



NGUGI WA THIONGO'S METAPHORICAL MEANING OF LAND IN AFRICAN CULTURE

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1. Introduction

A land conflict is defined as a social fact in which at least two parties are involved, the root of which are different interests over the property rights to land: the right to use the land, to manage the land, to generate an income from the land, to exclude others from the land, to transfer it and the right to compensation for it. A land conflict can be understood as a misuse, restriction or dispute over property rights to land (Wehrmann: 2005).

2. **Meaning of Land in *Matigari***

In *Protest and Baby 'D': The Postcolonial Africa's Image in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Matigari and Wizard of the Crow*, Mongolo (2010) describes in chapter three of this doctorate thesis, some reasons and real facts present in Africa (Kenya) which provoked the protest against the first government, after independence. Among these reasons, the author points out: street children problem, prostitution, corruption, social class inequalities, the presence of colonizers enterprises such as *Anglo-American Leather* and *Plastic Works*, sexual harassment by police, leaders loveless attitudes and the problem of land.

He went far by arguing that: 'Matigari wa Njiruungi is among those people who love their land and their people, who fought for their liberation (Mongbolo 2010:175). In the novel cited above, land has so many meanings in kikuyu tradition:

3. **Land is Land**

In the very first dimension of the novel, Matigari, the land that Matigari is searching, is claiming is fighting for, is the true land. The natural space covered by earth, water and air that belongs to each people since before the arrival of the white men in Africa. African was not working on factories, industries, technologies or any kind of such works before the colonisation but only on land. They used land for agriculture, fishing, hunting and alike activities in order to feed families. African land is full of diamond, gold, silver, cobalt, petrol and so on. This is the main factor which attracted Europeans to divide African lands into their powerful countries.

Africans live on a land that was no longer belonging to them. They become scoters on their own land. Taxes were imposed to them. Most them who opposed themselves against British rules were either killed of tortured. The hope was that independence could change this catastrophic situation, but nothing happened even post-independence period. This unaccepted humiliation forced some brave Africans to fight against the the government. Matigari was one of those brave

men. He left the bush, mountains and isolation were he stayed for a long time and came in the city to fight for his ancestor's land. His said:

'There are two types of people in the land: those who sell it out, the traitors, and those who serve the people, love the people, the patriots.'
(Mat, 37)

The same reality is seen in Ngugi's family. After indirectly writing it in *Weep Not, Child*, he made it clear that the story is his family's. In *Dreams in a Time of War*, Ngugi couldn't easily understand the secret of his father's whole life sorrow. It is only after being informed that the land they were living on what no longer theirs that Ngugi came to understand the danger of the situation. His father's land was sold to another man. They were even forbidden to enter the bush, to cultivate and to do any activities on the land. To define land in other word, it is a great wealth for the whole levels, it affects poor, rich, hunters, farmers, digger and so on; it means the soil is very important in our daily life and it is our natural resources, without land no life.

4. Land is not Land

Ngugi's meaning of land is beyond the natural earth where trees and animals live together with human being. In his two novels, the word land is the metaphor for everything that determines Africans existence. Land is peace between Africans, land is freedom of Kenyans, land is the representation of whole African culture, land represents African traditions and religion, land is the symbol of African magic powers, land is African wealthy, land is the environment, land is security, land is justice and of course it is also the symbol of African solidarity.

4.1 Land is the Symbol of Peace

After losing his land, Ngugi's father lost his peace, destroyed his family peace. *Dreams in a Time of War* reads: '...the second phase followed my father's expulsion from the fields around the homestead, because now his hut was rarely occupied and we did not share meals with him anymore. The women still took food to him daily, but to the edges of my maternal grandfather's forest of blue gum and eucalyptus trees, not far from the Limuru African market shops'. The situation described above by the young Ngugi is sadly unbelievable.

The same thing is discussed in Matigari, the protagonist tries to hardly speak the reasons of his lack of peace. Questioned by Muriuki about his family:

'And your mother? What does she do?'

'I have no mother.'

'You have no mother, no father- an orphan? What happened to your mother?'

'She was burned to death when the house was set on fire.'

'Set on fire? By whom?' (Mat:25)

'The landlord she used to rent a hut in the village but she could not afford to pay for it. The landlord told her to leave, but my mother asked him: where will I go if I leave this hut? You can't throw me out the wilderness like a wild animal. Money isn't important than life... that night, my mother returned home drunk... then the house burst into flames'.

From the two evidences above, Ngugi shows that the lack of land for an African is the lack of peace.

4.2 Land is the Symbol of Freedom

Matigari and Ngugi's father are as all Africans owners of their fathers' inheritance of lands. Before the arrival of white men in Africa, each village, clan and family had whole autonomy over their lands. The freedom of cultivating, hunting, selling, buying and fishing was not negotiable. Things become different with the colonialism and even after independence, nothing changed.

Africans, Kenyans lost their freedom over land which leads to the loss of all kinds of freedoms: of speech, of demonstration, of thought, etc.

4.3 Land is the Symbol of African Culture and Tradition

African culture and tradition are very rich, inspiring and unimaginable. White men thought that blacks are not civilised, have no culture, that their tradition was ridiculous. The fact that land was taken from owners made possible the process of enrooting Africans from their cultures and traditions. Kenyans were forced to speak like white man, to eat like them, to pray only in western religions, to dance

like British people, to read and write only in English and of course to think like them. This is what Matigari calls, the slavery of mind and the soul.

In African culture and tradition, no parents could expulse his child from home. No matter the degree of his faults. But this was not the case in Ngugi's life. He was victim of expulsion. His own father could no longer bear the lack of land. It changed him totally. It killed his peace and pushed him to home violence... after having seriously kicked their mother, Ngugi's father expulsed his two children: 'I want you to stop

Playing with my children. Go, follow your mother, he said, pointing in the general direction of my grandfather's place' (DTW, 96). This situation has effected Ngugi's whole life. Ngugi considered his family house, a paradise. A place where his writing inspiration came from, where he used to listen to African stories, tales and songs everyday night and day. For that expulsion he wrote: 'But it is not a good thing to have your own father deny you as one of his children. The move deepened my since of myself as an outsider, a feeling I had harboured since I learned that the land on which our homestead stood was not really ours. I had been an outsider at Kamandura, where it seemed that others belonged more than I did, and at Manguo upon moving there. Now I was an outsider in my father's house' (DTW, 97). Land really broke African societies and divided families.

4.4 Land is the Symbol of African Religion and Magic

Before the arrival of white men, Africans knew God. They had their religions and magic powers. Missionaries first missions were to separate indigenious people from their magical powers, their religions, their ruts and some practices. Christianity was preached all over Africa. Ngugi's point of view on those religions is still dark. The fact that he was baptised James Ngugi in catholic church and then rejected this European name, the fact that he was imprisoned for his play *I Will Marry When I Want*, which revealed hypocrisy of political leaders who hide behind Jesus Christ's name for taking poor country men's lands from them under so many pretexts, the fact that African people who were living together came to become pure enemies divided by religion, as he described in *The River Between*... Ngugi want to show that land's power is what link people. Taking the lands from local people is to destroy their religion and magical powers.

Ngugi says about religion views: ‘From Lord Reverend Kahahu I myself learned to revere modernity; from Baba Mukuru, the values of tradition; and from my father, a healthy scepticism of both. But the performance aspects of both Christianity and tradition always appealed to me’ (DTW, 86).

4.5 Land is the Symbol of African Wealthy.

African man who lived before 1900s didn’t have back investment. Land was everything he needed for his life. In land African found everything: water, food, construction materials, medicines, spiritual forces, etc.

After Ngugi’s father and Matigari losing their lands, they become miserable. None of them was able to nourish his family. About his father, Ngugi wrote: ‘The man who had everything had now lost all. His loss of wealth devastated my father’ (DTW, 90). Another incident took place in 1927. Ngugi reads: ‘In 1927 Lika Kahangara, a spokesperson, broke ranks. He agreed to move to alternative lands in Lari. He gave the British legal cover for the theft. Those who held out were moved by force, their houses torched. They lost their land and houses’ (DTW, 183). The situation explained above is sad to imagine. This is real. It happened in Kenya. Once a person is asked to leave his land and home by force, he leaves not only the land but also his wealthy. He could become a miserable.

4.6 Land is the Symbol of African Security and Justice

The loss of land is the lack of true security and justice. Land represents African’s security and justice. When Ngugi spoke about the expulsion of people from their land and homes in 1927, he added: ‘A British officer asked his African askaris to open fire. When they hesitated, he opened fire himself, with a machine gun. The captives fell in a heap. To make sure that they were all dead, the officer shot another round of machine-gun fire on those who had already fallen. He and his men went away’ (DTW, 183).

The events described here above are real situations that characterised post-independence Africa. Local people were not secured by their government. Justice and security were only for white men and their fellow corrupted African friends. When Matigari was questioned about the justice and security police, he replied:

'Let me tell you one thing, whether they imprison, detain or kill us, they will never stop we who toil from struggling against those who only feed on our toil' (Matigari, 138).

Nobody trusted police, justice and government, they were all corrupted. Citizens of Kenya could no longer be sure that a poor peasant can win a justice judgement against rich white or African men.

4.7 Land is the Symbol of African Solidarity

Ngugi is from a big family. His father, Thiong'o wa Nducu had three wives and twenty-four children. The family lived in good harmony and peace link by the blood. Solidarity has characterised the family. Everything started to fall down with the sad news: 'I learned that our land was not quite our land; that our compound was part of property owned by an African landlord' (DTW, 11). The loss of land made Ngugi's family miserable, their father become violent against his children and wives. The Family's solidarity was broken.

These break heart events were present in Ngugi's whole family. His grandmother was victim of the expulsion from their village to an unknown place. It was hard to practice solidarity in the time of war. Not gun's war, but land's war. War caused by powerful African to suffer their wear brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins and nephews. Land is the symbol of African unity and solidarity.

5. Kinds of Land Conflict

All land conflicts, no matter how peaceful or violent (they are, produce negative consequences for individual people as well as for the entire society. All over the world, people struggle for land. Many of them struggle with land conflicts and some of them struggle to solve them peacefully. (Babette W, 8).

The most difficult type of land conflict to resolve involves a powerful person against one or more poor people. ' Powerful is shorthand for a group of categories of people that include high-ranking politicians, civil servants, the military, the police, companies and other rich and influential groups or individuals.

In order to successfully resolve land conflicts, it is important to be aware of the many different types of land conflicts that exist. One difference is found in the

identity of the actors involved, some of them being legitimated to act in the way they do, others not. Other differences are found in aspects of the land itself, whether the conflicts occur on state, private or commonly owned land. Still other differences result from the complexity of causes of the conflict, as well as how these influence and intensify one another. Finally, the dimension of a land conflict varies significantly which makes a major difference for its resolution. Understanding the specific nature of the land conflict under consideration is a vital step in its eventual resolution.

6. Conclusion

Africa is the only continent nowadays considered as less developed, less civilized and with fewer opportunities. Civil wars and ethnic conflicts are frequent in the modern history of Africa. Thought, another key point in Africa's problems is *Land*. The unprepared arrival of colonizers in the continent came to destroy the natural harmony of our culture, people and land. Most postcolonial African writers are interested to write about land and its conflicts. In Ngugi's body of work, land has a metaphorical meaning.

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