family as reflected in Post-colonial African Drama: Ngugi and Ngugi's *I Will Marry When I Want*

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Abstract

In literary studies, critics demonstrate authors' role to depict human life using characters and themes affecting them through various literary forms viz prose fiction, poetry and drama. The latter tells a story by engaging dialogue and conflicts among characters. Driven by the didactic literary theory, the researchers carry out a literary analysis of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's morality play "I Will Marry When I Want"; and explore the situation of an enslaved family reflected in the impossible promise of the land grabber and exploiter targeting a one and half acres of land that the family was living on. Discussion centers on character victims in the story, leading to the conclusion that the play depicts the hypocrisy and power of the elite - haves at the expense of the poor in post-colonial Africa. The Kioi's malice unbeknown to Kiguunda's family is one of many cases of human bad manners that affect society members due to their poor life background rooted in the effects of exploitation and oppression; resulting in the victim's wrong choice motivated by the stopgap altogether.

Keywords— Literature, Ngugi, drama, post-colonial Africa, hypocrisy, land, poverty, marriage.

I. INTRODUCTION

Research in literature reflects on messages that authors wanted to convey to society. African literature is no exception. Most of African writers take interest in drawing a picture of how people lived or live so that the audience can learn how to live. Literary works concerned with the ills of Post-colonial Africa fall in this category including drama where African playwrights depict how the African fall victim of the ills of robbery done by land grabbers, exploiters, and oppressors who, according to Ngugi and Ngugi (1982) 'know only to take from the poor'. Contemporary emerging African playwrights aim to fighting for transformation for a better society free of oppression, corruption, injustice, embezzlement, opportunism (Elegba, 2021) among other rampant issues on African continent. It is in this realm that two Kenyans

co - authored a play titled "*I Will Marry When I want*" originally written in Kikuyu language holding the title *Ngaahika Ndeenda*". The play ranges among the postcolonial literary works concerned mainly with the ills suffered by the local communities. Babayeju & Adedipe (2018) refer to such situation as "the effects of long – lasting domination of Africans by their masters while (Akingbe, 2013) views it as the "debilitating poverty experienced by the peasants in the play caused by the socio-economic dislocation they suffered in the hands of colonial authorities. Against this background, this paper is a related literary study to pinpoint the devils of exploitation of man by his fellow human beings no matter how the latter is enslaved due to their wrong but nature forced choices.

Problem Statement

The unfair behavior that characterizes betrayers, hypocrite, malicious and greedy oppressor- exploiters still endangers the life of the innocent victims due to their inability or lack of means to cope with the outsider's imposed or dictated plan. The post-colonial African poor family is identified as victim of the powerful and haves - hypocrites who are owners of land to the detriment of the local people. In some situations, characters in the African drama are depicted as disadvantaged exploited and oppressed due to weaknesses to grapple with the ills resulted from the colonial period. As Fashina (2009) points it out, the play co-authored by Ngugi wa Mirii and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o presents the question of the "evils of neocolonialism and capitalist exploitation in the post- independence Kenya", a historical and socio-economic situation worth exploring to delve into experience of native Africans on their land. The hypocrisy and malice coupled with false promises that enslaved the disadvantaged community still need be examined for people to learn how they can grapple with similar or identical situations.

Aims and Scope of the study

This paper ranges among literary analyses in African Literature with particular emphasis on the Post-colonial East African drama. Analysis is carried on "I Will Marry When I want", a play co-authored by two Kenyan playwrights namely Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Ngugi Wa Mirii. Further, the study intended to:

- (i) Demonstrate that drama is a literary form that reflects reality;
- (ii) Explore the post - colonial African victim of human hypocrisy;
- (iii) Identify some lessons that the two authors wanted the audience to draw.

Study Questions

- (i) How far is drama a literary form that reflects reality?
- (ii) To what extent does "I will Marry When I want" depict the African family as a victim of the post - colonial human malice towards his fellows?
- (iii) What possible messages do the authors of the play "I Will Marry when I want" want the audience to draw?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is a tool that has always addressed public issues by reflecting them in an imaginative way (Klimková, 2019) and through it people can learn to live, to ape good deeds and denounce the ills done on the human beings by

their fellows(Bazimaziki, 2021). Post-colonial African playwrights are no exception as they are mostly interested in depicting the African history, their socio-political issues, and their cultural values as well; an approach recommended in Asagba (1986) that African playwrights could make a giant step if they portray the historical and cultural values of their local people. Klimková (2019) elucidates it well that the main concern of the postcolonial literature has always been concerned with the portrayal of marginalized and oppressed communities. Put another way, the post- colonial African drama could not be distanced from the historical and social traditions (Asagba, 1986) and most of African playwrights were mainly concerned with the ills of colonialism including but without limitation to greedy, hypocrisy, betrayal, injustice and nepotism done by natives over their fellows, among other things.

According to Gilbert & Tompkins (1996), the term post-colonialism does not only refer to the time after independence; but also denotes a contestation of colonialism structure and an engagement to cope with the effects of colonial rule. Fashina (2009) contends that African postcolonial drama is a means of teaching people as it engages history while attempting to transcend the boundaries of political, socio-economic and cultural alienation. In this vein, numerous studies conducted in light of Ngugi's writings converge to the same conclusion of an invaluable role he played as a teacher of history to Africans about the ills suffered by the local people affected by the colonial rule. For instance, Klimková (2019) views Ngugi as not only one of the postcolonial powerful voices but also a critic and social activist while Babayeju & Adedipe (2018) assert that Ngugi's writings intended to reclaim cultural and language loss; while his co-authored play *I Will Marry When I Want* explores the post-colonial Africa exploited by the colonizer.

Similarly, studies conducted on this play involved religion as a form of massive exploitation (Babayeju & Adedipe, 2018), alienation and revolutionary vision (Fashina, 2009), while other studies reveal how in that play the "two playwrights unequivocally confirm that the poverty and misery of [post-colonial] Kenyans was orchestrated by the elite class" (Akingbe, 2013); thus a portrayal of a situation where Africans lost their land in favour of their masters. Inherently, exploring the same play, Usongo (2013) posits that oppression, exploitation and other ills still perpetuated in many parts of Africa as a result of colonialism; leading the minority rule to have supplanted the majority rule; a situation that Akingbe (2013) calls rapacious gluttony for land grabbing; a 'backdrop of land theft' by and large. Using the didactic theory of literature, this study intends to explore similar issues based on the hypocrite character that

enslaved the land owner through a promise that is not delivered, an impossible marriage of a couple, a poor lady to an elite class suitor.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study involves a post-colonial reading of East African Drama. It is a qualitative analysis driven by the didactic theory of literature which posits that literature is a source of knowledge, insights and wisdom. Passages extracted from the primary source "*I Will Marry when I Want*" are discussed in consideration with the supporting related literature. Thus, the methodology involved reading and analysis of the corpus supplemented by related studies in similar areas of contention to cement the discussion.

IV. DISCUSSION

Some literary gurus support that literature is concerned with expression of feeling and emotions; while others consider it as a source of insights, knowledge and wisdom. It is a social tool through which critics know about the past, the ups and downs that people experienced in the world they lived at a particular time. Be they plays, prose fiction and non-fiction, or poetry, literary works are therefore concerned with issues related to people acting in favour of or against human creatures with whom they live. According to Fashina (2009), of all the genres drama is the most didactic tool due to its depiction of real life situations. African victims depicted in "*I Will Marry when I Want*" are an evidence that drama involves human life situation. Characters described in that play are some of those people that are oppressed and exploited a great deal as a result of colonialism. In this discussion, much emphasis is put on the peasant family of Kiguunda and Wangeci described as an African family victim of the ills resulted from the colonial rule which acted to the disadvantage of the native land owners.

Initially, the play title, '*I Will Marry When I Want*' derives from a family conflict between Wangeci and Gathoni, her daughter whom they did not take to school but now the mother wants her to get married. Such a pressure will cause the parents to be enslaved by the trap of Kioi, a rich who is targeting their only one - and a half acres of land. The mother tells her daughter:

Why don't you get yourself a husband?

[...] There is no girl worth the name

Who is contented with being an old maid

In her mother's homestead

[...] There is no maiden who makes a home in
her father's backyard.

And there's no maiden worth the name who
wants to get grey

hairs at her parents' home" (Ngugi & Ngugi,
1983)

Actually, the above words imply that the mother is anxious about her daughter's marriage. She would like her to get a husband. She sees her daughter as a threat as reflected in her words that "when two axes are kept in the same basket, they must necessarily knock against each other" meaning that she is not comfortable to live with her daughter. Hence, a mother-daughter conflict which shows the family is unhappy to a certain extent. In reaction to her mother's words, Gathoni expresses her sorrow and categorically tells what is on her mind as shown in the lines below:

Mother, why are you insulting me?

Is that why you refused to send me to school,

So that I may remain your slave

And for ever toil for you?

Packing tea and coffee only for you to pocket the wages?

And all that so that you can get money

To pay fees for your son!

Do you want me to remain buried under these ashes/

And on top of all that injury

You have to abuse me night and day?

Do you think I cannot get a husband?

I'll be happy the day I leave this home!

[...] I shall marry when I want

Nobody will force me into it

I shall marry when I want" (Ngugi & Ngugi, 1982) The above lines reveal that there is a dispute resulting from family poor life conditions. When Gathoni complained that she could be sent to school instead of staying home doing household chores, she meant that the daughter is a victim of parents' poor plan. They will plan for her forced but unsuccessful marriage orchestrated by Kioi's will to misappropriate a land at the disadvantage of the poor family which still lives in rampant poverty despite independence they got as Kiguunda's words put it:

How many years have gone

Since we got independence?

Ten and over,

Quite a good number of years

And now look at me!

One and a half acres of land in dry plains.

Our family land was given to home guards.

Today I am just a labourer
On farms owned by Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru.
My trousers are pure tatters.
Look at you.
See what the years of independence in poverty
Have done to you!
Poverty has hawled down your former splendor
Poverty has dug trenches on your face
Your hells are now so many cracks,...
(Ngugi & Ngugi, 1982)

As revealed in the above words, Kiguunda is telling his wife about disappointment. While they were expecting to enjoy the independence, the situation stands that they are still living in poverty, living on their only land, yet owned by Kioi. He adds that they are wearing old clothes and look hungry, thus living a miserable life. They are victims of the evils left behind by colonialism and that independence did not address as expected. It follows that the one and a half acres mentioned in the above lines will later be a topic for discussion when Kioi and his family visited Kiguunda's family. It is a master's visit to his slave as well explained in Kiguunda's words that "...they want to see how their slaves live", a visit which targets a love affair between Gathoni – Kiguunda's daughter; and John Muhuuni, son of a wealthy Ahab Kioi. Eventually, Gathoni's involvement with John Muhuuni now becomes clear and is accepted by the daughter's parents when they pay the Kioi's a visit. They say:

We have come because of that matter.
We have thought a great deal about that matter,
And we came to the conclusion that
We should not put obstacles to your larger purposes

In response to these words, Kioi now expresses his feelings as his plan is gradually reaching its apex. He says:

If you have agreed to our plans
We shall now become true friends,
Your house and mine becoming one
In the name of Lord...

The lines above translate the agreement between the two in-laws on their children engagement to marry each other. Unfortunately, marriage does not take place. Rather, Kiguunda's family is disillusioned and faces a much more critical situation, a twofold loss. First, the family becomes victim of hypocrisy of Kioi. The latter already owns Kiguunda's land and proposes them to give the same land

as collateral so that they can get a loan from his bank to cover marriage related expenses. Second, Gathoni made pregnant by John Muhuuni with whom she is engaged, becomes a heavier load for her family. She has been rejected by her lover saying that "he is not responsible for the pregnancy, that he cannot marry a prostitute" (Ngugi and Ngugi, 1983). It is critical and the situation worsens for Kiguunda's family when they fail to pay back the loan. Consequently, Kioi wins maliciously the land and the poor family is totally disappointed as Wangeci explains in a great despair:

We went to Kioi's place
To tell him about Gathoni and Muhuuni.
Kioi and Kiguunda exchanged heated words.
Kiguunda took out his sword
Kioi's wife took out a gun
What can I say?
We are now breathing
Only because the bullets missed us
Death was not ready to receive us.
Kioi said he could not pursue the matter further,
But he dismissed Kiguunda from his job.
After a week
Kiguunda got a letter from the bank's lawyers.
The letter said: Pay back the loan
Or we shall sell the piece of land.
Kiguunda has no job.
He has tried to sell the goods
We foolishly bought with the loan money
And they are not fetching much.
So the radio announced that
The piece of land would be auctioned. (Ngugi and Ngugi, 1982)

At times, Wangeci was always anxious about her daughter's marriage; and this has been an issue that is causing disagreement and dispute among the family members. Elsewhere, Kioi's proposal to Kiguunda's family to marry Gathoni to his son John Muhuuni is ironically seen as remedy to Wangeci's wish. The two families are now planning together for marriage preparation. The in-laws are now interested in that bond. Surprisingly, Kiguunda's family is given a loan from the bank which Kioi is director. It is a double edged weapon he uses to grab their land; pure hypocrisy and malice that Kioi uses to win the Kiguunda's land given as collateral

rather than selling it, another alternative that Kioi suggested to the family.

When the suitor, John Muhuuni, once takes Gathoni to Mombasa, he makes her pregnant; a situation that will make all the marriage plan to abort altogether. It is a success for Kioi and desperation for the Kiguunda's. The latter is unable to pay back the loan as he is already dismissed by his ironic- in-law boss. The land must consequently be auctioned to pay back the bank money. It is misery and hell that fall on the poor family as a result of a long plan to enslave them.

From the above discussion now stem two important questions: Why couldn't Kioi sponsor the marriage if he needed his son to get the hand of Kiguunda's daughter? Why didn't the maiden parents learn from Kioi's trick-double-edged – sword of either selling their only land or give it to his bank as a guarantee? They fall victims of making a wrong and light choice rather than thinking beyond the stopgap solution that caused them such flaw. It is an error of judgment that made the family to lose their property. Kiguunda's family is thus an enslaved victim of malicious and impossible promise orchestrated by their poor life background rooted in the effects of colonialism on the native Africans. Often times, lack of thinking long and hard leads to such negative effects as has happened to Kiguunda. Kioi fires him from his job which demoralizes him; then Kioi's son rejects Gathoni; and their land is sold to pay the "recalled loan bank"(Lovesy, 2000). From Kiguundas's family experience, one can draw an important lesson: To think back on the past so as to decide on how to live well the present and the future.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Drama is a literary form that tells a story through performance of human actions. It engages dialogue and conflicts among characters. It is a tool that authors use to show how some human beings on earth are fair or unfair to their fellows. It conveys historical happenings in an imaginative way. The playwrights of postcolonial era describe this situation where the African people are oppressed and affected by exploitation of man by his fellow. Characters in Ngugi and Ngugi's "*I Will Marry when I Want*" are good examples of people not only in post-colonial Africa but also in other settings characterized by human hypocrisy towards the disadvantaged group. The Kioi's malice unbeknown to Kiguunda's family is one of many cases of victims of human bad manners that affect society members due to their poor life background rooted in the effects of exploitation and oppression, whereby the stopgap motivates the victim's wrong but imposed choice.

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