

A Novel Look at National Economic Aspirations and International Interventions: Ngugi's *Matigari* from an Environmental Perspective

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An important feature of the literary work coming out of Africa has been its remarkable focus on the prevailing social and political concerns of the continent. Works of fiction are written and read as if they constitute just one other medium of discourse to address and interpret some of Africa's pressing issues of the day. Given the influence that they have enjoyed in shaping public opinion, it is unavoidable that these works invite the interest of scholars in the social sciences to take a closer look at the interpretations adopted and the messages that are being advanced.

アフリカの文学の重要な特徴は、それがアフリカ大陸の国々に広く見られる社会問題及び政治問題に深い関心を寄せる点である。小説が書かれまた読まれるのは、恰も現代アフリカが直面する問題を取り上げ、それを論じる媒体を今一つ手にするためであったとも言えよう。そこに世論を形成する影響力を認めることができるとすれば、社会学者が文学作品に窺われる意見とその解釈を吟味したくなるのもまた当然であるといわねばならない。

Prologue

This discussion will proceed in three segmented but inter-related parts. The first part introduces both the author and the novel in the context and tradition of African writers of fiction. The second part examines the characterization of Kenya's social and economic conditions as depicted in the novel, *Matigari*. The nature and problems of Kenya's modern economy, the forces that control it, and the impact that modernization has had on the lives of Kenyans are assessed as these are presented in the pages of the novel. The third part advances an alternative perspective from the field of industrial organization to explain the social and economic conditions that Kenya has found itself in.

I would like to preface my discussion with a brief statement regarding the applicability of a social science type perspective to the analysis of a literary or fictional work. This is not a literary critique, and my background in the social sciences does not qualify me for that task. But then *Matigari* is not confined to purely abstract literary work either. It transcends the bounds of abstract literature in its direct and daring address of issues that are social, political and economic in nature. This paper is not to be regarded as a commentary on the literary qualities of "Matigari." Rather, it is a tentative application of an interdisciplinary analysis to an engaging and influential African novel with a distinct socioeconomic message.

At another level, this paper may also be regarded as a commentary on the delicate and somewhat tricky task of problem identification, regardless of which group ventures out to identify the problems of Africa. As the parable of the seven visually-impaired persons and the elephant alerts us, our judgement of a situation is often defined by our choice of evidence; but it is also filtered through a set of feelings and thoughts that reflect our past experience. It is quite possible to come away with seven descriptions of the same elephant—with each description proving factual up to a point. Up to a point may be good enough, but a problem does arise when a point gets mistaken for a whole picture.

Introduction: African Writers as Writers on Africa

It is clear to many that contemporary African writers have their own distinct styles that sets them apart from writers in the West. This distinctive style is present even as the writer communicates in a western language, and an aspect of this distinction is the extent to which the writer immerses his or her works in the real issues and problems of the day facing African societies. Aimé Césaire provides an explanation, "Our duty as men of culture, our double duty, is this: to hasten decolonization and, in the very heart of the present, to make ready for good decolonization, a decolonization without aftereffects" (Cartey and Kilson, p. 154).

Wole Soyinka suggests that this represents a sacrifice of artistic freedom and a departure from some kind of universal norm, but a necessary sacrifice, nonetheless, which the writer must temporarily put up with:

The writer must, for the moment at least (he persuades himself) postpone that unique reflection on experience and events which is what makes a writer—and constitute himself into a part of that machinery that will actually shape events. . . the African writer found that he could not deny his society; he could, however, temporarily at least, deny himself. (Cartey & Kilson, *African Reader*, p.136)

Chinua Achebe is more firm in his endorsement of this role. He asserts, "It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant—like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames" (Cartey and Kilson, p. 162).

Writers in French also lend their voice to this view. "Regarding the relationship of the intellectual to his culture, Senghor writes that the artist in Africa is by necessity involved in his society, because it is characteristic of the African way of life, of his negritude, to be related and to be a spokesperson for his community and his culture" (Cartey & Kilson, p. 124).

And of course more explicit and consistent in both the advocacy and practice of this role of the African writer is Ngugi himself. "As a writer I feel at one first and foremost with Kenyan people who are struggling against neo-colonial oppression and repression," he asserts. "I belong to Kenyan people, African people, Third World people, all peoples struggling against economic exploitation and social oppression, those in the world struggling for human dignity" (Wilkinson, *Talking with African Writers*, p. 131-132).

Thus, while declaring their aims with varying degrees of clarity, many African writers of fiction have applied themselves to expounding on the form and depth of the social and economic problems facing Africans. Beyond that, some have sought to articulate their particular visions of how the continent should reorder its affairs and overcome its predicaments. They have expressed themselves in ways that made their aims clear, their arguments forceful, and their messages urgent. They have also made their impacts. As Ukpabi Asika asserts, "We are where we are at the moment, because, in large measure, our self-identified 'leaders of thought' have put us there" (Cartey & Kilson, p. 143).

It is quite possible to find reasons why African writers lend their intellect to resolving societal issues. It may be that they are expressing attachment to the concept of extended family, as Senghor implies, by placing their concern for society ahead of their artistic inclinations. It could also be that, much like early intellectuals of the enlightenment period, their status as the few and the privileged does not permit "specialization" and inevitably draws them to try their hands in various fields of interest. This is much like the situation in Europe and elsewhere when the philosopher, the scientist, the artist, the poet, etc., all resided in one person. Still another explanation may be that the African writer is a product of a less-than-benign global environment that has left a continent with its back to the wall and its intellectuals on the defensive. The writer feels obligated to behave as a soldier of intellect and campaign for the political and economic emancipation of his nation.

As the works cited above indicate, there is little question that African novelists have dedicated themselves to wrestling with the pressing problems of their respective societies. This may well be quite proper for them to do. That is not what is being questioned here. If there is a question it has to do with whether the writers can continue to enjoy the sacrosanct freedom of the artist in light of the extra-artistic endeavors in which they have chosen to engage. Having picked up the mantle of social and economic policy advocates, can they avoid inviting questions concerning the validity of their interpretations and the viability of their prescriptions? I think not. And considering their large audience and immense influence in disseminating messages and popularizing ideas, it is important that their contributions pass interdisciplinary scrutiny and analytical rigor. It is in this context that I venture to apply a non-literary perspective to critically analyze the essentially social and economic worldview that is presented in *Matigari*.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Ngugi is a Kenyan author who has published more than half a dozen novels, five plays, several essays, and three children's books. His books include the novels: *Weep Not Child*, *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, *Matigari*, and his critiques of literary cultures: *Homecoming*, *Writers in Politics*, *Barrel of a Pen*, and *Decolonizing the Mind*. Translated into more than twenty languages, including German, Japanese, Swedish, Russian, Danish, his work has itself become the subject of several books, monographs, doctoral dissertations and international conferences. He has lectured at universities in Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.

His work has been recognized by national and international awards: including the East African Novel prize, the Lotus Prize for Literature, and the Paul Robeson Award for Artistic Excellence, Political Conscience and Integrity.

Born in 1938 in Kamiriithu Village near Limuru, Kenya, he grew up in his landless peasant father's household of a large family of four wives and twenty-eight children. He attended schools in Kenya and then received his higher education at Makerere University in Uganda and at Leeds University in England. But as a young man whose critically acclaimed novel, *Weep Not Child*, was written while he was still a college student, his education had progressed well before he set foot on any campus. And it is perhaps the influence of this other education that has sustained the unique and distinguished character of his work.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o grew up during a time of great turmoil and hardship in his native Kenya. His ancestral land in the temperate fertile highlands had been declared British Crown land and taken away from African farmers for redistribution to European settlers. Resistance to British colonialism had come to a head, and the repressive measures adopted to neutralize the "Mau Mau" freedom fighters were both harsh and indiscriminate.

Ngugi's family was hit hard. One of his brothers fled to join the freedom fighters. His mother was detained for three months and tortured. His home was razed to the ground, and his entire village was dismantled and up-rooted. His deaf and mute brother was shot and killed by authorities for failing to stop when ordered to do so.

The consistency of his theme, the insistence of his voice, and the clarity of his messages all seem to fall into place against these very trying circumstances that surrounded this writer's formative years. He observes, "I wrote, I suppose, because I had been moved by the bloodshed and violence during the Mau Mau uprising."

Matigari

Matigari is a fictional character in Ngugi's novel of the same name. He is a man from a simple background faced with the complex problems of life under colonial and, subsequently, neo-colonial rule. His mission was to preserve what to him were Kenya's tradition of familyhood, sharing, and the dignity of labor. He stands for the aspirations of Kenyans for independence and their daring struggle against oppression by a colonial power. He was locked in a protracted mortal combat against Settler Williams, the man who symbolizes the brute power and greed of the settlers that dispossessed the Kikuyu² of their ancestral land and deprived them of their traditional ways of life. Matigari is also a tragic hero in that he defeats Settler Williams only to discover that, following independence, Williams is now resurrected in many forms and under new guises. Kenya may be independent, but the legacies of Williams (arbitrary dispossession, coercion, and the use of brute force) continue to thrive and inflict their detrimental effects on the lives of Kenyans in post-independence Kenya. To his despair, he discovers that he could no longer fight and win against the forces that are now arrayed against him in the independent Kenya that he already fought for and thought he had won.

The Picture of Kenya in the Novel

Matigari is an indictment of independent Kenya's path of social and economic development. It argues that independence brought no marked improvement in the lives of ordinary Kenyans. Key resources are said to be in the hands of foreign owners, just as in the days of colonialism. There is division, mutual distrust, and fear among the people. The

colonial preoccupation with "law and order" at the expense of individual liberties still survives in the form of state sponsored campaigns of propaganda and disinformation as well as through direct repression and violence. There is corruption and blatant misuse of power. There is extreme inequality among classes, an inequality that has corroded the fabric of Kenya's traditional society of communal life. The system is shown to have failed all, except for a thin layer of the country's business and political elite which derives its privileges by acting as a local guard for powerful foreign interests.

What led Kenya on such a path of development?

It is a tale of betrayed promises. Matigari had a clear understanding of what it was that he fought for; and he returns from the forest expecting gains for his struggle. His simple and clear wish was to return to his family as a free person. Upon his return, he expresses a long cherished hope, "Let me tell them that the years of roaming are over. We shall go home together" (p. 10). It is good that I have now laid down my arms. . . . I have now girded myself with a belt of peace. I shall go back to my house and rebuild my home" (p. 5). But this was not to be. Neither his family nor his home was available for him to claim back. All his sacrifices amounted to nothing. He could not reconcile such an outcome of his years of struggle with that of freedom's original promise.

A recurring theme in the novel, and one for which Matigari expresses his strongest objection, is the economic injustice that he found pervasive in Kenyan society. This is both the cause for, and the effect of, the sad state of affairs that Matigari discovered upon his return from his forest hideout. The oft-repeated phrase "he who reaps where he never sowed" is a succinct expression of the denial of economic rights to those who won them through hard toil. "The builder demands back his house, and the tiller his land," he declares thus alerting us to the nature of the problem he encountered and the solutions he envisioned. ". . . from this day on, the builder refuses to beg for a place where he can lay his head; the tiller refuses to starve; the tailor refuses to go without clothes; and the producer refuses to part with his wealth."

His musings, his indignation and protestations are about the betrayal of hope. It seems that Matigari was the only person that could see that things had gone terribly wrong, that the aims of the independence struggle were abandoned, and that the lives of ordinary Kenyans were just as hard as under the colonial rule. It is as if he had stumbled out of his forest hideout and intruded into a society that is altered beyond his recognition and against all his hopes. In the words of the Provincial Commissioner, "Matigari is in a deep sleep -like Rip Van Winkle... By the time he woke up, he found that everything in the country had changed." (p.118) He returns from his long years of isolation to discover that his possessions are all taken over. His way of life has been overtaken by events that are unwelcome, and the freedom that he fought for is denied to him by forces that are unseen.

Why did the promises of the independence struggle get betrayed?

It is a dressing down of callous, cynical, and greedy leaders. The novel begins with the imagery of a riderless horse, and ends with the same. It symbolizes a condition of being leaderless. The message is that there is a leadership vacuum in Kenya because those in power do not serve the interests of the people. The scene in a mural at a restaurant captures the essence of this message: "King lion sat in the center of the circle, collecting money. On his crown he wore were the words 'King of the Jungle'. On his belly was the word 'Tribute', and at his feet was a barrel with the words 'Drink it, Drink It. After All, It Costs So Little, Drink It!'" The Kenyan people are subjected to the avarice of the mighty, and their will to resist is diluted in alcohol. In case you think this is reading too much into a mural scene, there are the bitter words of a detained man who shared a cell with Matigari, " Our leaders have hearts as cold as that of Pharaoh. Or even colder than those of the colonialists. They cannot hear the cry of the people"

It may well be that their hearts are cold, but their pockets seem to be full of gold. The ubiquitous black Mercedes are the most visible symbols of the fruits of their leadership. In a country with a 1995 per capita GNP of U.S. \$280, this can only be an achievement that consumes much skill and energy, not to mention scruples. This perhaps explains the equally ubiquitous policemen with dogs. Both help protect the loot while keeping the disenchanted at

bay. It also explains the somewhat subtler attempt at control by the tireless Minister of Truth and Justice who declares that there is no need for worker strikes because the government is a workers' government and there is no need for opposition parties in Kenya because the government is a people's government

How did Kenya fall and then remain under the scepter of such leadership?

It is the story of dispossessed, confused, and cowed masses. There are accounts of workers that are underpaid, overworked, and finally discarded without an old-age pension. "I spent all these years opposed to strikes," laments one. "I kept on saying: If I go on strike and lose my job, what will my children eat tomorrow?" Worker demands for better pay and better working conditions are routinely answered with police beatings. Another worker describes one such scene, "The workers were fleeing in every direction. The police and the soldiers followed in hot pursuit. Our eyes were smarting from the tear-gas they kept firing at us."

The cost of standing up for one's rights is kept rather high, and one consequence is the passivity that is induced by fear. There is the scene in which policemen set their menacing dogs on a defenseless woman who had scorned their sexual advances. "A crowd of people stood around Guthera, watching the policemen unleash terror on the woman" (p. 30). Again, Matigari appears to be the only one who could see, and dare object to, the wrong that was being perpetrated. His fury was directed as much at the passive crowd as at the dog-wielding policemen:

What is going on here? Are you going to let our children be made to eat shit while you stand around nodding in approval? How can you stand there watching the beauty of our land being trodden down by these beasts? . . . Why do you hide behind a cloak of silence and let yourselves be ruled by fear? Remember the saying that too much fear breeds misery in the land (p. 30-31).

We are told that the initial impression that Matigari made on the crowd was that of a lunatic. This crowd obviously could not contemplate for itself any civic involvement beyond that of passive observation.

How did Kenyans become so passive and unwilling to stand up for their rights?

Kenyans are shown to live in fear of their own government. They are under constant threat of loss of jobs, physical attacks, imprisonment, or even loss of life if they are regarded as "trouble makers" by any one in authority. Their words and actions are closely monitored by an army of spies that has infiltrated all walks of Kenyan life. Any misstep that can be misconstrued as an affront to the government can get the offender in serious trouble. Given such a repressive environment, passivity takes the form of a survival skill that Kenyans cultivate for the preservation of self and family.

Thus, in various contexts and on different levels, the novel does not shy away from identifying the causes and effects of Kenya's condition. And in doing so, it delves into an area of social science-like discourse in which the proper identification of causes and effects begin to matter. But does its catalogue of causes and effects offer an accurate interpretation of the prevailing conditions in Kenya?

How did conditions reach such a state of affairs?

Numerous causes are suggested. Excessive accommodation of foreign interests, wrong headed and corrupt leadership, rampant consumerism the elite, individualism, and the erosion of traditional Kenyan values are a few that can be identified.

The domination of Kenya's economy by foreign interests is seen to bring more harm than good. There is a parade of some well-known multinational interests that appear in the pages of the novel. "On either side of the highway they were now driving on were tall buildings. Neon lights flashed their various names: American Express, Citibank, Barclays, Bank of Japan, American Life, Inter-Continental, The Hilton, Woolworths, Wimpy Bar, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonalds, Shah's Supermarket Stores, Bata Shoes, African Retailers and many others. . . she read out the different names as they flashed by. 'General Motors. . . Firestone. . . Coca-Cola. . . IBM. . . Unilever Products. . . Madhvani Products. . . Del Monte. . . BAT. . . Union Carbide. . . Mitsubishi Products. . . African Cycle Mart. . .' and

so on" (p. 148). These are cast as the tentacles of imperialism. Now, as in the days of colonialism, these interests enjoy unchecked power in their business dealings, including the treatment of their workers. They achieve and protect such power through lavish gifts to or bribery of government and party officials. They then abuse this power by over-working and under-paying their Kenyan employees. And they get away with these practices with the unquestioning support and cooperation of Kenyan officialdom. Workers are beaten, tear-gassed and intimidated into submission. Kenyan workers are exploited and abused by foreign masters. No other single condition could symbolize so clearly the betrayal of Matigari's struggle and sacrifice for independence. It is colonialism in another guise. Matigari points to a solution:

You foreign oppressor,
Pack your bags and leave!
For the owner of this house
Is on his way (p. 46)

Hence, continued foreign domination is one cause and abuse and exploitation of Kenyans is the effect.

How is it possible for this to happen in independent Kenya? The answer is that imperialism has its local confederates in Kenya's top government officials. Laments Matigari, "Settler Williams could never rock the foundation of my home without a collaborator" (p. 114). These officials, it appears, never bought into the independence struggle in the first place. The government is seen to be under the tight control of loyalists³ of the colonial rule. As the Minister of Truth and Justice proudly asserts, "Yes, we loyalists are the ones in power today. Long live loyalism." A government that has retained intact the priorities and proclivities of the colonial administrators cannot but betray the hopes that Kenyans placed in their independence.

Who is responsible for this betrayal?

Institutions from academia to the media are shown to have betrayed the interests of Kenyans. Asserts the Minister of Truth and Justice, "These permanent professors are the ones who know how to obey and abide by the law, how to serve the law. You agree with me, Professor, don't you? The Permanent Professor in the History of Parratology shot up at once. So did the Ph.D. in Parratology and the Editor of the Daily Parrot. They sang three stanzas from Songs of a Parrot and then sat down, clinging to the hymn-book as though their lives depended on it" (pp. 103-104).

The betrayal continues so long as loyalty is rewarded with a life of comfort and opulence. Boasts the same Minister of Truth and Justice, "I have a seven-storied house here. I have three swimming pools. . . yes, three. . . one for the children, one for the guests and one for me and my wife! The house is decorated with marble, from Italy. Imported Italian marble!" (p. 102-103). As Matigari sadly observes, ". . . So a handful of people still profited from the suffering of the majority, the sorrow of the many being the joy of the few?" (p. 12).

The joy of the few is as conspicuous as is the sorrow of the many. We are given a glimpse of this joy of the few by the remnants of the feast. "In front of them was a scrap yard where cars of all makes were heaped—Ford, Mercedes, Volkswagen, Peugeot, Volvo, Fiat, Datsun" (p. 15).

In its original state, each scrap cost the equivalent of forty-five to fifty times the average annual per capita income of Kenyans. What is suggested here is that the opportunity cost of acquiring these imported luxury items by one group of Kenyans is the denial of jobs and income opportunities to another larger group of Kenyans. If so, it is indeed a case of "the sorrow of the many being the joy of the few." These scraps represent the counterfeit currency for which the country's independence and the well being of its people were traded. These are the rusted remnants of ephemeral rewards for which Kenyan leaders struck a Faustian bargain with neo-colonialism. In other words, these leaders chose to abdicate their leadership responsibilities. Hence the imagery of the Kenyan state as a riderless horse.

Having abdicated its responsibility, this leadership manages to hang on to the privileges and material rewards of its position through some unusual means. It applies itself vigorously to the Orwellian art of "double-speak" and manufactured facts. Blares the

government owned national radio, "His Excellence 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" (p. 7). Banning opposition parties has other benefits as well; it makes it possible for his Excellency and company to win elections with 99 per cent of the votes. It allows one to become "President for Life."

Seen through the eyes of Matigari, foreign domination and corrupt political leaders are the cause of Kenya's problems. Add to that the self-serving individualism of the elite to round out the picture of a rot at the top. John Boy proudly refers to this as "the survival of the fittest." But this individualism amounts to little more than rampant and ostentatious consumerism that acquires a garish distinction against the backdrop of the pervasive poverty in the land. This same elite also scoffs at and undermines traditional Kenyan values of mutual help and communal responsibility. The "survival of the fittest" has the imperilment of the many as its corollary. Is it any wonder that Matigari felt that he was too hasty to trade his belt of war for his belt of peace?

Matigari: A champion of freedom or an African Don Quixote?

Matigari's indefatigable campaigns to reassert his rights and personal dignity appear to move through three stages: first he looked for his family until the point when he got arrested. What that says is that the family, which symbolized Kenya's time-honored traditional institutions, could no longer be reclaimed. Second he searched for truth and justice after he escaped from detention. The message here is quite apparent; there exists in the land dishonesty, injustice, oppression and the abuse of power. And, finally, he set out on a mission of revenge against John Boy, the westernized African executive who personified all the ills that Matigari had to endure. This means that the wrong types of people hold positions of power and so must be removed from ruling and ruining the lives of Kenyans. He failed completely with the first two aims, and ended up self-destructing as he attempted the third. He was first disappointed, then bewildered and, in the end, angry. At every stage of his campaign, he was to meet frustration and complete failure. Matigari's laudable and patriotic efforts were dogged by a sequence of actions and reactions whose negative turns cannot bode well for the prospects of overcoming the country's problems.

Does the preceding account of Kenya's problems accurately reflect reality? Are the right causes identified? Would removing the identified causes lead to Matigari's desired results? Who is the enemy, and who or what precisely is the patriot struggling against? Can there be other causes and explanations?

Perhaps to understand developments in post-colonial Kenya, we have to step back and take a somewhat more detached survey of the situation. For what has been happening in Kenya is by no means unique to that country. Several other African countries have encountered much the same frustration with the not so uplifting results of their independence. According to most accounts and by most measures of social and economic conditions, the ordinary citizens of most African countries find themselves worse off today than they were thirty years ago.

How does one explain such a record of failure? Do we attribute this to the same set of causes that the novel identifies in the Kenyan context? Is it that Africa has an exclusive lock on having bad and corrupt leadership? Are Africa's elite somehow more callous and greedy than elite elsewhere?

Even if the answers to these questions were in the affirmative, how does one explain such a unique phenomenon? An attempt at answering these questions requires a look at the broader and global context in which independent Kenya's experience has been shaped. In other words, what is the nature of the relevant environment that cradled the country's birth and nurtured its development? These questions and the answers that they elicit are significant not only to our understanding of Kenya's experience but also to get a better sense of the nature and depth of the challenges faced by many developing nations both in Africa and around the world.

Matigari's success as a novel is in part in the clarity and cogency of the author's message in rendering the Kenyan scene. It is a scene drawn masterfully. But it is also a scene framed by a point of view. And the point of view is this. Where colonialism did deprive Kenyans of their freedom and dignity as a people, the achievement of independence should

have restored the same to them. Independence connotes the freeing of oneself from encumbrances, obligations, and general conditions that are detrimental to the pursuit and fulfillment of one's self interest. By implication, an independent state is one that allows its citizens a free rein to pursue their life's ambition and make progress on the social and economic front. If and when independence fails to deliver such progress, it must be because the leadership of the state is inept, corrupt, repressive, traitorous or all of the above.

This is an interpretation of history and societal affairs that places great significance on the role of individual actors in determining or undermining national progress. Presidents, ministers, CEOs, and others are singled out as willful conspirators whose conduct and performance have brought much hardships and misery to the people of Kenya.

An Alternative View: Kenya's Experience from an Environmental Perspective

In the spirit of the interdisciplinary study approach that this paper has consciously adopted, I will attempt to apply an analytical method that is borrowed from the field of Industrial Organization to offer an alternative explanation for the indicated developments in Matigari's Kenya. The analytical method adopted is known as the "environmental perspective."⁴

Definition: The term *environment* here stands for the setting or context in which a particular entity exists and functions. As an example, the environment of a business organization is made up of other organizations in its industry, other industries, customers, suppliers, government rules and regulations, technology, major regional, national and international developments, etc. If the entity is a state such as Kenya, its relevant environment consists of other states with which it interacts, its trading partners, international laws and organizations that exercise jurisdictions over it. Its environment would also include global changes in technology, in products, and in tastes and preferences, as well as other new developments in near and distant regions of the world. It is important to note that the term environment is used differently than in its more traditional use, which use was generally understood to mean just one's natural settings.

The environmental perspective method as applied here places emphasis on the importance of studying the environment or context in which an entity—be that an organization, a state, or a living organism—exists and functions. According to this perspective, the behavior and conduct of the state⁵ are better understood if seen mainly as a series of reactions to signals and prods from the environment than as the state or its leadership acting willfully and autonomously. Under this perspective, interacting with the environment, even when it is threatening and costly, cannot be optional if the state is to secure resources necessary for its survival and growth.

Interacting with the environment often requires some give and take type concessions that could lead to loss of autonomy for the state. Where the environment turns more unstable or hostile, the state will be exposed to growing risks to its survival. Simply put, the game of survival involves making compromises that the state may neither desire nor is able to prevent. Given this perspective, the Kenya that Matigari found can be an inevitable outcome of a long series of environmentally exacted changes and compromises that the Kenyan society had no choice but to accede to and accommodate.

The State and its environment: some key assumptions

The environmental perspective and its application to the study of Kenya's social and economic conditions rest on the following assumptions:

Assumption 1: A state (society, country) like Kenya is much like a living organism; it has goals, which include survival, the preservation of organic integrity, and the autonomy of "decision making" in identifying and setting those goals.

To ensure survival, the state must continuously tap into, and make use of, a range of resources in its relevant environment. To preserve its integrity, however, it has to devise

strategies that can shield it from instances of excessive demands that are likely to be directed at it from that same environment.

Assumption 2: Goals of maintaining organic integrity and decision autonomy can be enhanced with isolation from external influences, whereas the goal of survival is enhanced through frequent, but prudent, interaction with one's environment. (The environment refers to the sources of stimuli, both positive and negative, that are impacting on the entity, and include resources, climate, etc., as well as other nations or global events such as wars, and activities such as foreign trade, investment, etc.)

In other words, the goal of survival forces the state to behave, in systems parlance, as an open system that needs to interact with its relevant environment. Such interaction is indicated by trades (or two-way exchanges) in resources, values, influences, etc., between the state and its environment. This offers the state opportunities for acquiring resources that are essential nutrients for its growth and development.

It is important for the state to remain open in order to receive benefits from its environment. But then this also leaves it open to threats and dangers that abound in the same environment. It will find itself subjected to costly demands from the environment, demands that will undermine its organic integrity and curtail its autonomy in its goal-setting activity. The greater the intrusion from the environment, the more eroded becomes the state's goal-setting autonomy.

Assumption 3: Successful (or gainful) interaction with the environment involves the state receiving more from the environment than it ends up giving to it; it seeks to secure benefits from the environment without depleting its resources or diminishing its own autonomy. At the very least, the state must aim for a "break even" in these transactions.

To the state, the environment clearly represents both a resource pool and a constraint. It is a resource pool because that is where the state obtains its supply of new ideas, skills, materials, and products. Without the continued flow of these tangible and intangible resources, the state may find it impossible to survive and thrive. But the environment also represents a constraint to it. That is because the environment itself imposes its own demands that the state is compelled to satisfy. While the state does obtain its resources from the environment, it does so at a cost: the cost of having to make concessions to the changing and not insignificant demands of the environment. Successful interaction for the state is then essentially about figuring out ways of maximizing benefits while minimizing the attendant costs or constraints of interacting with its relevant environment.

Assumption 4: Environmental instability of modest scale can be negotiated through a measured process of adaptations on the part of the state, adaptations that often involve either undertaking evasive maneuvers or, failing in that, making costly concessions to new demands from the environment.

The aim is to maintain a maximum flow of resources from the environment, while keeping to a minimum the erosion of integrity and autonomy. This may be difficult to accomplish, but it is less so if the state remains alert and responsive to any occurrences of change in the environment. The state must continuously scan the environmental horizon for signs of new demands that may be directed at it. It must then modify its goals as well as overhaul its negotiation strategies so as to remain abreast of changes in the environment. Flexibility of goals and adaptability of its survival methods constitute an important strength for a state faced with such challenges. Where such maneuvers prove inadequate, the negotiation strategy must then concentrate on minimizing both the scale and ramifications of unavoidable concessions.

Assumption 5: Negotiation success declines as the environment becomes less stable and increasingly unpredictable; the state's capacity to fend for itself is undermined in an environment that is changing too rapidly.

Changes in the environment, especially when they are rapid, bring with them greater uncertainty and unpredictability. Sufficient and reliable data on the rapidly changing occurrences will be lacking, thereby making sound decisions unattainable. At the same time,

changing conditions will render obsolete and irrelevant existing experience, skills, and "tried-and-true methods" for handling environmental demands. This is a condition in which interacting with the environment will likely result in less benefits and greater costs to the state, regardless of what group may be holding the scepter of leadership.

Assumption 6: Where severe instability or turbulence occurs in the environment, this may threaten the state's integrity, its autonomy and, ultimately, its survival.⁶

The severity of impact that this will register on the state is a function of two important factors. One is the level of the environmental turbulence itself. Second is the level of preparedness (or lack thereof) of the state, to the extent that such preparation is possible, in anticipating this pending turbulence and adopting measures to deal with it. Severe turbulence is in itself capable of delivering a debilitating blow to the state.⁷ Likewise, lack of preparedness on the part of the state may render quite severe the consequences of even a modest change in the environment. When both factors are at work, the resulting chaos will place the entity's very survival in jeopardy.

The preceding assumptions point to certain probable causes and effects that the student of political economy of societies such as Kenya should heed. To wit, the policies and actions that are often pursued by governments such as that of Kenya do not necessarily reflect autonomous plans and decisions of national leaders that are consciously chosen and willfully administered. Rather, they are likely to constitute some form of adaptive reactions that are prompted and sustained by pressures from the environment. It is not only that these "leaders" must contend with the relentless demands of external environmental forces in many of the decisions and actions that they undertake; but the range of permissible options that they can exercise can also be narrowly circumscribed by these same environmental forces. How does a state find itself in such a situation?

The State as a living entity and adaptation as a survival art

As indicated above, a state or society can be likened to an organism in that it requires and uses resources to survive and thrive. It undergoes changes, it eschews risks and seeks opportunities, and it sets itself goals that it pursues and protects. Also, like an organism, it exists in an environment that both offers opportunities and poses threats. The relative share of threats and opportunities in the environment may vary according to time and place. This requires the society to be flexible and adaptable if it is to ensure that the environment continues to work for it or, at the very least, prevent its working against it.

Thus, societies undergo changes mainly as a result of voluntary or involuntary responses to changes in their environments. They change voluntarily because they need to make necessary adjustments in order to protect their interests in the face of new threats and opportunities in their environment. Or, they change involuntarily because they get caught unprepared and find themselves forced into new and unfavorable situations. Once in such a situation, they are subjected to demands that weaken their position to negotiate with the environment. And their capacities to conduct gainful transactions are undermined.

Minding environmental changes

Next to recognizing the special role that is played by the local and global environments in the affairs of the state, the importance of *environmental change* to the future prospects of the a state rank quite high indeed. It is important to draw distinctions between change that state undergoes from change in the environment itself. We can map out these distinctions as follows:

Stable (Unchanging) Environment ➡ Predictable Demands ➡ Voluntary Adaptive Changes by the State
 Unstable (Changing) Environment ➡ Unpredictable Demands ➡ Involuntary & Wrenching Changes

According to the environmental perspective⁸ such changes in the environment may be traced through four distinct stages:

A. Placid Randomized, in which sources of environmental influence are relatively unchanged and unchanging. (Emery and Trist refer to such influence as "goods and bads.")

The analogy is that of a lone boat on an open and calm (placid) bay, or a single car on a flat empty stretch of highway in the country. Here, entities in the environment are few and far between. Each is well isolated from the others. Conditions are quite predictable and without threats for the boat or the car. Applied to societies such as Kenya, this applies to a stage in its history when there were few state actors yet interacting with it. This would suggest that Kenya's established norms, rules, and other institutions faced little or no challenges originating in the environment. Communal identities were well established and secure; institutions were credible and intact; and threats to these had not yet shown up on its horizons. Such a situation describes Kenya's condition before the arrival of intruders from distant places by both land and sea.

During this stage, it is quite easy for any state to be lulled into a sense of permanent wellbeing and security. Both knowledge and practices passed from tradition would be adequate to meet the state's existent needs. The old were venerated and their attitudes and ways emulated. Anything having to do with the state's future was wholly and fatalistically entrusted to the schemes of the gods and the care of ancestral spirits. The concept of change and its unsettling implications were neither understood nor anticipated. One might say that the state involuntarily moved in one direction while it had its face turned in the other. In so doing, it set itself up for all sorts of dangers that lurked in its path.

B. Placid Clustered, in which the number of potential sources of influence is increasing; more entities are appearing on one's environmental horizon, but there is limited interaction between them.

This would be similar to more boats appearing and tending to crowd our boat on a still placid bay, or several cars converging to surround the car on the open country highway. Each boat or car operator has to be alert and must exercise greater care than before. While there is no imminent threat, the potential for one has increased with the new arrivals. In Kenya's experience, the boats would be Spanish caravelles, Portuguese men-of-wars, Arab sumbuqs, or Indian dhows plowing its waters along the Indian Ocean coast. Kenyans witness, no doubt with some nervousness, the coming and going of unfamiliar traders and prying adventurers.

This would be the time to closely follow and study these changes; it would also be a good time for the state to take inventory of all available resources with which to meet the new challenges that these changes may bring with them. Old institutional tools need to be modified, new ones added, and obsolete ones discarded. In other words, the situation calls for contingency planning—one that can anticipate all likely and credible threats and prepares appropriate responses to them. The steps for the proactive measures that prudence calls for are fairly well known:

1. The society or state is alert to recognize a need for a decision.
2. It undertakes a complete analysis of the situation that it faces.
3. It identifies alternative courses of action.
4. It carefully weighs the probable outcomes or consequences of each alternative.
5. It selects the course of action that entails the least cost and yields the most benefit.⁹

Admittedly, the above procedure is far from being free of difficulties. In the first instance it is data intensive. It faces the usual hurdle of making the right information available at the right time and at an acceptable cost. This can become almost an impossible task once the environment gets into a mode of rapid and convulsive change. But the preceding stage may still be considered calm and ordered enough to permit such a rational approach to problem handling.

C. Disturbed Reactive, in which the number of sources of influence in the environment is high, and their influences increase in pace and intensity, requiring one to resist, negotiate, accommodate, or otherwise react to changes whose occurrences are beyond one's control.

This is similar to more numerous, faster and larger vehicles now moving at fast speed in different directions, creating hazardous traffic conditions that the previous boat or car can ignore only at its own peril. The boat is taking water, visibility is impaired, and the crowded traffic raises the prospect for collision. For Kenya, this means that it is now being visited by hostile war ships, armed bands of slave traders, fortune hunters, and bounty seekers. Its shorelines become sites for foreign forts, and its hinterland is colonized by autonomous trading posts controlled by outsiders. Missionaries set up shop dispensing imported religions to displace indigenous ones. Demands from the environment increase at an increasing rate. The viability of Kenya's norms and institutions are tested to their limits.

If the state chose to remain inactive during the first two stages above, it may now be already too late for it to put up an effective and credible defense against these real and imminent threats. A rational decision making approach is no longer an option. It may however still resort to a tactic of minimizing its losses through creative and skillful negotiations. But this can not be a negotiation conducted from a position of strength. The state will have to make considerable concessions to the demands of its new environment so as to preserve some modicum of its autonomy. Furthermore, these concessions are likely to grow as demands from the environment increase in scale and persistence.

D. Turbulent field, in which the environment itself is undergoing rapid and convulsive change. New and far more threatening demands are generated, demands that prove completely beyond the entity's capacity to resist. Resistance becomes futile and, given the goal of survival, even counter-productive. It finds itself totally at the mercy of environmental forces.

This is similar to gale force winds battering the bay, generating twenty-five foot high waves, or an earthquake buckling highways and overpasses under fast moving cars. No boat or car is responsible for the occurrence, and no boat or car is equipped to control the occurrence. Threats do not come from individual entities, but from a new dynamic in the environment that transcends the influence of individual entities. Existing resources and techniques designed for managing the more common type of problem situations will now prove totally inadequate.

Kenya is engulfed and overwhelmed by colonialism, a force that in turn was unleashed by the imperatives of merchant and, subsequently, industrial capitalism in Europe. The country's bargaining power is practically nonexistent, and it is unable to resist ever increasing and aggressive environmental demands for frequent and far-reaching concessions.

Turbulent concessions

Such was the case, as this quote from a German commander during the "Maji Maji"¹⁰ uprising of people to the south of Kenya in October 1905 indicates:

In my view only hunger and want can bring about a final submission. Military actions alone will remain more or less a drop in the ocean. The people will be compelled to abandon their resistance completely only when the food supplies now available have been consumed, their houses have been destroyed by constant raids, and they have been deprived of the opportunity to cultivate new fields.¹¹

The commander's plans were carried out with devastating effect. "For many peoples, as for the Matumbi, the famine marked the end of a way of life."¹² Other similar measures were undertaken at different times in Kenya to weaken resistance and enforce submission to the dictates of external demands.

Down to 1912-13, African production had accounted for at least 70 percent of exports. By 1929 it accounted for less than 20 percent, and from 1925 the absolute value of African export production declined as the "reserves"¹³ increasingly relapsed into subsistence farming to support their increasing populations. ...By the mid-1920s more than half the able-bodied men in the two largest agricultural tribes (the Kikuyu and Luo) were estimated to be working for Europeans.¹⁴

Still another account of African societies caught in this vortex of environmental turbulence draws an equally telling picture. The following is a description of activities by the chief agent of the Dutch West India Company at a slave trading station in what is today Ghana.

When these Slaves come to Fida, they are put in Prison altogether, and when we treat concerning buying them, they are all brought out together in a large Plain; where by our Chiurgeons, whose Province it is, they are thoroughly examined, even to the smallest Member, and that naked too both Men and Women, without the least Distinction of Modesty. Those which are approved as good are set on one side; and the lame and faulty are set by as Invalides[sic.]...the remainder are numbered, and it is entered who delivered them. In the mean while a burning iron, with the Arms or Name of the Companies, lyes [sic.] in the Fire; with which ours are marked on the Breast...I doubt not but this Trade seems very barbarous to you, but since it is followed by meer [sic.] necessity it must go on; but we yet take all possible care that they are not burned too hard, especially the Women, who are more tender than the Men¹⁵

Each war, each battle, and each little skirmish that was fought and lost by Kenyans (and other Africans elsewhere) over the centuries brought with it humiliating concessions and further loss of autonomy whose consequences linger to this day. The social and political turbulence so created shatters virtually all institutions that lend a given society its special character. A society's cultures and traditions are altered. Its autonomy to define and set its goals in accordance with its own perceived interests gets suppressed as these become supplanted by the requirements of other externally originating goals. And once its autonomy is breached, its organic integrity as a society will be severely undermined. What is left for it to do is to try and secure its survival, such as it is, with far reaching concessions in its autonomy. This describes the condition that has been faced by Kenya as a neo-colonial state.

Aspires for competition yet induced into coalition

Even with its severely fettered independence and the weak bargaining position that that places it in, a state such as Kenya will even then have no choice but to interact with its environment. Absent a withdrawal from engagement as an option that it can exercise, what remains for the state is to try and make the best of a bad situation. It can seek out the least intrusive mode of environmental transaction and figure ways of minimizing the risks that will shadow its search for opportunities.

The manner in which the state (as an open system) transacts with its environment can also vary. The state may compete where it can or cooperate where its freedom may be constrained.¹⁶ Competition implies a relatively autonomous (or independent) position in which the state sets and pursues its own goals and then contests (from a position of relative strength) for access to resources in its environment. Cooperation, on the other hand, suggests varying degrees of concessions that could lead to the erosion of goal setting autonomy. And this could range, in a decreasing scale of autonomy, from bargaining to co-optation and to coalition. Bargaining involves a give-and-take or "horse trading" approach in dealing with one's environment. Co-optation is a process in which the state rewards and placates key elements and forces in the environment in order to ensure the continued flow of benefits or to avert perceived threats. Coalition occurs when the state is overwhelmed by forces in its environment and is made to give up its autonomy and identity.

Competition, as applied here, indicates that the goal setting and decision making autonomy of the state is more or less intact and that its institutions and activities are organized in ways that are consistent with advancing its own interests. The state must still "prove itself" able as it has to contest for the same resources that other states will also scramble for. But its capacity to gain from its broader environment (through trade, as an example) is relatively secure and sufficient to offset its losses as it transacts with that environment. Such a society has the potential to become stable and economically prosperous. From the standpoint of managing environmental challenges, competition offers the most desirable mode. But few states, including the relatively prosperous ones, have the luxury of functioning under a purely competitive mode; they often find themselves pushed into engaging in some form of cooperation with other states.

Quite the opposite is the case under coalition. Here the state will have given up much of its own goals and significantly modified or transformed its institutions under duress. External forces have overcome its will to resist concessions to their demands. Its own interests are overwhelmed and supplanted by the interests of others. It lacks the autonomy to define and pursue its own goals. In the extreme, it may even be faced with extinction. It falls back to making concessions as a means of averting such an extreme fate.

Whenever it can, however, the state must skillfully and continuously negotiate with its environment so as to minimize its risks and maximize its opportunities. In other words, it has no choice but to transact with its environment, but it must also strive to keep the cost of such transactions down while keeping the benefits that it derives high. This, of course, is not a simple task to accomplish. It is made even more difficult by the fact that the environment itself is assiduously seeking to extract unlimited benefits from the state while at the same time resisting making any concessions to it. The entity's fortunes in its dealings with its environment worsen as the mode of its interaction moves from competition to cooperation and finally to coalition. This deterioration of the state's fortunes in turn reflects the occurrence of increasing change and turbulence in its environment.

Competition is much like Matigari's idealized Kenya, but the one that he found himself confronted by resembles more that under the coalition model.

When and why did Kenya fail in its negotiated transactions with its environment?

As in the case of many African states, modern day independent Kenya came into being following several decades of domination and control under European colonialism. As a modern day state, its existence covers only three and a half decades. What constitutes modern in Kenya, whether this applies to institutions, infrastructures, or activities, is, directly or indirectly, a by-product of the colonial experience. Simply put, they are colonial creations. This includes the system of governance, the structure and function of legal and administrative organs, civic organizations, and even the background and orientation of the elite from which Kenya's political leadership has been drawn. As Oginga Odinga, a prominent Kenyan opposition leader, observes, "Neocolonialism, after all, is not centered in a vacuum. It is built on to the previous colonial history of the country in which it operates, from foundations that the colonial regime lays before its ostensible departure. . . . Everything is done to ensure that the accredited heirs of colonial interests capture power."¹⁷

This means that, with respect to the very laws, rules, and institutions that define modern day Kenya, it stands as a society whose present veneer of modern life is borne of its colonial experience. As such, this "modern life" has been de-linked from the country's past and is effectively suspended over a chasm of missing indigenous culture and history. The state's survival under the weight of such external domination had to be secured with great loss of control over decisions affecting its own interests. Its institutions had to undergo sufficient re-configuration to be receptive and accommodating to demands made by external (colonial) forces. But this de-linking process did not happen overnight; nor is it helpful to regard this as the work of a corrupt elite belonging to a single generation of Kenyans. Its current state of affairs is, by and large, a product of a long series of environmental conditioning that started several centuries earlier and culminated in its colonial experience during the first six decades of the twentieth century.

Colonialism was not an autonomous self-standing phenomenon with clearly demarcated beginning and ending. Neither is neo-colonialism. They are both epochal expressions of the on-going feud between a state and its environment over contested claims for resource share and control. Colonialism indicates a condition in which the state can no longer protect itself against excessive external demands and is, therefore, being totally overwhelmed by forces in its environment. Whether by omission or commission, several generations of Kenyans were unwitting collaborators in bringing about the sequence of failures that paved the way for the country's colonization.

What does all this mean to our understanding of Matigari's Kenya, and Kenya's Africa?

Well, for a starter, the "authentic Kenyan-ness" with its egalitarian ways and communal values that Matigari idealizes is not pushed out of his reach by the machination of the wicked individuals or groups that he thought were "running" Kenya. The changes that he bemoans have occurred in incremental stages and over a long period of time. Such changes evolve as the relevance and influence of indigenous institutions become devalued each time they fail the challenges that a changing environment brings with it. They are quietly replaced by other institutions that promise better responses to managing these new challenges. Kenya's

institutions had no choice but to evolve in response to a long series of prevailing environmental conditions that, over the centuries, have impacted upon and extracted concessions from Kenya.

It is a time-honored African value to show respect and admiration to the old—old persons, old institutions, and the old ways of doing things. But that is a value which can enjoy legitimacy mostly under conditions in which the environment remains stable and predictable. A society that adulates and celebrates the old ways is one that behaves like its environment is immune to changes, that what is useful knowledge or skill for transacting with one's environment is already known, and that future events will merely be repetitions of events from the past. When the environment changes, as it inevitably does, such a society is bound to suffer the consequences of its costly miscalculations. Its behavior is similar to attempting to hang on to a fixed structure of tradition while its feet are caught on a fast moving vehicle of environmental change.

Assuming that it has the option, a society may of course exercise a choice between remaining attached to its past or embracing change. Or it may opt for some mix of tradition and change. What choice it makes is entirely a normative decision that only the society can make for itself. Whichever choice it makes, however, success in attaining its goal would require that it master the art of correctly reading and effectively managing its interactions with the environment. This means that, even to be able to protect and preserve the old, it must strive to understand the special characteristics and methods of the new that are cropping up all around it. It must know what it is that it is resisting against if its resistance is to meet even a modest level of success. Whether seeking to preserve tradition or marching head-long into modernization, the ability to successfully anticipate, read and negotiate changes in the environment is a key determinant of the success of a state in surviving and thriving.

Conclusion

What is one to make of this environmental perspective? This is the message. Once the organism of a society is forced to interact with its environment, its success and survival is heavily influenced by the thrusts of demands directed at it from the environment. While there is an exchange of resources, this is not on fixed terms since each seeks to receive more while conceding less. When faced by a rather unfamiliar environment that is made up of aggressive nations with far superior organizations, equipment, and arsenal, a society's capacity to preserve its survival with any degree of integrity can be overwhelmed. If it survives the onslaught, it would have made sufficient concessions to alter its identity in a way that meets the relentless demands of the new environment.

Once Kenya "opted" to engage in the process of modernization, it is inevitable that the old traditional values and institutions would be subordinated to the requirements of the new externally induced ones. His ardent protestations notwithstanding, Matigari did buy into modernization and its unsettling ramifications when he and others pooled their funds to send John Boy to study abroad. That was no gesture for the preservation of tradition. This act, along with other gestures, was tantamount to a change in allegiance from the old ancestral order to the new order of things; it was an invitation to a new and alien scheme of organizing society as well as mobilizing and exploiting (read; efficient use) of its resources.

It is neither John Boy, nor the Minister of Truth and Justice, nor even His Excellence Ole Excellence that are the real culprits, in spite of Matigari's strenuous effort to demonize them all. These are no helmsmen, to extend our boat out on the sea analogy. Rather, their roles are those of watchmen on a deck.

The ship of state is propelled along a course charted and programmed by the currents of both historical and global events. It is a centuries-old long series of neglected duties, oversight, missteps and miscalculations in sparring with an ever changing environment that has placed the ship in the path of this swirling current. It is important to note this so as to place the limited role played by the present day "leaders" of Kenya in perspective. To change course, one must first comprehend and deal with the currents of the environment. Dismissing the deck watchmen cannot by it self improve the ship's fortunes. We may despise them for their opportunistic and unscrupulous behavior, but we cannot hold them wholly responsible

for the harm that weighs on the lives of Kenya's masses. They themselves are creations of forces that they may not fully understand.

Just as their presence is not the cause, getting rid of the political and business elite of the land will not end the hardship. John Boy replaces Boy Senior, Robert Williams replaces Settler Williams, Moi replaces Kenyatta, and neo-colonialism replaces colonialism. And one can be certain that there are many more replacements where these came from. Does Matigari's patriotic duty call for the elimination of all these "enemies" all his life and beyond? Is he equipped to do that? Even if he were to succeed, would that yield any positive results?

Matigari may know what it is that he wants, but it is not clear that he has correctly identified the nature of the obstacles that stand in his way. And what stands in his way is a much larger force than the corrupt ways of a few nasty characters masquerading as leaders. For, to adopt western ways, which Kenya (and Matigari himself) did, was to submit to play the west's game of life according to its own special rules. John Boy and company merely mastered these rules, but the choice to play the game predates them and was made for them by so many of their predecessors in so many historical venues and reaching back to much earlier dates.

What is being suggested here is not that capitulation to environmental forces should be viewed as the only option available to a society. Nor is the above argument to be taken as a justification of the policies and practices that are in place in today's Kenya. Rather, the argument that is being made here is more about the necessity to identify problems correctly; it is also about choosing the correct means to achieve desired ends. What is being suggested is that the cost of adherence to a fixed interpretation of problems (and the "solutions" that commence from that) can be unnecessarily high when the problems themselves will unavoidably reflect the fluidity of the environment that harbors them. Thus, seen in isolation from these environmental factors, Matigari's deeds assume the epic struggle of a credible freedom fighter with methods and mission that are worthy of emulation. But viewed in the context of the changing environments that Kenya has found itself in, however, his role is reduced to the futile antics of an African Don Quixote whose struggle to free Kenya was doomed to be as feeble as his reading of Kenya's problems proved to be incorrect.

Africa's problems are inevitable consequences of on-going changes in its global environment; changes for which its people failed to prepare themselves adequately. But in spite of the difficult challenges with which it is presented, the continent cannot afford to withdraw and shelter itself from further engagement with this environment either. It cannot afford to withdraw because the solutions for much of the continent's problems will inevitably be filtered through and mediated by the imperatives of the same environment.

Matigari can choose to try to single-handedly block and stop a rapidly advancing and fast evolving environmental juggernaut; or, he can climb aboard, figure out its controls, and redirect its movements and impacts so as to achieve his aims. With the first method, his efforts will be doomed. With the second, he will realize that it does not yield an immediate result as its effect is gradual and requiring patience and long term investment in skills and resources. Beyond the acquisition of skills, the question of whose goals and interests these skills will be employed to serve is another layer of problem to be resolved. With all its limitations, however, this second course of action would be the most rational course for Matigari to choose.

What Matigari does is quite different. He wants to eschew change and preserve tradition; but he also buys into the notion that modernization can promise the goods that he wants to enjoy. Can that be possible? The environmental perspective suggests that Matigari's attachment to his idealized past is in conflict with his aspirations for a future in which Kenya will hold its place among the politically and economically advanced nations of the world.

Notes

¹ This is a name used to refer to the armed resistance to British colonial rule in Kenya. Mostly manned by Kikuyu freedom fighters, the guerilla type struggled began around 1952 and ended with the lifting of the "State of Emergency" in 1959.

² This is one of the major ethnic nationalities in Kenya, whose traditional home is in the central highland region of the country. The temperate climate and good soil of the region

drew large-scale settlement by European immigrants and led to the wholesale displacement of the Kikuyu from their ancestral homeland.

³ This is a reference to African functionaries that were trusted by the European colonial officials and were given positions of responsibility under the colonial administration.

⁴ The word "environment" as used here refers to the entire set of conditions, both local and global, in which the state exists and functions. Key among these are other states and their activities, trade regimes, international businesses, multilateral organizations, availability and distribution of resources and technology, etc.

⁵ As used here, the word "state" is interchangeable with the words "community" or "society" and does not necessarily mean a legally constituted modern government alone.

⁶ Note: total loss of autonomy may be viewed as one form of failure in the struggle for survival.

⁷ Examples of states that were overwhelmed by environmental turbulence abound in history. A classic example in Africa is the case of the Christian Kingdom of Nubia that collapsed as a result of the regional turmoil that was brought about by the onset of the Crusades.

⁸ Adopted from F.E. Emery and E.L. Trist, "The Casual Texture of Organizational Environments" in Frank Baker, ed., *Organizational Systems: General Systems Approaches to Complex Organizations*. (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1973).

⁹ James D. Thompson and William J. McEwen, "Organization Goals and Environment" in John G. Maurer, *Readings in Organization Theory: Open System Approaches*: (New York: Random House, 1971), p.451.

¹⁰ An uprising by African freedom fighters against German colonial rule in "German East Africa."

¹¹ In Robert O. Collins, *Eastern African History*, (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1990), p. 139.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹³ Reserves refer to the marginal lands to which Kenyan Africans who lost their traditional lands to white settlers were relocated by the colonial authorities.

¹⁴ In Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 31.

¹⁵ In Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, (London: UCL Press, 1997), pp. 33-34.

¹⁶ Adopted from Thompson and McEwen, *op. cit.*, pp. 451-454.

¹⁷ Oginga Odinga, "Not Yet Uhuru," in Cartey and Kilson, *Independent Africa*, (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. 229.

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