

Block

4

NGUGI WA THIONG'O: *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI*

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 4 of the BEGE – 142 course (Understanding Drama) takes up Ngugi Wa Thiong’O’s play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. The overall context is provided by African and Kenyan History. These are taken up in Unit 1 titled: African Drama: An Introduction”.

Unit 2: Ngugi Wa Thiong’O’s Life and Worldview talks about Ngugi’s life and worldview. His concern is with class and with African language. He sees literature and politics as inextricably linked.

Unit 3: *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*: Reading the Text, offers a view of the text of the play by taking up the all the ‘Movements’ which go with the play’s structure.

Unit 4: *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*: Evaluating the Text, offers a critical evolution of the play with special attention to theatrical techniques and devices used in the play. It also deals with characterization in the play.



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UNIT 1 AFRICAN DRAMA: AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Africa – the Dark Continent
- 1.2 Pre-historic Kenya – Location, Antiquity
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- 1.5 First Protests – K.A., K.C.A., Y.K.A., Harry Thuku
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- 1.9 Drama under Colonialism
- 1.10 Drama after Independence
- 1.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.12 Questions
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Unit are manifold. The first is to trace briefly the history of the African continent since the pre-historic times, and also to discuss the various meanings implied in the epithet ‘the dark continent’ as applied to Africa by the European colonial powers

A brief account of the colonization of the continent from the time of the arrival of the first Europeans – the Portuguese – is also given. This has been done with the aim, primarily, of providing the political-cultural background to our study of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. In the second part of the Unit you will be given a detailed history of Kenya since the pre-historic times to the situation at the point of its Uhuru in December 1963. In between are the details of its first colonization by the Arabs and the Portuguese. The model of colonization followed by the British is described next. Some of you may be reading African literature for the first time. It is for this reason that a detailed background history is necessary. The struggles waged by the Africans – including the Mau Mau struggle – are also discussed in the Unit. All these have a significant bearing on our understanding of the text – *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* – which is based on the theme of the freedom struggle of Kenya.

1.1 AFRICA – THE DARK CONTINENT

In most books of history written by Europeans, the continent of Africa is referred to as ‘the dark continent’. This expression – the dark continent – was most

probably first used by travelers and missionaries who happened to visit the African continent much before political claims on its territory were made and it was colonized by various European powers. The term 'dark' has been used for describing the continent of Africa because, firstly, the early travelers as well as missionaries considered as 'dark' anything that they did not understand much about. Secondly, and more importantly, these first visitors considered Africa to be inhabited by people who were primitive and uncivilized. The colour of ignorance, as we know, is black. According to these early missionaries, the Africans believed in magic and other so-called irrational rituals and customs. Once again, magic is associated with black colour as the term 'black magic' implies. Finally, there was the most obvious reason for calling Africa the dark continent: its inhabitants had very dark skins. These opinions, particularly about the Africans being primitive and uncivilized were accepted blindly by most Europeans who entered the continent either for trade or for colonization. In fact, the colonial administrations built upon this myth of primitiveness of the Africans by stating that Africa had no history, no culture, no past.

Africa – the Myth of Primitivism and Political Reasons Thereof

From the European point of view, there was a sound reason behind accepting such an image of the Africans. The European powers used the excuse of 'civilizing' these savages for entering Africa and staying on for the economic and political exploitation of its people. Thus was created the myth of the white man's burden which expression meant – on the face of it – that the white man had taken upon himself the onerous task – the burden – of 'civilizing' the savage African.

However, as later researches into the history, politics, social organization and cultural achievements of the continent have shown, Africa was neither primitive nor uncivilized before the Europeans occupied it. Civilization, as we know, is much more than technological progress and cannot be equated with the possession of fly-by-wire aircrafts, flat screen television sets, personal computers, cell phones, microwave ovens and even under the-skin planted chips. If this were so, people belonging to the most ancient civilizations like the Indian, the Chinese, the Egyptian and the South American would all be primitive and savage. Like these, ancient Africa also boasted of various centers of civilization and culture with well-organized social and political systems and significant achievements in their respective fields of fine arts like music and dance.

Africa and the Evolution of Man

By now enough archeological and anthropological evidence is available to show that during the evolutionary process our ancestors – Australopithecus African or man-ape, as he was called – first emerged on the African continent. Rift valley region in East Africa was the most probable place where it happened. Excavations at the Olduvai Gorge in what is now called Tanzania have produced ample evidence of it being one of the oldest sites of world cultures. Discovery of primitive tools for hunting like the hand axe in not only east Africa but also in the Congo Basin and Zimbabwe shows a parallel development of this culture. This also compares well with the developments in other similar centers in India, China and parts of Europe.

Africa and the Ancient Egyptian Civilization

However, the most fascinating evidence about the culture developments in Africa

has been provided by a Senegalese school – Cheikh Anti Diop – who claims that the ancient Egyptian civilization was set up and nurtured by black Africans more than ten thousand years ago. Relying upon evidence from various sources including historical accounts, Cheikh Anti Diop convinces us that when the great Sahara started drying up about 7000 B.C., before which it was a huge lake, a section of Africans began to trek along the routes of the river Nile. They finally settled in the valley at the mouth of the Nile delta where the river emptied into the Mediterranean. Here they set up the great ancient Egyptian civilization with unprecedented progress in speculative scientific research. This cycle of the civilizational progress lasted many thousands of years during the course of which these black Africans colonized neighbouring territories inhabited by whites. The Semitic world of today perhaps a result of a free cross-breeding between the two races.

However, like many other ancient civilizations, this civilization set by black Africans in the valley of the Nile also ran out of steam. In the course of time it was overrun by the Persians. Then came the Macedonians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Turks in that order. More recently, the French and the British occupied the territory. This prolonged colonization resulted in the snapping of the links between the delta and the original centers of the civilization back in Africa. These centers lost touch with not only the Egyptian art but with one another as well, surviving for some time as isolated pockets during which period they concentrated more on the social, political and moral organization of their societies rather than on material development. In the mean time, Europe benefited from the ancient Egyptian civilization via the Greeks and the Romans. Thus, while Africa lagged behind in technological progress, Europe marched ahead full steam. The great empires of Ghana, Mali, and life in West Africa, Ethiopia in the East, Zimbabwe in the South and Congo in South West are a testimony to the great civilization that the Africans built thousands of years ago.

Whether the hypothesis of Cheikh Anta Diop is wholly or partially true is really not so important for us for the time being. What matters is the fact that it establishes beyond any doubt that ancient Africa at that time was as much primitive or developed, as much barbaric or civilized as any other part of the world, including Europe. It, therefore, proves as false the opinion of the European powers that when they arrived in Africa they found its people to be primitive.

Africa under Europe

Africa's recent contact with Europe took place at the end of the fifteenth century when the Portuguese set up some rest and recuperation stations as also military garrisons on both the west coast of Atlantic and the east coast of the Indian ocean route to the East where they were headed, led by the legendary Vasco da Gama, for exploring the fabled riches of the Orient. Later, as the naval supremacy of France and Great Britain increased after the defeat of the Spanish Armada at the end of the sixteenth century, they, too, entered Africa to explore its interior for economic exploitation. By the end of the nineteenth century many more European powers had entered Africa. In fact, there were military clashes among them for proclaiming supremacy over various parts of Africa. It is this that led to the holding of an European conference in Berlin in 1885 to portion out Africa among them. With this, the process of colonization of Africa was initiated with common European consent and was soon completed.

1.2 PRE-HISTORIC KENYA – LOCATION, ANTIQUITY

The Republic of Kenya – abode of legendary Gikuyu and Mumbi – is an ancient land, lying on the east-central coast of Africa, across the Equator and encompassing some of the most arid as well as most fertile parts of Africa within its geographical bounds of 5,82,644 square kilometers. Bordered in the north by Sudan and Ethiopia in the east by Somalia and the Indian Ocean, in the south by Tanzania and in the west by Uganda, Kenya is a former British colony which at one time was known as East Africa Protectorate.

Anthropologists would have us believe that man first appeared on the earth in these parts of Africa, as also in many other parts of the continent, about a million years ago. Once again, like in other parts of the world, the people in this region too passed through various stages of development.

The inhabitants of Kenya seems to have come in contact with traders from some of the civilized countries of that time, such as Egypt, Greece, Persia and India. In all probability, it is these traders who first introduced agriculture and domestication of animals to the people of this period.

Social and Political Structure in Pre-historic Kenya

There were no classes in most Kenyan societies at that time. There were only different ethnic groups with varied styles of political and economic organizations. Because of a lack of means of communication, they lived in isolation from each other. The mode of production was subsistence-oriented and was based on a communal system of labour utilization which was either voluntary or obligatory or both. Each tribe was a distinctive unit, generally managed by the tribe-elders, as was the case with the Gikuyu, for instance. Land tenure was a complex affair. While land was not saleable, each adult had rights to its use that was controlled by the tribal authority. A member had temporary use on a piece of land, which ceased when he moved to another assigned area under the shifting cultivation system.

Modern Kenya – the First Colonization by Arabs and First Contacts with Europe – the Portuguese

The first colonization of these people and of the coastal region began with the arrival of Arab Muslims in the eighth century, who came to propagate Islam but stayed on to trade in ivory, gold, timber, iron and black slaves.

In course of time, a number of independent city states – mostly ruled by Arabs came up all along the coast from Mogadishu to Kilwa. Most of the Arab influence was, however, confined to the coastal areas only and there in no evidence of a similar contact with the natives of the interior.

By the middle of the 15th century, the Portuguese who had by then become a major colonial power and who were looking for controlling the sources of 'exotic' products of the Orient for trade purposes, make their first penetration of the coast, in their search for gold and spices and began to expand their slave trade. In doing so, they drove the Arab rulers from the coastal areas of Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania, which they continued to occupy and exploit for the next 200 years.

1.3 THE BRITISH

The beginning of the 19th century, however, saw more European powers, particularly the British, the Germans and the French becoming more interested in Africa in general and the East Coast in particular. A number of explorers and missionaries traveled into the interior and made contacts with the Africans.

Towards the end of the 19th century, European interests in the continent had reached competitive proportions. In a conference held in Berlin in 1884-85, in which Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austro-Hungarian Empire, etc. participated, it was decided to 'partition' Africa. Germany and Britain, however, continued to clash over supremacy in East Africa. Eventually, it was agreed that Lake Victoria would form the boundary between their respective areas of influence. The territories lying north of the lake – Kenya and Uganda – came under the British control, while the territories lying south of the lake – Tanganyika – became the German domain. The British government, however, chose not to administer these areas directly.

East Africa Trading Company

A trading company – The Imperial British East Africa Company – was founded in 1888 through the granting of a Royal Charter to Sir William Mackinnon, a shipping magnate. Besides, Kenya and Uganda, a ten-mile strip of the East Coast was obtained from the Sultan of Zanzibar on lease. The Company, it was claimed, had been 'formed for the purposes of pushing forward the civilization of Africa'. The *modus operandi* of this colonization in the name of civilization was once again the same as in Asia: eventual political control in the guise of trade.

However, the Company soon found out that the trade, particularly in ivory, cost enormously on account of transportation. It was then decided to construct a railway right from Mombassa up to Lake Victoria. During the construction, which was being done with the help of labour force brought from India, the Company had to bear huge financial burdens. The Company was wound up. Its Charter was annulled in 1895.

East Africa Protectorate

The East Africa Protectorate was proclaimed in 1895, with Lord Harding as its first Commissioner. By 1896, the British control over the area had stabilized, and the work on the railway was progressing smoothly.

Big game hunters and explorers passing through the region had been struck particularly by vast tracts of fertile land in the Rift Valley region. Among such travelers was one Captain Lugard who dreamt of large-scale agricultural farming and stock – raising.

The principal inhabitants of the region, which later came to be known as 'white highlands' were the Gikuyu who were primarily agriculturists.

1.4 THE SETTLERS – THE LAND GRAB

With the completion of the railway in 1901, the idea of European settlement in the area was taken up in earnest so that the traffic derived from settlement would

make the railway a profitable undertaking. This together with the transfer of the Eastern Province of Uganda where most of the highlands were situated, to the East Africa Protectorate in 1902, further strengthened the possibility of non-African settlement. Harry or Johnston, who was then the Special Commissioner for Uganda, proposed initially to develop the area 'as a white man's country'.

Reports of the fertility of the land sent out of the administration to South Africa attracted a number of Europeans and as per the available records, the first batch of settlers mainly from Great Britain and South Africa arrived in 1902. These settlers occupied large chunks of fertile land for both farming and trading. Through a number of ordinances, the government reserved the highlands exclusively for the white Europeans, excluding the native Africans and Indians. The principal sufferers were of course the Gikuyu, since it was they who primarily inhabited the area and who were dislocated more than once after their land had been 'alienated' and given away to the European settlers – for a song. As the land lust of the settlers increased, other tribes were deprived of their land as well. The Masai, the Nandis and the Kisis too suffered through removal to far-flung areas labeled as 'native reserves'. A series of land legislations – Land Regulations of the East Africa (1897), Indian Land Acquisition Act (1902) – provided the government with control of all land in Kenya and parts of Uganda for selling, granting lease or otherwise disposing of.

Forced labour

Land grab was not the only problem brought about by the colonial policy of European settlement. The settlers wanted a constant supply of cheap or free labour to work on these farms and with the African reluctance to work for outsiders i.e. European farmers, they found it increasingly difficult to obtain cheap labour. The Africans' reluctance was due to the fact that their basic needs were provided by the subsistence economy and moreover, they did not want to work for the colonialists. In those cases where African settlements were part of European acquired lands, the Africans were declared squatters with permission to cultivate a small plot of land on the farm premises and to keep the members of their families as well as a few cattle. Appalling working conditions and severe restrictions on both the physical movements of the squatters and also on the number of cattle they could keep and the kind of crops they could cultivate were definitely oppressive. Moreover, the wages were abysmally low. They were subjected to most cruel punishments on the flimsiest of excuses. In fact, their plight in many ways was worse than that of their brethren who had been sold as slaves in the Americas by the Arabs and the Europeans. The result was that as in other countries of Tropical Africa, labour force in Kenya was created by the 'method of extra economic coercion'.

In fact, the settlers, with the help of successive government legislations, seized more than 7.6 million acres of most fertile land. Yet, even close to the end of colonial period, only 18% of this land was cultivated while millions of Africans strived to eke out a living on highly congested reserves.

Native Reserves

These steps together with prohibitive rates of poll and hut taxes led to massive migration of peasants in search of living. This led to further problems in the native reserves, from which most able-bodied males were absent. Earning money

as wage labourers for paying personal taxes (it caused physical hardships to peasants who walked large distances, sometimes hundreds of miles for many weeks and sometimes months to gain employment) also stripped the African villages of its most efficient labour force, leaving behind mainly old men, women and children.

1.5 FIRST PROTESTS – K.A., Y.K.A., K.C.A., HARRY THUKU

By now, the Africans were sufficiently alarmed about the settlers' conspiracy to annex their land permanently and they formed two Associations to defend their interests. The Kikuyu Association (K.A.) was formed in 1920 with the primary aim of defending Gikuyu land. It comprised mainly Gikuyu chiefs and headmen. A year later, more broad-based and more militant association – the Young Kikuyu Association (Y.K.A.) – was formed with Harry Thuku as its secretary. Thuku, a government telephone operator, launched his agitation against not only the policies of annexing Gikuyu land, the 'Northey circulars' on forced labour, but also against the policy of carrying of Kipande – a card bearing the finger-prints of the bearer – by all African male adults and the doubling of the hut and poll taxes from Rs. 5 to Rs. 10. Thuku received generous help from M.A. Desai, an Indian leader and journalist, in running his association. Although he started by enrolling only the Gikuyu, he soon extended its membership to other tribes as well. His arrest and subsequent deportation by the government led to a large demonstration in Nairobi in which over 20 Africans were killed by police firing. This act of the government triggered off the militant struggle by the Africans which led to the full scale national liberation movement and eventual independence of Kenya in 1963.

Thuku's Y.K.A. which had been banned after his arrest and subsequent deportation, reappeared in 1925 under the new name Kikuyu Central Association (K.C.A.). Its appearance had coincided with the transfer of authority among the Gikuyu from one age-group to another – an event which occurred once in about twenty years. The K.C.A. immediately demanded, among others, the Africans right to grow coffee, the appointment of a Gikuyu Paramount Chief, the publication of laws in Gikuyu language and the release of Harry Thuku. It also demanded direct representation by twelve Africans on the legislative council since the Europeans had neither true sympathy nor thorough contact with the people. They also expressed their fears about the security of title of their land after the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915.

Female Circumcision

In the meantime, yet another confrontation broke out, this time between the missionaries and the Africans. In 1929, The Church of Scotland condemned the tribal practice of female circumcision – a form of clitoridectomy – as 'savage' and barbarous. Female circumcision was a custom that was regarded by the Gikuyu as also many other tribes, as an essential element of their social structure. The issue was immediately taken up by K.C.A. and it held large meetings in the Gikuyu reserves, highlighting the condemnation as yet another attack on their way of life by the Europeans, since the missionaries threatened to debar from church those persons practicing female circumcision and polygamy and also

those disallowing the children of such parents from obtaining education in missionary schools. Most schools, as we know, were at that time run by Christian missions. It, therefore, called the bluff of the missionaries of doing the wonderful job at least in educating the Africans. The Africans went to the extent of setting up their own African Church and Independence African Schools, both of which institutions were to play a crucial role in the Kenyan struggle for national independence. The controversy also provided an excellent opportunity to Jomo Kenyatta, the general secretary of the K.C.A. to increase the sphere of the influence of this organization as well as to project himself as a leader. He addressed big political meetings that helped the organization in enrolling new members and collecting money for the struggle.

Joint Struggles by Africans and Indians

The joint fight by the Indians and Africans was brought about through contacts among the trade union leaders. The government tended to overlook the strength of the African Associations. The government decision in 1938 to destroy thousands of cattle heads belonging to the Wakamba provoked a mass protest by them and brought them in touch with the Gikuyu.

At the same time, the simmering discontent over appalling working conditions among the labour broke into a full scale strike. Makhan Singh, an Indian printing press worker, who had organized the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, and the K.C.A. played a stellar role in organizing this strike that led to the appointment of a Commission to enquire into the working conditions of the labour force in Kenya. The report revealed government neglect and a scandalous state of affairs. With the outbreak of the war, K.C.A. and other such organizations of the Kamba and Teita tribes were banned and their leaders arrested. The Indians and Europeans too suspended their political activities.

1.6 THE EMERGENCE OF JOMO KENYATTA

The Kikuyu African Union (K.A.U.), feeling frustrated, began to talk of a revolutionary struggle to free themselves from the colonial yoke. It was at this stage that Kenyatta returned to Kenya after his long stay in England and other countries of Europe and was accorded a hero's welcome.

Kenyatta found that the country was a fertile field for political activities because of the post-war discontent. The war-returnees had become aware of national liberation movements in Asia. As unemployment grew both in the cities and in the countryside, the cry of 'Africa for Africans' grew stronger. Overcrowding in the reserves and extensive soil erosion had made the Africans talk of getting back their 'stolen lands' from the Europeans. Kenyatta began to travel around the country and addressed large meetings. In June 1947, he was elected the President of the Kikuyu African Union (K.A.U.) and began to attack the government policies.

African Trade Union Congress – the First Demand for Total Independence

African Trade Union Congress under the leadership of Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh also supported the struggle launched by Kenyatta in a big way. In fact, it was the ATUC, on May 1, 1950, that demanded for the first time in Kenya, total

independence. Both Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh were arrested for being office bearers of an 'illegal' labour organization. Although the ensuing strike failed finally, it further strengthened the increasing cooperation between the Africans and the Asians in Kenya. As frustration increased and as Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh were deported, the custom of oathing began in a big way across the whole country and a militant movement – Mau Mau – began to take shape which believed in inflicting damage on government machinery, among others, through violent means.

1.7 BANNING OF MAU MAU – THE EMERGENCY

In 1950, the government banned the so-called Mau Mau movement. Although Kenyatta and other so-called moderates denounced the movement, it continued to gain strength through the active cooperation of the people at large. As subsequent events were to prove, proscribing it proved to be counterproductive for the British government that got bogged down by it more and more with each passing day. The Europeans started putting pressure on the government to arrest the Gikuyu leaders and declare a state of Emergency in order to check what they called the 'Mau Mau' activities and which according to them were both anti-Christian and anti-European. On October 20, 1952, the Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring declared a state of Emergency. Not only Jomo Kenyatta and eleven other top African leaders were arrested but killing and arrest of ordinary Kenyans began at an unprecedented scale. Over 90,000 Kenyans were detained and over 10,000 killed during the Emergency that lasted five years.

Lifting of the Emergency and the Constitution Conference in London

Finally the Emergency was lifted in 1957 and the process of devolving more powers to the Africans began. A Constitutional Conference was called in London in 1960, wherein it was decided to give the Africans majority seats – 33 out of 65 – in the Legislative Council. The Africans would also have the largest number of ministers, viz. four against three Europeans and an Asian. The plan naturally irked the Europeans who dubbed it as a 'victory of Mau Mau' and attacked the British volte face. The fond hope of an Uhuru in not so distant a future gave a new fillip to the efforts of Africans. A new mass organization – Kenya African Nation Union (K.A.N.U.) was formed incorporating the member of the K.A.U. and Jomo Kenyatta was nominated as the President. Soon, however, there was a split and another party – Kenya African Democratic Union (K.A.D.U.) was formed with the aim of opposing K.A.N.U.

Uhuru – Kenyatta as the First Prime Minister

In 1961, first national elections were held and K.A.N.U. dominated the K.A.D.U. and in June 1963, Kenyatta became the first Prime Minister. Finally, on December 12, 1963, Kenya gained its much awaited Uhuru.

1.8 DRAMA IN KENYA – THE BEGINNINGS

Like in any other society, drama in Kenya too had its origin in man's interaction with nature. Like any other group of people, primitive people in Kenya, too, tried to overpower nature for sustaining themselves. Thus, they cleared jungles,

planted and harvested crops, first with their hands and later with the help of some tools. These tools for them were no less than things endowed with magical powers and they expressed their gratefulness to them by worshipping them or performing certain rituals relating to them.

Sustaining life in the face of all kinds of difficulties and calamities was no less than a miracle and hence there were rituals and rites for various mysteries of life, too: birth, circumcision, initiation, marriage, death.

Again, nature was not just benign but cruel, too. There were diseases and epidemics, floods and droughts, devastation and death. So nature and gods needed to be propitiated. More ceremonies, rituals and rites started happening. It was believed that these could help convert a hostile nature to a friendly and kind one.

And then, there were man-made calamities, too. Battles and wars, thefts and robberies, wounding and killing took place. Once again, men turned to rituals and ceremonies to seek nature's assistance in combating the enemies.

Most of the rituals and rites, ceremonies and propitiations involved the community and were carried out in the open and in everyone's presence. A large number of them involved imitating or mining with the help of masks or without, pretending to be this or that. In other words drama was central to all these ceremonies and rituals. It was so with all human societies at that stage of evolution, including in pre-colonial Kenya. Thus drama came to be associated with what Ngugi calls 'the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community'. And it was enacted in 'empty spaces' where everyone could be present and participate, if required. Some of these dramatic activities could last days or weeks or even more. So specific periods of time were chosen so as not to disrupt the daily flow of life and everyday chores. However, some continued over fairly long periods of time. The Ituika ceremony, for instance, was held every twenty five years among the Gikuyu in Kenya. This coincided with the power change from one generation to another and the celebrations involving feasting, singing and dancing over a period of six months. New songs and dance forms as well as dramatic performances were created specifically for such occasions.

Thus we can see that drama in pre-colonial Kenya was not an isolated event. It was, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o puts it, 'an activity among other activities, often drawing its energy from those other activities.'

1.9 DRAMA UNDER COLONIALISM

This tradition of drama in Kenya as enunciated above was destroyed during the period of colonialism under the British. Missionaries termed some of these rituals, rites and ceremonies as works of the devil and hence many performances were banned. For instance, the Ituika was banned in 1925. For other ceremonies, they made obtaining of a license compulsory. Again, 'empty spaces' were converted into community halls, school halls, and church buildings or even open prisons with barbed wires surrounding them, as was the case during the Emergency after the 'Mau Mau' movement.

The kind of plays that were encouraged to be staged were propagandist in nature, eulogizing the colonial administration. In the name of naivete of the people from

the countryside, who could not handle the urban situation and mechanical devices, Kenyan people were presented as fools and their cultural practices ridiculed. Also, plays were produced in English that were based on English literary texts, thereby alienating the masses from dramatic activities. Besides the plays of Shakespeare presented in simplified versions, West End comedies and sugary musicals, as Ngugi calls them, were staged regularly in Kenyan National Theatre, a government establishment. The colonial regime also encouraged radio plays with Africans depicted as clowns.

1.10 DRAMA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The situation did not change much after Kenya gained independence in 1963. Theatre continued to be confined to enclosed spaces like ‘halls’ and musicals like *Annie Get your Gun* or *Boeing* continued to be popular performances. Expatriate professionals continued to comprise both the production teams and the cast and very few if any Africans were involved in either production or performance of these.

However, a counter movement had started in schools and colleges during the last phase of colonialism where young students wrote scripts in Kswahili. Some of the popular productions included *Nakupenda Lakini* by Henri Kuria, *Maisha ni Nini* by Kimani Nyoike and *Atakiwa na Polisi* by B.M. Kurutu.

Immediately after independence, an alternative tradition, more nationalistic in character, came into existence. This included playwrights like Francis Imbuga, Kenneth Watene and Micere Mugo and directors like Seth Adagala, Tirus Gathwe and David Mulwa. Some of these plays were openly patriotic, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist in their message. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* scripted by Micere Mugo and Ngugi wa Thiong’o is the high point of such a trend, if not the tradition. The seventies also saw a movement to wrest the control of the Kenya National Theatre from the clutches of white expatriates and clamour for African Theatre grew stronger. A debate ensued whether a theatre was only a building or a location or it had something to do with the kind of plays that were staged there. Schools Drama Festival now came to be dominated by Africans and instead of being located at the Kenyan National Theatre in Nairobi, it became a touring festival. Kiswahili replaced English as the language of the plays. Thus the seventies saw Kenyan theatre undergoing major changes with drama trying to break from its colonial confinement.

Kamirithu Community and Educational Cultural Centre

One such attempt was the setting up of the Kamiriithu Community and Education Cultural Centre – a four acre plot with mud-barracked four rooms that were falling apart and the rest only grass. The peasants and workers from the neighbourhood built the stage and a semi-circular bamboo wall behind to separate it from rooms that served both as a store and changing rooms. With no roof over it, it was an open air theatre, much in the tradition of empty spaces that we have spoken about above. Over 10,000 people could be accommodated to watch performances. When Miiri and Ngugi wa Thiong’o collaborated to script a play, they decided to do it in Gikuyu rather than in English, a language in which Ngugi wa Thiong’o had done all his earlier writings. The result was a play called

Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will Marry when I want) that resulted in what Ngugi himself has called an 'epistemological break' with his past, particularly in the area of theatre.

The play depicted the proletarianisation of the peasantry in a neo-colonial society through the family of a poor peasant – Kiguunda – who owns a small piece of land that sustains him and the family but is deprived of the same by a multinational consortium with the help of comprador landlords and businessmen.

The play was path – breaking in more than one ways. It asked several questions – about national freedom, its objectives, people's perception of post-colonial societies and the role of the leadership in meeting people's aspirations. At the level of language while it was Gikuyu, it had been revised after repeated consultations with people at large through practice performances. Many aspects of the pre-colonial dramatic form were brought into the script – song, dance and mime. But what was most crucial about the play was its depiction of history that had been done, once again, after extensive consultation with the community. And this is what the authorities found to be most unpalatable and hence the play was banned on November 16, 1977. Ngugi was arrested and spent a most horrible year in jail without any charges. A second attempt in 1982 to stage another play with a similar theme – *Maitu Njugira (Mother Sing for me)* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o was again outlawed. And this time, the whole building itself was razed to the ground.

As stated above, song, dance and mime were an integral part of the African drama in pre-colonial times and playwrights brought it back as an integral part of theatre after independence for the simple reasons that it continued to be an integral part of their lives – at birth, circumcision, marriage, funerals and many other ceremonies. Thus plays like *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Ngaahika Ndeenda* have a number of songs, dances and mime as part of the structure and movement in the plays. However, what gives the form of these plays tautness and special character is the content, involving man's interaction with nature through history. But these plays also focus on correcting distortions of history introduced by the colonizing forces. And one of the ways of making such corrections was to introduce African languages rather than English as the medium of expression in plays since it is through language that many such distortions are slipped into the portrayal of history. Thus African drama with its focus on dance, song and mime but above all with its use of African languages has gained some of its pre-colonial significance and glory.

1.11 LET US SUM UP

This unit enables us to trace the history of Africa since the pre-historic times. It gives a detailed history of Kenya since the pre-historic times to the situation at the point of its Uhuru in December 1963. The various struggles waged by the Africans including the Mau Mau Struggle is also discussed briefly. This unit also deals with the tradition of Drama in Kenya.

1.12 QUESTIONS

1. Why Africa is called 'the dark continent'?

2. Write a short note on the importance of Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya's modern history.
3. Write a short note on the dramatic tradition in Kenya.

1.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

Ngugi Wo Thiongoó. Decolonising the Mind-The Politics of Language in African Literature James Currey Ltd. 1986

Ngugi Wa Thiongo. Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-colonial Kenya: James Curry Ltd. 1983

Ngugi Wa Thiongo. Writing Against Neo-Colonisation. James Curry Ltd. 1986.



UNIT 2 NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S LIFE AND WORLDVIEW

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Birth and Early Education
- 2.2 Higher Education
- 2.3 Teaching Career
- 2.4 Detention and Exile
- 2.5 Ngugi's Ideology and WorldView
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Questions
- 2.8 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to familiarize you with the details of Ngugi's life, including his education, teaching and writing career. The unit would also focus on the evolution of Ngugi's world view, especially as it got reflected in his writings at various stages, especially in the writing of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

2.1 BIRTH AND EARLY EDUCATION



Image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ng%C5%A9g%C4%A9_wa_Thiong%27o

Born in 1938, in the family of a landless squatter on the land of a well-to-do farmer in the Kamiithu village in Limuru district of Kenya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o went to the mission-run Kamaandura school in Limuru and later to a school of the Independent Schools Movement. Later, he joined the Alliance High School – Kenya's first full-fledged school for Africans – run by an alliance of the Protestant denominations in Kenya. It is here that Ngugi's religious awareness about Christianity – all his writings including *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* have copious references to Christianity – was formed.

Ngugi was fourteen when a state of Emergency was declared in Kenya in 1952, on October 20, 1952, to be precise. His passion for education seems to have weighed heavily with him in his decision to continue with it and as a result, unlike a large number of young persons of his age, he missed out on actual participation in the movement. This fact seems to have given him a kind of guilt complex and is perhaps one of the major reasons for making the freedom struggle, particularly the 'Mau Mau' phase, the theme of most of his books.

2.2 HIGHER EDUCATION

Makarere University College, Uganda

After finishing his school education at Alliance High School, Ngugi joined B.A. (Hons.) in English at the Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda which was the only university college in the whole of East Africa. It is here that his creative talents developed. Before graduating in 1963, Ngugi had written his first full length play – *The Black Hermit* – which was performed on the occasion of the Independence of Uganda in 1962. He had also written his first two novels – *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*. During this period, he also became the student editor of *Pen Point Africa*, and wrote a number of short stories as well. During the same period he also contributed a regular column – 'As I see It' – to the *Daily Nation*, a prominent newspaper published from Nairobi.

It was a conventional course in English Literature that Ngugi pursued in Makerere, and some critics are of the opinion that the study of D.H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad exercised an early influence on his writings.

Leeds University, United Kingdom

Leeds was Ngugi's next halt for education. Here he soon became part of Arnold Kettle's group that provided him with a new perspective on various issues – political, social, cultural and academic. In his own words – "Leeds systematized my thinking". At Leeds, he started working on Caribbean literature for his dissertation for the M.A. degree – a work that he never submitted and that was later to be published as a part of his first book of essays – 'Homecoming' – in 1972.

But what is really significant about his staying in Leeds is that it is here that he published his next novel – *A Grain of Wheat* – in 1967 which many critics believe to be his magnum opus.

2.3 TEACHING CAREER

Nairobi University

Returning home the same year, Ngugi became a lecturer at the English department of Nairobi University. Soon, he suggested a number of radical changes in the syllabus, recommending, among others, the incorporation of literatures written in African languages as a part of the Programme of English Studies. These were, however, not accepted. Ngugi resigned from his position in 1969, due to the stiff attitude of the university authorities against students who had been forced to go on a strike for raising various demands. Back to Makerere, where he had accepted a year's fellowship, Ngugi wa Thiong'o helped his new institution reorganize its

English department as the African Literature Department with special focus on world literatures rather than on English literature alone. This was very much in keeping with his recommendations at the English department in Nairobi University.

Teaching in the U.S.A. and After

Ngugi went to the U.S.A. for a year to teach African literature at North Western University, Illinois, where he got an opportunity to observe, as he put it in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, "Neo-imperialism at close quarters". He was back at the English department in Nairobi University in 1971 where he was able to introduce the desired changes and the department was organized as Department of Literature. The period between 1972 and 1977 proved very fruitful in Ngugi's literary career. He published a number of books, beginning with *Homecoming and Other Essays* (1972), *Secret Lives* (1975), a collection of short stories, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), which he wrote together with his colleague Micere Mugo. *Petals of Blood* (1977), his next novel, was also published during this period.

2.4 DETENTION AND EXILE

Ngugi got into trouble with government authorities in Kenya over portions of his *Petals of Blood* in which he dealt with, for the first time in his writings, situations in post-independence Kenya. Also the text of a play – *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will Marry when I want)* about peasants in independent Kenya which he wrote together with Ngugi wa Miiri in his mother tongue Gikuyu and which was performed at the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre, Limuru in 1977. The authorities did not find it to their liking and eventually banned its performance on November 17, 1977. On 31st December, 1977, Ngugi was taken to a police station near his residence for "routine questioning" but was detained without trial for almost a year – until December 12, 1978. He was released as inexplicably as he had been detained. However, he was not restored to his position as Professor and Head of the Department of Literature, Nairobi University.

During his detention, Ngugi wrote down on pieces of toilet paper – literally – the details of his routine as a detainee as also the strategies through which he was to keep his sanity in the face of humiliations and torture – both physical and mental. The writing was later published as 'Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary' in 1981. During this period, he also wrote the manuscript of his next novel – *Cathiani Mutharaba Ini (Devil on the Cross)* – in Gikuyu. Ngugi had made his first attempt at writing in his mother tongue Gikuyu as a conscious decision when he had collaborated with Ngugi wa Miiri in writing a play which was published *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will Marry when I want)* in 1980.

After his request to restore him to his position as Professor in Nairobi University was turned down, Ngugi wa Thiong'o went away to England, settling down as a full time writer. It is from here that a number of his books – *Writers in Politics*, *Barrel of a Pen*, *Decolonizing the Mind*, *Mother Sing to Me*, *Moving the Centre* and his latest novel *Matigari* – were published. He also made common cause with all those who were fighting for the restoration of democracy in Kenya. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has since shifted to the USA where he teaches literature.

Ngugi went back to Kenya in 2005 but unfortunately he and his wife were assaulted brutally and his wife was also raped.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o'
Life and Worldview

2.5 NGUGI'S IDEOLOGY AND WORLDVIEW

Ngugi wa Thiong'o believes that literature and politics are inextricably linked with each other because both are about "living men, actual men and women and children, breathing, eating, crying, laughing, creating, dying, flowering men in history of which they are the products and the maker."

Therefore, he chose as the subject of his writings single events in the history of Kenya that has affected its people the most, namely, Mau Mau. Ngugi believes, together with many other African writers, that the primary aim of literature is not merely to entertain but also to persuade. Ngugi, therefore, does not confine himself to mere chronicling of factual details of historical events, but he also adopts a position on them. In his own words:

What is important... is the attitude and the world view
Embodied in (the Writer's) work and with which he has persuaded us
To identify vis-à-vis the historical drama his
Community is undergoing.

(Writers in Politics, p. 75)

It is because of this historic responsibility of a writer through which Ngugi makes known his own partisanship; while portraying the basic opposition between the forces of imperialism and capitalism on one hand and the forces of national liberation and socialism on the other, between a small class of 'haves' backed by transnational monopoly capital and the 'have nots' representing the masses of Kenyan people. Ngugi, therefore, has refused to confine his portrayal of the national struggle – as has been the case with many other African writers portraying similar struggles in other respective countries – as a struggle of the black against the white. Once again, unlike his other fellow African counterparts Ngugi is very forthright – particularly in his later novels and plays – in advocating socialism not only as a viable but an extremely desirable political system of governance for solving the problems of newly – liberated African nations reeling under the covert attack of neo-colonialism.

Ngugi is also critical of those writers who seek a solution to all their present, post-colonial ills by suggesting to go back to the past, by making an appeal for adopting the African past completely and uncritically. He suggests – quite candidly – a class approach to those problems and their solutions:

...for as long as there are classes – classes defined by
where or how the various people stand in relation
to the means of production – a truly human contact in
love, joy, laughter, creative fulfillment in labour
will never be possible. We can talk meaningfully of
class love, class joy, class marriage, class family
and class culture.

(Writers in Politics, p. 79)

Ngugi is therefore quite wary of those writers who talk of humanism, universalism, justice and peace in abstract terms. In this respect he reserves his worst criticism for a section of the bourgeoisie that may be characterized as comprador bourgeoisie – the class of people that collaborated with the ruling colonial forces during the phase of colonialism, particularly during the crucial phase of the national freedom struggle. According to Ngugi, such a class worked itself into positions of political power during the post-independence phase in order to subserve the interests of neo-colonialism and imperialism via the transnationals. Ngugi has stressed that the colonial administration-appointed home guards and village chiefs were the most prominent representatives of the class of comprador bourgeoisie.

While tracing the origin of the colonial process in capturing the economic resources of Kenya, particularly the illegal misappropriation of its fertile land – white highlands, as these came to be called – Ngugi does not overlook another important fact: 'cultural bomb'. Culture for Ngugi includes the sum total of all the intellectual, moral, ideological forces that give the social relations of production – what we call society – a unique character, a distinctive mark, a certain identity in a particular historical phase. Culture, therefore, includes for Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the education system, the legal system, the religious system, language, literature, forms of dances and songs. Of these the two most significant instruments of cultural imperialism were the church and western system of education, both of which subserved the interests of colonialism. It is because of this that these two underlie the themes of almost all his creative writing including *A Grain of Wheat* wherein he exposed the collaborative role of Christianity most forcefully through the character of Kihika, a revolutionary in the struggle for national freedom.

The other major component of the British colonial cultural bomb in Kenya has been education – the western system of education. Once again, the western system of education which, like Christianity, had been first introduced by the missionaries as a part of the church activities to lure and beguile the gullible, had the same twin objectives of disrupting the traditional way of life in Kenya and to create a class of obedient Kenyans who, mouthing clichés and phrases from English language, expressed their allegiance openly to the power of colonialism. No wonder that this class received a big patronage from the colonial administration through nominations as village chiefs and employment in the home guards system, both of which played the negative role of collaborating with saboteurs during the height of Emergency between 1952 and 1957. Karanja in *A Grain of Wheat* is Ngugi's most powerful portrayal of such collaborators.

In fact, this class of comprador bourgeoisie became the subject of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* wherein he has shown this class to be essentially a parasitic class with a wish for permanent identification with the cultures of imperialist bourgeoisie. The members of this parasitic class are the ones who promote prostitution, alcoholism and gambling by setting up massage parlours, beer-bars and casinos in the name of encouraging tourism and effecting 'development' of Kenya, particularly the rural areas.

Ngugi, however, is not satisfied by mere portrayal of the socio-political situation in Kenya during and after the national struggle for independence. He suggests this in a book titled 'Decolonizing the Mind'. By this he means a kind of 'dialectal

negation of the colonial process', dismantling, as it were, the various psychological structures that had been in the minds of men as a result of sustained colonial propaganda, covert as well as overt, during the period of colonization. In his book 'Writers in Politics', he suggests to the writers and intellectuals the task of 'going back to the roots' with the aim of restoring the African personality to its true creative potentials in history, so as to enhance the quality of life. He exhorts teachers and educational institutions to emphasize African languages and literatures while pleading with African writers to write in their own languages rather than in European languages.

Ngugi then goes on to define the function of literature in society:

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is
Given impetus, shape, direction and even area of
Concern by social, political and economic forces in a
society. The relationship between creative literature
and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially
in Africa, where modern literature has grown against
the gory background of European imperialism and its
changing manifestation: slavery, colonialism and neo-
colonialism.

(*Home Coming*, p.xv)

Based on this, Ngugi differentiates the social role of a contemporary artist in Africa from that of one in Europe:

There was never, in any African society, the cult of the artist with its bohemian priests along with the banks of Seine and Thames. Today, the artist in Europe sees himself as an outsider, living in a kind of individual culture and obeying only the laws of his imagination.

(*Home Coming*, p. 6)

It is for similar reasons that Ngugi advocated the use of African languages as the vehicle for the writings by Africans. For many years, he observed, members of the petty bourgeois class comprising students, teachers, journalists and bureaucrats have continued to compose what Ngugi calls 'Afro-European literature' in the languages of Europe, for a readership that also came from the same class. It meant that the moment of truth for Ngugi had arrived. He had to link up his struggle through creative literature with the struggle of the Kenyan masses – now pitted against the comprador bourgeoisie that had usurped power in Kenya and was clinging to it. Thus in a statement prefixed to *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi declared that –

This book, *Decolonizing the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili as the way. (Preface, p. xiv)

It is, therefore, not at all surprising that Ngugi assigned a very radical role to a writer in a society, particularly in a society based on sharp class distinctions:

...literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it,

his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battle field: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics...

(*Writers in Politics*. Preface)

It is on this very powerful note about the ideological obligations of a writer that we would like to end this discussion about Ngugi's world view.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed –

- the details of Ngugi Wa Thiongo'O's life, education and career.
- the evolution of Ngugi's Ideology and worldview.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Give in brief some of the important events in Ngugi's life and career.
2. Comment on Ngugi's ideology and worldview with special reference to the relationship between politics and literature.

2.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Bennet, G. *Kenya – A Political History: The Colonial Period*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

Brown, J.M. *Kenyatta*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1972.

UNIT 3 *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI* – READING THE TEXT

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 ‘The Preface’
- 3.2 The Opening
- 3.3 First Movement
- 3.4 Second Movement
- 3.5 Third Movement
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to provide a detailed summary of the play. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* written by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Micere Githae Mugo. However, it is not a plain summary but is also an elucidation of issues wherever there is a need for contextual elaborations – historical, political and social. Extensive quotations from the text have been reproduced to support the points made during the summarization and also to provide inter-connectivity.

Before we discuss the detailed summary of the play, it would be in order to make the observation that **The Preface, Acknowledgements** and **Preliminary Notes** also carry significant statements by the authors about the play and must be read carefully for the evaluation of the play. Therefore, before summarizing the play proper, we present a critical summary of the Preface.

3.1 ‘THE PREFACE’

The authors state that it was in August 1971 that they first thought of writing this play. The authors also let the readers know that their literary interests and collaboration goes back to their ‘undergraduate days at Makerere of the early 60’s where we used to share many literary interests including editing *Penpoint*, reading and directing plays.’ The immediate provocation for their agreeing to write this play was a joint realization by both of them ‘that Imperialism was the enemy of all working peoples’ – a realization they had reached after both of them had ‘lived in North America and travelled in Western Europe’ and after they had ‘encountered capitalism in its home ground’. Taking the example of the United States of America as an instance of imperialism the authors observe that while America had ‘huge highways, skyscrapers, the world’s most efficient systems of communication, tremendous leaps in science and technology, every kind of material luxury one could think of, there was ‘the appalling poverty of workers especially those in the black and Puerto Rican Ghettos’ and ‘All the

advantages of modern science and technology, the wealth produced by the labour power of many people, went to the hands of a few'.

The authors also observe that there existed 'American Imperialist projects of theft through deception, murder and enslavement of the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America. There was the American direct occupation of Vietnam and South Korea: there was the indirect American control of South Africa and Palestine.' America's immense wealth, the authors observe, 'was gained through the impoverishment and misery of millions!'

A discussion about the war in Vietnam, the authors observe, 'led us back to Mau Mau, the actual subject of our discussion' and they wondered whether the theme of Mau Mau struggles had been exhausted in their literature. Other related questions, for instance, that agitated their thinking were:

"Had this heroic peasant armed struggle against the British Forces of occupation been adequately treated in our literature? Why was Kenyan Literature on the whole so submissive and hardly depicted the people, the masses, as capable of making and changing history? Take the heroes and heroines of our history: Kimathi, Koitalel, Me Kitilili, Mary Nyanjiru, Waiyaki. Why were our imaginative artists not singing songs of praise to these and their epic deeds of resistance? Whose history and whose deeds were the historians and creative writers recording for our children to read?

The play, structured differently from the tradition of plays in Europe, is divided into what the authors call 'Movements' that are preceded by an 'Opening'. Given below is a detailed summary of all the Movements as also the Opening.

3.2 THE OPENING

The stage directions for the Opening tell the readers/viewers that the venue of the action is a courtroom where a white judge is presiding. Seated near him is an African clerk who is described to be 'fat' and 'important-looking' but who is 'fiddling nervously with papers'. The use of the adjective 'nervously' to describe the state of the 'important-looking' clerk is to send a signal to the readers/viewers that something significant – unusual – is about to take place in the courtroom.

Next, the focus of the stage directions shifts to the person in the dock who is described to be in chains. This observation sends a signal to the readers/viewers that the accused is perhaps too dangerous to be allowed to free movement of his body. Simultaneously, it is perhaps also indicative of the gravity of his alleged crime. This latter inference is also borne out by the fact that he is being guarded by a 'European District-cum-police officer' – Waitina – and two African K.A.R. – the full form is Kenya African Rifles – soldiers who are 'heavily armed'. The suspense builds up about the prisoner since despite being chained, he is being guarded by armed soldiers and an officer. Adding to the suspense is the observation by the authors that the courtroom is 'overcrowded'.

The next set of stage directions carry a whole lot of significant socio-cultural and political information: 'Africans squeeze around one side, seated on rough benches' while the 'Whites occupy more comfortable seats on the opposite side'.

The segregation is symptomatic of the racial divide in the country which extends even to the courtroom – right in front of the law. And the contrast between ‘rough benches’ and ‘more comfortable seats’ symbolizes the difference in economic status of the two – Africans and the White Europeans – right under the nose of the law. In fact, it is the court which has provided for this differentiated treatment between the two segments of the society.

It is important to note here that the directions themselves have been very carefully thought out by the authors and communicate significant information not only about the state of affairs in Kenya but also about the shape of things to come.

After it has been observed as a final part of stage directions that there is ‘Dead silence’ and the Judge begins to speak.

The Judge addresses the accused in the dock, speaking aloud his name and other related details about his identification: ‘Dedan Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, alias Prime Minister or Field Marshal, of no fixed address...’ One may pause and observe here that the contrast created by the pronouncement by the judge that Dedan Kimathi who has an alias or a Prime Minister or a Field Marshal but does not even have ‘fixed address’ is done with the deliberate intention of making fun of the accused.

The judge then goes on to announce the charge laid against him – Kimathi is ‘found in possession of a firearm, namely a revolver, without a licence, contrary to section 89 of the penal code, which under Special Emergency Regulations constitutes a criminal offence’. He then asks the accused whether he confesses his guilt or not. The stage directions state that Kimathi ‘remains silent, defiant’. The stage directions once again give an indication about the impending confrontation between the judge and the accused, between the white colonial rulers and the black colonized ruled.

The judge, feeling slighted and hence angry on this act of defiance of his authority, threatens the accused that this would tantamount to ‘contempt of court’ and the accused could be punished for this by being ‘sent for a certain term to jail’. Since Dedan Kimathi still remains silent and hence defiant, a murmuring starts among the audience. The judge reads aloud the charge again and asks the accused to state whether he considers himself guilty or not.

The stage directions state that for a few moments there is silence after which the whole stage goes dark suddenly. This ‘sudden darkness’ is symbolic of many things simultaneously. It symbolizes a complete rupture in communication. More significantly, it anticipates the shape of events to come which would lead to the death of Kimathi eventually since darkness symbolizes death. At the same time it also draws the reader/viewer’s attention to the dark – non-transparent – aspect of the farcical trial which is about to follow.

Thus we see that the ‘Opening’ which is a kind of prelude to the actual action of the play is significant in both providing the socio-political background and setting the tone for whatever is to follow.

What are usually described as Acts in western drama are described as Movements in this play. The play has been divided into three Movements which the authors claim should in fact be viewed as a ‘single Movement’.

3.3 FIRST MOVEMENT

The directions before the opening of the action in the First Movement state that 'Darkness reigns'. There is the sound of 'Distant drums that grow louder and louder until they culminate in a frantic, frenzied and intense climax, filling the entire stage and auditorium with their rhythm.' With the coming on of the 'Twilight', loud singing by a crowd of peasants is heard. Once again, the authors' directions are that the voices of the peasants combine 'aggression with firmness'. The song which is in Swahili, is apparently a song of freedom. Simultaneously, there is the sound of a gunshot. Groans and screams follow after 'whiplashes are heard falling on human skins'. Sad music now takes over as 'the Black Man's History takes place on the stage'. The enactment of the history is in four phases, signifying the milestones in the history of Africa: the first phase shows the hoodwinking of black African chiefs by slave-traders wherein 'Several strong black men and a few women are given away for a long, posh piece of cloth and a heap of trinkets'; in the second phase, 'a chain of exhausted slaves, roped onto one another... row a boat across the stage, under heavy whipping'. The third phase shows 'A labour force of blacks, toiling on plantation under the supervision of a cruel, ruthless fellow black overseer' and the fourth phase shows 'An angry procession of defiant blacks, chanting anti-imperialist slogans through songs and thunderous shouts'. The song is once again a freedom song showing the determination of the blacks to 'unchain the people'.

The significance of the directions as well as the enactment of the Black Man's History is to not only provide the audience with the socio-political background of wherever has happened to Africa and Africans during the last few hundred years but also – more significantly – to make them aware that whatever is to follow is a part of the same history and there is a continuum in the struggle of Blacks from Africa to America.

'Now definite dawn breaks over the stage' and the 'action focuses on two retreating Mau Mau guerrillas into the 'bush' with machine guns on the ready'. Off stage sounds of 'rough kicks, slaps and whiplashes' are heard together with voices of protest. Then an African official – Waitina – and a hooded collaborator – Gakunia who also doubles up as Gatotia – are seen to be instructing the African soldiers to present before them 'those Mau Mau villagers two by two' for screening. On a nod from Gakunia, some are detained for further questioning. Among those brought before Waitina is a 'fruitseller – Matunda' who appears to be acting funny and even Waitina is amused by his 'antics'. However, Waitina tells the fruit seller to go "to Manyani to sell your fruits there". The directions given at this point tell the readers that "we should see the man frustrated" (p.8).

The scene now changes. It is proper daylight. A woman is seen walking across the stage. Between 30 and 40, she is mature, slightly built good looking with a youthful face. Though "apparently a simple peasant, the woman is obviously world-wise, and perceptive of behaviour and society. Throughout, her actions are under control: her body and mind are fully alert.

Fearless determination and a spirit of daring is her character. She is versatile and full of energy in her responses to different roles and situations. A mother, a fighter, all in one." (p.8)

She walks straight into the mouth of a gun wielded by a white man, Johnnie who is a soldier. He asks her for her 'passbook' to which she replies that 'women, they don't carry passi'. He then eyes her seductively and begins to flirt with her:

"Women are their own passbooks, eh? Even to heaven (grinning seductively) Do you live around these parts?" (p.9)

Suddenly he becomes tense on seeing her carry a kondo – a small basket generally carried by women and asks her to 'put it on the ground. Now hands on your head. Move a step back. Two steps. That's good. Don't try any tricks now.' (pp.9-10) This incident is intended to highlight the state of paranoia that prevails among the whites. Picking up the basket, he observes – 'You never know what's hidden in these shenzi things!'

Seeing fruit, he cannot help picking up a banana and eating it. As it turns out, he has had a hard night's work.

"Of course. A white man also gets hungry especially after a whole night without sleep or food. Had to fight off those bloody terrorists until daybreak"

Then Johnnie discovers suddenly that there is a bread wrapped in the parcel that the woman has been carrying:

"Ahh, just bread... Rather heavy bread, I must say. Bush millet, eh? Could have been a grenade. They are quite cunning, you know. Homemade guns. Homemade machine guns. Fanatics! Shall we have a bite?"

He is about to break the bread into two when he is suddenly distracted by the woman 'kneeling on the ground, almost reaching out for his legs' and beseeching him not to break the bread since it was meant for her hungry children. She supplicates to him to let her go.

A sudden noise from somewhere nearby scares him and he runs away in a hurry. The woman too gets away. Two African soldiers appear on the stage. Their conversation updates the readers on the current socio-political situation as also gives them a peep into the past vis-à-vis Kimathi and the 'Mau Mau'.

The first soldier is quite sceptical about the whole exercise of hunting for Mau Mau terrorists:

"Where are the terrorists who are supposed to be all over Nyeri? We've been patrolling all night without as much as catching sight of a single one of them. Simply harassing innocent villagers. The way mzungu makes us thirst to kill one another!" (p.12)

The second soldier replies to this by observing that "The bloodyfuckin' Mau Mau are finished without that bugger Kimathi." (p.12)

Through their conversation we also come to know that 'their bloody Kimathi is appearing in court at Nyeri today. This afternoon.' While one of them hopes that there would be 'no attempt to rescue him. Something like what happened last night', the other observes that "...I don't think they will try again. Mau Mau... They are funkin' cowards. They won't come out into the open in daylight and fight it out like men." (p.13)

As they discuss the details of Kimathi's character, the audience/readers are presented with two opposite views about Kimathi the individual and his deeds:

"Second Soldier: ...Angry mothers who have lost their husbands and their children might want to tear that beastly Kimathi to pieces!

First Soldier: Wapi? That's what Bwana Shaw Henderson says. But he doesn't know the people. Kimathi is a hero to the people. They love him like anything, say what you will."

...

...

Second soldier: ...But ...let me tell you, after the trial, after Kimathi is hanged, there will be no more fighting. It will be the end of this bloody struggle. Mzungu! Don't play with him.

First Soldier: Well, time will tell."

After the soldiers have left, the woman comes out of her hiding, observing to herself about a comment made by one of the soldiers –

"What was one of those soldiers said? "The way the enemy makes us thirsty to kill one another." How right he was! He must be one of the lost sons of the soil. H'm. Take the case of us peasants, for one. We are told you are Luo, you are Kalenjin, you are Kamba, you are Maasai, you are Kikuyu. You are a woman, you are a man, you are this, you are that, you are the other. (After some thought): Yes. We are only ants trodden upon by the merciless elephants." (p.14)

She wraps her bread back, resolves to 'find the fruit seller quickly' and is about to start off when a youth enters, chasing a girl. He catches her, holds her down roughly and demands his money. Seeing this, the woman reproaches him for ill-treating a girl:

"Shame on you. A big boy, well, a young man like you! And you want kill your sister! Your own mother's daughter!"

On his continuing to quarrel with the girl and abusing her for letting the girl escape his clutches, she berates him:

"You are a woman's son? I have a mind to wring your neck. Running about and fighting like that when screeners and army jeeps are all over Nyeri. Where is your heart? Can't you see that you are big enough? That you could easily be taken to Manyani? What has she done?" (pp. 15-16)

She then asks him to tell her about himself and the girl. After a brief hesitation during which he examines the woman closely, the boy 'involuntarily begins to tell his story:

"It was in Nairobi, you see. She and I and other boys and girls used to roam the streets together...

...We scrounged into every dustbin from Kariobangi to Grogan Road. But mostly we'd hang around big hotels: New Stanley, Norfolk, Grosvenor. There were a lot of settlers and tourists and we would carry their bags. Sometimes we would act

crippled or blind and deaf. They would give us money – some of them as much as ten shillings! The police would often come chasing us away, but we managed. Somehow.” (p.16)

He then goes on to say how one day she – the girl – had run away without giving him his share of money earned by carrying bags of a fat American. And ‘Today by luck, I saw her’.

Touched by his story, the woman gives the boy twenty shillings to go eat something and bring her back the change. While he is gone, she observes to herself:

“It is the same old story. Everywhere. Mombasa. Nkuru. Kisumu. Eldoret. The same old story. Our people... tearing one another... and all because of the crumbs thrown at them by the exploiting foreigners. Our own food eaten and leftovers thrown to us – in our own land, where we should have the whole share. We buy wood from our own forests; sweat on our own soil for the profit of our oppressors. Kimathi’s teaching is: unite, drive out the enemy and control your own riches, enjoy the fruit of your sweat. It is for this that the enemy has captured him.” (p.18)

The Boy goes on to narrate his story – how a greedy relation of his father had deprived them of their land in Nyeri, reducing his father and him to workers in Nairobi where his father died of an accident on a machine and he was forced to fight “with dogs and cats in the rubbish bins, for food... and we became men and women before our time.” (p.19)

Narrating her own story in the city where “I was a bad woman”, she tells them that she knew the vicious bind of “Fighting...Drinking...Fighting...Drinking... Kangari, karubu, busaa, chang’aa...Mathere Valley...Pumwani...all that and more.” (p.19) She then goes on to tell them how she changed after hearing “The call of the people”. Inviting the Boy to understand the real nature of things, she tells him this:

“The day you understand why your father died: the day you ask yourself whether it was right for him to die so; the day you ask yourself: “what can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstances?” that day, my son, you’ll become a man. Just now you are a beast and the girl was right to call you a brute.” (p.19)

She lets them know later about Dedan Kimathi who has been captured by the colonial administration and who had been fighting to ensure that “the soil will be restored to the people. Our land shall one day be truly ours”. (p.21)

Finally, she assigns them a task:

“There, outside the prison gates or outside the courtroom, or somewhere between the prison gates and the courtroom, you will find a man selling oranges. He will be wearing a red shirt. He will be singing: “Oranges cheap today! Thandaraita – aaa.” Give him this loaf of bread.” (p.21)

The First Movement ends with the Boy recalling the words of the Woman, “The day you’ll ask yourself... what can I do so that another shall not die under such grisly circumstance... that day you’ll become a man, my son.” (p.22)

3.4 SECOND MOVEMENT

The scene is outside the court where quite a big crowd has gathered around. The Woman disguised as a man in a red shirt, is selling oranges from a basket 'he' is carrying.

Inside the court, "Whites enter, women dressed as if for a show, fanning their faces. Men swagger in with pistols belted around their waists. They sit on one side of the court." (p.23)

The stage instructions state that "As the Africans enter, it should be a study in contrast with their torn clothes and tattered shoes. They are frisked by the African soldiers under Waitina's orders. Sticks or anything that might suggest a weapon are removed from them. N.B. Throughout the court scenes, Africans are defiant towards the settlers and the colonial authorities while appreciative of Kimathi's stand... In the court, blacks and whites sit on separate side. It is as if a huge gulf lies between them." (p.23)

After the entry of Shaw Henderson dressed as a judge, the prisoner – Dedan Kimathi – is "brought in under heavy guard, with chains on his feet and chains on his hands. He is pushed into the witness box by Waitina who is flanked by First and Second soldiers." (p.24)

The judge then reads out the charges against him:

"Dedan Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, alias Prime Minister, or Field Marshal, of no fixed address, you are charged that on the night of Sunday, October the 21st, 1956, at or near Ihururu in Nyeri District, you were found in possession of a firearm, namely a revolver, without a licence, contrary to section 89 of the penal code, which under Special Emergency regulations constitutes a criminal offence. Guilty or not guilty?" (p.24)

On Kimathi remaining silent, the judge warns him of contempt of court and repeats the entire charge. Kimathi questions his right to try him – "By what right dare you, a colonial judge, sit in judgement over me?" (p.25) The judge reminds him that he is charged with 'a most serious crime. It carries a death sentence.' Kimathi now enters into a polemic with the judge questioning the very basis of colonial justice:

"Kimathi: To a criminal judge, in a criminal court, set up by criminal law: the law of oppression. I have no word.

Judge: Law is law. The rule of law is the basis of every civilized community. Justice is justice.

Kimathi: Whose law? Whose justice?

Judge: There is only one law, one justice.

Kimathi: Two laws. Two justices. One law and one justice protects the man of property, the man of wealth, the foreign exploiter. Another law, another justice, silences the poor, the hungry, our people" (pp. 25-26)

Kimathi then goes on to list the 'crimes' of colonial administration:

"Protected the oppressor. Licensed the murderers of the people
Our people,

whipped when they did not pick your tea leaves
your coffee beans
Imprisoned when they refused to “ayah”
your babies
and “boy” your houses and gardens
Murdered when they didn’t rickshaw
your ladies and your gentlemen.”

The polemic ends in the judge adjourning the court until the next day. After the judge had left, a settler rushes at Kimathi, pointing his gun at him, he threatens to kill him:

“Field Marshall/Prime Minister. Fucking black monkey. Listen, you’ll die now, wog.

I’ll teach you justice...

I had cattle and sheep – by the thousands.

Where are they now?

I had acres of maize and wheat:

Where are they now?

I had a wife and daughter:

Where are they now?

Killed. Burnt. Maimed

by this lunatic and his pack of bandits” (p.28)

The scene briefly shifts to the street where the woman disguised as Fruitseller is seen selling oranges. After she has left, the boy comes looking for the Fruitseller, holding the loaf of bread in his hand, spots the Girl and runs after her demanding his money.

Next, we have the First Trial.

The First Trial

The stage instructions tell us that “All four trials of Dedan Kimathi take place in his cell.

...Kimathi sits in a corner, long chain from his leg dragging behind him.” (p.31)

Shaw Henderson enters and identifies himself as ‘I am a friend’ and tells Kimathi that the people have ‘sent me to talk sense into your obstinate head’. He says further that he had come to ‘make a deal’: “You must plead in court tomorrow. And you must plead guilty?” (p.33) He promises to spare his life, citing the examples of ‘China. Gati. Hungu. Gaceru’ whose lives they had spared after they became ‘our collaborators’. Henderson recalls how as children they – Kimathi and him – used to play together the game of the horse and the rider. Kimathi in turn reminds Henderson that he always wanted Kimathi to play the horse so that he could ride him.

Henderson asks Kimathi to stop the blood-bath, observing that 'your people are the losers, Dedan'. Kimathi's reply is typical of a nationalist freedom fighter:

"With the British, we have been losers all the way – yes – but this is a new era. This is a new war. We have bled for you. We have fought your wars for you, against the Germans, Japanese, Italians. This time we shall bleed for our soil, for our freedom, until you let go." (p.34)

On being told by Henderson that he was dreaming again, Kimathi says, 'Yes. And I shall keep on dreaming till my visions come true and our people are free.' On Kimathi's observation that 'Kimathi will never sell Kenya', Henderson leaves in a huff, threatening that 'I'll get you yet. I swear I'll get you. I, Shaw Henderson, will break you. I know the native mind. Black man, I'll have the last laugh.' (p.36)

The Second Trial

In the second trial, Kimathi recalls his childhood, particularly the influence of his blind grandmother on him:

"I was blessed by a blind grandmother,
A peasant, a toiler.
She imparted her strength, the strength
of our people into me." (p.36)

He recalls the various dances by different peoples of Kenya before the intervention of colonialism –

"They used to dance these
Before the white colonialist came
In the arena...at initiation...
during funerals...during marriage...
Then the colonialist came
And the people danced
A different dance." (p.37)

He recalls how he became a leader of the struggle of the people:

"I became an organizer of youth,
We collected from the seven ridges around Karunaini.
Gichamu we called ourselves
And we devised new dances
Talking of the struggle before us
Readying ourselves for the war...

...

We asked ourselves
How long shall we
Gichamu Karunaini youth

of Iregi Generation
Allow our people to continue
Slaves of hunger, disease, sorrow
In our own lands
While foreigners eat
And snore in bed with fullness?" (pp.37-38)

At this point, when he is soliloquizing about 'hunger, disease, sorrow', he is visited by a Trade-cum-businessman's delegation, who observe that 'this is holding back investment, the flow of money, development'. On Kimathi's questioning whether money is development, one of them – the banker – cites the example of foreign banks as the makers of modern Kenya:

"Now you'll agree with me that they did transform this land. Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale, Kisumu. Modern cities, Modern Highways." (p.38)

Then the Indian who is a part of the delegation, joins in –

"In India – a, ve got our independent. Freedom. To make money. This here, our true friend. Not racialism. Leaves your customs alone. You can pray Budha, pray Confucius, pray under the trees, pray rocks, wear sari... your culture...songs...dances...we don't mind...propitiated...we make money... friend...friend." (p.39)

When Kimathi reminds the Indian that Kenyans passing through India during the war had seen 'hungry peoples, beggars on pavements... wives selling themselves for a rupee...', the Indian can only mutter – 'Little, Little...'.
THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY

Soon the delegation is pleading with Kimathi to confess, repent:

"Co-operate – like the surrendered generals. Tell your people to come out of the Forest. We need stability. There never can be progress without stability. Then we can finance big Hotels...International Hotels...seaside resorts...Night Clubs...Casinos...Tarmac roads...oil refineries and pipelines... The tourists from USA, Germany, France, Switzerland, Japan, will flock in. Investment, my friend, development, prosperity, happiness." (p.40)

On being questioned by Kimathi about the fate and role of 'my people... The oppressed of the land...all those whose labour power has transformed this land', the reply of the Banker is typical:

"Toilers there will always be... There are servants and masters... sellers of labour and buyers of labour. Masters and servants." (p.40)

On being called 'Judas' by Kimathi the members of the delegation go out.

The scene now shifts to the street outside. The Girl enters, soliloquizing about her life:

"All my life I have been running. On the run. On the road. Men molesting me. I was once a dutiful daughter. A nice Christian home. It was in the settled area. ...I ran away from school because the headmaster wanted to do wicked

things with me. Always: you remain behind. You take the wood to my house. You take this chalk and books to the office. Then he would follow me and all he wanted was to touch my breasts. So I left school. I wanted to stay home and teach myself how to sew or do something with my life. But my father would have nothing of it. He called me an idler and sent me to pick tea leaves for that cruel settler, Mr. Jones. How he used to abuse and punish us! I had to run away from home... In the city it was the boys... I lost my virginity while trying to run away from losing it. How else could I live?" (p.41)

Now the Boy enters the scene and soon enough a quarrel ensues, the girl mistaking the Boy's sincere apology for another trick of his. In the melee, the bread falls down and out comes the gun, on seeing which both are shocked beyond belief. The boy thinks that he has been tricked by the Women to land him into trouble and proposes to report her to the police. Suddenly he hears a voice – the Woman's – telling him:

"The day you'll understand why your father died: the day you'll ask yourself whether it was right for him to die so; the day you'll ask yourself – what can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstances, that day, my son, you'll become a man." (p.43)

He changes his mind saying, 'But how can I turn/Against her call/And/Live?'

They leave.

Third Trial

This time the delegation visiting Kimathi comprises an African Businessman, dressed like an Englishman, politician and a Priest. Kimathi seems to recognize the Businessman and tells him that he has been 'sitting on hot coals of trials and temptations' and asks him to 'Ease my heart' (p.44). The African Businessman reminds Kimathi that he had stood by him. He had contributed money to the cause and his shop at Masira used to be an 'oathing centre'. He goes on to ask Kimathi – 'Don't you think we have won the war?' In return, Kimathi asks him whether their oppressors had surrendered. The reply by the African Businessman is again typical of collaborators:

"It is not, eeh, exactly like that. But there have been two important announcements. They have said: No more racialism. No more colour bar. In public places. In administration. In business. In the allocation of loans. In the grabbing, well, in the acquisition of land. Partnership in progress, that's the new motto. Is this not what we have been fighting for? Any black man who now works hard and has capital can make it to the top. We can become local directors of foreign companies. We can now buy land in the White Highlands. What Highlands no more. It's now: willing Seller, willing Buyer." (p.45)

At this point, the politician takes over and tells Kimathi that they had been given the choice to independence 'province by province'. Kimathi rejects his contention as that of 'new drinkers of honey from human skulls' and calls them 'Neo-slaves'. Once they leave, the Priest approaches Kimathi. Like the others, the Priest too urges Kimathi to "Surrender. Call off bloodshed. New Life, New Brotherhood in Christ." (p.50). He informs Kimathi that "We are now Africanizing the Church.

We want to see Christ reflected in our culture. Drums in Church. African Bishops. African

Moderators. African cardinals”. (p.49) Kimathi, however, refuses to see the kind of light that the Priest is trying to show him. He considers them as collaborators:

“Betrayal. Betrayal. Prophets. Seers. Strange. I have always been suspicious of those who would preach cold peace in the face of violence. Turn the other cheek. Don’t struggle against those that clothe themselves as butterflies. Collaborators.” (p.49)

Finally, he too is asked to go: ‘My trial has begun’. As the Priest leaves, Kimathi soliloquizes:

“Who are friends and who enemies?

Oh, the agony of a lone battle!

But I will fight on to the end

Alone...

Alone, did I say?

No. Cast out these doubts!” (p.51)

The scene changes back to the street where the Boy and Girl are seen talking to the Warder of the jail, asking if he had seen ‘a man selling oranges around here’. Stranded with the gun, they leave to devise the strategy of reaching the gun to Kimathi. After they have left, the Woman enters, disguised as Fruitseller only to discover that the Warder she had expected to see is not there. The Warder informs her that the fear of an armed rescue could have led to sudden changes of guards. She goes out.

Fourth Trial

Kimathi is visited in the jail by Shaw Henderson who asks him to ‘Stop dreaming’ and wake up to the reality. Kimathi is furious:

“What more do you want from me?

Sale of our people...land..sale of my soul.

For a badge from King George, or is it the Queen?

...Shaw Henderson! Trader with people’s lives!.

...Yes, self-appointed saviour of our people. Listen and listen well. I will fight to the bitter end. Protect our soil. Protect our people. This is what I, Kimathi wa Wachiuri, swore at initiation.” (p.54)

Listening to all this and more, Henderson reacts wildly, striking Kimathi ‘with hands, legs, gun and swearing as he strikes’. Finally, he orders Waitina to instruct Gatotia to ‘give him intensive treatment’ in the torture chamber.

The stage instructions at this point tell us that as Waitina lifts the whip, ‘*lights go off and the audience only hear noise from the torture chamber. Gradually, semi-darkness. In semi-darkness we watch the miming of black history (earlier enacted) going on, against the torturing behind the scene.*’ (p.56)

Further stage instructions tell us that :

"Kimathi, blood-stained, shirt torn, emerges from the torture chamber kicked, pushed from behind. He can hardly walk. He falls on his hands and feet. Henderson, Waitina and Gatotia and the two soldiers follow, holding some of the instruments of torture. They stand in a group except the human soldier who stands apart, slightly hiding his face in shame. Kimathi is obviously broken in body.. BUT not in spirit." (p.57)

After Henderson has handed him a piece of paper, ordering him to 'Sign – surrender', Kimathi tears it into pieces, 'throws the pieces in Henderson's face' and says:

"Our people will never surrender."

The Second Movement ends with this.

3.5 THIRD MOVEMENT

In the Third Movement, the scene is early morning, near the gate of the jail house where Dedan Kimathi has been held. Boy and Girl, dressed as Masai, approach the Warder and express a wish to see the prisoner – Kimathi. The Warder is surprised – "Wonders will never cease. Masai? Kimathi? Who are you fooling? Go away!" (p.59)

They tell him that they want to greet him and give him the loaf of bread they are carrying. Observing that he has been starving on his duty, he snatches the bread from them. He is about to break it when suddenly there is a sound of an aeroplane and throwing the bread, he rushes off. The Boy and Girl retrieve the bread and are about to go away when they run into the Woman, still dressed as a fruitseller. She reveals her real identity to them and they are quite surprised.

They move away to confer. "Both Boy and Girl sit at the feet of the woman", who "now represents all the working mothers talking to their children." (p.59)

The Boy asks her – "Why did you trick me into carrying a gun?" to which she replies that that was a kind of initiation for him. On her enquiring whether he was afraid, he confesses that he was... "But the Girl here.... She was all strength and daring and no fear." The woman praises them, observing that –

"Instead of fighting against one another, we who struggle against exploitation and oppression, should give one another strength and faith till victory is ours." (p.59)

She then informs them that "Yesterday was a day of setbacks. First the screening and the Johnnies! I walked into the mouth of a gun! Then, after we parted, I found out that fruitseller so that you would easily recognize me. The court adjourned sooner than I had thought: I then followed the crowd. I was going to speak to the Warder, another contact. I found that he too had been transferred to another place. So only you remained. I kept on looking for you. Between here and Majengo, there is not a place I have not visited. Great risks: but the task once started must be completed?" (p.60)

She reveals to them the plan to rescue Kimathi and assigns them the crucial task of starting the shooting when Kimathi is taken to court. Suddenly, the Girl, losing

interest in the whole thing, asks a basic question – “Who really is Dedan Kimathi?” to which the Woman replies – “Leader of the landless. Leader of them that toil.” (p.61)

The Boy and Girl then narrate some of the stories – these are legends in the making – that they have heard about the miraculous feats of Dedan Kimathi. For instance, they believe he once disguised himself as a European inspector of Police, enjoyed the hospitality of a dinner by the Governor and escaped. Again, they believe that “he could turn himself into an aeroplane” or “walk for a 100 miles on his belly” or “that he could mimic any noise of a bird and none could tell the difference”. (p.61) The Woman replies to these beliefs of the Boy and Girl by observing, sadly and contemplatively:

“It is true children, that Kimathi could do many things. Even today, they sing of the battle of Mathari; the battles he waged in Mount Kenya; the battle of Naivasha. Yes, they sing of the enemy aeroplanes he brought down with only a rifle! He was a wonderful teacher: with a laugh that was truly infectious. He could also act and mimic any character in the world: a story teller too, and many were the nights he would calm his men and make their hearts light and gay with humorous anecdotes. But above all, he loved people, and he loved his country. He so hated the sight of Africans killing one another that he sometimes became a little soft with our enemies. [*softly*] He, Great commander that he was, Great organizer that he was, Great fearless fighter that he was, he was human! [*almost savagely, bitterly*]: Too human at times!”

The scene now shifts to A Guerilla Camp in Nyandarua Forest where in a court-cum-general meeting, a trial of two British soldiers and one African K.A.R. is in progress. Kimathi is seen to be questioning the prisoners about their names, regiments, places of origin back in United Kingdom and the background of their parents. On learning that their parents were poor, Kimathi observes:

“It’s always the same story. Poor men sent to die so that parasites might live in paradise with ill-gotten wealth. Know that we are not fighting against the British people. We are fighting against British colonialism and imperialist robbers of our land, our factories, our wealth. Will you denounce British imperialism?” (pp.64) On their refusal to do so, they are led away to be punished.

Kimathi then turns to the K.A.R. soldier who pleads – “Truly, I’m black. Black like you. Spare me brother.

Kimathi comments:

“And yet you fight against us?
A true mercenary!
You fought for imperialism in Burma!
You fought for them in Japan!
And now you fight for them
Against your own country?
Against your people’s interest! (pp.64-65)

On learning that they are paid only a hundred shillings per month plus posho, he ridicules them –

"I thought they would bribe you with more!
A share in their Export-Import trade,
A share in their tourist hotels,
A share in their wheat fields
A share in their stolen wealth.
Only that? (p.65)

They too are led away to be punished.

Kimathi now turns to the general meeting and addressing them, he observes –

"We now must open new fronts
We have sent envoys to arouse
Warriors from Nyanza,
Girama people at the Coast
And also young Kalenjin braves
To set a grand alliance of Kenyan People
And chastise the enemy for ever.

...

...

We must know our history
Especially the deeds of those
Who have always resisted
The rape of our beautiful Kenya
Who have always stood firmly
Against oppression and exploitation.
I could sing praise for them all day:
Waiyaki, Me Katilili
Mbatiani, Koitalel.

And vilify collaborators:
Mimias, Wangombe
Karuri, Gakure
Kinyanjui, Luka –
All who sold us to foreigners to aid
their own stomachs and their family store.
We must learn from our past strength
Past weaknesses
From past defeats
And past victories." (pp.66-68)

Next, another group of offenders are brought in who are guilty of negotiating with the enemy. These include Kimathi's younger brother, Wambararia. Kimathi is shocked:

“My kindred brother –
To negotiate behind my back?” (p.71)

A debate ensues about the kind and quantum of punishment to be meted out to the offenders. At this point, Kimathi points to the Woman and observes:

“Do you see this woman?
How many tasks has she performed
Without complaint
Between here and the villages?
How many people has she
snatched from jails, from colonial
Jaws of death!

...

...

When this struggle is over
We shall erect at all the city corners
Monuments
To our women
Their courage and dedication
To our struggle? (p.72)

While the fate of the offenders is being decided, the news is brought in that they have managed to escape upon which Kimathi orders – “Shoot them on sight”.

This was a kind of flash back after which the scene now shifts back to the Courtroom where the trial of Kimathi is to be resumed. While the judge is reading out the charges to Kimathi, the Woman enters the court but is identified by the collaborators and is apprehended, chained and led away. While she is leaving, singing songs of freedom, the Boy and Girl enter and take the place vacated by her on the bench. When the judge asks Kimathi to plead ‘Guilty or not guilty?’, Kimathi’s reply is typical of freedom fighters –

“In the court of Imperialism!
There has never and will never be
Justice for the people
Under imperialism.
Justice is created
through a revolutionary struggle
Against all the forces of imperialism.
Our struggle must therefore continue.” (p.82)

Admonishing the collaborators like Hungu Gati, Gatotia for their acts of betrayal and lauding the bravery of the Woman who he had seen being arrested, chained and led away a short while ago, he proclaims –

“But our people will never surrender
Internal and external foes
will be demolished
And Kenya shall be free (p.83)

After the judge pronounces the judgement “Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, you are sentenced to die, by hanging. You will be hanged by the rope until you are dead” and leaves the court, the Boy and Girl stand up suddenly, break the bread, hold the gun and speak together – “Not dead!”

In the ensuing melee, darkness falls for a moment, after which “the stage gives way to a mighty crowd of workers and peasants at the centre of which are Boy and Girl, singing a thunderous freedom song. All the soldiers are gone, except for the First soldier who shyly joins in the singing from behind.”

The play ends on this note.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed in detail:

- The Preface, Acknowledgements and Preliminary Notes that carry significant statements by the authors about the play.
- The summary of the play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* along with the elucidation of the historical, political and social issues.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the broad movements in the structure of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.
2. What view of the justice system emerges from the exchanges between the judge and Dedan Kimathi.

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Cook, David & Okenimkpe, M. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, London: Heinemann, 1983.

Killam, G.D. *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, London: Heinemann, 1980.

UNIT 4 *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI* – EVALUATING THE TEXT

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 The Objective of the Play
- 4.2 Theatrical Techniques and Devices Employed in the Play
- 4.3 ‘Time’ in the Play
- 4.4 Characters in the Play
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to familiarize you with major critical evaluations of the Play. For this, various aspects of the play, namely, the Preface, the theatrical devices, characters, etc. have been presented as separate sections. But this is only a strategy for focusing on various aspects and the play must be viewed as a whole.

Given below are critical comments on various aspects of the play. While the comments are based on observations made by various Ngugi scholars, illustrations have been drawn from the text to support the arguments contained therein. More illustrations may, however, be found through an intensive study of the play.

4.1 THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PLAY

Commenting on the objective of Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo in writing this play, G.D. Killam (*An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, London: Heinemann, 1980) comments that it is “‘a song of praise’ for the feats of leadership and resistance of the most brilliant of the generals of the independence struggle who, along with his brothers-in-arms, Koitalel and Me Kitilili, for example, are neglected, often repudiated heroes, their deeds for the most part not known by the present generation of young Kenyans.” (p.86) The play, therefore, according to Killam, is “an attempt to restore the character of Kimathi to his legitimate place in the history of Kenya.” (p.86)

Again, according to Killam, “the play establishes the connection with the masses in the present struggle by reasserting Kimathi’s values. More than this the play is a self-conscious assertion of the part that literature should play in the revolution.” Killam goes to reproduce the following quote from the Preface of the play –

“We agreed that the most important thing was for us to reconstruct imaginatively our history, envisioning the world of the Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants’ and workers’ struggle before and after constitutional independence. The play is not a reproduction of the farcical ‘trial’ at Nyeri.

It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement.” (Italics author’s, p.viii)

In fact, Ngugi and Micere Mugo elaborate on the *raison d’être* of their project:

“There was no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic resistance of Kenyan people fighting foreign forces of exploitation and domination, a resistance movement whose history goes back to the 15th and 16th centuries when Kenyans and other East African people first took up arms against European colonial power – the Portuguese forces of conquest, murder and plunder. Our historians, our political scientists, and even some of our literary figures were too busy spewing out, elaborating and trying to document the same colonial myths which had it that Kenyan people traditionally wandered aimlessly from place to place engaging in purposeless warfare; that the people readily accommodated themselves to the British forces of occupation! For whose benefit were these intellectuals writing? Unashamedly, some were outright defenders of Imperialism and lauded the pronouncements of colonist governors, basking in the sunshine of their pax-Anglo-Africana Commonwealth.” (Preface)

4.2 THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES EMPLOYED IN THE PLAY

The authors employ a number of techniques and devices which are different from those used in the theatre conventionally. The play is divided into an **Opening**, Three **Movements** and fourteen **scenes** which are different from the usual divisions of plays into Acts and Scenes which are numbered and referred to as Act I Scene 2 etc. G.D. Killam refers to them as ‘characteristics of the non-naturalistic theatre’.

“Note that the peasants singing should also enact the flashback of Black people’s History that follows the song.” (p.4)

Again, in the Second Movement, Court scene, the stage directions state, among others, *“As the Africans enter, it should be a study in contrast with their torn clothes and tattered shoes... In the court, blacks and whites sit on separate sides. It is as if a huge gulf lies between them.” (p.23)*

In the Third Movement, the scene involving the Woman, the Boy and Girl, has the following as stage directions:

“They move a little way off. Both Girl and Boy sit at the feet of the woman. It should be symbolic: the woman now represents all the working mothers talking to their children.” (p.59)

These stage notes show very clearly that the authors want the characters to communicate their ‘message’ most appropriately.

The play also makes use of related audio-visual devices like mime, dancing, drumming, singing, music, sudden blackouts and changes in light effects.

In the First Movement, for instance, while ‘*Loud singing by a crowd of peasants*’ is going on, in the background ‘*the Black people’s History*’ is being enacted on the stage:

“Phase I: An exchange between a rich-looking black chief and a white hungry-looking slave trader. Several strong black men and a few women are given away for a long, posh piece of cloth and a heap of trinkets.

Bereaved relations and children weep, throwing themselves onto the ground, while other raise closed fists in a threatening manner.

Phase II: A chain of exhausted slaves, roped onto one another, drag themselves through the auditorium, carrying heavy burdens, ending up on the stage. They row a boat across the stage, under heavy whipping.

Phase III: A labour force of black, toiling on a plantation under the supervision of a cruel, ruthless fellow black overseer. A white master comes around and inspects the work.

Phase IV: An angry procession of defiant blacks, chanting anti-imperialist slogans through songs and thunderous shouts:

LEADER: Away with oppression!

Unchain the people!

CROWD: Away with oppression!

Unchain the people!

...

...

FEW VOICES: Uhuruuuuuuu-uu!” (pp.4-5)

During the Second Trial of Kimathi, When Kimathi recalls the glorious pre-colonial past of various Kenyan ethnic groups, the Mime in the background shows “*the Groups of dancers, performing a sequence of dances by different peoples of Kenya take up the arena in turns. Each group dances its part and then walks right across the stage and stands aside.*” (p.37)

The purpose behind the mime is to show not only a composite cultural identity of Kenyans but, more importantly, co-existence and cultural cooperation among members of various ethnic groups in Kenya.

Again, when during the same trial, the Banker refers to the financing of the building of the railways in Kenya, a Mime shows “*Coolies and Swahilis building the Railway. They are driven away by Nandi warriors led by Koitalel.*” (p.39)

The purpose of showing this Mime is to recall that the resistance to colonial forces is not something new but it goes back to the times when the railways was being built and that the people of Kenya had understood the colonial designs of economic exploitation from the very beginning.

In fact, these devices together with their worldview – expressed through various characters – is what the authors ‘believe’ ‘good theatre’ is – “that which is on the side of the people, that which, without masking mistakes and weaknesses gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation.” (Preface)

4.3 'TIME' IN THE PLAY

Ngugi and Mugo have used some of the theatrical devices mentioned above to communicate a continuum in the flow of time – the past and the present merging in order to point to the future. In fact, the authors, keeping in with the objectives they set for themselves – reinterpreting the history of the people's struggle for independence, designated by the colonizers as Mau Mau – have offered a time-sequence of events in such a manner that not only does the present appear to be linked to the past events but also the present throws a new light on the past, offering a fresh interpretation of the past events in the light of present happenings. For instance, in the First Movement, when the 'Loud singing by a crowd of peasants' also shows – simultaneously – the enactment of the history of the Black people in four Phases, the authors' stage directions are –

"The phases recapitulated flow into one another, without break or interruption." (p.4)

During the Fourth Trial, while "In semi-darkness we watch the miming of black history (earlier enacted) going on, against the torturing behind the scene." (p.56), the authors' stage directions are –

"There should be as much harmony as possible between the action on the visible stage and the goings on in the torture chamber." (p.56)

Finally, an excellent example of this merger of time past and time present occurs in the very last scene of the play when after the judge has pronounced the death sentence on Dedan Kimathi and the Boy and Girl stand up to announce "Not dead!", the stage directions are –

"...soon, the stage gives way to a mighty crowd of workers and peasants at the centre of which are Boy and Girl, singing a thunderous freedom song."

4.4 CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

The characters in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are more of type than those endowed with traits that signify individuality. The **Preliminary Notes** make it very clear:

"There is impersonation, merging of characters and reflection of history emphasizing the complexity, duality and interrelationships of people and events. A character like Shaw Henderson, for instance, can be played as a judge-Prosecutor and member of the Special Branch. He is also the enemy-friend of the Africans." (p.2)

Note the use of compound word-formations like 'Judge-Prosecutor' and "enemy-friend", highlighting the apparent contradictory duality contained in them which in turn is a significant pointer to the audience/readers to distinguish between the mask and the reality of colonial administration.

In no other characters is the type mode more evident than in those of the Boy, the Girl and the Woman. In fact, all three of them have not been given any names which as we know is the first sociological device to differentiate between individuals. Named simply as 'Boy', 'Girl' or 'Woman', they represent all persons in Kenya belonging to their respective categories. This is neither an oversight

nor a coincidence but is quite deliberate. It is quite apparent from some of the stage directions given by the authors to those directing it for performance.

In the beginning of the Third Movement, for instance, when the Boy and Girl and the Women move ‘a little way off’ on the stage to confer, the stage directions are –

“Both Girl and Boy sit at the feet of the woman. It should be symbolic: the woman now represents all the working mothers talking to their children.”
(p.59)

The authors had all this – the woman representing all the working mothers – worked out from the very conception of the character. It is apparent from the description they bestow upon her when she is first introduced:

“She is between thirty and forty years of age, with a mature but youthful face, strongly built. Goodlooking. She wears a peasant woman’s clothes and is barefoot. Though apparently a simple peasant, the woman is obviously world-wise, and perceptive of behaviour and society. Throughout, her actions are under control: her body and mind are fully alert.

Fearless determination and a spirit of daring is her character. She is versatile and full of energy in her responses to different roles and situations. A mother, a fighter, all in one. She wears a kanga cloth wrapped around her upper body – over her simple frock – and has a small kondo, a sisal basket, hanging over her neck and across the shoulder over her shawl on the side nearest the audience. She walks not exactly stealthily, but with great care – as if she treads on treacherous ground.” (p.8)

The characteristics bestowed on her – She is versatile and full of energy in her responses to different roles and situations – are borne out amply when Johnnie, the soldier notices her kondo – the sisal basket – and is about to discover – among others – a parcel wrapped in paper. The stage directions tell us – ‘the woman is talking, cunningly trying to distract Johnnie’.

Again, after Johnnie has discovered the bread wrapped in paper and is about to break it into two – we come to know later that a gun had been hidden in it – the woman changes her stance suddenly, changing it into one of ‘supplication and feminine submissiveness’. The stage directions tell us – ‘*The woman dramatically kneels on the ground, almost reaching out for his legs... She talks all the time.*’:

“WOMAN: [*simultaneously with the above action*]: Don’t eat it. Bwana. Master. Afande a hundred times. It’s all I have to quieten the enemy who is finishing us.

JOHNNIE: Enemy?

WOMAN: Hunger. If you take it, I’ll die. I spent so many hours kneading the heavy millet paste. Look. You have almost finished all my bananas. You deserve to die. Have mercy on a poor woman.

JOHNNIE: [*Obviously relieved and pleased with her supplication and feminine submissiveness. He does not realize that she is over-reacting*]

You don’t look too poor to me. Stand up. All you need is a brush, water, soap, high heels. A modern lady.” (p.11)

When, in the Third Movement, the Girl and Boy catch up with her disguised as fruitseller and the Boy accuses her of tricking him into carrying a gun, she explains –

“In the struggle, you learn to adapt to changed circumstances. Yesterday was a day of setbacks. First the screening and the Johnnies! I walked into the mouth of a gun! Then, after we parted, I found out that the fruitseller was among the ones picked in yesterday’s morning raid. That was a crucial contact gone. This upset all the plans. What was I to do? I dressed as a fruitseller so that you would easily recognize me. The court adjourned sooner than I had thought: I then followed the crowd. I was going to speak to the Warder, another contact. I found that he too had been transferred to another place. So only you remained. I kept on looking for you. Between here and Majengo, there is not a place I have not visited. Great risk: but the task once started must be completed.” (p.60)

Earlier, on not finding the fruitseller to whom he had been instructed by the Woman to hand over the bread, the Boy – representing the stereotypical thinking about women and their lack of courage – soliloquizes:

“She told me that he would be around here. But I have not seen an orange seller or any fruitseller. What a woman! Why would she not take the bread herself? Afraid. That’s it. Afraid. Why should she expect me to risk my life taking bread, just a loaf of bread to Kimathi? In any case, they say that Kimathi does not eat bread. And suppose it’s not Kimathi, and it is his double, his shadow whom they have arrested? [makes as if to move]: But where shall I find her? Where can I get her? I know. She did not want me to take the loaf to anybody. She wanted to test me. To see if I would eat the bread. [breaks a piece]: But she said she would be watching me all the time.” (pp.30-31)

Still earlier, when the boy after telling his life story had observed that he did not understand the reason behind the exploitation of ‘millions of labouring men and women of Kenya’, the Woman – true to her role as the mother of all children – had explained to him:

“The day you understand why your father died: the day you ask yourself whether it was right for him to die so; the day you ask yourself: “What can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstance?” that day, my son, you’ll become a man.” (p.19)

It is because of this understanding of and dedication to the cause of the freedom struggle that Kimathi pays a handsome tribute to her:

“Do you see this woman?
How many tasks has she performed
Without complaint
Between here and the villages?
How many people has she
snatched from jails, from colonial
Jaws of death!
How many brave warriors has she

recruited at great risks!
Walking for miles
Hardly getting sleep
for days.” (pp.72-73)

In fact, Dedan Kimathi recognizes – through the Woman – the contribution made by women in Kenyan freedom struggle. He goes on to declare –

“When this struggle is over
we shall erect at all the city corners
Monuments
To our women
Their courage and dedication
To our struggle...” (p.73)

Like in the case of the Woman, so in that of the Boy and Girl also, the authors have created characters that would represent the Kenyan youth in general rather than individual persons. Once again, it is for this reason that they too have been identified simply as Boy and Girl rather than with individual names.

When the Woman first finds the Boy chasing the girl, catching her and handling her roughly and shouting to kill her, she berates him for behaving like an animal. The Boy protests and explains his reasons for being harsh with the girl. Then, he goes on to narrate to her how his mother had died during childbirth and his “father was driven away from Mbari land in Nyeri by one of his relatives who worked as a court interpreter. Now that man is a big government chief and a big landowner... The man was clever at court cases and bribed the magistrates.” (p.18) The boy then tells her how his father and he went to Nairobi:

“He found a job with a firm of timber merchants. A tiny room: a tiny salary. Then I did not understand and I would steal from him, even the little that he earned for both of us. His ambition was to earn enough to come back to Nyeri and buy a piece of land. But he never made it. The machine cut off his right hand...and... he died of bleeding. No medical care from his employers. I was thrown out of the room he had rented.” (pp.18-19) Since then, he tells her, he and the Girl and other boys have been roaming the streets at Pumwani, Shauri Moyo, Bahati, Makadara:

“we scrounged into every dustbin from Kariobangi to Grogan Road. But mostly we’d hang around big hotels: New Stanley, Norfolk, Grosvenor. There were a lot of settlers and tourists and we would carry their bags. Sometimes we would act crippled or blind and deaf. They would give us money – some of them as much as ten shillings! The police would often come chasing us away, but we managed. Somehow.” (p.16)

The Woman’s reaction only confirms that the Boy represents not only himself but most Kenyan youth:

“It is the same old story. Everywhere. Mombasa. Nakuru. Kisumu. Eldoret. The same old story. Our people...tearing one another...and all because of the crumbs thrown at them by the exploiting foreigners. Our own food eaten

and leftovers thrown to us – in our own land, where we should have the whole share. We buy wood from our own forests; sweat on our own soil for the profit of our oppressors. Kimathi's teaching is: unite, drive out the enemy and control your own riches, enjoy the fruit of your sweat." (p.18)

The Boy is confused and does not understand when the Woman tells him that she too used to be like him – 'Fighting...Drinking...Fighting...Drinking...' until the day she heard 'The call of our people. The humiliated, the injured, the insulted, the exploited, the submerged millions of labouring men and women of Kenya.' The Woman then goes on to educate him:

"...the day you ask yourself: What can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstances? That day, my son, you'll become a man."

The Boy still does not understand it all and after the woman has given him money to go eat something since he had been hungry for a full day, he offers to work for her:

"...if I can do something, anything, you know... like cleaning up your house, your compound, weeding your shamba, even washing you clothes.." (p.20)
The Woman continues explaining things to him, commenting –

"You want to change masters? A black master for a white master! Have you no other horizon? Except to be a slave! If I didn't have better things to do, why, I would properly thrash you." (20)

It is from this point onwards that the transformation of the Boy begins and when the woman assigns to him the task of carrying a loaf of bread to a fruitseller he readily accepts. However, doubts continue to haunt him from time to time – when, for instance, the Boy and Girl discover – accidentally – that the bread had a gun hidden in it and again when they are not able to find the fruitseller. But then each time, the words of the woman – 'the day you'll understand... that day, my son, you'll become a man' – come back to her in the form of a voice he hears and his resolve returns:

"No, no, not now, Mama.
But how can I turn
Against her call
And
Live?" (p.4)

The culmination in the Boy's evolution is reached when after Dedan Kimathi has been sentenced to death by Judge in the last scene of the play, the Boy and Girl suddenly enter the court, break the bread, pull out the gun and shout in unison – 'Not dead'.

Suddenly it is all dark on the stage during which 'A loud shot is heard' and when the light returns, 'the stage gives way to a mighty crowd of workers and peasants at the centre of which are Boy and Girl, singing a thunderous freedom song.' (p.84)

The story of the Girl is never told in such details as that of the Boy but from the way she is found initially to be 'scrounging' dustbins and roaming the hotels and

tourist places and from the manner in which the Boy refers to her as ‘a thief’ and ‘a slut’ only shows the kind of rough life she too has had in the city. After the Woman has restored peace between them and after she has explained the real reasons behind their life and after she has assigned to them the task of carrying a loaf of bread to a certain fruit seller, the girl shows signs of more maturity and better understanding of things. As stated above, while the Boy has, at times, doubts about the intention of the Woman, the Girl is more rigid in her resolve. It is she who acts as his inspiration in the absence of the Woman. The end of the play shows them together – this time not ‘scrounging’ the dustbins but acting in unison in a mission to rescue Dedan Kimathi.

Not only the characters of the Woman, the Boy and Girl but also the characters of soldiers, the Priest, the Banker, the Indian and the Politician are all drawn in the type mode, representing their class and the authors make their intentions clear by making them speak on behalf of their community or class. Even Shaw Henderson has been assigned multiple identities to show how, under colonialism, various sections of the colonizing community acted in collusion. Similarly, the character of Dedan Kimathi himself has been drawn more in terms of general characteristics of leaders of freedom fighters rather than specific individuals. This is also evident from the observations that the authors make in the Preface to the play:

We agreed that the most important thing was for us to reconstruct imaginatively our history, envisioning the world of Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants’ and workers’ struggle before and after constitutional independence. The play is *not* a reproduction of the farcical ‘trial’ at Nyeri. It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement.” (Preface)

But having said that, the authors let us know the efforts they put in to discover the ‘real’ Dedan Kimathi as he existed in the minds and memories of the people among whom he lived and grew up and those with whose help he organized the struggle rather than in the official records, documents and history books written by armchair academics:

“The writing of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* has been both challenging and exciting. It has put us through a lot of education in connection with the continuing struggle against economic and other forms of oppression. We also discovered that Kimathi was still a hero of the Kenyan masses. One day, for instance, we visited Kimathi’s birthplace (thanks to Mr. Mundia who organized the trip) with the aim of eliciting a first hand assessment of Kimathi from the people who had known him as a child, a villager and guerrilla hero. It was a Sunday. The drive to Karunaini took us through beautiful valleys, ridges, hills and forests that helped the imagination recapture the countryside where the Mau Mau War was hottest and had often been fought out in pitched battles. Standing powerful and dominant to the north was Kirinyaga, the mountain at the foot of which the undulating Nyeri plains spread, rising to the Nyandarua mountains. Karunaini was right next to Nyandarua Forest and, standing very near the school where Kimathi once

taught, we could see the spot where he was finally shot down. The huge trench that the people were once forced to dig by the British forces so as to cut off the villages from the Forest was still visible.” (Preface)

The authors then go on to share with the readers the responses of some of Kimathi’s contemporaries:

“Among the group that stopped by the roadside to talk to us was a woman who had once been Kimathi’s pupil at Karunaini Independent School, and some four or five older men, who had known Kimathi since childhood. Had we too come all the way to see where Kimathi was born? From them, we learned a few factual stories as well as one or two conflicting legends about this great fighter. For instance, it is generally assumed that Kimathi fought in the Second ‘World’ War and people have tended to assume that that was where he learnt his military skills as well as his skills in making guns. Kimathi *never* fought in that war. He evolved his brilliant guerrilla tactics and his enormous organizing capacity from the needs of the struggle.” (Preface)

Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo wanted to counter the colonial construction of Dedan Kimathi as a gun-totting terrorist who was always thirsty for the blood of the innocent – be they Africans or Europeans. They recall for us, in the Preface, how people remembered the multifaceted personality of Dedan Kimathi:

“Karunaini people were proud of their son; they talked of him as a dedicated teacher, the committed organizer of a theatre group he named Gichamu, as a man with tremendous sense of humour who could keep a whole house roaring with laughter. They talked of his warm personality and his love of people. He was clearly their beloved son, their respected leader...” (Preface)

The authors also show how Kimathi had become a legend among the people of Kenya:

“...and they talked of him as still being alive. ‘Kimathi will never die’, the woman said. ‘But of course if your people have killed him, go and show us his grave!’ She said this in a strange tone of voice, between defiance and bitterness, and for a moment we all kept quiet.” (Preface)

At this point, it is relevant to recall how the Boy, in the play, recalls Kimathi when the Woman mentions him for the first time –

“Boy: [*becoming really excited*]: They say...they say he used to talk with God.

...

Boy: They say...they say that he could crawl on his belly for ten miles or more...

...

Boy: They say...they say that he could change himself into a bird, an aeroplane, wind, anything?

...

Boy: They say...they say that the tree under which he used to pray fell to the ground?

...

Boy: May be they only captured his shadow, his outer form...don't you think?...and let his spirit abroad, in arms." (pp.20-21)

However, the authors are not out to eulogize Kimathi. They do not hesitate to point out his weaknesses, too. For instance, in the Third Movement, the Woman while speaking to the Girl and Boy makes the following remarks about Kimathi:

"...He so hated the sight of Africans killing one another that he sometimes became a little soft with our enemies. [*softly*]: He, Great commander that he was, Great organizer that he was, Great fearless fighter that he was, he was human! [*almost savagely, bitterly*]: Too human at times!" (p.62)

As spokesperson for the worldview of the authors, Dedan Kimathi, while fighting the colonial oppression, has also the choicest invectives for their guile and guise of being friends of Kenyans. When, during the Second Movement, Shaw Henderson visits Kimathi in the prison for the First Trial, he remarks – 'All your people know me I'm a friend'. (p.32) Kimathi's response is forthright – 'Friend and killer of Africans, ugh!' In fact, when Shaw Henderson asks Kimathi to 'plead guilty' in the court the next day, Kimathi mocks him by telling him – 'I must say you looked rather splendid in your prosecuting judge's robes. Even handed justice.' (p.33) When even after all this, Henderson goes on to tempt him with an offer of decorations for him if he confessed and cooperated, Kimathi's reply is stinging:

"Luring voices of poisonous serpents. Do you take me for a fool?" (p.34)

However, acting as the persona carrying the burden of speaking for the authors, Kimathi comes down most heavily on the class of collaborators – those Kenyans who joined hands with the colonizers in order to hoodwink and put down innocent Kenyans. Thus, his harshest criticism is reserved for Gati, Gatotia, Hungu, Gaceru, Mwendanda and his own brother Wambararia:

"...
To sabotage our cause
It is treason to the people
It is like having homeguards In our midst!
These traitors must die!" (p.71)

Earlier, Kimathi had similarly chastised the Banker and the Indian – comparing them with the betrayer of Jesus Christ – when they visited him in the prison with tempting offers only if cooperated and let peace return to Kenya:

"The religion of enslavement! Like colonialism which makes the colonized sweat and bleed while master comes to harvest.

...
Money...for a sell-out of our people...NEVER.
...
Judas!" (p.40)

Finally, before he is sentenced to death by the judge in the last scene of the play, Kimathi pronounces his own judgement:

"In the court of Imperialism!
There has never and will never be
Justice for the people
Under imperialism
Justice is created
through a revolutionary struggle
Against all the forces of imperialism
Our struggle must therefore continue." (p.82)

Recalling his struggle, he observes:

"In the forest. I was sometimes plagued
by doubts.
If I died today
Would our people continue
the struggle?
I would look at the braves
killed
I would say:
If I died to-day
Will this blood ever be
betrayed?
That was my Trial.
But now I know that
for every traitor
there are a thousand patriots. (p.82)

His final message to them is –

"So, go!
Organize in your homes
Organize in the mountains
Know that your only
Kindred blood is he
who is in the struggle
Denounce those who weaken
Our struggle
by creating ethnic divisions
Uproot from you those
Who are selling out to imperialism
Kenyan masses shall be free! (pp.83-84)

Thus we know that the main objective of the authors in "not a reproduction of the farcical 'trial' at Nyeri. It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation

of the collective will of the peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement.” (Preface)

There is, however, a second objective too:

“In this, we believe that Kenyan Literature – indeed all African Literature, and its writers is on trial. We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism. African Literature and African Writers are either fighting with the people or aiding imperialism and the class enemies of the people. We believe that good theatre is that which is on the side of the people, that which, without masking mistakes and weaknesses gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation.” (Preface)

Finally, a third and an equally significant objective in writing the play that the authors tell us in the closing words of the Preface is:

“So the challenge was to truly depict the masses (symbolized by Kimathi) in the only historically correct perspective, heroically and as the true makers of history.”

Thus, to end our evaluation, the play is not only what the authors call, ‘good theatre’ but ‘good history’.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed in detail :

- the objective of the Play.
- Theatrical Techniques and Devices employed in the play by the authors.
- the significance of time in the play.
- the importance of characters in the play.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on characterization in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.
2. How does the Mau Mau struggle (a part of Kenya’s recent history) get reflected in the play?
3. Comment on the concept of time in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.
4. Write a character sketch of Dedan Kimathi.

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Narang, Harish. *Politics as Fiction*, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1995.

Nazareth, Peter. *Critical Essays on Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, New York: Twayne Publications, 2000.

