
UNIT 1 AFRICA—THE DARK CONTINENT AND KENYA—THE LAND OF GIKUYU AND MUMBI

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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 *A Grain of Wheat*. 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 this Unit. All these have a significant bearing on our understanding of the text – *A Grain of Wheat*—which is based on the theme of the freedom struggle of Kenya.

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 travellers 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, these early travellers as well as missionaries considered as 'dark' anything mysterious that they did not understand much about. Secondly, and more importantly, these first visitors considered Africa to be inhabited by people who were primitive, uncivilized and savages. 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, for example, 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 primitivism of the Africans by stating that Africa had no history, no culture, no past.

1.1.1 Africa—the Myth of Primitivism, Political reasons thereof

There was a sound reason—from the European point of view—behind accepting such an image of the Africans. The European powers used the excuse of 'civilizing' these savages for entering Africa and for 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 Africans.

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, airconditioned cars and microwave ovens. 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 centres 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.

1.1.2 Africa and the Evolution of Man

By now enough archeological and anthropological evidence is available to show that during the evolutionary process our ancestor—Australopithecus Africans 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 centres in India, China and parts of Europe.

1.1.3 Africa and the Ancient Egyptian Civilization

However, the most fascinating evidence about the cultural developments in Africa has been provided by a Senegalese scholar—Cheikh Anta 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 Anta 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 its waters 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 is perhaps a result of a free cross-breeding between the two races.

However, like many other ancient civilizations, this civilization set up 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 centres of the civilization back in Africa. These centres 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 meantime, Europe benefitted 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 Ife 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 true or partially false 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.

1.1.4 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 en 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 the East Africa Protectorate.

Anthropologists would have us believe that man first appeared on 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.

These inhabitants of Kenya seem 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.

1.2.1 Social and Political Structure in Pre-historic Kenya

There were no classes in Kenyan society 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.

1.2.2 Modern Kenya—the First Colonization by Arabs and First Contact 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 is 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, made 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 travelled into the interior and made contact 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.

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1.3.1 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, was extremely expensive on account of high costs of transportation. It was then decided to construct a railway right from Mombassa upto Lake Victoria. During its construction which was being done with the help of labour force brought from India, the Company had to bear huge financial burdens. The Company gradually wound itself. Its Charter was annulled in 1885.

1.3.2 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 travellers 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 Johnston, who was then the Special Commissioner for Uganda initially proposed 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 Kikuyu too suffered through removal to far-flung areas labelled as 'native reserves'. A series of land legislations—Land Regulations of the East Africa(1897), Indian Land Acquisition Act(1896), East Africa Land Acquisition Order (1901), and the Crown Lands Ordinance(1902)—provided the government with control of all land in Kenya and parts of Uganda for selling, granting lease or otherwise disposing of.

1.4.1 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 African's 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—Shamba—and to keep members of the family 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 'methods 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 the colonial period only 18% of this land was cultivated while millions of Africans strived to eke out a living in highly congested reserves.

1.4.2 Native Reserves

These steps together with prohibitive rates of poll and hut taxes led to massive migration of peasants in search of a 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. Not only did it cause physical hardships for peasants who walked large distances, sometimes hundreds of miles, for many weeks and sometime months to gain employment, but it also stripped the African villages of its most efficient labour force, leaving mainly old men, women and children.

1.5 FIRST PROTESTS—K.C.A., Y.K.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 first—The Kikuyu Association(K.A.)—was formed in 1920, with the primary aim of defending Gikuyu land. It comprised mainly of Gikuyu Chiefs and headmen. A year later, a more broadbased 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 policy 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 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 demonstrations, 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.

1.5.1 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 by many other tribes, as an essential element of their social structure. The issue was immediately taken up by the 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 practising femal circumcision and polygamy and also disallow 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 doing 'the wonderful job, at least in educating Africans.' The Africans went to the extent of setting up of their own African Church and Independent African Schools, both of which institutions were to play a very 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 his 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.

1.5.2 Joint Struggle by Africans and Indians

The joint fight by the Indians and the Africans was brought about through contacts among the trade union leaders. The government tended to overlook the strength of the African Associations. The government's 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 steller 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 K.A.U., THE EMERGENCE OF 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 the 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.

1.6.1 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 oath-taking 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 the so-called Mau Mau activities, that, they alleged, were both anti-Christian and anti-European. Attacks on European farms and the murder of a senior Chief—Waruhiu—near Nairobi made the new Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring to declare a state of Emergency on October 20, 1952 and immediately thereafter Kenyatta and eleven top leaders besides others were arrested. British troops were flown in from Egypt and the reins of decision-making passed from the local administration to the government in London.

The outlawing of Mau Mau, the arrest of Kenyatta and other African leaders and the repression let loose on Africans in general by the British troops and district officials soon proved to be counter-productive. Over 10,000 Africans were killed by the

security forces and another 90,000 were detained in detention camps. Violence increased, leading to more repression that in turn generated more violence in reaction. The colonial government was, therefore, caught in a vicious circle of violence. Sentencing of Kenyatta and seven others at Kipenguria trial in a most unjust manner added more fuel to this fire. The settlers, taking advantage of this situation, demanded once again a share in conducting the Emergency operations. In June 1953, the K.A.U., was also banned, creating a kind of political 'vacuum' that once again was filled by the trade union movement under the leadership of Tom Mboya, a young Luo. The armed struggle, however, not only continued to be waged but became more broad-based.

1.7.1 Lifting of the Emergency and the Consitution 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. Africans would also have the largest number of ministers, viz., four against three Europeans and one Asian. The plan naturally irked the Europeans who dubbed it as 'a victory for Mau Mau' and attacked the British volte face. Ngala, on the other hand, claimed triumphantly that the 'European domination had been broken.' The fond hope of Uhuru in not so distant a future gave a new fillip to the efforts of Africans. A new mass organization—Kenya African National Union (K.A.N.U.) incorporating the members of the K.A.U., was formed in March 1960, with Kenyatta as its President. Gichuru was, however, to act in his place until his release from prison. Soon, however, there was a split in K.A.N.U., and another party Kenya African Democratic Union (K.A.D.U.) was formed with the aim of opposing K.A.N.U.

1.7.2 Uhuru—Kenyatta as the First Prime Minister

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

1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed the various meanings of the term 'the dark continent' as applied to Africa and also the political objectives of emphasising – by the Europeans—the primitiveness of the continent. We have cited the arguments of Cheikh Anta Diop who counters this hypothesis by showing that it is the Africans who set up the ancient Egyptian Civilization. We have also discussed, though very briefly, the process of colonization of Africa by various European powers from 15th century onwards.

This Unit also traces the history of Kenya since its pre-historic days, focussing on, primarily the colonization by the British, the freedom struggle including the Mau Mau Movement and the eventual independence of Kenya in 1963.

1.9 QUESTIONS

1. What are the implications of the term 'dark' in the expression 'the dark continent' as applied to Africa?

2. Why was the myth of primitivism of Africa created? What is meant by the Expression 'whiteman's burden'?
3. What is Cheikh Anta Diop's main argument about Africa's past?
4. When did the Europeans first come in contact with Africa and which was the first European power to colonize parts of Africa?
5. What was the social and political nature of societies in pre-historic Kenya?
6. What was the model of followed by the British in colonizing Kenya?
7. What was the inajor impact of settling Europeans in Kenya?
8. In what ways did the Kenyans resist the colonial administration?
9. What was the Mau Mau Movement? What did it achieve and how?

1.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 LITERATURE AND POLITICS

Structure

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to focus on the relationship between literature and politics, literature and reality, the creative process and the relationship between literature and ideology. All this is of theoretical significance for the study of *A Grain of Wheat*.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Literature and politics may appear to be--to some they definitely do--two aspects of human experience which are on the very face of it, irreconcilable. While literature is considered to represent one of the highest forms of the development of aesthetic sensibility of a society, politics is considered to be the playfield of the cunning and the low. To the advocates of such views it may, therefore, appear blasphemous to even put the two words--'literature' and 'politics'--close to each other. Hence, it is not very surprising to come across advice generally given to writers by some fellow scribes and also by certain sections of the society at large to not only shun politics in real life but also to hold a position of strict political neutrality in their writings. According to these self-styled well-wishers of writers, writing should be for writing's own sake.

2.2 LITERATURE--NATURE AND FUNCTIONS

However, a closer look at the nature and functions of literature will highlight the fact that such a position of irreconcilability of literature and politics is not only untenable but is also highly undesirable. A piece of literature representing one of the highest forms of development of human sensibility is a social phenomenon. It is written by someone, for someone to read and is meant to convey something. It is therefore a deliberate act of social communication. And as for its author, he too is a social being--member of a certain class--who is conditioned by the historical and politico-economic circumstances of his times. Therefore, events in the history of a society--

great or small--cannot but be a source of inspiration to its writers. Any serious work of literature, created as it is within the framework of existing social relations, is not only a living document of the contemporary happenings but also of the historical processes underlying them.

2.2.1 Literature and Truth

Literature develops along with life as writers try to meet the challenge of their time, tell the readers the truth--their truth--about the world, current events as also about themselves and voice their concern about the future--a truth without which mankind cannot advance. The great epics and tragedies of ancient Greece, rich in variety, lofty in thought and universal in comprehension as they are, also reflect the ancient Greek civilisation. In fact, we learn from them as much, if not more, about the Greek society of the times. The great Renaissance that swept through Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, too had its counterparts in the fields of fine arts and literature, producing such giants like Leonardo da Vinci, Dante, Michaelangelo and Shakespeare. Blake, Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley owe so much to the French Revolution. Balzac believed that to be productive one needed only to study the French society which should be "the historian, I only its amanuensis." For this, he won the highest praise from Engels who said that one could learn more about the French society from him "than from all the professional historians, economists and statisticians of the period together." Marx had earlier paid a similar tribute to the major English novelists of the nineteenth century whose "eloquent and graphic portrayals of the world have revealed more political and social truths than all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together." An artist, therefore, concerns himself with what Chinua Achebe has called "the most burning questions of the day."

2.2.2 Literature and Society

"The relationship between art and society", as a prominent literary theorist puts it, "cannot be ignored, for art itself is a social phenomenon. First, because the artist, however unique his primary experience might be, is a social being; second, because his work, however deeply marked by his primary experience and however unique and unrepeatable its objectification or form might be, is always a bridge, a connecting link between the artist and other members of society; third, because a work of art affects people--it contributes to the reaffirmation or devaluation of their ideas, goals or values--and is a social force which has its emotional or ideological weight, shakes or moves people. No body remains the same after having been deeply moved by a true work of art."

But what is it in a piece of literature that makes it exert this Ancient Mariner-like influence on its readers who, like the wedding guest, do not remain the same even after a chance acquaintance with it? It is the depiction of the social facts--the reality of the times--and the manner in which they are depicted that enables a writer to leave such an indelible impression on the psyche of not only individual readers but the entire community as well.

2.2.3 Literature and Reality

What, however, is this reality that a writer must contend with and reflect in his writings? Reality refers to, firstly, the knowledge of life's development in general and secondly to its concrete phenomena at a given time. The first is essential because knowledge of life is the main source from which a work of literature draws its strength and its writer his power of conviction. The second refers to the historically relative understanding of the truth at the moment when a particular literary product comes into being. In order to reflect this reality in his works, a writer, therefore, captures the essential features of the epoch's great events--their strength as well as weaknesses. Tolstoy, for instance, is great because of the "depth and impressiveness

with which the epoch is described," (Scherbina, 1974:20) and "the truthfulness with which he rendered the contradictions and the ruthless breaking up of the old established order that took place in post-reform Russia". The portrayal of reality, in other words, involves highlighting the important problems of the people and new aspects of life.

Creating a piece of realistic literature, however, does not mean merely bringing direct recollections of the external world into the work in a mechanistic manner, for to do so will be to write a piece of history, and literature and history, though having much in common, are two distinct disciplines. A writer, unlike a historian, is not obliged to consider the whole range of facts pertaining to a given event or phenomenon. He can afford to concentrate on a single fact, a single event, a single life. The roles of the writer and the historian can be distinguished from each other's on the lines suggested by Aristotle for a distinction between history and poetry:

Historians and poets do not differ in the fact that the latter writes in verse, the former in prose.... The difference lies rather in the fact that one reports what actually happened, the other what could happen. Thus poetry is more philosophical than history, for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.

2.3 LITERATURE AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

A writer sees before him the immediate, concrete reality but he does not, unlike the historian, remain on that plane for long. He moves away, going beyond the objective concreteness to what may be termed as the level of artistic concreteness. At this level of artistic concreteness, the writer creates a world of his own, a world in which through the creation of individual characters--imaginary or real, or both--he investigates the social being of man and the role of certain sections of society in history, the conflicts of their interests and the nature of their clashes and cleavages. It is through the study of these characters that a writer gives us an idea of the mentality of a people, their moral attitudes, their ideals and aspirations. It is with this intention that a Macbeth, or a Juliet, a Don Quixote or a Faust, an Okonkwo or a Gikonyo, a Lawino or a Muthoni, a Hori or a Mitro has been created. Through each one of them, the writer distills the historically significant phenomena and also reveals the links between literature and society. Each of these characters gives us a glimpse into the various stages of socio-political development and evolution of epochs. It is, therefore, by going 'beyond' that a writer rises to a universal level where a new artistic reality is born, a reality which is not very different from the objective one which delimits the range of history but which is aesthetically interpreted.

Depicting reality, therefore, is a process of creation and not of imitation. It is an act which serves as a bridge, linking the writer with the society not only at a given time but across time and social divisions. It is an act which portrays life in motion and in a perspective that through the depiction of the particular, expresses simultaneously the regular, the universal and the typical. To attain this level of realistic depiction is, however, by no means an easy task and a writer, in its pursuit, passes through various stages: at the first stage, a writer singles out and records what he believes to be most important and characteristic out of the diversity of facts and the chaos of every day life. He finds, as Gorky expected of him, "that which is of general significance in life, typical not for given day alone." However, this preliminary stage is only a prelude to a more important second stage when a writer creates his own particular world of images, and peoples it with characters, situations and actions so that the apparent contradictions between the particular and the general, the immediate and the conceptual may be so resolved as to give an impression of an inseparable integrity. It examines individual human relationships to discover that the particular and the general merge in an organic and dynamic way. At the final stage of creation, the

impressions and images are structured in accordance with the principles of harmony and what Leo Tolstoy called, "sense of proportion". It is at this stage that a unity of form and content is achieved to make the work an organic whole.

2.4 LITERATURE AND THE WRITER'S ATTITUDE

The writer's attitude plays a very crucial role in depicting this reality. In fact, no correct evaluation of a book or a writer is possible without probing into the writer's attitude to life because a piece of literature is not merely a dream but an act of deliberate communication, a choice of verbal gesture for advocating a certain point of view. In the words of Joan Rockwell, "for the student who wishes to use literature as a key to the specific values of a period or cultural area, the point is to discover the author's intentions." (*Fact in Fiction* p. 60) That is why books written on the same theme by different authors turn out to be different in quality and value. An artist must so create his works that they may give men happiness; not merely depict misery and injustice but also show them the way to fight it and make the world to be more just, more happy, more full of dreams. Since dreams--those fond hopes of future--are also an integral part of life, a writer must talk of them too. As Wole Soyinka puts it, a writer is not just "the recorder of the mores and experiences of his society" but also "the voice of vision in his own time." (Peterson, 1988 p. 7) He must not shirk from looking into the face of the future and discovering for his readers, new shoots of life, because the future is as perfectly real as the present. "Real poetry", said Lenin, "must always get ahead of life, if only by an hour." (Scherbina, 1974 p.9)

Reality so depicted will be of a higher order, a new reality which will give us truths about men in flesh and blood, living in a given society, in historically and socially conditioned human relationships, and about the sufferings, struggles and rejoicings.

However, a number of writers as well as theorists have denied any essential or even "desirable" links between literature and reality thereby banishing the notion of realism from the sphere of art and literature. To take up some of their basic objections, one of them is against realist art because it is "an art for the plebeians, for the masses, for those poor in spirit," (Scherbina, 1974 p. 36) implying thereby that pursuit of art and literature is essentially an elitist activity. "Realists", they allege, "are always simple observers while symbolists are always thinkers. Realists are in the grip of concrete life, it washes over them like the surf and they see nothing behind it." (Scherbina, 1974 p. 37)

2.5 LITERATURE AND SUBJECTIVISM

Such an attitude towards reality and its role in creation of literature leads to positions of subjectivism which stem from a thinking that art is basically irrational and that ideological, political and social questions are foreign to its nature. It is, above all, the expression of an artist's isolated subjective impressions, no matter whether they correspond to the real image of the objective world or not. This is primarily done to assert the seeming independence of creativity. The high priest of such a point of view is Benedetto Croce who seeks to dissociate literature completely from history, restricting it solely to the intuition and individuality of the writer. Croce, in fact, goes on to deny any aesthetic progress of mankind, asserting that every individual creates his own artistic world and that works of art and literature are in no way linked with any tradition. An extreme position in this was, however, taken by Lipps, who said, "The inner form of an object is always determined by me, through my inner activity."

At the other extreme of this position of subjectivism is the position of complete objectivity--of naturalism--according to the pursuers of which the only way of obtaining true impressions of life and its reality is to act as simple direct, lifeless and passive mirrors, reflecting all happenings around, without playing an active role in either organising them according to their importance or selecting them according to their relevance. The writer, they believe, is like a mobile camera, recording at random, the myriad impressions of life; and this, they again believe, is the only way of portraying reality. A natural corollary of such a position is that a writer should maintain a strict neutrality between various points of view concerning a particular issue, presenting them all equally eloquently and leaving it to the readers to draw their own conclusions. Support to any one point of view, they contend, will reduce literature to social and political propaganda.

The fact, however, is that such a collage of photographic details may not have any direct bearing on life and its reality, since it is neither history nor literature. It neither selects facts, as a historian does, nor does it place them in an imaginative context, as does a writer. Speaking of Balzac, Oscar Wilde observed that he was "no mere reporter. Photography and process verbal were not the essentials of his method. Observation gave him the facts of life, but his genius converted facts into truths and truths into truth". Wilde drives the point home in his characteristic style by drawing a distinction between Zola's *L'Assommoir* and Balzac's *Illusions Perdues*. The former he calls a piece of "unimaginative realism" and the latter "imaginative reality."

2.5.2 Literature and Neutrality

As for maintaining strict neutrality between various points of view, such a position is contrary to the reality of life wherein everyone is forced to take sides all the time on all kinds of issues. We have the testimony of no less a celebrity than Thomas Mann who in his *Kultur und Politik* recognises the fact that "being apolitical is nothing less than being simply antidemocratic." Mann, starting from *Reflections of an Apolitical Man*--the title speaks for itself--learnt his lessons the hard way, because he was born and brought up in the spiritual traditions of German burgher society. He was forced to admit that "I arrived at the conviction that what is political and social is an indivisible part of what is human and enters into the one problem of humanism, into which our intellect must include it, and that in this problem a dangerous hiatus destructive for culture may manifest itself if we ignore the political, social elements inherent to it." (*Aesthetics and Poetics*, p.16) Earlier, Romain Rolland who too had opined that a writer should remain uncommitted, revised his opinion about the neutrality of a writer. Howard Fast illustrates the point through the example of portraying a workers' strike: "A motion picture camera may preserve the strike as a partial abstraction; but this would be neither art nor truth. To become art the strike must be related to historical process and that relationship can hardly be neutral." (*Literature and Reality*, p. 20-21)

A completely neutral stand is, therefore, myth. Chinua Achebe, using rather strong language for his otherwise mild manner of expression has called such "neutral" art as "deodorised dog-shit." In fact, to be neutral as a matter of principle is in itself a partisan position. A writer, therefore, has to make a choice between the responsibility of siding with truth, justice and humaneness or standing in open favour of exploitation and injustice. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o puts it:

... 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 battlefield: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to

2.6 AFRICAN LITERATURE POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY

In the case of African literature, politics has always been of paramount significance. Alex La Guma, renowned novelist from South Africa has put it in a most dramatic manner:

I, as a South African writer, am prepared TO RUN GUNS AND HOLD UP RADIO STATIONS, because in South Africa that is what we are faced with, whether we are writers or whether we are common labourers. ("The Writer in Modern Africa" p.20)

The question of ideology--the author's intention or attitude--to which we have made a reference above, is an integral part of this relationship between literature and politics. In the case of African literature this question of ideological stand-point of the writer although implicit in the very social nature of literature, became prominent in the context of the various freedom struggles and it continued to remain relevant in the post-independence period as well, as the gap between the affluent few and pauper majority widened alarmingly and as the infrastructure of ethics crumbled. As Alex La Guma puts it, "when we sit down to write a book, I or any of my colleagues around me, we are, as writers, faced with the reality that 80% of the population lives below the bread-line standard." (Wetberg, 1988:20)

It is within this broad-based framework of relationship between literature and politics rather than any specific theory of literature that this book attempts to evaluate the major writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

However, before we analyse the writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, it would only be appropriate to look at the grafting and development of novel as a genre on the African soil, particularly in the sub-Saharan region. This we will do in the next Unit.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have looked at the definitions of literature, politics, their respective natures, and also the relationship between literature and truth, literature and reality, literature and subjectivity, literature and naturalism, literature and neutrality. We have also discussed the political nature of African literature and its ideological content.

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. Why is it that literature and politics are considered to be incompatible?
2. What is the nature and function of literature in society?
3. What is relationship between literature and truth, literature and reality and literature and subjectivity?
4. Comment on the ideological nature of African literature.

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UNIT 3 MODERN NOVEL IN AFRICA

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Africa—the First Storytellers
 - 3.1.1 Orature—the Tradition of Narrating Orally
- 3.2 Africa—First Written Narratives
 - 3.2.1 Literacy and the Bible—European Missionaries
- 3.3 Africa—First Publications in English : *Ethiopia Unbound, Eighteen Pence*
- 3.4 African Writings as part of National Struggles
 - 3.4.1 Professionals' and Writers' Meets in Paris, Rome-- International links
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 - 3.6.1 *Things Fall Apart*—Encounter with Europe as a Theme
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 - 3.6.3 South Africa—Racial Clash as Fiction: Paton, La Guma, Gordimer
 - 3.6.4 Corruption as a Major Theme of Post-Independence African Fiction
 - 3.6.5 The Emergence of the Political Novel—Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*
 - 3.6.6 Fiction by African Women
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Questions
- 3.9 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The principal objective of this Unit is to focus on the tradition of narration in Africa. The tradition that was primarily oral, became written after the arrival of first the Arabs who introduced the Arabic language and also its script and later by the Europeans who introduced literacy in order to enable them to read the Bible. Still later, they introduced their respective system of education, as a part of which the Africans were exposed to their literatures. The British for instance introduced as a part of the educational requirements, texts like the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*. These in turn became the role models when the first samples of fiction by Africans written in English appeared.

The Unit also discusses briefly the various stages through which the African novel in English passed and the major themes it embraced at various points of time. It also takes note of fiction writing by African women.

3.1 AFRICA—THE FIRST STORYTELLERS

If what the anthropologists tell us is true that man first appeared on the African continent, then the credit for being the first fiction-artist must also go to an African, since the art of story-telling is as old as man. Thus, it may not be difficult to visualize a group of people—not just children—gathered around a person—most probably a man but could as well be a woman—in the fading light of the evening after the day's work—of hunting but could also be of fruit-gathering—had been done and requesting him to tell of his hunting experience. Exaggerating a little here to enhance his valour and understating a little there to minimize his sense of fear and cowardice, the man narrates the factual experience of a hunt. On another occasion, the person not only

exaggerated a little here and understated a little there but he also supplied a few details that never occurred, slipping them into his narrative in such a manner that it was difficult to separate one from the other—those that actually happened from those that never happened. Thus was born the first fiction-artist of Africa—and of the world.

3.1.1 Orature—the Tradition of Narrating Orally

We have used the expression 'story-teller' or 'fiction-artist' and not the expression 'fiction-writer', for this was in the oral tradition of narration. The oral tradition as the only mode of narration was to last millenia in the case of Africa and in many cases still continues to be the only mode of creating stories or songs. In course of time there grew not only a sizeable body of significant oral narratives—*orature*—but also groups of professional narrators—the griot, the *babalawo* and *Giccandi* players—who moved from place to place in various African societies and narrated these tales.

3.2 AFRICA—FIRST WRITTEN NARRATIVES

However, it was with the coming of outsiders—primarily invaders, although some came for trade alone as well, the Chinese or the Indians for instance—that written forms of narration were introduced into the cultural soil of Africa. Contrary to popular impression, those who introduced scripts for African languages for the first time were not Europeans but Arabs who came down from the North to invade, convert and set up kingdoms for continued economic exploitation. Thus Hausa, a language of the people living in northern parts of Nigeria, acquired a script—the Arabic script. Thus Swahili—a trade patois spoken on the coast from Mombassa to Zanzibar—also became a written language with the help of the Arabic script.

However, literary activity in these and other similar languages was only scanty, at best. With the coming of Europeans towards the end of the 15th century—the Portuguese under Vasco-da-Gama were perhaps among the very first—European languages were introduced on the continent of Africa. Within a couple of hundred years the continent was abuzz with Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, German, Flemish and Italian.

3.2.1 Literacy and the Bible—European Missionaries

It was the missionaries from different parts of Europe who entered various regions of Africa on the apparent pretext of bringing enlightenment to its people who brought literacy to Africa. The Bible had to be read. The weekly sermon by the priest was a written discourse read aloud to the congregation. This in turn led to a number of significant developments: first, the Bible had to be translated into various African languages, most of which did not have a script. So scripts were either invented or adapted for these languages before such translations could be undertaken. Thus, the 'credit' of transforming a large number of African societies from oral to written, from pre-literate to literate goes to these missionaries. In the meantime, the Africans were encouraged by the missionaries to learn to read the word in European languages as well. Thus the reading—and writing too—of English, French, Portuguese, etc., was introduced by the missionaries. By this time, most parts of the continent had been colonized for economic exploitation through either guile or force or both. The exploitation needed to be perpetuated and that could only be done by controlling not just the bodies but the minds of Africans. Hence, western systems of education were introduced to instil into the minds of Africans the superiority—economic, political, social, cultural and ideological—of the western ways of life, thereby filling their minds—simultaneously—with a sense of inferiority about all things and ideas which were African. Teaching and learning of European languages and literatures—English, French and Portuguese—became a part of the school education curricula. *Pilgrim's*

Progress by Bunyan, for instance, became an almost essential text in various parts of British Africa. It is, therefore, no surprise that when the first generation of African literates—those 'been-o's, as they came to be known in the English parts of Africa—came to write their first narratives in English, these were based on *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible.

3.3 AFRICA—FIRST PUBLICATIONS IN ENGLISH: *ETHIOPIA UNBOUND, EIGHTEENPENCE*

Since this missionary activity on the continent began in a big way in the 19th century primarily on the west coast—Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, etc.—where the 'freed' slaves had been settled, it is only natural that the first education facilities by westerners were also introduced in the same region and in course of time the first shoots of creative writing also sprouted from the same soil.

E. Casely-Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound* published in 1911 is perhaps the first long narrative in prose by an African. The book is a 'hotch-potch of ideas' wherein Casely-Hayford tries to focus on a number of contemporary issues including education, christianity and colonialism. The modes of narration too vary from realistic to fantastic.

R.E. Obeng's *Eighteenpence* (1943) is considered by some to be closer to what may be called modern African novel rather than Casely-Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound*. The book is an allegory where characters are representatives of qualities. The influence of the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress* is more obvious in *Eighteenpence* than on *Ethiopia Unbound*.

Both these writers paved the way for the first major narrative to be recognized as a novel: Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard*.

3.4 AFRICAN WRITINGS AS PART OF NATIONAL STRUGGLES

As we have stated in the introduction, literary activity by modern African writers—including that of novelists—began in a big way only after the second world war, primarily as a result of the conscious decisions by emigrant Africans in Europe who under the inspiration of thinkers like Amie Caesar, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon and George Padmore, opened a 'second front' as it were, and stepped up their cultural activities to assist the freedom struggles in their respective countries back home. As Amilcar Cabral put it, national liberation movements are "the organized political expression of the struggling people's culture." This, however, is not to give an impression that there were no literary activities in various parts of Africa before this. But with only forty nine of seven hundred odd African languages having been subject to a written form, the literary efforts in pre-colonial Africa were primarily oral and a rich body of what Ngugi wa Thiong'o called orature had existed in most African societies. There were of course languages like Swahili and Hausa in East and West Africa respectively and Sesotho in South Africa which had the tradition of written literature.

3.4.1 Professionals' and Writers' Meets in Paris, Rome—International Links

A formal status to the efforts of emigrant Africans was accorded when in 1956, a meeting was organized in Sorbonne, Paris under the auspices of "Presence Africaine" a journal devoted to various aspects of Africa and its people that was being published

from there under the editorship of Alioune Diop. The meeting adopted a resolution that stated, among others, that there was no nation with culture, no culture without a past and no authentic cultural liberation was possible without political liberation first. This meeting was followed by a second one in Rome in 1959, which proclaimed, among others, that 'political independence and economic freedom are indispensable prerequisites of fecund cultural development in underdeveloped countries in general and in the countries of black Africa in particular.'

Political scientists like Phillipe Decreane and Thomas Hodgking, writers like Jean Paul Sartre and critics like Lilyan Kesteloot recognized immediately the significance of such literary efforts. Phillipe Decreane, for instance, considered Sehghor's theory of negritude as the literary counterpart of Pan Africanism whereas Ms. Kesteloot opined that African writers "have produced original works only when they have become politically committed."

Soon this body of African writers forged links with others in underdeveloped countries, particularly of Asia, and a larger body of Afro-Asian writers came about whose initial meetings were held in New Delhi in 1956, Tashkent in 1958 and Cairo in 1962.

3.4.2 Goals of African Literatures—Social, Cultural and Political

Thus literary rejuvenation in Africa became a part of a large cultural renaissance that had evolved close links with political struggles of various countries on other continents. An African writer, therefore, used his pen not only like the barrel of a gun but he also carried a pen in one hand and a gun in the other—literally. Sedor Senghor, Augustino Neto, Mamadu Dia, Tafawa Balewa, Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah were not only the first ranking political leaders of their respective countries but their leading writers as well. The aims of African writers—novelists included—were, therefore, overtly political and there were three principal reasons for which they wrote, each of which was implied in the resolution quoted above. These were first to bring out the rich cultural heritage of Africa to debunk the colonial propaganda that Africa had no culture, no history, no past and that Europeans had intervened in Africa to "civilize" it. Critics have called this phenomenon as "Prospero Syndrome." This had led to distortions and even halting of their cultural development under the policies of cultural imperialism pursued by the colonial powers of which creating a class of "been to's" evolves and assimilados were the extreme forms. The second aim of these writers was, therefore, to step up the struggle for their cultural liberation. However, since no 'authentic cultural liberation' was possible without political liberation first, the third and the most significant aim of these writers was to support their respective national liberation movements. In this, they were inspired by the writings and research of Cheikh Anta Diop from Senegal who had collected adequate evidence from the fields of anthropology, archaeology, language, literature and history to assert that the ancient Egyptian Civilization had been set up and developed by black Africans. The hands of modern African writers—including those of novelists—were therefore quite full with political commitments from the very beginning.

3.4.3 The Language Question—Mediums of Creative Writings

Before moving on to the examination of the rise and development of novel in Africa, let us make a few observations about the choice of languages by African writers for their creative writings. This like the other observations about African writers affected the novelists as well. Since the aims for which African writers had taken to writing were overtly political, they had to choose the mediums of their creative works keeping such objectives in mind. Since their primary objectives were to aid and assist their respective national liberation struggles, they needed to reach their messages—which were not only to inform about their cultures, their histories and their pasts but also the present state of affairs under colonialism—to the educated, politically aware and liberal minded people in the ruling countries so as to create an empathy for their

cause of political independence. Thus they chose the languages of their European masters—English, French, Portuguese—as the vehicles of their thoughts. Simultaneously, they also wanted to reach that limited section of the reading public in their own countries—those “been to’s” and assimilados—who had lost faith in their own cultures and their pasts and who were not only resigned to their colonized fate but who were also “sold” to it, thanks to the impact of European education systems and the accompanying crumbs. In short, such writings were also aimed at what Ngugi wa Thiong’o has called “decolonizing the mind” of the African educated middle class. Then there was, of course, the third reason on a number of African languages lacking a script and hence the inability of many a writer to adopt it as the medium of expressing his creative abilities. This question of the choice of European languages was later to develop into a big controversy, particularly among novelists like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Nurudin Farah. The choice, we may say, to conclude the debate on this point, was made consciously and after careful considerations, keeping in mind the then objectives of supporting political struggles in various parts of Africa.

3.5 THE RISE OF MODERN NOVEL IN AFRICA

The rise of the novel as a genre in Africa coincided with the rise of African intelligentsia whose members were—primarily—the products of mission-run schools who had been fed on the staple diet of the Bible and Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. And the time too was of violent social upheaval not only in Africa but all around the world. After the end of the second world war, the Soviet Union had emerged as a global power and had become a rallying force not only for a large number of newly independent nations but also for those who were still struggling for political independence in Asia, Africa and Latin America. A socialist revolution had succeeded in China. India and a number of nations in Asia had gained freedom from colonial rule. The Vietnamese had defeated the French. The economies of colonial powers lay in shambles. All this had great morale-boosting impact on the African bourgeoisie which was leading these struggles for political independence. They realized, perhaps for the first time, that the Mzungu—that’s the Swahili word for the white men—were after all not invincible. Sensing success, they stepped up their struggles. Members of the intelligentsia, the literary counterparts of the African bourgeoisie, too had been inspired by these events and also by the role played by their counterparts elsewhere, particularly in Asia. We have already referred to the beginning and developing of such contacts between writers of Africa and Asia at conferences in New Delhi, Tashkent and Cairo.

3.5.1 Assimilating Native Traditions of Narration

The genre of novel is a European transplant in Africa since, its birth coincided with the arrival of literacy and the western systems of education based on it. However, the transplant could sink its roots very quickly into the soil and soon threw around new shoots primarily because the soil was very conducive to its growth. The tradition of long narratives—both in prose and in poetry—had existed in most African societies for long. In fact, in some societies this tradition had been formally institutionalized through professional narrators—the Griot singers and the Giccandi players, for instance—who moved from place to place very much like our own sankirtan jathas, or singers of Hari Katha or the baul singers of Bengal. These folk narratives themselves were open-ended and individual narrators kept on varying the text spatially and temporally by adding episodes and incidents of local and contemporary interests. This provided the narrator with ample opportunities to give free reins to his fertile imagination and interpolate the text thereby secularizing it in the process. Let us add here that these narrators combined in themselves the functions of singers of epics, social chroniclers and the reciters on specific religious occasions. Now the first novels in Africa could and did draw their strength from the tradition of such

narratives whose taproots had been buried deep for centuries. It is no wonder, therefore, that early African novels drew their sustenance from fables, folk tales, proverbs, sayings and similar cultural material. Let us illustrate this point by taking a couple of examples from the Nigerian novel.

3.6 SOME EARLY NOVELS

One of the first novels to come out of Nigeria in the fifties—1952, to be precise—was *The Palm Wine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola. In fact, many scholars consider Tutuola to be the grand sire of modern fiction in Africa. The novel created a sensation. Before elaborating on that let us look at a small excerpt from the novel:

I was a palm wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age.
I had no other work more than to drink palm wine in my
life... My father got eight children and I was the eldest among
them, all of the rest were hard working, but I myself was an
expert palm wine drinkard...(Tutuola, 1952:7)

The novel was praised and condemned simultaneously—of course by different groups of people—for the same feature but again for wrong reasons. Tutuola's writer colleagues most of whom had been to the mission-run schools and the university—Tutuola unfortunately had not gone beyond class six—were embarrassed by his 'irregular' use of English. His western critics, however, hailed it as a novel use of English. Dylan Thomas referred to it as "young English by a West African" and Anthony West saw in it "the very beginnings of literature". However, they all agreed on one thing: that *The Palm Wine Drinkard* was some kind of a "freakish first" which was an "unrepeatable happy hit." However, Tutuola repeated the hit no less than five times after the publication of *The Palm Wine Drinkard*. It was then that it dawned on both his Nigerian colleagues as well as western critics that there was more to the novel than just its plain bad English. And that something more was the Yoruba folk material that Tutuola had so cleverly built into his narrative, bending the structure of English language as well as of the novel as a form to carry the burden of his narrative. And it was in this that the strength of the novel lay and not in its bad English. In this respect Tutuola was a path breaker who had grafted successfully the African narrative on to the western novel and the mutated form—although still called a novel—was soon adopted by his successors not only in Nigeria but all over Africa.

3.6.1 *Things Fall Apart*—Encounter with Europe as a Theme

Chinua Achebe was perhaps among the first to notice the immense possibility of such "hybridization". He, however, avoided the most obvious of Tutuola's pitfalls namely his "unacceptable" English. In his first novel—*Things Fall Apart* published in 1958, six years after the publications of *The Palm Wine Drinkard*—Achebe replaced Tutuola's crooked English sentence structure by simple, crisp, short but correct structures and the Yoruba folk material by his own Ibo myths and fables, customs and rituals, superstitions and sayings. The result has been there for everyone to see. Hailed as a modern classic, *Things Fall Apart* has been translated into scores of modern major languages of the world—and some minor ones too—and has sold more copies than any other modern novel. On the continent, it replaced Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as an almost compulsory school text. However, it was not only in matters of language and style that Achebe had differed from Tutuola. If it were so, Achebe would be a poor pupil and not the trend setter that he became with his first novel. More significantly, Achebe had altered the political agenda with his *Things Fall Apart*. Updating his theme, Achebe had chosen the "encounter" phase of Nigerian history as the subject of his novel—an encounter between the Ibos of Umuofia and the white missionaries and administrators. Universalising his theme as any great writer does, Achebe presented this encounter as an encounter between Africa and

Europe, between two different races and above all between two different ways of life. Through his sociological details—and there is no dearth of them including the copious use of Ibo proverbs and for which Achebe was accused of being an ancestor-worshipper and a supporter of the raffia skirt culture—Achebe was proving the political point that Africans were no “yesterday people” and that African history was not, to borrow his own words, “one long night of savagery.” However, Achebe, unlike Tutuola, was not prepared to present the African past uncritically. Okonkwo and the Umuofian people with their obstinacy and a rigid way of life as their besetting flaw are as much responsible for the tragic going under of their society as are the white colonizers with their superior technology. As stated above, Achebe’s reference to his past did not go down well with a number of his critics, particularly the European ones. Apparently, some of them could see through Achebe’s clever use of invocation of his past to subserve his present political ends. They had, for instance, not objected to Tutuola’s invocation of the Yoruba past.

3.6.2 Early Writings of Ngugi wa Thiong’o

It is by foregrounding the colonization of Africa on the agenda of African fiction writing that Achebe became the trend-setter and many novelists across the continent began to write similar novels. So significant had been his influence that six years later when Ngugi wa Thiong’o was writing his first novel—*The River Between*—on the eve of Kenyan Uhuru he modelled it on *Things Fall Apart*. Ngugi’s portrayal of the “encounter” between the Gikuyu and the white missionaries has been considered to be so exact a parallel to Achebe’s depiction of the encounter between the Ibo and the whites that some critics have considered *The River Between* stepping out of the very pages of *Things Fall Apart*. This, however, is an exaggeration because Ngugi’s novel, drawing as it does, its inspiration from Achebe’s novel, is very different from *Things Fall Apart* in more than one ways. The hero of *The River Between*—Waiaki—unlike Okonkwo is a child of two worlds: he is the son of a traditional Gikuyu religious leader and a mundo mugo but is educated at a mission-run school. The white missionaries have not only already arrived in Makuyu-Kameno region but have already entrenched themselves by winning themselves a few converts like Joshua. The “encounter” has already developed into a full-fledged “conflict”—the immediate provocation being the custom of female circumcision which is condemned by the white missionaries as “savage” and “barbaric”. Ngugi, in fact, deliberately chose this custom of circumcising the girl-child as the basis of the conflict since it had its roots in Kenya’s recent history. Female circumcision had been a major point of conflict between the various Kenyan tribes and the British colonial administration. It had led to drastic divide—the setting up of Independent schools and even Independent churches by the Kenyans—thereby radicalizing their struggle for political independence in order to save their cultural independence. It was something which, as we have mentioned earlier, had been on the original political agenda of African writers since the early fifties. Ngugi’s theme, therefore, is not only more complex than that of Achebe’s but it also lays more stress on the conflict aspect of the encounter by mixing myth with reality, Lord Gikuyu with Jomo Kenyatta. And again, Ngugi is more radical in expressing his views about the havoc wrought by colonialism than the mild-mannered Achebe. But perhaps it was the model of colonialism in East Africa which was responsible for stronger political overtones of East African writers. East Africa, unlike its western counterpart, had to contend with the additional menace of ‘settlers’ which made their freedom struggle much more complicated and difficult. Freedom struggles in neither Ghana nor in Nigeria had to go through as violent and bloody a phase as the so-called Mau Mau struggle in Kenya between 1952 and 1957. The greater intensity of the political struggle had, of course, brought rich dividends for Kenyan writers of fiction. A number of Kenyan novelists—Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Meja Mwangi or Godwin Wachira, for instance—built their central works around the theme of Mau Mau.

3.6.3 South Africa—Racial Clash as Fiction: Paton, La Guma, Gordimer

Modern Novel in Africa

Whether it is *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o or *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) and *Taste of Death* (1975) both by Meja Mwangi or *Ordeal in the Forest* (1967) by Godwin Wachira, the emphasis is on "protest"—something which East African fiction of the sixties shares more with South African fiction rather than with West African writings. Protest as the major theme of their writings was included from the very beginning of their careers, by major South African writers whether white or black or coloured or even by those of Indian origin. This was primarily due to the policy of apartheid—separate development—pursued by successive racist South African governments since 1948. We shall not go into the implications of this policy for the people of South Africa here since these are too well-known. However, what we would certainly like to comment upon is its implications for writers in South Africa, particularly the novelists. The policy of Apartheid by keeping various communities apart on the basis of pigmentation and enforcing it ruthlessly through scores of draconian laws had insulated South African writers from one another's world and had forced them to write in a "fractured society" about a "fractured society." As Nadine Gordimer who by being both white and a woman represents a minority within a minority, put it –

Living in a society that has been as deeply and calculatedly compartmentalized as South Africa's has been under the colour bar, the writer's potential has unscaleable limitations. (*Literature and Society in South Africa*, p. 161)

Alex La Guma, who as per South African labellings was a coloured writer, observed that –

The problem is living in one set of compartments and knowing only of your own life, and then trying to inject yourself into the life of the environment of another part, another party. (*Literature and Society in South Africa*, p. 161)

The result is that early writings of Alan Paton—*Cry the Beloved Country*, for instance—and Nadine Gordimer's—*Burger's Daughter* or the short stories, for instance—get labelled as white writings, whereas those of Peter Abrahams—*Mine Boy*, or *Tell Freedom*, for instance—and those of Alex La Guma—*A Walk in the Night* and *A Threefold Cord*, for instance—belong to the coloured constituency.

As observed above, the basic political agenda of these novels was "protest." However, the manner of protest by each one of them was her or his own, governed by her or his *welt anschaaung* which in turn depended on which side of the colour bar you actually were.

3.6.4 Corruption as a Major Theme of Post-Independence African Fiction

As the sixties neared, African hopes soared. Uhuru was in the air. Ghana got its independence in 1957 and Nigeria in 1960. The process of the decolonization of Africa had begun in a big way. As the people celebrated and waited with bated breath for the fulfilment of their dreams, it appeared that the committed African novelists, particularly of the protest and conflict variety would have to hang their spikes or at least change their tune if not the song. But as colonialists who had gone out of the front door sneaked in from the back door, and as bourgeoisie that had come to power in most newly independent countries of Africa changed to its true comprador character, as imperialism made inroads into Africa through various aid and trade agreements, democratic set ups in a large number of African countries, fragile as they were as yet, were threatened. As coup after coup took place in various countries, as military juntas tightened their grips over reins of political power, as unemployment figures soared and as corruption ruled rampant in these countries, as people's bones

sank lower than their economic status, and as their dreams of an egalitarian society soured, the African writer was forced once again to wage yet another political battle—this time against the ruling cliques of his own fellow countrymen. Novelist after novelist made corruption, coups and cliques as the themes of their books. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by renowned Ghanaian writer A.K. Armah, is perhaps one of the most powerful portrayals of such situations. Achebe's *A Man of the People*, Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*, and *Kill Me Quick*, Mwangi Ruheni's *What a Life*, Sembene Ousmane's *Xala* and *Petals of Blood* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o are all novels written about the theme of corruption in various African nations.

Petals of Blood by Ngugi wa Thiong'o is quite different from the other novels not only in terms of his more radical and more openly pronounced views about the neo-colonialist regime of Kenya, but also in providing greater space to women and their problems. Wanjia is as much the principal character of the novel as her male counterparts, Munira, Abdulla and Karega. In fact, she is one of the personas through which the author expresses his views about the neo-colonial phase of African governance. Not only Ngugi but a large number of other authors also came to focus on the problems of women, those doubly-disadvantaged victims of colonialism who were exploited first as black Africans and second for being women. Ngugi, Ekwensi, Ousmane, and Occuli have all made the problems of women in post-independence Africa, particularly their sexual exploitations, the bases of their novels.

3.6.5 The Emergence of the Political Novel in Africa—Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*

Finally, as neo-colonialism tightened its grip on Africa in the seventies and the eighties, as unpopular collaborationist regimes and military juntas failing to solve the basic problems of food, shelter and clothing of the masses, let loose more repression, as famine, hunger and civil war stalked the continent, the novelists further fine-tuned their songs. Novel and novelists both became politically more radical. In his *Devil on the Cross*, for instance, Ngugi builds the story around the worsening living conditions of ordinary Kenyans and blends it with generous use of technical terms of political analysis based on class. Written in the form of a political fable, it indicts the ruling comprador bourgeoisie through a satire that is, at times, as scathing as Swift's in *A Modest Proposal*. But the most significant feature—political—about *Devil on the Cross* was its original publication in Gikuyu, Ngugi's mother tongue. Ngugi had earlier decided to give up the use of English for his creative writing and the reasons he had cited were political. Continued use of English in free Kenya, he had said symbolized the colonized mind and had also alienated him from the Kenyan masses with whom he needed to interact in order to reach his political message to them. He, of course, drew a lot of flak for this decision of his, particularly from his fellow novelists. Nurudin Farah, for instance, criticised him very bitterly for becoming a "backwater fish". Even Chinua Achebe had reservations about this decision of his. However, the way his maiden attempt at novel writing in Gikuyu has been received has vindicated the political correctness of Ngugi's decision. Very often, groups of people pooled money together to pay for the beer of a professional reader to listen to excerpts from *Devil on the Cross* in restaurants and beer-bars. Publication of novels like *My Son's Story* by Nadine Gordimer, *Matigari* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *Patriots* by Sousa Jamba, an Angolan writing originally in English and copious references made to various political movements and real episodes in these novels shows that literature still continues to be closely aligned to politics in Africa. And it has not always been an alliance on behalf of the people as is the case with Sousa Jamba's *Patriots* where the author is clearly on the side of the UNITA, considering it to be a more democratic front. However, by the time the novel was published, events in Angola had proved his partisan stand to be wrong.

This relationship between literature and politics has, however, not been a one-sided affair. It is not only politics as fiction—not always. It has also been the other way round—at least sometimes. How else does one explain the convulsions of a fictional

coup—in *A Man of the People*—leading to a real one or a fictional hero—Matigari in *Matigari*—scaring an oppressive regime so much as to invite an arrest warrant against himself. In Africa, it is not only novelists who have led the politics of their respective countries as was the case with Abubaker Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria but it is also the novel itself which had led politics sometimes—literally—as was the case with both *A Man of the People* and *Matigari*.

3.6.6 Fiction by African Women

The most powerful political statements about women have, however, been made by women novelists themselves. More and more women in Africa have been taking to writing – novel writing in particular—and we do know that the very act of writing is a political act for women. Grace Ogot from Kenya in her *The Promised Land*, Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria in her *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Destination Biafra* and *Second Class Citizen*, Flora Nwapa from Nigeria in her *Women are Different*, Rebecca Njau from Kenya in her *Ripples in the Pool*, Mariama Ba from Senegal in her *Scarlet Song*, Bessie Head from South Africa/Botswana in her *Maru* and *The Collector of Treasures*, Farida Karodia also from South Africa in her *Coming Home* and Nadine Gordimer in her novel *My Son's Story* and numerous short stories—have all made women a significant part of the political agenda of African novelists. But it would be unfair to the women novelists from Africa if we attempted to state that their themes are restricted to the problems of women alone, for they have not only raised other problems confronting the African people at large but have been focussing on women only in the overall context of colonialism and its aftermath namely neo-colonialism in Africa.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have learnt about the development of the novel in Africa. Beginning with the pre-colonial tradition of oral narratives, the novel in Africa developed as a hybrid under the influence of western novel writing and the Bible, both of which were introduced on the African soil after the continent's encounter with Europe. The African novel, from the very beginning, had overt socio-political goals, namely, of countering the western propaganda that African societies were primitive, savage, devoid of any cultural and historical developments. Therefore, the novel in Africa—together with other genres of writing—played a crucial role in decolonizing the minds of Africans. Contemporary novel writing in Africa is highlighting the socio-political problems faced by the people of many post-colonial nations in Africa.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. What was the nature of oral narratives in Africa? Discuss.
2. Discuss in details the circumstances leading to the transplantation on the African soil of the genre of western novel.
3. What were the major influences on the African novel in its initial phase of development?
4. Why did Achebe choose “encounter with Europe” as the theme of his first novel—*Things Fall Apart*?
5. How and under what circumstances did Ngugi wa Thiong'o shift the themes of his books from that of “encounter” to “conflict”?

6. Write a detailed note on the fiction writing by African women.
7. Why do recent developments in African fiction show a trend towards writing a more radical political novel?

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 4 NGUGI WA THIONG'O—LIFE, LITERATURE AND IDEOLOGY

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Birth and Early Education
- 4.2 Higher Education
 - 4.2.1 Makerere University College Uganda
 - 4.2.2 Leeds University, United Kingdom
- 4.3 Teaching Career
 - 4.3.1 Nairobi University
 - 4.3.2 Teaching in the U.S.A.
- 4.4 Detention and Exile
- 4.5 Ideology
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Questions
- 4.8 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

One of the objectives of this Unit is to provide details of the life of Ngugi wa Thiong'o including his educational background. However, the main focus of the unit is on his writings—the time and the place where various books were conceived, written and published. The Unit also highlights various events in his life that have had a direct impact on his writing career. Finally, Ngugi's views about language, literature, education, religion and their impact on society—both during colonial rule and in the post-colonial situation are discussed in detail at the end of this unit since these have a bearing on his creative writing. In fact, these views constitute his ideological standpoint—his very world view.

4.1 BIRTH AND EARLY EDUCATION

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—a fact which is more than obvious from his writings, particularly in *A Grain of Wheat* where copious references were made to the Bible—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 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, repeatedly the theme of most of his books.

4.2 HIGHER EDUCATION

4.2.1 Makerere University College Uganda

After finishing his school education at Alliance High School, Ngugi joined B.A.(Hons) in English at the Makerere University College, at 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* 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 at Makerere and some critics are of the opinion that the study of D.H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad left an early influence on his writings.

4.2.2 Leeds University, United Kingdom

Leeds was Ngugi's next halt for education. Here he soon became a part of Arnold Kettle's group that provided him with new perspectives on various issues—political, social, cultural and academic. In his own words—"Leeds systematised my thinking." At Leeds, he started working on Caribbean literature as 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. Leeds also provided him with an opportunity to participate in a number of conferences in Syria, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. 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.

4.3 TEACHING CAREER

4.3.1 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, incorporation of literatures written in African languages as a part of the Programme. 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 the 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.

4.3.2 Teaching in the U.S.A.

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 bring about 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 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.

4.4 DETENTION AND EXILE

Ngugi got into trouble with government authorities in Kenya over portions of his *Petals of Blood* in which he dealt 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, was objected to by the authorities who eventually banned its performances on November 16, 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 to be precise. He was released as unexplicably as he had been detained. However, he was not restored to his position as Professor and Head of the Department of Literature, Nairobi University despite repeated requests.

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 alive in the face of humiliations and torture—both physical and mental. This was later published as *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* in 1981. During this period, he also wrote the manuscript of his next novel—*Caithni Mutharaba Ini* (*Devil on the Cross*)—in Gikuyu. Ngugi, let us recall, 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 as *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I will Marry when I want*) in 1980.

His request for the restoration of his position as Professor at the Nairobi University having been turned down, Ngugi wa Thiong'o went away to English, settling down as a fulltime 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 has 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 U.S.A. where he teaches in a college in New York

4.5 IDEOLOGY

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 product and the maker.”

Therefore, he chose as the subject of his writings that single event in the history of Kenya that has affected its people the most, namely, the most crucial phase of their struggle for freedom—the so called 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 takes a certain partisan attitude towards them. In his own words.

What is important... is the attitude and the world view embodied in his work and with which he is 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, which he believes, lies on the shoulders of a writer that Ngugi makes known his 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 their 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 the most desirable political system of governance for solving the problems of newly liberated African nations reeling under the covert attack of neo-colonialism.

He 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 these 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 fulfilment 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 and which wormed 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. The colonial administration-appointed home guards and village chiefs were the most prominent representatives of this 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 high lands, as these were called—Ngugi does not overlook another important fact namely what he calls a "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 baptize the natives...

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 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 a very nefarious role of collaborating 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 an incurable wish for permanent identification with the culture of imperialist bourgeoisie. They 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-cultural situation in Kenya during and after the national struggle for independence. He suggests, in a book of the same title, "decolonizing the mind." By this he means a kind of "dialectical negation of the colonial process," dismantling, as it were, of 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. To teachers and educational institutions he exhorts to emphasise African languages and literature 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 manifestations. 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 advocates the use of African languages as the vehicle for the writings by Africans. For many years, he observes, members of the petty bourgeoisie class comprising students, teachers, journalists and bureaucrats 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 *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi declared that—

This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all 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 battlefield: 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 statement about the ideological obligations of a writer that we would like to end this discussion about Ngugi's world-view.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have learnt about the life and works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. We have learnt about the early influences on his writings. We have also discussed Ngugi's decision to shift from English to Gikuyu as the medium of his writings. Finally—and most significantly—we have discussed in the last part of this Unit his views about language, literature, education, religion and the impact of all this on writers in post-colonial societies. This is what constitutes his ideological standpoint—his very world-view.

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. Why did Ngugi wa Thiong'o write repeatedly about the theme of Mau Mau? Discuss.
2. Discuss Ngugi's views about the British colonial rule in Kenya as depicted in his writings.
3. Why did Ngugi decide to shift from English to Gikuyu as the medium of his writings?
4. What are Ngugi's views about the role of writer in society? Discuss.
5. Discuss Ngugi's formulations about the comprador bourgeois class in a neo-colonial society.

4.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 5 *A GRAIN OF WHEAT* – SUMMARY

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Summary – Chapters 1, 2, and 3
- 5.2 Summary—Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8
- 5.3 Summary—Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13
- 5.4 Summary—Chapters 14, Karanja, Mugo, Warui, Wambui, and Harambee
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this Unit is to provide a chapter-by-chapter summary of *A Grain of Wheat*, focussing not only on the story-line but also on the theme, major events and main characters. While doing so, relevant quotations from the text have been reproduced with the intention of drawing the attention of the students to their significance in the study of the novel.

Since Ngugi had divided his novel in different sections—not formally but by separating them with a quotation—we have also clubbed the summaries of the chapters accordingly into different sections.

The objective of this Unit is to whet the appetite of the students to read the text in original and not make do with the summary provided here. Let me repeat that the summary is not a substitute for the text. Please read the text attentively, making notes as you go along.

5.1 SUMMARY—CHAPTERS 1, 2 AND 3

1

The novel begins with Mugo getting out of his bed in the morning to go to his *shamba*—a small piece of land for cultivation. This was a routine that he had followed since his coming out of the detention camp. As he walked through the village—Thabai—on this particular day, he met a number of people who, like him, had suffered during the Emergency. For instance, Warui, a village elder, whom Mugo met en-route to his *shamba*, had lost his piece of land through confiscation while he was under detention. The basic character of Thabai had remained the same since its founding in 1955. Mugo next ran into Githua who was dressed in tatters and who we are told has sustained bullet wounds at the hands of whitemen during the freedom struggle and had as a result become a little soft in the head. Mugo felt uneasy on meeting him on this particular day, particularly after he saw children making fun of him.

Mugo suddenly recalled the old woman who lived at the end of the main street of the village—the woman who had a grown up son—Gitogo—who was deaf and dumb. Gitogo ‘worked in eating houses, meat shops, lifting and carrying heavy loads’ thereby supporting his old mother. Mugo recalled how during one of the police raids for screening of villagers during the Emergency, Gitogo had been shot dead by soldiers in cold blood while he was running away—out of fright—on seeing the policemen. The official version had been—‘Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead’. The old woman they said had refused to grieve her son’s death and her eyes

had haunted Mugo ever since. In her presence, he had 'always felt naked, seen'. On this particular day, Mugo felt like entering the hut of the woman and talking to her but his courage failed him and he continued on to his field.

Soon Mugo was at his *shamba*, working, but he felt that the soil was 'dry and hollow and he realised that the soil did not 'fascinate' him as much as it did before the Emergency. Ruminating over his past, Mugo recalled how his parents had died when he was quite young and he had been brought up by an aunt—Waitherero—who was also drunk and who abused him so much that Mugo wanted to kill her. After his aunt had died of 'age and over-drinking', Mugo took to working on the *shamba*, dreaming of a peaceful, prosperous life.

'But then Kihika had come into his life'...

Mugo did not linger much longer in the field and went home early, walking 'like a man who knows he is followed or watched, yet does not want to reveal this awareness by his gait or behaviour'. In the evening he was surprised by the visit of a group of people from the village, led by Warui, the village elder. He was accompanied by Wambui and Gikonyo, who had married Kihika's sister. After welcoming them into his hut, Mugo's first instinct was to run away from them.

'We are only voiced sent to you from the Party', said Gikonyo and others agreed with him. Mugo asked, intrigued—'The Party?'—and they repeated—'Yes... mere voices from the Party'.

2

The mention of the word 'Party' in the previous chapter provides the author with an opportunity to intervene and trace, in this chapter, the history of Kenya from the time when the first missionaries arrived to the present, when Kenya is about to gain independence from the colonial British who had followed on the heels of the missionaries.

The Party was an entity whose existence had been taken for granted, particularly by the younger generation for whom it was a 'rallying centre for action'. On 'the eve of Uhuru, its influence stretched from one horizon touching the sea to the other resting on the great lake.' Its origin, Ngugi suggests, could be 'traced to the day the whiteman came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic witness that the whiteman was a messenger from the Lord.' Ngugi then goes on to trace the history of the entrenchment of missionaries among them who told them of a woman ruler in a far off land. The reference to a woman ruler gives Ngugi a chance to recall a bygone era when the Gikuyu were ruled by women. He remembers particularly one beautiful woman ruler—Wangu Makeri—who lost her throne because of overreaching herself and dancing naked in public.

Ngugi then goes on to dilate on the strategy employed by the missionaries, first, in converting the Africans into christianity and later in helping the colonising British in overpowering them:

They looked beyond the laughing face of the whiteman and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried, not the Bible but the sword.'
(p.12)

Soon the resistance offered by Waiyaki and others was overcome with Waiyaki himself being buried alive by the colonisers. Ngugi suggests that Waiyaki's blood contained 'within it a seed, a grain which gave birth to a political party whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil.' (p.13)

Harry Thuku then became their leader, their Moses, who asked them 'to join the Party and find strength in unity'. People followed Harry's advice and 'waited for something to happen. The revolt of the peasant was at hand.'

The whiteman clamped Harry into chains and put him in jail which made the people only more determined and they held a major demonstration in Nairobi demanding Young Harry's release. Waiyaki, then a young man, had walked all the way from Thabai to Nairobi to join the procession. In 1953, when Jomo Kenyatta was arrested by the whiteman, Waiyaki recalled the 1923 procession for Harry Thuku:

We came from ridges here, ridges there, everywhere. Most of us walked. Others did not bring food. We shared whatever crumbs we had brought. Great love I saw there. A bean fell to the ground, and it was quickly split among the children. For three days we gathered in Nairobi with our blood we wrote vows to free Harry.(pp.13-14)

In the firing by the soldiers on the processionists, fifteen Africans died. Waiyaki's regret was—'Perhaps if we had the spears...' The movement failed and 'the man with the flaming eyes came to the scene'—one who came to be known later as 'the burning spear'.

Mugo recalled, he had once attended a meeting of the Party at Rung'ei Market. Gikonyo was there and so was Mumbi, said to be one of the most beautiful women on all the eight ridges. Sometimes she was compared with Wangu Makeri. Kihika from Thabai, Mumbi's brother, was one of the speakers who received a big ovation from the crowds when he said—'This is not 1920. What we now want is action, a blow which will tell'. Kihika summed up the great betrayal by the whiteman in the following words:

We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He said: Let us kneel down to pray. We knelt down. Mubia said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth.(p.15)

Kihika had spoken of blood and Mugo had hated him for his arrogance. Also he had felt a twang of jealousy as he had seen everyone look at the speaker with admiration.

After the 1952 arrest of Jomo Kenyatta and others, Kihika had disappeared into the forest, later to be followed by a handful of young men from Thabai and Rung'ei. Kihika had raided the transit prisoner's camp of Mahee, carrying fresh supplies of men, guns and ammunition to continue on a scale unheard of in the days of Waiyaki and young Harry.

A year later Kihika was arrested, tortured and 'hanged in public', one Sunday at Rung'ei Market, 'not far from where he had once stood calling for blood to rain on and water the tree of freedom.'

The Party had, however, remained alive even after Kihika's death, growing, as people put it, on the wounds of those Kihika left behind.

3

The narrative reverts back to the delegation sitting in Mugo's hut. We now understand that they had come to persuade Mugo to lead the Uhuru—Independence—celebrations. Gikonyo, Ngugi tells us had worked hard to become 'one of the richest men in Thabai', four years after returning home from detention.

Warui, the second person in the delegation to Mugo's house, was the seniormost of the villagers whose 'life was, in a way, the story of the Party; he had taken part in the meetings of Young Harry, had helped in building people's own schools and listened to Jomo's speeches in the 'twenties.' The third person in the delegation was Wambui, a woman who 'carried secrets from the villages to the forest and back to the villages and towns' during the Emergency. Sitting there, talking about the celebrations for the Uhuru, they observe that they cannot forget their sons who sacrificed their lives for freedom. 'And Kihika was such a man, a great man.' Before Mugo reacts to their proposal, they are joined by two more persons—Lieutenant Koinandu and General R—both of whom were in the forest with Kihika. Sitting there all of them—except Mugo—reminisce about Kihika. General R, in fact, brings out the Bible which Kihika always carried on his person, except that he did not carry it with him on his last mission when he was captured—betrayed as General R says. Observing that Mugo was the last man who had given Kihika shelter a week before his capture, both Koinandu and General enquire from him whether Kihika had mentioned the name of the person he was going to see the week after. Mugo denies any knowledge, saying that Kihika did not mention the name of Karanja even, whom all suspect to be the betrayer of Kihika.

Asking Mugo to give them an answer about leading the celebrations soon since December 12—the day of the Uhuru—only four days away, the members of the delegation leave.

Back in their hut, both Lieutenant Koinandu and General R go over the circumstances under which Kihika had been captured and express their resolve to find the traitor who had betrayed Kihika. Warui and Wambui, on their part, wonder about the strange behaviour of Mugo who had shown no enthusiasm for the celebrations. They also recall that during the detention while he had been beaten very badly by the authorities, he had refused to confess that he had given shelter to Kihika.

On his way home, Gikonyo focusses on his personal life, particularly the chasm that had come between him and his wife Mumbi—Kihika's sister—since his return home from detention. While we are given a glimpse of it when Gikonyo—back home—refuses to eat food, we are not made privy to the reasons behind this tension between the two. It is on this note that the chapter ends.

5.2 SUMMARY—CHAPTERS 4, 5, 6, 7 AND 8

4

Ngugi now shifts the focus to Githima—Githima Forestry and Agriculture Research Station—where the thoughts of Europeans as well the African employees are focussed on the forthcoming Uhuru and the changes it is likely to bring in their lives—both personal and professional. It is also an occasion for some of them to review their past in Kenya.

Karanja, for instance, is apprehensive about the rumour that the Europeans working in the Research Station were about to leave for home for good. This would affect his own status in a big way since he derived all his power over fellow Africans from his so-called proximity to the white masters, particularly John Thompson, the Administrative Secretary. Already, Karanja feels that his fellow Africans are defying him, answering back to him and are showing signs of not being scared of him.

John Thompson, on the other hand, is worried about the Research Station going to the dogs once the Europeans leave :

Would these things remain after Thursday? Perhaps for two months: and then—test-tubes and beakers would be broken or lie unwashed on the

cement, the hot-house and seed beds strewn with wild plants and the outer bush which had been carefully hemmed, would gradually creep into a litter-filled compound. (p.38)

John Thompson also senses a sense of defiance and open hostility among his African employees—with the exception of Karanja, of course, who was simply servile in their presence even now. The way the employees had talked back to Dr. Lynd whose dog had charged them, makes Thompson recall the incident at Rira detention Camp where he was once the Commanding Officer. His detainees had gone on a strike, refusing even food. When he had ordered their beating in order to break their defiance, as many as eleven had died and then his name had been bandied about even in the British Parliament.

Dr. Lynd, a research officer, recalls the unfortunate incident during the Emergency when three Africans including her houseboy had raped her when she was staying at Muguga. Apparently, she had become the victim of the Africans' hatred towards the white people since, as she herself puts it, 'she had never harmed anybody.'

On the eve of Uhuru and their departure back home, Thompson's wife, Margery, recalls the period of their stay in Kenya as one in which personal relations between her husband and herself had come under a lot of strain, thanks to John's preoccupation with official work. Stressed after the Rira disaster, she had sought solace in the arms of Dr. Van Dyke, by letting him 'make love to her' and had experienced, 'for the first time, the terrible beauty of a rebellion.' On this particular day, when Karanja comes home to deliver to her a message from her husband, she feels a similar sensual urge towards him but Karanja, for whom a cup of coffee offered by the white Memsahib was more than what he could hope for, had refused to pick up the hints which had left her feeling both frustrated and miserable.

5

Thompson continues to ruminate over the prospects of the Research Station under his successor, worrying about the place falling apart after his departure while in fact what pained him was the realization that he was not indispensable. He tries to transfer his frustration to his wife and wants to ask her if in case of his death would she consider marrying another man but he lacks the courage to confront his wife with such a question.

At the same time, his wife, Margery, too is preoccupied with her thoughts. She remembers the kind of life they had led after coming to Kenya which had taken her husband away from her. Also she is depressed about leaving her home at Githima:

Would she never, never see Githima again? Would her flowers mean anything to whoever would take her place in this house? Every corner of the house, the chairs, the table and even the walls held a memory for her; in her wanderings from district to district all over Kenya, no other house, no other place was so intimately bound up with her. No other place had given such a sense of relief, of freedom, of power. (p.44)

It was in Githima that she had met Dr. Van Dyke with whom she had carried on an affair despite the fact that she did not like his uncouth behaviour. However, on the eve of Uhuru which had created a new crisis in their lives, she wanted Thompson and her to renew this dialogue, their sharing of anxieties and fears with each other.

The author also takes this opportunity to narrate in his own voice, the story of John Thompson's coming to East Africa riding high on the colonial morals of serving humanity through the development of the native Africans. From the first day of his arrival he had treated his work as a mission and had decided to write a book about it which he had titled as *Prospero in Africa*. Towards this end, he had been keeping

notes of his work in a notebook. The author lets us have a peep into the notebook which reveals a typical colonial mindset. Among the notes are his observations on the Mau Mau which he considers to be 'evil: a movement which if not checked will mean complete destruction of all the values on which our civilization has thriven.' (p.49)

6

Ngugi now focusses on the life of Gikonyo, who, he tells us was 'among the first of detainees to pass through the pipe-line back to the village. He set himself up as a carpenter, worked hard, refused to give indefinite credit and built himself a good reputation. Simultaneously, he got into retailing food grains by buying immediately after the harvest when the prices were low and selling when the stocks in the market were low. His wife and his mother helped him in his business and soon he prospered.

The chapter also gives Ngugi an opportunity to dilate on the life of an M.P. since Gikonyo visits the M.P. of his area to get a recommendation for a loan from a bank for buying a piece of land. He is quite amused at the mannerisms of the M.P. including the way he dressed, which was a blind aping of their white masters. In fact, the M.P. also spoke like the whiteman, holding no promise for help.

In the meanwhile, people began to speak about the courage shown and sacrifices made by Mugo, who was quite upset by their proposal asking him to lead the celebrations:

Why did they want him to lead the Uhuru celebrations? Why not Gikonyo, Warui, or one of the forest fighters? Why Mugo? Why? Why? (p. 56)

Mugo had made only one real speech in his life. It was about the demand by the Party for Kenyatta's release from detention. Mugo spoke of the injustice of the whiteman in arresting him:

They took us to the roads and to the quarries even those who had never done anything. They called us criminals But not because we had stolen anything or killed anyone. We had only asked for the thing that belonged to us from the time of Agu and Agu. Day and night, they made us dig. We were stricken ill, we often slept with empty stomachs, and our clothes were just rags and tatters so that the rain and the wind and the sun knew our nakedness. In those days we did not stay alive because we thought our cause strong. It was not even because we loved the country. If that had been all, who would not have perished? (p. 58)

Although Mugo became a recluse thereafter, people had spoken of his powerful speech for a long time.

This time, however, he was apprehensive too. Why had, he wondered, General R. 'asked those pointed questions. Meeting somebody after a week? Karanja? Yes, could they have really asked him to carve his place in society by singing tributes to the man he had so treacherously betrayed?' (p.59)

He is visited by Gikonyo who reminds him of the hunger strike at Rira and Mugo remembered vividly the Rira detention camp and the beating he had received at the hands of Thompson. While he comments that 'the government says we should bury the past', Gikonyo says that he cannot. He also tells him that he had confessed his oath while he—Mugo—had not and that's why they admired him all the more. He also observes that those who had made no sacrifices for freedom were enjoying its fruits while true patriots like Mugo were suffering.

Mugo consoles Gikonyo by saying that his confession was understandable since he wanted to be united with his wife Mumbi. While agreeing with Mugo that he loved

Mumbi very much and wanted to be united with her, Gikonyo remarks that everything had changed—even Mumbi:

‘She too had changed,’ Gikonyo said, almost in a whisper.
‘God, where is the Mumbi I left behind.’ (p.61)

7

Chapter seven begins with Ngugi tracing the history of the Thabai ridge which had developed as a market for the area where even some Indians had set up shops. More Indians had come from Nairobi, bought grains and vegetables and sold them at a higher price in the city. The passing of the railway line from near Thabai had helped in all this. Ngugi, in his authorial voice, recalls the early days when the railway line—the Iron snake—had reached Thabai, people had run away considering the snake to be harmful.

Later the railway platform became the meeting place for the young. They talked in groups at home, they went for walks in the county, some even went to church; but in their minds was always the train on Sunday. On Sunday afternoon, the passenger train to Kampala and the one to Mombasa met at Rung’ei station. People did not go there, as it might be thought, to meet friends arriving from Mombasa, Kisumu and Kampala—they just went there to meet one another, to talk, to gossip, to laugh.

Love affairs were often hatched there; many marriages with their attendant cry of woe or joy had their origin at the station platform...

The train became an obsession: if you missed it, sorrow seized your heart for the rest of the week; you longed for the next train. Then Sunday came, you went there on time, and immediately you were healed. (p. 63)

Resuming his story, Gikonyo tells Mugo that he rarely missed the train and –

‘Yet the day I missed the train was the happiest in my life’ (p.64)

Gikonyo, an outsider settled in Thabai, had become an adept carpenter, thanks to his mother Wangari who encouraged him to learn the trade. Gikonyo had come to admire Mumbi, a beautiful girl of the area whose father Mbugua was a village elder. While Gikonyo admired Mumbi quietly, it was Karanja, another youth from the village who amused all—including Mumbi—by his funny manner of telling stories and episodes. One day, Mumbi had asked Gikonyo to play the guitar for her and she had sung along. Thereafter, she felt very peaceful. On another she came to him to have the handle of her panga fixed by him and admired his skills. She teased him in her youthful ways when Gikonyo came to return the repaired panga. This way intimacy between the two grew.

On a particular Sunday, when they—Mumbi, Karanja, Gikonyo and others—were running to catch a glimpse of the train, Mumbi drew him back and they went to a wood en route. There he made love to her:

She lay against his breast, their heart-beat each to each. It was all quiet. Mumbi was trembling, and this sent a quiver of fear and joy trilling in his blood. Gradually, he pulled her to the ground, the long grass covered them. Mumbi breathed hard, but could not, dare not, speak. One by one, Gikonyo removed her clothes as if performing a dark ritual in the wood. Now her body gleamed in the sun. Her eyes were soft and wild and submissive and defiant. Gikonyo passed his hands through her hair and over her breasts, slowly coaxing and smoothing stiffness from her body, until she lay limp in his hands. Suddenly, Gikonyo found himself suspended in a void, he was near

breaking point and as he swooned into the dark depth he heard a moan escape Mumbi's parted lips. She held him tight to herself. Their breath was now one. The earth moved beneath their one body into a stillness. (p.80)

Karanja had thus lost Mumbi to Gikonyo and he now hated not only both of them but also her brother Kihika who had by now become an outstanding orator, speaking of the usurpation of their land by the whiteman and was thinking of himself as 'a saint, leading the Gikuyu people to freedom and power.' (p.73)

Kihika had earlier left the Mahiga mission school on contradicting his teacher who had called circumcision of women a heathen custom. He had then gone to work in Nairobi, attended political meetings and discovered the Party. "He had found a new vision." (pp.76-77)

In his speeches, Kihika often referred to the example of India that had shown a rare unity in fighting the British:

The example of India is there before our noses. The British were there for hundreds and hundreds of years. They ate India's wealth. They drank India's blood. They never listened to the political talk-talk of a few men. What happened? There came this man Gandhi. Mark you, Gandhi knows his whiteman well. He goes round and organizes the Indian masses into a weapon stronger than the bomb... Do you know why Gandhi succeeded? Because he made his people give up their fathers and mothers and serve their one mother—India. With us Kenya is our mother. (pp.77-78)

Later they all—Karanja, Kihika, Wambuku and others went to the forest, where Kihika again spoke of freeing Kenyan land from the clutches of the British:

'My father's ten acres? That is not the important thing. Kenya belongs to black people. Can't you see that Cain was wrong? I am my brother's keeper. In any case, whether the land was stolen from Gikuyu, Ubabi or Nandi, it does not belong to the whiteman. And even if did, shouldn't everybody have a share in the common shamba, our Kenya? Take your whiteman, anywhere, in the settled area. He owns hundreds and hundreds of acres of land. What about the black men who squat there, who sweat dry on the farms to grow coffee, tea, sisal wheat and yet only get ten shillings a month?' (p.85)

All this Gikonyo recalled while sitting with Mugo. He also recalled the day Kihika ran away to the forest 'to fight'. This was after Jomo Kenyatta had been arrested. More men were rounded up. Gikonyo recalled his own detention and release after six years, during which he had aged but he had clung to the dream of being united with his mother Wangari and wife Mumbi. It is this intense desire to be united with Mumbi that had forced him to confess his oath—he did not name anyone of the oath administerers—he had got an early release.

On his return, Gikonyo was shocked to discover that Mumbi had mothered a child while he was in detention. He also discovered that Karanja who had become the village chief, had blackmailed her into this. Gikonyo felt shattered. His dream had soured into an ugly reality. When he went to see Karanja, he played the chief part openly, telling Gikonyo—

Listen carefully. You have now come back into a normal life in the village. People here obey the law, hear? No meetings at night, no stories about Gandhi and Unity and all that. The whiteman is here to stay. (p.103)

Gikonyo could not believe his eyes:

...the man with whom he had taken an oath to fight the whiteman was talking to him about the power of the white people, the man with whom he used to

play the guitar, the man who often came to the workshop for gossip, was now shouting at him.(p.104)

8

However, while narrating that past to Mugo, Gikonyo could not recall clearly the way he lived during those early days after his release. After he had left, Mugo felt that he too should have told Gikonyo something. However, he was apprehensive too—

Suppose I had told him...suppose I had suddenly told him... Everything would have been all over...all over...the knowledge...the burden...fears...and hopes...(p. 107)

His memory was of a particular day in May 1955, after the Emergency had been in force for about two years. A week after that day D.O. Robson had been shot dead and Kihika had come into his life.

Mugo felt like a cup of tea and went to Kabui shops. There, he met Githogo again who reminded him of the excesses of Emergency as also the negligence by their own government of their sacrifices:

‘The government has forgotten us. We fought for freedom. And yet now!’(p.110)

Mugo suddenly felt like a saviour—saviour of people like Githua, the old woman whose deaf and dumb son Gitogo had been shot dead. He told himself that ‘Nobody need ever know about Kihika. To the few, elect of God, the past was forgiven, was made clean by great deeds that saved many. It was so in the time of Jacob and Esau; it was so in the time of Moses.’(p.110)

5.3 SUMMARY—CHAPTERS 9, 10, 11, 12, AND 13

9

This chapter details out the detention of Mugo that began from Thika detention camp and then they—there were others from Embu, Meru and Mwariga—were transferred to Manyani. Thereafter, they were taken to Rira—a desert. John Thompson had been transferred there after his success at Yala. He tempted the detainees to confess their oaths by providing them with better living conditions and promising them reunion with their families. However, he also applied strong arm tactics on the detainees. As for Mugo, Thompson often picked him up for whipping personally but Mugo did not confess his oath. Thus Mugo’s prestige rose among his fellow detainees. This gave them also enough courage to demand better facilities, including increased ration, or else, they threatened, they would go on a hunger strike. And then the strike happened. The day and night beating of the detainees in order to break their unity led to the killing of eleven but Mugo had survived the torture.

Reminiscing all this the next day, that is the day after the delegation had visited him, Mugo went to see Gikonyo at his place. There he met Mumbi—Gikonyo’s wife and Kihika’s sister—who too reminiscenced about those days. She reminded Mugo how they all had dreams. Kihika had dreams of liberting their land from the clutches of the whiteman, Wambuku, Kihika’s girl-friend had dreamt of settling down peacefully with Kihika. Njeri, who too had a crush on Kihika, dreamt of fighting by his side from the forests. And then Mumbi told Mugo that she wanted to talk to him about Gikonyo, her husband. To spite her, Mugo told her that Gikonyo had shared his thoughts with him only the previous evening—even about the child she had had in Gikonyo’s absence. Mumbi, however, insisted on telling him about her life after

Gikonyo and Mugo and other men had been taken away to detention camps. She told him how the administration had asked them to move to a new village and those refusing had homes destroyed right before their eyes:

'Even now, at night, in bed,' she started, 'I remember the red flames. There were two huts. One belonged to my mother, the other was mine. They told us to remove our bedding and clothes and utensils. They splashed some petrol on the grass thatch of my mother's hut. I then idly thought this was unnecessary as the grass was dry. Anyway, they poured petrol on the dry thatch. The sun burnt hot. My mother sat on a stool by the pile of things from our huts and I stood beside her. I had a gikoi on my head. The leader of the homeguards struck a match and threw it at the roof. It did not light, and the others laughed at him. They shouted and encouraged him. One of them tried to take the matches from him to demonstrate how it could be done. It became a game between them. At the fourth or fifth attempt the roof caught fire. Dark and blue smoke tossed from the roof, and the flames leapt to the sky. They went to my hut. I could not bear to see the game repeated, so I shut my eyes. I wanted to scream but I must have lost my voice because no sound left my throat. I suddenly remembered my mother beside me, and I wanted to take her from the scene, to prevent her from seeing it all to the end. For those huts meant much to her because she had built them after Waruhiu, her husband from the Rift Valley, had divorced her from his side. Anyway, she pushed my hands away and she shook her head slightly and she went on staring at the flames. The roofs were cracking. I remember the pain as the cracking noise repeated in my heart. Soon the roofs of the huts fell in, one after the other, with a roar. I heard my mother gasp at the first roar. But she never let her eyes from the sight...something gave way in my heart, something in me cracked when I saw our home fall.' (p.123)

Mumbi told Mugo that she had then, like a man, built her house at the new site. Karanja who had been her friend since childhood and who had helped her once in a while, tried to show his old affection now that Gikonyo was not around—Gikonyo who had beaten Karanja in the race to possess Mumbi. Mumbi however spurned him, as she had done years ago.

And then Kihika was caught and hanged, shattering her parents and herself. It was whispered that Karanja had betrayed him, although Mumbi could not believe it since they had taken the oath together. The trench digging to which women were subjected by the soldiers brought more misery to their lives since it also meant that soldiers picked up women at random at night and took them to their huts to satisfy their lusts. Many had died. Also, there was hardly any food at home and in these circumstances Karanja, who had become a home guard, had brought her some food which she had refused to take. When he came with food, a second time, he said to her—

"You don't understand. Did you want us all to die in the Forest and in Detention so that the whiteman could live here on this land alone? The whiteman is strong. Don't you ever forget that. I know, because I have tasted his power. Don't you ever deceive yourself that Jomo Kenyatta will ever be released from Lodwar. And bombs are going to be dropped into the forest as the British did in Japan and Malaya. And those in detention will never, never see this land again. No, Mumbi." The coward lived to see mother while the brave was left dead on the battlefield. And to ward off a blow is not cowardice. (p.130)

And again—

Karanja always pointed out to me that my faithfulness was vain. The government forces were beating the Freedom Fighters. We never got a letter

or heard a word from those in detention. The radio no longer mentioned them. And with years, Karanja became arrogant towards me. (p. 131)

And then one day, out of the blue, he had told her about Gikonyo's return. He even showed her the list and in that moment of weakness she had given herself up to him:

'That I remember being full of submissive gratitude? That I laughed—even welcomed Karanja's cold lips on my face? I was in a strange world, and it was like if I was mad. And need I tell you more? I let Karanja make love to me... When I woke and realized fully what had happened, I became cold, the whole body. Karanja tried to say nice things to me, but I could see he was laughing at me with triumph. I took one of his shoes and threw it at him. (pp.131-132)

At this point General R. came to Mumbi's place and joined them in their reminiscences. Soon, however, he was back to his obsession of catching Kihika's betrayer and said that he suspected Karanja to be the man. When he reminded Mugo about the celebrations on Thursday by which time they hoped to catch Kihika's betrayer and asked Mugo to lead them, Mugo refused by saying—

'That cannot be,' he said. 'I came here to tell Gikonyo and the Party that I am not a fit man to lead them. The Party should look elsewhere for a leader.' (p.134)

10

Chapter ten focusses on Genral R. and Karanja. To General R. the decision that 'Karanja should die on Independence Day seemed just: that he should be humiliated in front of a huge crowd, if he gave himself up, or else he made uncomfortable, was only a necessary preparation for the ritual.' (p.135)

Ngugi now fills the readers with the details of General R.'s life in his authorial voice, as he has done about other major characters in the novel. Before the war of Independence, General R., we are told, had lived in Rung'ei, working as a tailor. Nobody knew for sure where he came from originally: Nyeri or Embu. They did not even know his real name and called him Ka-40 because once or twice in those few moments of lowered self-defence, he had had said thus:

'See me, a young man of '40. I was born in 1940, circumcised in 1940, went to fight Hitler in 1940, and married in 1940. So me, I am a young man of '40.' (p.135)

While General R. was pronouncing the death sentence on Karanja, Karanja, we are told, was busy trying to find out whether John Thompson was really leaving Kenya. He was obviously very worried because—

... to Karanja, John Thompson had always assumed the symbol of whiteman's power, unmovable like a rock, a power that had built the bomb and transformed a country from wild bush and forests into modern cities, with tarmac highways, motor vehicles on two or four legs, railways, trains, aeroplanes and buildings whose towers scraped the sky—and all this in the space of sixty years. Had he himself not experienced that power, which also ruled over the souls of men, when he, as a chief, could make circumcised men cower before him, women scream by the lift of his finger? (p. 136)

When Mwaura asked him whether it was true that John Thompson was leaving and that 'an African, a man with a black skin like you or me is coming to replace him' Karanja screamed at him, denying the rumour: 'You may think what you like, but Thompson is not going anywhere.'

However, soon thereafter, when Karanja asked Thompson, in a halting voice about his rumoured departure, John Thompson confirmed his worst fears by answering quickly, 'yes, yes'.

11

Chapter eleven focusses on the farewell of John Thompson and the fears and anxieties lurking in the minds of the white people, bringing a state of uncertainty to the fore in every heart. For instance, the departure of John Thompson was considered a kind of sacrifice being made by the colonial government to appease the Africans—

What was he going to do? Had he found a job? Wasn't it a shame the way the British government abandoned men she had encouraged and sent abroad? It came from her yielding to African violence and International Communism. Didn't you see what was happening in Uganda and Tanganyika? The Chinese and the Russians had rushed to establish embassies. Mrs. Dickinson, the librarian, was always the more outspoken in politics and predicted a holocaust after Uhuru. (pp. 142-143)

Driving back from the party, both John Thompson and his wife Margery are in a sombre mood. Thompson, particularly, is still agitated over the impending loss of all that they, the British, had done for Africa:

'Perhaps this is not the journey's end,' he said, at last.

'What?'

'We are not yet beaten,' he asserted hoarsely. 'Africa cannot, cannot do without Europe.'

Margery looked up at him, but said nothing. (p. 144)

12

This chapter focusses on the relations between Gikonyo and Mumbi which seem to have gone from bad to worse ever since Gikonyo had discovered about Mumbi's child from Karanja. After he came back, Mumbi tried to engage him in a conversation telling him about the visit by Mugo and his refusal to lead the celebrations. Gikonyo was in a foul mood because of his M.P. having double-crossed him in procuring the Green Hill Farm. In this mood, he picked up a quarrel with his wife, hit her and received a dressing down from his mother Wangari who called him a coward who was not ready to know about and face the circumstances under which Mumbi had given in to Karanja. In the meantime, Mumbi had left his place to go back to her parents since she found it difficult to live with Gikonyo anymore.

Gikonyo went to consult with Warui about the forthcoming celebrations and the crisis created by Mugo's refusal to lead the celebrations. He also told Warui about his disappointment over the Green Hill Farm. They decided to go to Mugo's hut once again.

In the meantime, Mugo having returned from Mumbi's place who had reminded him of his heroic deed in saving Wambui from the homeguard's whipping, recalled the whole incident in its entirety:

The whole scene became alive and vivid. He worked a few yards from the woman. He had worked in the same place for three days. Now a homeguard jumped into the trench and lashed the woman with a whip. Mugo felt the whip eat into his flesh, and her pained whimper was like a cry from his own heart. Yet he did not know her, had for the three days refused to recognize those around him as fellow sufferers. Now he only saw the woman, the whip, and the homeguard. Most people continued digging, pretending not to hear

the woman's screams, and fearing to meet a similar fate. Others furtively glanced at the woman as they raised their shovels and jembes. In terror, Mugo pushed forward, and held the whip before the homeguard could hit the woman a fifth time. More homeguards and two or three soldiers ran to the scene. Other people temporarily stopped digging and watched the struggle and the whips that now descended on Mugo's body. 'He's mad,' some people later said, after Mugo had been taken away in a police van. To Mugo the scene remained a nightmare whose broken and blurred edges he could not pick or reconstruct during the secret screening that later followed. (p.150)

Mugo's persistent refusal to participate in the Independence Day celebrations, earned him more respect:

The man who had suffered so much had further revealed his greatness in modesty. By refusing to lead, Mugo had become a legendary hero. (p.153)

13

Chapter thirteen opens with the Thabai women in the Rung'ei market watching with curiosity Mugo shopping around in the rain, on the day before the celebrations. They were proud of him: 'Tonight Kenya would get Uhuru. And Mugo, our village hero, was no ordinary man.' Wambui went about, asking women to 'force the issue' with Mugo—persuade him to lead the celebrations since 'Mugo was Kihika born again' (p.156) It was decided to send Mumbi to Mugo. Mumbi, at her parents' place, was however, more worried about what General R. had told her: that Karanja should be killed on the Independence Day.

Should this be done in the name of her brother? Surely, enough blood had been already shed: why add more guilt to the land? She woke up in the morning with the problem still unresolved. (p.158)

She sent a note to Karanja, asking him not to 'come to the meeting tomorrow.' Having done this and feeling a little relieved, she went to Mugo's place to request him to join 'the meeting tomorrow.' However, Mugo declined the invitation, saying that he did not want to reopen the wounds of the past:

'When I was young, I saw the whiteman, I did not know who he was or where he came from. Now I know that a Mzungu is not a man—always remember that—he is a devil—devil... I saw a man whose manhood was broken with pincers. He came out of the screening office and fell down and he cried: to know I will never touch my wife again, oh God, can I ever look at her in the eyes after this? For me I only looked into an abyss and deep inside I only saw a darkness I could not penetrate. (p.160)

Mumbi then appealed to him to talk about himself—his experiences. Suddenly Mugo began to act strange, claiming he had strangled Kihika and now he was going to strangle her—Mumbi.

Ngugi then uses his authorial voice to recall the events leading to the shooting of D.O. Thomas Robson, who as D.O. of Rung'ei had become a legend among the villagers due to his ruthless terror wherein he'd force innocent people to dig their own graves—literally—and then shoot them into it. In May 1955, Kihika shot him dead and then he sought shelter in Mugo's hut. On being questioned by Mugo about their motivation in shedding blood, Kihika had told him—

'We just don't kill anybody... We are not murderers. We are not hangmen—like Robson—killing men and women without cause or purpose...

We only hit back. You are struck on the left cheek. You turn the right cheek. One, two, three—sixty years. Then suddenly, it is always sudden, you say: 'I am not turning the other cheek any more...' (p. 166)

Then Kihika had set up a meeting with Mugo 'in a week's time' to 'organize our underground movement in the new village.' Mugo was confused and 'the fatal day', Friday, therefore, caught him undecided on a course of action. He was shocked to see a poster announcing a price on Kihika's head. In such a state of mind, Mugo went and saw John Thompson the D.O. and informed him about Kihika—about his proposed meeting with Mugo. Having given out the details, Mugo felt giddy—'He did not want to know what he had done.' (p. 174)

5.4 SUMMARY—CHAPTERS 14, KARANJA, MUGO, WARUI, WAMBUI, AND HARAMBEE

14

Chapter fourteen describes the happenings on 12th December 1963 in an anonymous voice from the village: 'In our village and despite the drizzling rain, men and women and children, it seemed, had emptied themselves into the streets where they sang and danced in the mud.' (p. 177) At midnight, the time of the Uhuru, people 'broke into one long ululation. Then the women cried out the five Ngemi to welcome a son at birth or at circumcision. These they sang for Kihika and Mugo.' (p. 178) They danced Muthuio, Mucung'wa and Ndumo. A three mile race was organized in the morning. Mwaura persuaded Karanja to join the race. Mumbi was shocked to see him there. She was particularly embarrassed to see both Gikonyo and Karanja present at the same place at the same time, in her presence. However, circumstances had changed. She had by now known that Mugo and not Karanja was Kihika's betrayer. While trying to strangle her when she was at his place, Mugo had told her—

'Listen, Mugo! I saw my brother die. The District Officer was there and the policemen.'

'You have eyes and ears. Don't you know who betrayed your brother?'

'Karanja! You were there. General R. told us.'

'No!'

She recoiled from him. In his hollow cry, in his look, she knew.

'You!'

'Me- yes- me.' (p. 181)

In the meantime, she had told Wambui that Mugo did not want to take part in the ceremonies. However—

The knowledge she carried inside her involved her in a new dilemma: either Karanja or Mugo. But she did not want anybody to die or come to harm because of her brother. She wished she could talk to Gikonyo, who might find a way out. (p. 181)

Gikonyo, while running in the race, recalled another one. In fact, he heard a train's whistle in his mind:

He heard a train rumbling at the Rung'ei station. He thought of his father in the Rift Valley provinces. Was he really alive? What did he look like? He traversed the wide field of his childhood, early manhood, romance with Mumbi; Kihika, the Emergency, the detention camps, the stones on the pavement, the return home to betrayal passed through his mind in rapid succession. How Mumbi had dominated his life. Her very absence had unarmed him and made him break down. He angrily jerked his head,

compelling himself to concentrate on the present race. He and Karanja were rivals again. But rivals for what? For whom were they competing? Karanja is only mocking me, he thought. He seethed with hatred as he panted and mopped sweat away from his forehead. He ran on, the desire to win inflamed him. He maintained his place close behind Karanja. His aim was to keep a certain pace, reserving his energy for the last lap or so, when he would dash forward, trusting his muscles would obey his will. (pp. 181-182)

Karanja too recalled

‘a scene, long ago, at the Railway Station, when he stood there fighting his knowledge that Gikonyo and Mumbi were left behind, alone. How he had yearned for the woman... Later when he proposed to her, she refused him—with a smile. And that refusal irrevocably bound him to her. He waited for his chance... He sold the Party and Oath secrets, the price of remaining near Mumbi. Thereafter the wheel of things drove him into greater and greater reliance on the whiteman. That reliance gave him power—power to save, to imprison, to kill. Men cowered before him; he despised and also feared them. Women offered their naked bodies to him; even some of the most respectable came to him by night. But Mumbi, his Mumbi, would not yield, he could not never bring himself to force her. Ironically, as he thought later, as he thought now, she only lay under him when he stood on the brink of defeat. He had felt a momentary pang of intense victory which, seconds later, after the act, melted into utter isolation and humiliation. He had taken advantage of her. For this, so he thought, she despised him. He could not face her—not after that shoe which caught him in the face and provoked blinding tears. He had always wanted Mumbi to come to him, freely because he was important to her, irresistible. (pp. 182-183)

And now with the security provided by the whiteman already gone, he walked in the dark corridors. He could not see the sun, and then the letter had come.

Why? He had ignored Mumbi’s warning and come. A new hope had rekindled his heart after learning that Mumbi had left her husband.

The race had now been reduced to two men leading—Gikonyo and Karanja. General R. running next to them, recalled his childhood in Nyeri where he had a chequered childhood and youth, what with a drunken father and a cowering mother. He had finally managed to get away by joining the British army during the war.

Koinandu, who was in the race too, recalled his own youth, the experience during the war and thereafter. He had once raped a white woman he had worked for and we are now told that she was none other than Dr. Lynd.

The race therefore turns out to be a kind of journey down the memory lane for almost all principal characters of the novel.

The race was soon reduced to a battle ‘between Gikonyo and Karanja. Few knew that there were hidden motives and passions behind this battle; the crowd merely felt its peculiar ring and tension.’ (p. 186)

Then an expected turn of events had seen Gikonyo tumble and Karanja, running close behind him, falling along with him. General R. had won the race.

In the meantime the sun brightened up the sky and the celebrations began. The secretary of the Party made a speech, a preacher gave a sermon and finally it was announced that General R. would speak. He recalled for the audience the reason for their fighting:

'You ask us why we fought, why we lived in the forest with wild beasts. You ask why we killed and spilt blood.

'The whiteman went in cars. He lived in a big house. His children went to school. But who tilled the soil on which grew coffee, tea, pyrethrum, and sisal? Who dug the roads and paid the taxes? The whiteman lived on our land. He ate what we grew and cooked. And even the crumbs from the tables, he threw to his dogs. That is why we went into the forest. He who was not on our side, was against us. That is why we killed our black brothers. Because, inside, they were whitemen. And I know even now this war is not ended. We get Uhuru today. Tomorrow we shall ask: where is the land? Where is the food? Where are the schools? Let therefore these things be done now, for we do not want another war...no more blood in my...in these our hands...' (pp.191-192)

And then General R. said—

'May be he who betrayed Kihika is here, now, in this crowd. We ask him to come forward to this platform, to confess and repent before us all.' (p.192)

No body had seen Mugo come to the scene who was now standing up. People waited for him to speak:

'You asked for Judas,' he started. 'You asked for the man who led Kihika to this tree, here. That man stands before you, now. Kihika came to me by night. He put his life into my hands, and I sold it to the whiteman. And this thing has eaten into my life all these years.' (p. 193)

The sun had faded; clouds were gathering in the sky. Nyamu, Warui, General R., and a few other elders remained behind to complete the sacrifice before the storm.

Karanja

After the meeting, Karanja came to his mother's hut. He was in a foul mood although he knew how narrowly he had escaped death, thanks to Mugo. He had decided to go back to Githima when he saw Mumbi. He walked upto her, enquired about Gikonyo and said that he wanted to thank her for the note, the real significance he did not realize then since they had wanted to kill him. On Mumbi's asking him as to who told him this, he narrated to her what had happened at the meeting: how Mugo had come to the meeting and had confessed. Then he had asked Mumbi to see the child for the last time but Mumbi had said no, asking him to leave her alone.

Riding a bus to Githima, Karanja recalled his past—how he had, after Kihika's death, confessed his oath, become a homeguard and later a chief. He had been extremely frustrated after Mumbi had declined his offer of marriage. He had first become a 'hood'—a person who identified—incognito—the Mau Mau activists and later a ruthless killer on behalf of the whiteman:

When he shot them, they seemed less like human beings and more like animals. At first this had merely thrilled Karanja and made him feel a new man, a part of an invisible might whose symbol was the whiteman. Later, this consciousness of power, this ability to dispose of human life by merely pulling a trigger, so obsessed him that it became a need. Now that power had gone. (p.199)

Mugo

Coming back from the hospital where she had been visiting Gikonyo who had refused to acknowledge her presence, Mumbi was in a foul mood. The news about Mugo's public confession had upset her further and she vowed not to go back to Gikonyo —

ever. Her mother berated her for that, reminding her that as per customs Gikonyo was still her husband until he asked for his bride-price back. Sulking, Mumbi sat with her parents when her father observed about Mugo:

'He was a brave man inside,' he said. 'He stood before much honour, praises were heaped on him. He would have become a Chief. Tell me another person who would have exposed his soul for all the eyes to peck at... Remember that few people in that meeting are fit to lift a stone against that man. Not unless I-we-too-in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at.' (p.202)

Mumbi, on hearing this, regretted that she had not gone to see Mugo before coming to her parent's place. She resolved to go the next day, which she did. However, she did not find Mugo in his hut. She also tried to meet General R. but he too was not available in his hut.

While Mumbi is re-enacting in her mind, the scene in Mugo's hut when she had visited him, the author in his omniscient presence, lets us—the readers into the mind of Mugo after he had made the confession to her:

Why should I not let Karanja bear the blame? He dismissed the temptation and stood up. How else could he ever look Mumbi in the face? ... He would stand there and publicly own the crime... As soon as the first words were out, Mugo felt light. A load of many years was lifted from his shoulders. He felt free, sure, confident. (p.204)

After the confession when he had returned to his hut, dismissing the idea of running away, he was visited in his hut by General R. and Lieutenant Koinandu who had told him tersely that the trial was scheduled for later that night and Wambui was to be the judge while they—both himself and Koinandu—would be the only elders present.

'I am ready,' Mugo said, and stood up, without looking at his visitors. General R. and Lt. Koinandu had then led him out of the hut.

Warui, Wambui

Mumbi had decided to go to Mugo's hut the next day. When she went there, she could not find him and when she returned in the night, he still wasn't there. Then she went to Wambui's hut to enquire about him, she found both Warui and Wambui sitting and brooding over the happenings of the past few days. First the accident in which Gikonyo had injured his arm, then the confession by Mugo and then the death of the old woman – Gitogo's mother—who used to live alone in her hut. On Mumbi's enquiring about Mugo, Wambui did not answer her straight, hiding the fact that on the night of the confession, General R. and Lieutenant Koinandu had visited Mugo in his hut and told him about the trial later that night, in which Wambui was to be the judge and besides himself, Lieutenant Koinandu would be the other person present.

When Mumbi told them that Mugo had confessed to her the night previous to the Celebrations when she had visited him in his hut, both Warui and Wambui were surprised, particularly when Mumbi mentioned that she had seen the pain of guilt in Mugo's eyes. Both then observed that they had been deceived by Mugo's eyes. It is apparent, although it is not mentioned clearly that Mugo had had to pay for the crime of betraying Kihika with his life.

Mumbi went home, very disturbed. However, life had to go on:

Perhaps we should not have tried him, she muttered. Then she shook herself, trying to bring her thoughts to the present. I must light the fire. First I must sweep the room. How dirt can so quickly collect in a clean hut! (p.210)

The chapter begins with Gikonyo, convalescing in the hospital, recalling his detention days in Wamumu in the Mweya plains in the Embu district. Here he would often recall his association with Mumbi and would desire intensely to be united with her again. It was there, Gikonyo recalled, that he had first decided to carve out a wooden three-legged stool from a Muiri stem—a wedding gift for Mumbi. He also recalled, lying there in the hospital bed, Mugo's confession and then his own confession of oath before the authorities. What however, puzzled him was the stoic silence of Mumbi and he shuddered to imagine the consequences of revealing to her his secret of having confessed his oath. He also tried to imagine how his children from Mumbi would look like. This desire to be reunited with Mumbi filled him once again with the desire to carve out the stool and all those various figures he had planned to carve on the legs as well as the face on the seat—the face of a woman.

When Mumbi came to see him next, after a day's gap, she told him about the illness of the child. Gikonyo showed concern for the child and also offered that they should speak about the child. After a lot of reluctance, Mumbi agreed to do so for the sake of their future relationship. Thrilled, Gikonyo decided in his mind at once, to carve out the image of the woman on the stool as that of a pregnant woman—'big with child'.

This is the note—a note full of hope represented with the image of a pregnant woman—on which the novel ends. Mumbi represents, clearly, the nation of Kenya, her being big with child representing future hopes of the nation. Their—Gikonyo's and Mumbi's—agreeing to talk over the matter about the child represents the attempt of the divided nation to reconcile its various sections—those who had fought the whiteman for the freedom of the nation and those who had sided with the whiteman—without apportioning blame to one other.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have provided a detailed chapter-by-chapter summary of the novel, *A Grain of Wheat*. The emphasis has been on not only summarizing the story but also on highlighting the theme and focussing on the major characters in the novel. Each chapter summary is supplemented by key quotations from the text. The summary, however, has been provided with the objective of encouraging the student to read the text of the novel in the original. This summary is in no way a substitute for the reading of the text.

UNIT 6 *A GRAIN OF WHEAT* – AN EVALUATION

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this Unit is to present an evaluation of *A Grain of Wheat* as a piece of fiction based on the history of the Kenyan National Movement, setting up a comparison wherever possible with another work of fiction based on the same theme. As T.S Eliot reminds us, a literary critic must compare and analyze. Thus a comparison between *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *Carcase for Hounds* by Meja Mwangi, another Kenyan novelist fictionalising the Kenyan National Movement would be offered during the course of discussion in this Unit.

6.1 THE CONTEXT

6.1.1 The Colonization

The Kenyan national movement--particularly its violent phase--has been the subject of a number of literary works by Kenyans in English. We shall, in this Unit, analyse and evaluate *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. But before we do so, we may like to go into the details of the freedom struggle itself. These details form the pre/text of the novel and only in the light of these details can we evaluate the treatment of this aspect of Kenyan history by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

As stated in an earlier Unit, the covert colonisation of the Kenyan people began towards the end of the 19th century through the granting of a Royal Charter for Trade to the Imperial East African Trading Company within the bounds of what was then known as the East Africa Protectorate. The annexation, however, became overt and formal when the company withdrew for financial reasons and the British government took over the control of the territory in its own hands and appointed a Commissioner for the Protectorate. The resistance against the colonial government began almost

simultaneously with the annexation of the region, but such resistance was in the form of isolated incidents involving small groups of people who were immediately affected by the British control of the region. The government decision to bring in foreign settlers from Europe, Asia and South Africa further complicated the situation and made the freedom struggle by Kenyans not only a prolonged one but also a more bitter one. In the words of Nkrumah:

Kenya under colonial rule, unlike the average colony in West Africa, was plagued with settler problems. Consequently, the liberation struggle in Kenya was bound to be one of the most dramatic in the history of the Continent. (*Not Yet Uhuru*: p.xiv)

The struggle after decades of peaceful constitutional moves both inside and outside the legislative council, took a violent turn in the early fifties when the cup of Kenyans' patient suffering and humiliation at the hands of both the settlers and the colonial government began to overflow.

The freedom movement was the result of ills of colonisation affecting almost all tribes in Kenya. Their lands were taken away from them by the Europeans. Their education cut, their freedom curtailed through forced labour, their wages made miserably low and their pride and dignity trampled through disallowance of observance of tribal customs and rituals and finally through the practice of obnoxious colour bar. (*Mau Mau from Within* p.74)

Although, the struggle against colonisation began almost simultaneously with the act of colonisation, such acts of resistance were both spontaneous and sporadic. These acts, obviously, did not have much impact because of a lack of perspective, proper planning and coordination among various sections of the society.

6.1.2 Freedom Struggle—the Militant Phase

The most violent phase of the freedom movement occurred between the years 1952 and 1957. It all began when the most moderate demands made in 1951 were turned down by the British Socialist Government and a tougher attitude became apparent in the inner councils of the Africans. The basic reason had, of course, been the British government's policy of taking over the most fertile land from the Africans and giving it to the Europeans to cultivate. This led to a chronic shortage of land in the African reserves. As a result, thousands of unemployed youths were forced to work on European farms at miserably low wages and in appalling conditions.

The post-second world war phase saw a new revolutionary atmosphere in Kenya. The social and economic grievance became plainer as more and more Africans became educated and they began to understand that the social system was not immutable. Moreover, thousands of Kenyan soldiers who had recently returned from war duties abroad, had travelled widely and seen Europeans at close quarters in their own home grounds.

The granting of independence to India and Pakistan also inspired ordinary Kenyans, who were now getting more impatient with each passing day. Their revolt against the colonial masters manifested itself in many ways. They, for instance, resented the patronising attitude of the clergy, who though professing Christian brotherhood, regarded the African Christians as inferior beings, Kariuki sums up this resentment in the following words:

When the British came with their missionaries, traders and administrators we felt they had something to teach us which were good. Education, medicine, farming and industrial techniques, these we welcomed. As a tribe the

Europeans had certain characteristics which were perhaps, not pleasant. Quick to anger, inhospitable, aloof, boorish and insensitive, they often behaved as if God created Kenya and us for their use. they accepted the dignity of a man as long as his skin was white. (*Mau Mau Detainee* p.41)

The trade unions too were clamouring for more rights and better working conditions. There were a number of strikes. This brought an offensive from the settlers and the government in the form of 'Kenya Plan'. As the details of this notorious move to convert Kenya into 'whiteman's country' became known in 1949, the radicals among the Kenyans whose political awareness had been steadily increasing over the years, decided to launch a final 'do or die' battle for the liberation of Kenya, accepting the alternative of violence, 'fully realising the suffering it would bring on all of them'.

The Oath:

Once the decision was taken to go for militant actions, the first step was to ensure mass support for those who had gone underground. This was achieved through the administration of an 'oath' to groups of people. The unity of numbers was our strongest, indeed almost our only weapon, and plans for cementing that unity with the Movement of the oath were put in train. (*Mau Mau Detainee* p.43)

The moment the government came to know about the administration of the oath, it came down heavily on not only those who were involved in it but also on a large number of innocent people. The harsh and brutal measures taken by the government to stop the oath proved to be counter productive as more and more young people impatient for a change took the oath.

6.1.3 Mau Mau—the Origins

It was during a raid on the oathing ceremonies at Naivasha that the police party is first reported to have heard the term 'Mau Mau', a name with which they subsequently tried to damn the entire national freedom movement in Kenya, although as Kaggia says, 'we ourselves had no particular name for it in the early days'. The word 'Mau Mau' has no meaning in either Gikuyu or Swahili and there are interesting speculations about its origin. Some suggested that the expression was arrived at through transposition of the word 'Uma-Uma'--out, out--in Gikuyu, which referred to the desire of the Africans that the Europeans leave Kenya. Another explanation offered is that a witness at the Naivasha trial used the expression 'mumumumu', referring to the whispered voices at the oathing ceremonies. This was misheard by journalists as 'Mau Mau' and so reported in the story. Njama, however, links the expression to the Gikuyu word 'Muma' meaning oath, used by a witness at the Naivasha trial and which a police officer was unable to pronounce or spell correctly. He, therefore, created his own pronunciation--Mau Mau.

As the movement grew in strength, simultaneous with the most repressive measures used against the Kenyans at large and the Gikuyu in particular, the British government let loose most foul propaganda to paint the entire movement in total black.

The entire propaganda machinery of the government swung into action. L.B.S. Leakey in his *Defeating Mau Mau* has painted a one-sided and completely distorted picture of the Kenyan reality:

... the noble whiteman, who fervently engaged in bringing civilisation, Christianity, education and the 'good life' to Kenya's backward natives, was suddenly forced to defend self and property, law and order, peace and morality against the treacherous attack of atavistic savages gone mad with a blood lust.

The freedom movement, contrary to the false propaganda unleashed by both the settlers and the colonial government, was the result of colonisation affecting almost all tribes in Kenya. The forcible 'alienation' of land for exclusive European use, the acts of forced labour at miserably low wages, the disallowance of observance of tribal customs and rituals and the observance of the colour bar all compounded together, led to a situation wherein a solution to all these ills was sought to be achieved through the single demand for national freedom.

As in the case of motives of the movement, so also with respect to the details of the sufferings of Kenyans during the struggle, the colonial government told blatant lies. News of atrocities on common Kenyans in the reserves, on those who had been detained in specially created camps and on those who sought refuge in the jungles was suppressed while details of raids by guerrilla fighters were blown out of proportion to malign the movement. But the truth, they say, is like sand held in a closed fist, which always manages to slip out and be revealed. So did the details of gory killings and cruelties perpetrated on Kenyans, particularly during the emergency:

A significant sector of the European settler community tended to interpret the emergency declaration and legislation as promulgating a sort of 'open season' on Kikuyu, Embu and Meru tribesmen. Forced confessions, beatings, robbery of stock, food and clothing, brutalising of various sorts and outright killings were frequent enough occurrences to arouse a fear in the heart of most Kikuyu that the intent of the whitemen was to eliminate the whole Kikuyu tribe. (*Mau Mau from Within* p.71)

Emergency—the crackdown:

The magnitude of the toll of this 'Open season' can be gauged from the fact that during the emergency alone some 10,000 Africans were killed by the security forces and over 80,000 were detained in various camps. Here they were subjected to indescribable brutalities. No detainee was released until he had been passed along a security clearance channel known as 'Pipe line'. Among the Emergency casualties not recorded are the victims of the 'Pipe line' who were injured and permanently disabled by torture to extract confession.

Detention Camps:

Manyani was the largest and perhaps the most notorious camp. This is what Kariuki, himself a detainee at the camp, has to say about the conditions there:

'Manyani', the largest camp, capable of holding upto 30,000 of us, is now a word deeply entrenched in the language of every tribe in Kenya, and no one hopes to understand the present temper of Kenya African politics without some awareness of the life led by our 80,000 detainees during those emergency years. (*Mau Mau Detainee* p.27)

Conditions in the reserves were no better either, where the chiefs, the home guards and other such henchmen ruled the roost with the help of local administrative authorities.

With all their sophisticated weapons and war machinery, as also trained troops, the British government could not crush the freedom movement. Fighting against heavy odds of scarce resources, lack of training, etc., and against superior forces, the guerrillas covered themselves with glory by continuing the struggle for more than four years, which earned them universal acclaim.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, General R. and Lieutenant Koinandu—together with Kihika, who of course is dead before the action of the novel takes place and is only recalled by various characters-- represent the Forest Fighters. Not only do they tell the readers—through their reminiscences on the eve of Uhuru—their life in the jungles but they also pursue the betrayer of Kihika with a single-minded devotion that is symptomatic of their unflinching devotion for the cause of the national freedom struggle.

We will now discuss Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*. It will be our endeavour firstly to discover his point of view from his writings and secondly evaluate this first vis-à-vis the views of another major writer on the same theme—Meja Mwangi in his *Carcase for Hounds* (1974)—and then the truth about the struggle as enumerated above by major participant historians like J.M. Kariuki, Karari Njama, Bildad Kaggia and Oginga Odinga.

6.2 *A GRAIN OF WHEAT AND CARCASE FOR HOUNDS—HISTORY AS FICTION*

A Grain of Wheat is a novel about the freedom movement. Through a series of flashbacks in the lives and experiences of his principal characters--Mugo, Gikonyo, Mumbi, Kihika, Karanja and Thompson--all of who reflect on it on the eve of the Uhuru, Ngugi is able to weave, extremely skilfully, a multi-faced but a powerful picture of the struggle. Both through direct narration and through reflections by his characters, Ngugi creates an atmosphere of hopes and fears, successes and defeats, loyalties and betrayals that were, as we have seen above, typical of the period of the struggle. *A Grain of Wheat* is the story of a group of people from a particular village--Thabai—who are about to celebrate the Uhuru day which is only four days later. This however is also the occasion when each one of them including the white D.O. Thompson, takes stock of his or her role in the freedom struggle, particularly during the emergency and the 'Mau Mau' phase of the struggle. Mugo recalls his betrayal of Kihika, the legendary youthful revolutionary who was hanged. Gikonyo recalls his confession of the oath during interrogation in the detention camp. Mumbi recalls the circumstances under which she was forced to submit herself to Karanja, the village Chief and a collaborator of the colonial administration. Karanja recalls his subservience to the D.O., while Thompson and his wife recall their role as a part of the white colonial administration that was trying its best to 'civilise' the Africans.

A Grain of Wheat—Mugo Recalls

The novel opens with Mugo, a resident of Thabai village in Kamanduru district and a civilian who had suffered extensively at the hands of the government during the freedom struggle, getting up early in the morning for going to cultivate his shamba. Our first impression of him is that he is a strange old man who appears to be seeing phantoms where there are none; one who, like Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, seems to be guarding something within him which he feels every one is out to seek and unravel on this fateful day. Among the first persons he meets is Githua, a fellow victim of the state violence who had not only lost a leg in it but who seems to have gone soft in the head too: "I tell you before the Emergency, I was like you before the white man did this to me with bullets, I could work with both hands." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.4)

As we already know from the accounts of Kariuki, Njama, General China and Bildad Kaggia, the story of Githua is the story of thousands who were disabled during the struggle and Githua's remarks put Mugo in a mood for reminiscing on the cruelties of the white man, the utter senseless killings and tortures that they indulged in. Passing by the hut of an old woman, Mugo recalls how her only son Gitogo, who was both

deaf and dumb, was killed by the government troops during one of their raids on the village:

People were being collected into the town square, the market place, for screening. Githogo ran to a shop, jumped over the counter and almost fell into the shopkeeper whom he found covering amongst the empty bags....'Halt!' the whiteman shouted. Githogo continued running. Something hit him at the back. He raised his arms in the air. He fell on his stomach. Apparently the bullet had touched his heart. The soldier left his place. Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.6)

The last sentence--*Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead*--seems to 'touch' the readers with the same force as the bullet that had killed Gitogo. With this one sentence Ngugi had nailed all those lies which talked of 'Mau Mau' terrorists being killed in 'encounters' with the troops.

Back from the Shamba, Mugo is visited on behalf of the party by a group of village elders: Warui, Wambui and Gikonyo, who want him to lead the celebrations for the Uhuru by making the main speech of the day. Sitting with them and discussing the history of the country, Mugo recalled--"...the day the whiteman came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic witness that whiteman was a messenger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with sugar; his humility was touching." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.12) Gradually, however, something else happened which surprised the people around:

Soon the people saw the whiteman had imperceptibly acquired more land to meet the growing needs of his position. He had already pulled the grass-thatched hut and erected a more permanent building. Elders of the land protested. They looked beyond the laughing face of the whiteman and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried not the Bible, but the sword. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.14)

There could not have been a more precise yet more forthright portrayal of that part of Kenyan history towards the end of the nineteenth century when the British launched a two-pronged attack by the clergy and the soldier to colonise Kenya. It was then, Mugo recalls, that Harry Thuku had appeared on the scene telling them of the discontent with taxation, forced labour on white settler's land and of uprooting of thousands as a result of resettlement schemes for white soldiers from abroad. It was *after he had formed a party and had been arrested that the first protest rally took place*. It was 1923, Warui, another elder of the village who was in the crowd, vividly recalls:

On the fourth day they marched forward singing. The police who waited for them with guns fixed with bayonets, opened fire. Three men raised their arms in the air. It is said that as they fell down they clutched soil in their fists. Another volley scattered the crowd. A man and a woman fell, their blood spurted out. People ran in all directions. Within a few seconds the big crowd had dispersed; nothing remained but fifteen crooked watchers on the ground, outside the State house. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.14)

Mugo then goes on to recall the changing mood of the people--a change from one of defiance to one of militant struggle. Kihika, a fighter who had inspired hundreds of young men had said in an address: "This is not 1920. What we now want is action, a blow which will tell." Kihika, like many others before, had exposed the game of deceit played by the colonisers in the guise of religion:

We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He said. Let us kneel down to pray. We knelt down. Mubia said. Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know his remained open so that he could read the word. When

we opened our eyes our land was gone and the Sword of flames stood on guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasure in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.15)

Once again, the last sentence—*But he laid his on earth, our earth*--exposes the two-pronged attack of the colonial British--through settlers as well as the church--more forcefully than many a long document on the issue.

After the arrest of Kenyatta, Mugo recalls, Kihika disappeared into the forest, later to be followed by a handful of youngmen from Thabai and Rung'ei. Ngugi's message is clear: this is how Mau Mau was born--out of the frustrations of the people to persuade the colonial masters to restore to them what was theirs.

It may not be out of place here at this juncture to refer to another novel based on the same theme written by Meja Mwangi--*Carcase for Hounds*--which suggests an altogether different reason for the beginning of Mau Mau activities. General Haraka, the hero of Mwangi's novel, who is the leader of a group of guerillas, recalls how he had become a Mau Mau activist:

Haraka remembered well when the white man struck him. It came as a resounding surprise, right across his face and into his heart. Though he was stunned, his reaction was quick. Spontaneous. He struck back a blow full of hate and distaste and protest against oppression. The D.C. collapsed and lay unmoving on the dusty floor of the office. For a second, a surge of well-being, of selfish revenge flooded him so that he stood rooted to the spot. Then a splinter of fear wedged its way into his mind. Had he killed him? No, the man was only unconscious. Then the magnitude of his crime sank in. Striking a white man was unheard of. Striking a District Commissioner senseless was unthinkable. The other white men would surely take revenge. An affront to the Queen! They might even shoot him... He had to run. Where to? *Naturally* into the forest, to the little terrorist leader." (*Carcase for Hounds* p.20)

Thus Maguru, son of Nyaga, is transformed into a freedom fighter by exchanging blows with his boss, the D.C. and by fleeing from punishment. The subtle use of the word '*Naturally*' in the last sentence cleverly suggests that most freedom fighters were such criminals fleeing from the law.

Ngugi, like Mwangi in *Carcase for Hounds*, also recalls through his characters, many raids by the freedom fighters but unlike Mwangi he places these raids in their proper perspective. They raided to obtain rations and ammunition, as also to cripple and destroy the machinery of oppression. Kihika and his fellow fighters were not, a gang of terrorists who derived sadistic pleasure out of such raids and killings. As Kihika tells Mugo "We can't just kill anybody....we are not murderers. We are not hangmen like Robson--killing men or women without cause or purpose." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.166)

As we know from the accounts by various freedom fighters, the torture of civilians had begun on a mass scale simultaneously with the militant struggle—a fact that is borne out by the passing of over a million Kenyans through the concentration camps and the 'pipeline' during the four years of the emergency:

"Kihika was tortured. Some say that the neck of a bottle was wedged into his body through the anus as the white people in the Special Branch tried to wrest the secrets of the forest from him." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.17)

Compared to the stories of atrocities or detainees in Manyani, Hola and Lari camps, Ngugi's above description appears to be an artistic understatement.

6.3 WOMEN AND THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT—A GRAIN OF WHEAT

Warui, the oldest of those who survived, recalls the role of Wambui:

"Wambui was not very old, although she had lost most of her teeth. During the Emergency, she carried secrets from the villager to the forest and back to the villagers and towns. She knew the underground movements in Nakuru, Elburgon and other places in an outside Rift valley." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.19)

Several women had played a very heroic role in the freedom movement--the names of Me Kitilifi and Mary Nyanjiru spring to the mind immediately--and through Wambui and Mumbi, Ngugi is paying a tribute to those heroic women warriors. He was to do this again through the character of 'the woman' in his *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976). In fact, with *A Grain of Wheat* Ngugi began a conscious attempt to not only create positively powerful women characters but also began to make them more 'visible' by providing them with greater 'space' in his books. This effort culminated in his portrayal of Wariinga as the protagonist in his *Devil on the Cross*.

The suppression of the movement, as observed earlier, had brought untold miseries on a very large section of civilian population particularly the women. *A Grain of Wheat*, highlights this through the story of Gikonyo and Mumbi--a very poignant portrayal of their love for each other through the tribulations of detention and physical suffering during the emergency. Women's suffering is also highlighted by references to an old woman in the Thabia village whose son—a deaf and dumb young man—was shot dead by soldiers in cold blood during a raid on the village and who had since then lost all interest in living.

In all Ngugi writings—novels, stories, plays—there are always women characters with qualities of unmatched patriotism, stoicism and suffering. These represent the ordinary Kenyan women who played a very significant role during the freedom struggle. However, the highest tribute paid to such womenfolk of Kenya was paid by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo in their joint play—*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*—wherein a very powerful character has been created who is called Woman—simply—and who represents the women of Kenya.

6.3.1 Freedom Movement and Social Tensions: Gikonyo and Mumbi

The story of Gikonyo and Mumbi which, apart from that of Mugo, is the central story of the novel, represents the social tensions spawned by the disruption of traditional African life with the intervention of colonialism and its aftermath. The hardships which Mumbi has to undergo to sustain herself and her parents-in-law after Gikonyo had been arrested and sent to the detention camp, represents the hardships suffered by tens of thousands of families whose lives broke down, thanks to the crackdown after the imposition of the Emergency. Inhuman oppression was let loose by soldiers through bulldozing of whole villages and uprooting people including the raping of women. Even the henchmen of the colonial administration—home guards and village chiefs—exploited the situation to stamp their authority by letting loose a rein of terror and withholding basic needs like food and extracting all kinds of price from their fellow villagers, including sexual gratification from women of the village. The way Karanja went after the people of his village, killing some, severely beating others and bartering food for sex, represents this very ugly face of the Emergency. The manner in which he stalks Mumbi—now cajoling, now threatening, now telling the truth about the atrocities in detention camps, now telling blatant lies about the detainees—is a sordid story which had a thousand replications in real life. And finally, when Mumbi gives in to him and lets him make love to her—the circumstances ironically are more

favourable to her at that point of time because Gikonyo has been freed and is on his way home—only shows that such social disruption would continue to have its negative impact on the lives of people even after the Uhuru is achieved. And this is what precisely happens when Gikonyo discovers that Mumbi has had a child from Karanja in his absence. Refusing to accept the bizarre and abnormal circumstance under which it must have happened—and we do know that the circumstances were both bizarre and very abnormal—he nearly gives up his wife, something quite rare and unusual in the traditional African way of life.

6.4 A GRAIN OF WHEAT: JOHN THOMPSON, MAU MAU AND THE COLONIZATION OF KENYA

Ngugi also presents in *A Grain of Wheat*, the whiteman's response to the Uhuru. Thompson, the D.O., a loyal British bureaucrat, cannot reconcile himself to this changed new reality and has therefore decided to quit his job as well as the country. He too reminisces. He believes that all that they had built in Kenya with so much of hard work would now be wasted since the blacks are incapable of maintaining it, let alone building on it. "Would these things remain after Thursday? Perhaps for two months: and then--test tubes and beakers would be broken or lie unwashed on the cement, the hot houses and seed beds strewn with wild plants and the outer bush which had been carefully hemmed, would gradually creep into a litter-filled compound." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.38)

Thompson also recalls another milestone in his career in Kenya: the strike at the Rira detention camp when he was the officer incharge. "At Rira, the tragedy of his life occurred. A hunger strike, a little beating and eleven detainees died: the fact leaked out. Because he was officer incharge, Thompson's name was bandied about in the House of Commons and in the world press." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.42)

His regret is over two things: the leaking of the news and the bandying about of his name. Thompson's regret, like that of most whites at that time, was also because of the realisation that they, the whites, too were dispensable. "Thompson felt that silent pain, almost agony that people feel at the knowledge that they might not be indispensable after all." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.42)

His wife too has similar feelings which she too like her husband tries to hide behind her doubts about the capabilities of their African successors: "Was she really using this kitchen for the last time? Would she never, never see Githima again? Would her flowers mean anything to whoever would take her place in this house." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.44)

Thompson is one of those who considered the British colonial expansion to be an act of moral crusade to civilise the world. The British, he believed, were like 'Prospero in Africa'--the land of Calibans. Having accepted that position, he goes on to justify the British action against the freedom fighters:

No government can tolerate anarchy, no civilisation can be built on this violence and savagery. Mau Mau is evil: a movement which if not checked will mean complete destruction of all the values on which our civilisation has thriven. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.72)

However, it was left to Kihika and scores of young men who had heard the stories of whiteman from their elders to discover the real face of Prospero:

Kihika's interest in politics began when he was a small boy and sat under the feet of Warui listening to stories of how the land was taken from black

and other warriors who by 1900 had been killed in the struggle to drive out the whiteman from the land: of young Harry and the fate that befell the 1923 procession; of Muthirigu and the mission schools that forbade circumcision in order to eat, like insects, both the roots and the stems of the Gikuyu society. Unknown to those around him, Kihika's heart hardened towards 'these people', long before he had even encountered a white face. Soldiers came back from the war and told stories of what they had seen in Burma, Egypt, Palestine and India; wasn't Mahatma Gandhi the saint, leading the Indian people against the British rule? Kihika fed on these stories, his imagination and daily observations told him the rest; from early on, he had visions of himself, a saint, leading the Gikuyu people to freedom and power. (*A Grain of Wheat* pp.72-73).

6.5 PORTRAYING THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE: NGUGI AND MWANGI

One has only to contrast this with general Haraka's reminiscences about his youth and the way he became a freedom fighter, (*Carcase for Hounds* p.20) to know the difference between Meja Mwangi's portrayal of the freedom struggle and Ngugi's:

He thought back to the time when he was not a general, not general Haraka, but simply Maguru son of Nyaga. And the Chief—he was no Chief but merely Kahuru son of Wamai. Haraka then thought further back to the time when they first met at the forest station, when it was first started. Their families came from different parts of the country to work for Mr. Jackson, clearing the jungle and planting trees. The two youngmen were no more than fifteen. There was no chief in the village then. The tree men were organised by a foreman under the Forest Officer, Mr. Jackson. As the village grew it knit in the vast family of over thirty families. The younger generation formed a society of their own. This was split into sections of adolescent gangs, each led by a self-appointed youth able to dominate the others. *They stole green maize from their parents' gardens and raped village maidens in hordes.* (*Carcase for Hounds* p.18, emphasis added)

In fact, Mwangi makes general Haraka, an ex-accomplice of the colonial government:

He remembered back to the time he headed the village security police before becoming the first chief of Pinewood Forest station that was before the Emergency and the Curfew and the forest fighters were heard of. (*Carcase for Hounds* p.19)

So here is the leader of a group of freedom fighters in the jungles--general Haraka--who was in his youth a juvenile gangster, expert at stealing green maize and raping village maidens in hordes. No wonder the general himself refers to a group as a 'gang' and Captain Kingsley considers them to be nothing but 'murderer Haraka and his band of cut-throats.' (*Carcase for Hounds* p.11)

In sharp contrast Ngugi, as we have seen above, has made use of the actual events--struggle by Waiyaki and the Procession in Nairobi for the release of Harry Thuku in which scores of Africans were killed--as a background for his fictional characters like Kihika.

6.5.1 History and Ideology: Ngugi's Kihika versus Mwangi's Haraka

Ngugi's forest fighter Kihika, incidentally, is dead before the action of the novel begins and we never meet him. Unlike Mwangi's general Haraka, he is a very sensitive young man who drew inspiration from the Indian National movement,

thereby showing a remarkable maturity of approach in recognising the commonness of all such struggles against the colonial British. "Do you know", he told his youthful friends, Gikonyo, Mumbi, Karanja and others, "why Gandhi succeeded? Because he made his people give up their fathers and mothers and serve their one Mother--India. With us Kenya is our mother." (*A Grain of Wheat* p. 83). Kihika is an ideal freedom fighter, who realising that Christianity had come to have a hold on the minds of many and that the priests were using it as a weapon to damn the freedom struggle, uses the same religious sentiment to arouse the people into action. Referring to the death of Christ, he says:

In Kenya we want a death which will change things, that is to say, we want a true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes the oath of unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.83)

Kihika is, in fact, a shrewd leader who uses various kinds of arguments to expose the real designs of the colonial masters. "My father's ten acres? That is not the important thing. Kenya belongs to black people. Can't you see that Cain was wrong? I am my brother's keeper. In any case, whether the land was stolen from Gikuyu, Ubabi or Nandi, it does not belong to the whiteman. And even if it did, shouldn't everybody have a share in the settled area. He owns hundreds and hundreds of acres of land. What about the black men who squat there, who sweat dry on the farms to grow coffee, tea, sisal, wheat and yet only get ten shillings a month?" (*A Grain of Wheat* p.85)

G.D. Killam in his essay on *A Grain of Wheat* in his *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, observes that Ngugi is at 'pains... to insure that his readers know that the struggle was a just one.' (1980:53). He thus considers Kihika's speeches to be laboured. This is uncharitable, to say the least, since Kihika's speeches have a very forceful impact because of their spontaneity and directness backed as they are by his conviction. Once again, in contrast, are the speeches of general Haraka who had only heard about land and other problems from his little leader and repeated them parrot-like (*Carcase for Hounds* p.54) which appear to be contrived completely.

The imposition of the Emergency created a host of other social problems for not only forest fighters like Kihika but for others as well. "More men were rounded up and taken to concentration camps named detention camps for the world outside Kenya. The platform at the railway station was not always empty; girls pined for their lovers behind cold huts and prayed that their young men would come quickly from the forest or from the camps." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.90). Unlike Mwangi, who shows general Haraka, lieutenant Kimamo and others having serious doubts about their cause, (*Carcase for Hounds* p.102) Ngugi shows them very resolute for their cause. "The detainees had agreed not to confess the oath, or give away details about Mau Mau: how could anybody reveal the binding force of the Agikuyu in their call for African freedom? They bore all the ills of the Whiteman, believing somehow that he who would endure unto the end would receive leaves of victory." (*A Grain of Wheat* p. 91). The torture grew as the struggle gained strength. "A common game in Rira had been to bury a man, naked, in the hot sand, sometimes leaving him there overnight." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.116). Even those who were left behind in villages--mostly women, old people and young children--were not spared such torture. Mumbi Gikanyo's wife, recalls:

There were two huts. One belonged to my mother, the other was mine. They told us to remove our bedding and clothes and utensils. They splashed some petrol on the grass thatch of my mother's hut. I then idly thought this was unnecessary as the grass was dry. Anyway, they poured, petrol on the dry thatch. The sun burnt hot. My mother sat on a stool by the pile of things from our huts and I stood beside her. I had a Gikoi on my head. The leader of the

homeguards struck a match and threw it at the roof. It did not light, and the others laughed at him. They shouted and encouraged him. One of them tried to take the matches from him to demonstrate how it could be done. It became a game between them. At the fourth or fifth attempt the roof caught fire. Dark and blue smoke tossed from the roof, and the flames leaped to the sky. They went to my hut. I could not bear to see the game repeated, so I shut my eyes. (*A Grain of Wheat* pp.122-123).

Whole villages were forced to dig trenches in most inhuman working conditions. Once again, Mumbi recalls: "They drove us into it, for, you see, there was a time limit. Women were allowed out two hours before sunset to go and look for food. Nobody else was allowed out: even school children had to remain in the village. Within days, the two hours of freedom were reduced to one. And as the time limit neared, even one hour of freedom was taken away. We were prisoners in the village, and the soldiers had built their camps all round to prevent any escape. We went without food. The cry of children was terrible to hear. The new D.O. did not mind the cries. He even permitted soldiers to pick women and carry them to their tents." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.166)

It is the perpetration of such atrocities that makes Mugo remark that "a Mzungu is not a man--always remember that--he is a devil."

Neither the fighters, not the civilians are, however, scared of this naked show of sadistic brutalities. Nor do they turn their other cheek anymore: "We only hit back. You are struck on the left cheek. You turn the right cheek. One, two, three-sixty years. Then suddenly, it is always sudden, you say; I am not turning the other cheek any more. Your back to the wall, you strike back." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.126) Throughout the struggle, African collaborators played an important role on behalf of their white masters, not only justifying all that the colonial government did but also emphasising the futility of challenging the invincible might of the Mzungu. Thus Karanja says:

The whiteman is strong. Don't ever forget that. I know, because I have tasted his power. Don't you ever deceive yourself that Jomo Kenyatta will ever be released from Lodwar. And bombs are going to be dropped into the forest as the British did in Japan and Malaya. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.130)

Once caught into the logic of surrender and collaboration, Karanja sinks deeper into such dependence:

He sold the party and oath secrets, the price of remaining near Mumbi. Thereafter the wheel of things drove him into greater reliance on the whiteman. That reliance gave him power--power to save, to imprison, to kill. Men cowered before him; he despised and also feared them. Women offered their naked bodies to him; even some of the most respectable came to him by night." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.182)

Ngugi, in fact, goes on to show the complete dehumanisation of Karanja by the colonial machinery. When he shot the freedom fighters or innocent citizens, "they seemed less like human beings and more like animals. At first this had merely thrilled Karanja and made him feel a new man, a part of an invisible might whose symbol was the whiteman. Later, this consciousness of power, this ability to dispose of human life by merely pulling a trigger, so obsessed that it became a need." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.199)

6.6 THE TITLE

You may have wondered what the title of the novel *A Grain of Wheat* means. Ngugi chooses a Christian myth and a religious framework to depict the violent freedom movement in Kenya. The title of the novel is itself from the Bible:

Thou fool, that which Thou sowest is not quickened, except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare again, it may chance of wheat, of some other grain.

(I Corinthians 15:36)

This epigraph appended to the novel is an attempt by St. Paul to answer queries by some Corinthians as to the possibility of the resurrection of the mortal body of Christ. St. Paul hints at the 'potentiality' of the mortal frame to get itself renewed in life for 'a second coming.' But like a sown seed, it has to die first before it can be born again. The image of dying to be born again runs recurrently and is central to the novel. In other words, the alchemy of "rebirth and regeneration" always lies embedded in a dying seed as a strong "potential" only waiting to be born again "through the will of God." (*African Literature Today* No.7 p. 111)

Ngugi applies this Christian epigraph to the gory nationalist struggle against colonialism. Referring to the martyrdom of Waiyaki during the early phase of this struggle, the novelist observes: "Waiyaki's blood contained within it a seed, a grain, which gave birth to a movement whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil" (p.12) Waiyaki sacrifices his life. But he rises again Phoenix—like in the form of a potential and formidable movement. This movement is organically linked to the soil of the people so as to provide succour, strength and inspiration to them in designing and building a new nation corresponding to their aspirations. Emphasising the need for sacrifice by one and all for a national cause, Kihika says:

I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say that you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ. Christ then is not one person. All those who take up the cross of liberating Kenya are the true Christs for us Kenyan people (p.95).

According to Govind Narayan Sharma, "Kihika is a true Christ who, through sacrifice, not only justifies himself but also brings about a revolution in the lives of his friends and followers by showing them the way to the spiritual regeneration." (*African Literature Today* No.10 p.170) Such a spirited defence of Kihika seeks to transcend the limitations of a religious principle so as to cover and embrace a secular pursuit; a social ethic; a national aspiration and a sense of commitment. Obviously, Kihika's sense of religion is not confined to its meaning in an abstraction but it is sought to be applied to a people engaged in a grim battle against colonial forces. Kihika feels stung by a remark made by his friend, Karanja, who reminds Kihika of his own saying that "Jesus had failed." (p.94) Karanja even wonders whether Kihika is trying to resort to religious revivalism. For a moment, Kihika is nonplussed. But he does not give in to the sarcasm or the logistics of Karanja. He continues to argue forcefully:

Pressed people have a cross to bear. The Jews refused to carry it and were scattered like dust all over the earth....In Kenya we want deaths which will change things, that is to say, we want true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. (P.95)

This passage has several layers of meaning and inferences. It points out categorically that Christ had failed in the Kenyan context. This is a common phenomenon in any colonial situation where the alien religion of Christianity always tended to support an oppressive regime causing hardships to the colonised. Ngugi is of the view that Christianity as an organised institution, paved the way for the coloniser and unhesitatingly supported him in consolidating his position in the colonies. Along with religion the imperial enterprise also used language as a tool of continued colonisation.

For example, English continues to occupy a superior status vis-à-vis indigenous languages in most colonised cultures.

Africans were also taken away from their places as slaves and scattered "all over the earth." Hence, the novelist appeals to the suffering masses the world over "to carry the cross" and bear the burden and take the fire right into the midst of the enemy's camp using the tools of the religion and the sword or the gun which had been used so far by the colonial master. In short, Ngugi is using Christian mythology to inspire a feeling of regeneration and revolution among oppressed peoples.

6.7 CHARACTERISATION

The portrayal of various characters in *A Grain of Wheat* is discussed in terms of their distinct peculiar circumstances and their sense of identity with the community.

6.7.1 Warui

"Warui's life was the story of the movement", (p. 18) which itself came into being imperceptibly as soon as the prophecy of Mugo wa Kabira about the arrival of "a people with clothes like the butterflies" (p. 10) became a reality. Warui is the living symbol, an important witness and an active participant in the 1923 procession against the arrest of Harry Thuku and in a similar upsurge against the imprisonment of Jomo Kenyatta and others in 1952. It is only in the fitness of things that he is given a place of prominence at the Uhuru celebrations of Dec. 12, 1963. It is an honour to a rural individual peasant who represents the collective conscience of the rural peasantry of Kenya.

6.7.2 Wambui

Wambui is not as old as Warui. She is an active participant in the Movement during the emergency in Kenya. She is something like a "courier" of the modern Liberationist struggles entrusted with the job of carrying messages to and from the forest. Once she "carried a pistol tied to her thighs near the groin." (p. 19) She was interrogated and searched by a homeguard. As the fellow was about to touch the vital spot, she screamed and teased the fellow saying, "I'll lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother, it is so aged, and see what gain it'll bring you for the rest of your life." (p. 19-20) She made a gesture to lift her clothes, but the fellow leaves her alone and she is let off. Wambui is assigned the role of a judge to try Mugo for the latter's betrayal of Kihika. She is of the view that they "should not have tried him." (p. 243) But, nevertheless, she feels the need "to sweep the room" and "light the fire" as she realizes how "dirt can so quickly collect in a clean hut." (p. 243) Ngugi fulfils his commitment of historicizing marginal men and women as represented by Warui and Wambui.

6.7.3 Koina

Koina was conscripted as a cook during the Second World War. He is fiercely independent and bold. After the War, he worked in a white man's shoe factory. When he demanded better wages, a decent house and a car, he was fired. It sobered him a little. Then, he joined Dr. Lynd as a house boy. Dr. Lynd was a spinster but lived in a house which was like a mansion. Her dog had its own room in the house, with a bed and sheets and blankets! while most of his fellow countrymen went without a proper roof over their heads. He thought about all this, took the Oath to join the Kenya Land and Freedom Army and became its lieutenant. He is propelled by a passion to drive away the likes of Dr. Lynd and her dogs from Kenya, a blackman's country. He leads two of his colleagues and storms into Dr. Lynd's

home, snatches her two guns and a pistol, and leaves the place after gang-raping her with vengeance. He also kills her dog with his panga and says. "Let me never see you again in this country." But to his shock, Dr. Lynd and her dog (another one) continue to live in the post-independence Kenya as though to mock at the blackman's sense of independence.

6.7.4 General R.

It is **General R.** (Russia) under whose direction the celebrations of Uhuru are conducted at Rung'e. He is obliged to deliver the main speech in place of Mugo. He evolves his own theory of violence and advocates the need for its use in a colonial situation.

According to Frantz Fanon, the 'race' dimension is a significant factor in addition to the class conflict in a revolutionary struggle. General R. like Fanon, lends legitimacy to violence against the oppressor, General R. justifies why they "killed and split blood." He says:

He who was not on our side, was against us. That is why we killed our black brothers. Because, inside, they were whitemen. And I know even now this war is not ended. We get Uhuru today. But what's the meaning of "Uhuru"? It is contained in the name of our Movement: Land and Freedom.....

We want a Kenya built on the heroic tradition of resistance of our people. We must revere our heroes and punish traitors and collaborators with the colonial enemy. (p.221)

General R. is hardened because of his parents, his harrowing experience of the white man's war, his own underground life in the forest for seven long years. He is on the look out for a sacrifice as part of the Uhuru celebrations. Consequent upon the betrayal of Kihika as confessed by Mugo himself, General pronounces: "The trial will be held tonight.....your deeds alone will condemn you." (p.238)

6.7.5 Gatu

Gatu is a detainee in a detention camp. He is probably the most lively character (next to Mumbi) in the novel. He provides fun and laughter in the midst of irony and suspense, tension and violence which are built into the novel. His gruesome murder in cold-blood casts a spell of gloom on the fellow detainees evoking a sense of the macabre on the one hand and empathy on the other. Gatu's sense of the history of the peoples of the world in relation to their liberation struggles in India, America, Russia and Africa is tremendous. His endless narration of stories marked by fantasy and fun and his sense of performance while telling them relieves the fellow detainees from their monotony, alienation and disgust.

He joins the Movement fairly early in life. His unflinching faith in it inspires the fresh oath seekers to whom he administers the Oath. He takes the beating and the tortures like a funeral ram. Often he would be confined in a cell alone because of his skill in "mimicking the English voices and miming their features." (p.108) Gatu becomes the symbol of the collective resistance to colonialism.

Gatu is a loner in the world without anybody to call his kith and kin. Yet his sense of the community is much more than those who are privileged to enjoy the warmth, comforts and the love of a family life. It is also possible for him "to laugh at himself and others." (p.111) He was taken away one evening, tortured and hanged in his cell. The death of Gatu thoroughly demoralises the fellow detainees. This unnerves and unsettles Ginkonyo who admits his Mau-Mau oath. Gatu's death underlines the tension between hope and human weakness.

6.7.6 Gikonyo

Gikonyo has in him the potentialities of a capitalist. He has a farm plot of five acres, a shop at Rung'ei and a lorry. On top of it all, he is the local Chairman of the Movement. He achieves all this within four years of his release from detention. The key to his success is due to a sense of application and hard work. He is aware of and very frank about the weak side of his personality. He tells Mugo praising the latter while conceding his own frailty: "I would have sold Kenya to the white man to buy my own freedom." (p.68) He says further "you have a great heart." (p.68) It is again Gikonyo who pays tributes to Mugo on the latter's confession of his guilt in public.

'He was a brave man, inside,' he said. 'He stood before much honour, praises were heaped on him. He would have become a Chief. Tell me another person who would have exposed his soul for all the eyes to peck at.' He paused and let his eyes linger on Mumbi. Then he looked away and said, 'Remember that few people in that meeting are fit to lift a stone against that man. Not unless I-we-too-in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at.' (p.233-34)

Gikonyo's assessment of the heroic streak in Mugo's character is highly incisive and discerning. It points out the need to indulge in self-introspection by one and all to know their weaknesses and limitations.

6.7.7 Mugo

Mugo is the most complex character in the novel. He is a fascinating person and a great betrayer at the same time. The novel in a way is a study in human nature and human psychology attempted through the psyche of Mugo. His attempt to wriggle out of a tension between his inescapable reality of loneliness and his need to return to the community – is sought to be dramatized by the novelist. According to Robson, Mugo is often "in a state of limbo, poised between the several different images he possesses - the hero, the sufferer, the betrayer, the hermit." (p.53) This, precisely, is the complex nature of Mugo's personality. On the one hand, he consciously attempts to be free from any involvement with others. On the other hand, he craves for the company of somebody or the other.

Mugo seems to be haunted by a desire "to kill" by strangling with his strong arms. He relishes the image of his attempt to strangle his aunt. The details of the same make one sit up and think about what sort of man Mugo is:

He would get her by the neck, strangle her with his naked hands. Give me the strength: give me the strength, god. He watched her struggle, like a fly in a spider's hands; her muffled groans and cries for mercy reached his ears. He would press harder, make her feel the power in his man's hands. Blood rushed to his finger-tips, he was breathless, acutely fascinated by the audacity and daring of his own action. (p.8)

He tells Mumbi that he had strangled her brother, Kihika. This is a distortion of the fact. He threatens to strangle Mumbi too and he nearly strangles her. After he shares the secret of Kihika's betrayal by him to the white man with her, he becomes hysterical and speaks incoherently, and in a flash jumps at her giving her no chance to escape. She is terrified as he "closed in on her, one hand on her mouth, the other searching her throat. She panted and whimpered horribly." (p.186) But Mugo comes to his senses soon and releases her from his grip.

Mugo is haunted by the burden of his guilt. Whenever anybody looks at him, he feels naked. He can not stand the anomaly of being treated as the village hero. Like Gatu, he bears his torture during his detention stoically. Unlike his fellow detainee, he has never taken any oath nor does he have anyone to return to as and when he is released. In the absence of an oath, he is more free and less bound to any cause. The irony is

that many detainees—Karanja, Gikonyo and several others confess their oath and ensure their release. His daring attempt to save Kihika's pregnant wife from being tortured becomes a living legend testifying to his humanity.

He walks to the dais like a hero and his daring admission of his betrayal of Kihika is both dramatic and anticlimatic. Following his confession, "Mugo felt light. A load of many years was lifted from his shoulders. He was free, sure, confident." (p.235) On seeing, Konia and General R., he says: "I am ready" (for the trial). (p.238) This is heroic indeed for the one who "took refuge in reticence" (p.66) and lived like a hermit. Eileen Julien treats Mugo as the hero of the novel and identifies him with the reader. She observes: "Mugo – in his complexity, resembles the reader.

He wants desperately to be integrated into the whole but is isolated by his crime and guilt." (*African Literature Today* p.142) Mugo's courageous confession puts most people to shame as they feel stripped naked from within. Ochola-Ojero comments: "humanity's task is to face up to the problem of shared guilt, for to err is human." (*Busara* No:2 p.43) Most people hang their heads in shame for Mugo and on their own behalf due to their own consciousness of their sense of betrayals, lapses and for all their misdeeds or indifference during a critical phase of their history. Thus, Mugo "is human in both the most glorious sense and in the most pathetic sense, such that his admission of his human nature is a victory – not for absolute virtue but for humanity."

6.8 CONCLUSION: A GRAIN OF WHEAT AS A COMPLEX PORTRAYAL OF HISTORY

Here then is Ngugi's portrayal of a traumatic phase in the history of Kenya--the so-called Mau Mau--a phase in which sections of a highly complex society comprising of people belonging to various African tribes, white settlers and Indians acted and reacted to events of violence in a highly emotionally surcharged and often contradictory manner. As P. Ochola - Ojero puts it:

In *A Grain of Wheat* the author probes into the psychology of those characters who have undergone serious difficulties and consequent disillusionment but who during the time of emergency have found some meaning and purpose in life in the tough fight for their country's independence. ("Of Tares and Broken Handles")

However, the novel is not as has been stated by both Ochola -Ojero, and David Cook (1983:69) about the theme of betrayal alone, in which 'all are guilty'. While it may be true that most major characters have—during some stage of their respective lives—acted in a manner that may be contrary to the behaviour expected from them at that time--Mugo betrays Kihika, Gikanyo confesses the oath and Mumbi sleeps with Karanja--it cannot be held against them as 'betrayal', particularly of the cause in question, namely, the freedom struggle. Mugo, for instance, redeemed himself much before his final confession when at Rira detention camp, he is singled out by Thompson for severe beatings:

Sometimes he would have the warders whip Mugo before the other detainees. Sometimes, in naked fury, he would snatch the whip from the warders and apply it himself. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.117)

Further, he had saved a woman--Wambuku--and many others from being beaten in the trenches.

The novel presents a very complex portrayal of the freedom struggle--the role of various sections of the society, their hopes and fears on the threshold of freedom. The

hopes of Warui, Wambui, General R and Lieutenant Koinandu, the fears of Mugo and of Karanja and the conflicting feelings of Gikonyo and Mumbi. Mixing fact with fiction--Kenyatta and Thuku with Kihika and Karanja--Ngugi creates a unique picture of the freedom struggle, which is truer than history and more imaginative than ordinary fiction.

The villagers of Thabai, represent the ordinary people of Kenya who, with all their human frailties and foibles, were forced to make compromises under terror and torture but still upheld the cause. Kihika represents the revolutionary youth who saw a basic unity in the struggle of the colonial world and who sacrificed everything for freedom. Karanja on the other hand represents the collaborationists who are basically cowards and who put self before society. Gikonyo and Mumbi, once again representing thousands of ordinary people, magnify those personal relationships that went to pieces under the Emergency through sheer physical separation for long periods. While focussing on those traumatic times which the Kenyans faced during their struggle for freedom, Ngugi also hints at the shape of things to come in independent Kenya. Although people danced and sung on the streets on the Uhuru day, showering praise on 'Jomo and Kaggia and Oginga' and although they 'recalled Waiyaki's heroic deeds', they were not unaware of their dream of independent Kenya as a Shamba for all turning sour. The way their M.P. grabs Mr. Burton's Green Hill Farm, denying Gikonyo and other villagers a chance for a cooperative farm, is symbolic of the ensuring struggle between the people and their leaders in new Kenya--a theme which Ngugi was to explore in his next novel *Petals of Blood*.

6.9 LET US SUM UP

In this chapter we have presented an evaluation of *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o as historical fiction. Evaluating it in the background of the Kenyan National Freedom Movement, we have also compared it with another novel—*Carcass for Hounds*—by another Kenyan novelist, Meja Mwangi whose text is also based on the same theme. Through a thorough analysis of various events and characters we have tried to show that Ngugi has succeeded in capturing a very complex reality or what could be called extraordinary times in the history of modern Kenya. While doing so we have also presented, with the help of relevant quotations, Ngugi's ideological standpoint of various issues relating to colonialism, nationalism, class structure of post-colonial societies and the role that various sections of the society played during the Freedom Movement.

6.10 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the character of Mugo. Do you think that he is the hero of the novel? Why?
2. The Emergency disrupted the social life of Gikonyo and Mumbi. Discuss.
3. What socio-political forces does Karanja represent in *A Grain of Wheat*? Discuss.
4. Discuss the role played by women—as delineated in *A Grain of Wheat*—in the National Freedom struggle.
5. In what way does John Thompson represent the colonial point of view? Discuss.

6. *A Grain of Wheat* is a very complex portrayal of a significant period of Kenyan history. Discuss.

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7. Based on *A Grain of Wheat*, discuss Ngugi's world-view.

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