CHAPTER - IV

NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN LITERATURE:

A GRAIN OF WHEAT

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 chapter, analyse and evaluate A Grain of Wheat by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and also set up a comparison between this novel and A Carcase for Hounds written by another prominent Kenyan novelist, Meja Mwangi. But before we do so, we may like to go into the details of the struggle, since we did not include these in our previous chapter on Kenya. These details form the pre-text of the novel and as such only in the light of these details can we evaluate the treatment of this aspect of Kenyan history by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

The covert colonisation of the Kenyan people, as stated earlier, began towards the end of 19th century through the granting of a Royal Chater 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.

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.

Although, as stated earlier, 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 lack of perspective, proper planning and coordination among various sections of the society.

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 Europeans to cultivate. This led to 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 grievances 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 homegrounds. As Bildad Kaggia, himself a war-returnee, puts it:

We could no longer accept the belief that a mzungu was better than an African. This generally pervasive feeling brought about the formation of organisations like the '40

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5. J.M. Kariuki, Mau Mau Detainee, op.cit., p.43. This and all subsequent references are from the Penguin Books edition of 1964.
group' which was mainly made up of ex-servicemen. These youngmen could not accept the repressive methods in the reserves.

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.

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.'

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.

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 act of 'oath' was

8. Ibid., p.43.
condemned in the most derogatory terms. This is how Margery Perharm describes it in her Forward to kariuki's book:

The movement was fostered and bound together by secret and graded oaths, and the bestiality of the more advanced of these was so revolting to Europeans, and not only to them, that it seemed to many that those who used such methods ceased to be normal human beings.

However, Kariuki himself has the following explanation to offer:

It is easy enough for anyone who knows my people to understand that it was spontaneous decision that they should be bound together in unity by a simple oath.... It started slowly, indeed regretfully, and was an oath of unity and brotherhood in the struggle for our land

In the opinion of Bildad Kaggia, "Given the settler's hold on Kenya, the resistance movement had to be secret and underground. The oath ensured the secrecy of

10. Ibid., p.49.
membership and activities."

The harsh and brutal measures taken by the government to stop the oath proved to be counterproductive as more and more young people impatient for a change, took the oath. The movement became increasingly radical and soon 'developed by action and reaction into a full-scale rebellion involving the soul of my people.'

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 suggest 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 'Mumia' 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.

Whatever the circumstances of origin of the expression, the name, 'Mau Mau' is 'an illustration of how successful propaganda can damn an entire movement to which thousands sacrificed everything, including their lives, by attaching to it an appellation that conjures up all the cliches about the 'dark continent' which still crowd the 13 European mind.'

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. At the Kapenguria trial, the Deputy Prosecutor, for instance, referred to 'Mau Mau' as 'a sort of stern gang'. The government tried hard to describe it as primarily a Gikuyu rebellion, lacking any all Kenya basis and failing to get any support across tribes:

The Mau Mau movement was in fact a

rebellion and in the main, the rebellion of
a single tribal group, that of the Kikuyu,
with some kindred and neighbouring group,
the Kamba, Meru and Embu, affecting in a
varying but lesser degrees.

Similarly, Margery Perham is of the opinion that 'the Mau
Mau movement, however, failed to extend beyond the Kikuyu
and those groups closely linked with them.'

The entire propaganda machinery of the government
swung into action, trying to convince the Kenyans at large
that those who had taken to the bush were thirsty for the
blood of everyone else. L.B.S. Leakey too 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
treachery attack of atavistic savages

15. Ibid., p.19.
gone mad with a blood lust.

Again, concerted efforts were made to suppress or underplay the real causes of the movement. Margery Perham, for instance, believed that the Gikuyu had lost only a very small portion of land to European settlers and as such their sense of increasing oppression was 'more psychological than reasoned'.

The Kenyans, both during the freedom struggle, and after the end of hostilities, have tried to correct this gross distortion of their heroic struggle on each of the above counts:

The mzungu explanations are not just unconvincing, they are lies which must be corrected. 'Mau Mau' must be represented in its true perspective. It must be recognised and praised for the true liberation movement it was, the first of its kind of the continent.

Mau Mau was, therefore, not, as has been sought to be portrayed by the British, a Gikuyu primitive organisation. It was in fact an organisation formed by KAU militants who

had lost faith in constitutional methods of fighting for independence. It was, therefore, ready to achieve that end through any means. In fact, this act of putting the movement in its true perspective had a welcome effect not only on the morale of the Kenyans but it also opened the eyes of the common Britishers about the true motives of their government in Africa.

They were surprised and indignant to hear about how their own government was opposing Africans. This was news to them. At that time the majority of English people believed that their government in the African colonies was a benevolent one which 'worked very hard to uplift the African'. They felt ashamed to hear that the main task of 'their' government was to exploit Africa and to do everything possible to keep Africans poor and backward.

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 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.

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.

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 up to 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 tempo of Kenya African politics without reference to the life led by our 80,000 detainees during those emergency years.

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

They said that things were very bad there and that the Reserves at this time were no place for young men, who were being chased and arrested on the slightest pretext. Many of them in desperation had already run away into the forest to escape this harrying.

Even Marjory Perham was forced to concede that the authorities were guilty of acts of torture:

In the early years of some incidents of the torture of prisoners came to light. When I was in Kenya in 1953, I heard stories of harsh treatment and I made my own protest to the Governor. The death of eleven hard-core prisoners at Hole camp at the hands of African warders in 1959 shocked the British

20. Kariuki, Mau Mau Detainee, op.cit., p.27.
opinion and led to an enquiry into the incident.

Besides Hola and Marzari, there were many other camps like Lari and Langata where similar massacres of innocent people who had been detained illegally, took place.

With the help of tens of thousands of British troops specially flown for the purpose, the government launched the notorious 'Operation Anvil' against both the civilians in cities and the fighters in forests which hardened the attitude of the guerrillas who became 'desperate men whose souls were filled with the hatred born on both sides in the travail of any war'. The intensification of the military operations against them instead of demoralizing them had a salutary effect on the fighters. "Out of dire necessity the groups of largely illiterate peasants who

22. Kariuki, Mau Mau Detainee, op.cit., p.12. Incidentally, Wole Soyinka, the Nobel-Laureate Nigerian playwright, poet and novelist has an interesting story to tell about the killings at Hola being turned into a play called 'Eleven Dead at Hola' during a performance of which he refused to go on stage because as an African he felt humiliated at the manner in which Africans were being depicted before a primarily European audience.

23. "In operation Anvil 25,000 soldiers and police rounded up the entire African population of Nairobi--just over 100,000 -- was screened and despatched to specially prepared detention camps all men between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five -- the warrior age -- from the so-called 'affected tribes.'" Oginga Odinga Not Yet Uhuru, op.cit., p.118.
went into the forests became under their great generals, experts at guerilla warfare, and they defied the might of Britain and Kenya for four years."

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 guerillas covered themselves with glory by continuing the struggle for more than four years, which earned them universal acclaim. Among them was a British general who advised the government to give up, since the movement could not be stamped out by force. The movement brought to the fore a number of truly great soldiers by any standards of military warfare. To name only a few, Dedan Kimathi, Stanley Mathenge, Gitau Matenjagwo, Ihura Kareri, Manyeki Wangombe, Kago Mboko, Mbaria and Warihiu Itote were some who were constantly feared by the British government, British soldiers and their helpers.

Apart from the successes in the field, the political achievements of the struggle were also far reaching:

As to what 'Mau Mau' achieved, only blind people could not appreciate the many concessions which the British government

granted Kenya ... These concessions were what K.A.U had been demanding for years. During the early months of the Emergency the colonial secretary said no change would be possible until the revolt was squashed. But before the beginning of the struggle, there was no sign of any of them being granted. The British government followed one concession by another, and it was clear that while the British tried on the one hand to discredit 'Mau Mau' as a primitive organisation whose only aim was to return the tribe to the past, another part of the government accepted the fact that 'Mau Mau' was political and that hostilities would only be ended with political advancement for Africans.

In the opinion of Kaggia, the following changes were effected within a short time as a direct result of the armed struggle. These changes eventually paved the way for Kenyan independence:

1. In 1954 a new constitution (the Lyttleton

Plan) started giving Africans for the first time in Kenya's history, one Minister in the government.

2. In 1955, the Coutts Commission was appointed to work on demarcation of African constituencies and to devise a method of voting for Africans.

3. In the same year the ban on political parties was lifted and Africans were allowed to form district political parties.

4. In 1956, two portfolios were given to Africans.

5. In 1957, limited voting rights were given to Africans and the number of African Members of Parliament increased to eight.

6. In 1958, the number of African members of Parliament increased to fourteen.

7. In 1959, the Emergency Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring was removed from office. He had vowed for years to 'crush' Mau Mau.

8. Britain agreed to a round table conference with the African members to decide on Kenya's future.

Let us once again borrow the words of Kaggia to sum up the impact of the 'Mau Mau' struggle on not only Kenya but also on the entire African politics:

The Mau Mau struggle, whether one likes it or not, will stand in history as one of the greatest liberation struggles in Africa. It was the first of its kind on the continent. Its heroes will be remembered by generations to come. Kenya would do a great service to future generations by establishing permanent monuments to this noble struggle. The greatness of the 'Mau Mau' struggle becomes more striking when one remembers that the fighters had no outside contacts, arms supply or money. 'Mau Mau' relied on its own resources. Money was collected from followers and supporters. In addition to capturing arms, the soldiers manufactured their own. It is time to recognise their achievements. Long live 'Mau Mau': Long live the freedom of Kenya, which it fought for and brought about.

This, in brief, is the history of the 'Mau Mau' struggle on various aspects of which many Kenyan writers writing in English including Ngugi wa Thiong'o have based their writings. Each writer has, of course, interpreted this part of Kenyan history in his own way. We will first discuss a novel by Meja Mwangi - Carcase for Hounds and then Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat. It will be our endeavour to firstly discover their respective points of view from their writings and secondly evaluate these vis-a-vis the truth about the struggle as enumerated above by major participant historians like J.M. Kariuki, Karari Njama, Bildad Kaggia and Oginga Odinga.

Meja Mwangi's Carcase for Hounds, set during an important stage in the Mau Mau liberation struggle in the Laikipia District, is one of the first novels based on 'Mau Mau' phase of the freedom movement of Kenya. The plot revolves around a group of freedom fighters led by general Haraka and his lieutenant Kimamo. Placed in opposition are Captain Kingsley, an ex D.C. and Chief Simba, a former companion of general haraka in his younger days.

On the face of it, the story highlights poignantly the difficult conditions in which the group fights against the ever increasing strength of government troops: acute shortage of food and ammunition, vagaries of weather and
the sabotage by government collaborators from amongst the Africans. For instance, the shortage of arms and ammunition is emphasized in the very beginning in the following conversation between General Haraka and Kimamo, his lieutenant:

'And there are those traps to check'. He spoke almost regretfully.

'How many do we have across there?' The big one turned to the little one.

'We laid four yesterday', he replied.

'Three of them are useless. They have not caught a deer for five days.'

'We will check just the one', the big man stated.

'That one is too close to the village. Only a stone's throw from the road.'

Not only food, a constant supply of arms and ammunition is equally vital for the survival of the movement:

'The arms' he asked.

'No words about those' Weru answered.

'Arms are what we want', he said, 'Many guns and ammunition'.

'Ammunition', he said.

The other looked down on his hand and the four sickly, dark copper 303s. With luck those were four white soldiers lying copper dead on nervous little Weru's palm. Four white soldiers, and there were hundreds, thousands more arriving at the capital from overseas!'

Like those of food and ammunition, the sources of information are drying up too. Weru, their contact man with Nairobi, shows up very late. This, we are given to understand, is very unusual. Again, not only does Weru bring the bad news of 'a big swoop in Nairobi' and of the arrest of 'most of the top organisers', but he also expresses his inability to meet them any more:

'I can't, general.... I can't.'

'Can't what?'

Go on meeting you like this every week, general', he cried.

'It seems they know all about us. Simba is becoming suspicious.

They will kill me. Please get somebody else, another messenger, please.'

30. Ibid., p.7.
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30. Ibid., p.7.
Thus the very first episode sets the tone of the subsequent events: a group of forest fighters in the Likki river area in the Aberdares, in a desperate battle against an ever-growing army of white soldiers and ever-shrinking sources of food, ammunition and information. However, a closer reading of the text reveals something else as well: the negative attitude of the author to damn the entire freedom movement in Kenya. It is negative not because the author believes that the movement to be a 'losing battle' but because he shows the entire fight to be based on a petty personal quarrel between General Haraka, who was then simply Maguru, and Captain Kingsley, who was then the District Commissioner. In a reminiscence, Captain Kingsley recalls:

He remembered the Haraka he knew, a brawny giant with cunning calm eyes that seemed to hide all feeling. A calm thief, until that one time in the chief's office when the devil had dared strike back at him, a district commissioner.

General Haraka, too, recalls the same episode which converted him from being a faithful chief into a freedom fighter:

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."

Thus Maguru, son of Nyaga, is transformed into a freedom fighter.  

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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. Again, Haraka's reference to the leader as a 'terrorist leader' emphasises the negative attitude toward the movement by those who themselves were becoming a part of it. That this is not an isolated and far-fetched interpretation but is consistent with the author's evaluation of the movement, is evident from the tracing of Haraka's personal history as a young man before the culmination of trading blows with the D.C.: 

He thought back to the time when he was not a general, not general Harka, but simply Maguru, 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 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 young men 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 into a 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.

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 his group as a 'gang' and Captain
Kingsley considers them to be nothing but 'murderer Haraka
and his band of cut-throats'.

Gikuyus are a highly organised society with a strong code
of 'dos and don'ts' for its members with an equally
elaborate code of punishment for violations. This was the
impression of early missionaries:

33. Mwangi, Carcase for Hounds, op.cit., p.18, emphasis added
34. Ibid., p.11.
...there were a good many things that the missionary spoke against in sermons and in instruction classes. Obviously these things, lying, stealing, murder, adultery, etc., were unchristian but most of them were things that the native himself thought of as wrong.

This is also evident from the portrayal of the highly disciplined Gikuyu society by Elspeth Huxley in her novel *Red Strangers*:

> You, my son, speak to me, Waseru said. His voice was high and Mughengi saw that his arms were shaking with anger. "Is there truth in what they are saying in the homesteads of Orumu's clan? Have you poured shame over the heads of the men of your clan? Have you indeed struck down one of your own age-grade as if he had been a wild pig, and drawn his blood?"

Mugo Gatheru, himself a Gikuyu, who like Haraka and Chief Simba, spent his youth as a squatter on a farm, describes the life of a youth in the following words in his

Usually, it was great fun-trying to ride the big billy-goat like Europeans ride their horses, playing with the tame big billy-goat, Kiumu that followed me around; playing 'retrieves' with the sheep-dog named Simba, 'the lion'...sometimes we whiled the time away by making bows and arrows tipped with porcupine quill, challenging each other to shoot birds; or sometimes we prepared ingenious bird traps. All of these activities were frowned upon by our fathers, and occasionally a father would come upon us delinquents, shouting: 'why did you let these goats scatter and sometimes whipping his youngster with a stick. There were times, too, when we went to sleep on a hot summer afternoon, and our fathers might come secretly upon us and box and cuff us.

Judging from the descriptions of the Gikuyu youth above, it is quite unlikely that Maguru, now general Haraka, and Kahuru, now Chief Simba, led gangs of adolescents.

Mwangi would like his chief characters to be. However, by deliberately creating such a negative image of general Haraka, Mwangi is not only denigrating the leadership of a section of freedom fighters but is damning the entire freedom movement itself.

As if it were not enough, 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.

Not only Haraka, but also the lower-rank leadership of the 'gang' consists of such riff-raff:

General Haraka watched and shook his head.
Nguru was a very apology for a leader. Always shouting at the men and deriding them. A really sad example of a lieutenant.

Since the group consist of individual who have neither

39. Ibid., p.21.
any idea nor ability. They obviously have no mass appeal and are a source of terror among the people:

Wambugu, the dairy watchman rounded up his dogs and locked them in the kennels. He greeted the general with the usual tale of brothers and smiled a great deal. Deep within himself, he was mortally afraid of the terrorist. He was afraid of what they could do to him if he failed to cooperate.

Again-

Once or twice the watchman thought he was fed up and wanted to report the incidents to the police or Mr. Anderson, the farm owner. But the stories of Haraka murders were too grim to be taken lightly. He had no wish at all to lose his head.

Thus, the freedom fighters are, in fact, no more than a gang of blood-thirsty savages. Any killings anywhere, and they could be conveniently blamed for them:

The story when it was unfolded turned out to have no complications at all. The home-

41. Ibid., p.24.
guards had just heard shots from the village. When they went out to investigate they came across the body. The murderers were gone. Simple as that. It was a straight forward Mau Mau killing. A Haraka thing.

Time and again, the author shows Haraka issuing instructions to the members of his raiding parties for wanton killings and destruction of property. "Remember the instructions well", he went on. "One division to take the northern tower. The other will take the southern one. Kill the men and burn the thing down. Understand".

If one were to generalise out of this portrayal, one would form an impression that the entire movement, as had also been made out by the British press and the official historians at that time, involved deliberate cold-blooded killings of the innocent people, particularly the police force and the settlers. The truth, on the other hand, is quite contrary to this. During the entire movement, only 30 Europeans were killed against over 10,000 Africans, killed by the security forces. Another 90,000 were detained in concentration camps.

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43. Ibid., p.35.
In his enthusiasm to paint the movement black, Mwangi describes even the physical features of General Haraka negatively in terms of animals. "As the tall, brutish terrorist stood over him, the man got up, shaking like a leaf in the mountain storm." And again, "Like a frenzied Rhino he tore through the glass and wood". It may be of interest to note here that a number of European writers have often referred to Africans in terms of animal imagery. Karen Blixen, for instance, uses such imagery very frequently in her book Out of Africa.

Since they are not fighters dedicated to any cause, it is only natural that Haraka and his group panic and run for their lives as the government troops close in on them. 'It was the most natural thing to do, run far. But the odds, the odds were too high against it.'

They suffer from the feeling of being trapped and are willing to fight only because there is no choice before them:

They do not want us at all. They will follow us wherever we go. We cannot escape them completely. It is unwise to run that far for nothing. Sooner or later we shall

44. Mwangi, Carcase for Hounds, op.cit., p.36, emphasis added.
45. Ibid., p.37, emphasis added.
46. Ibid., p.52.
have to stand and fight them back. I say the sooner the better. And now we have arms. Move we shall, yes but no, we shall not go to Meru. Not that far.

The manner in which general Haraka reflects on the causes of the fight, which he had learnt, parrot like, from his predecessor, clearly shows that he himself is not convinced of those. "He was sure they were fighting for the right cause. Out at the village he would make them understand. He would tell them about the soil, the land and jungles, the way the little general used to do. He would talk about the spoilt blood and the whiteman's selfishness and oppression. All the things the little leader had spoken about including freedom. The freedom of the black man in his country. Where had the little general learned all that? From the others he said were in the south, in the capital? Or had he read it in book in an intermediate school. This is about the only reference to the cause for which they seemed to be fighting. Naturally, they cannot carry much conviction with the villagers for their support.

It may not be out of place here to observe that Mwangi's

47. Mwangi, Carcase for Hounds, op.cit., p.53.
48. Ibid., p.54.
choice of words with negative connotations, which refer to the freedom fighters and their activities, amply demonstrates his attitude towards the movement. These are not words put in the mouth of either the white D.C. Kingsley or the colonial stooge Chief Simba. They are either in the form of direct narration by the author or in the observations of General Haraka and his fighters or even the sympathisers of the cause. Mwaniki, for instance, refers to those who have taken the oath as the ones 'we have branded'. Others are referred to as 'calves that remain to be marked'. We have already commented on general Haraka's use of the word 'gang' while referring to his group of fighters. As the time for the expiry of the ultimatum for him to surrender draws to a close, general Haraka, wounded and immobilised, is suddenly struck with the fear of being 'alone' in the fight. He recalls his predecessor, the little general speak of other forest fighters in other parts of the country. "But where were the others? Where were the leaders? Where were the fighters and the people now, when he needed them? He was not alone! Why didn't they stand by him in the cold darkness and hold his hand and say 'you are not alone?' Why? And why didn't they bring him more guns and more men and help him ward off the vultures? Why? Why? Why?"

From the fear of being 'isolated' to a sense of despair, defeat and eventually a sense of resignation are only the next logical steps. "His heart contracted painfully. Across the infinite emptiness he saw defeat, complete annihilation and death glaring back at him, preparing to spring for the kill."

Towards the end, Haraka is shown to be acting with an unsound mind, risking the lives of his fighters only for settling an 'old score'. He seeks personal vengeance against Chief Simba, whose head he demands at all costs, almost deliriously. 'The head, Kimamo', he groaned. 'The chief's head'. The impression one gets -- and that is sought to be given also -- is that Haraka is a vendetta maniac and that is all that is to his freedom fight.

The general's sense of fear, isolation and the utter hopelessness now infects his second in command, Lieutenant Kimamo. "Slowly, Kimamo felt the burden of responsibility over his head and then gradually settle on his own shoulders." He was terrified. What would he do with the men, where would he lead them to? He sat back by the fire, thinking. How long would it take the general to heal? He, Kimamo could take over command, but only for a

50. Mwangi, Carcase for Hounds, op.cit., p.102.
short time. Only temporarily," the group disintegrates with the approaching death of the general. Since most of them, the author tries to show, had come together because of loyalty to his person rather than to a cause:

They no longer had that feeling for the cause. Now that there was no general there was no cause at all. Thus they owed nobody any loyalty, no perseverance no nothing.

To give a befitting finale to a story of a gang which drifts around indulging in killing and looting sans cause, sans dedication, the author chooses a very macabre scene in which a delirious general Haraka shoots a completely demoralised Kimamo, his lieutenant, for failing to bring the head of Chief Simba.

Through this sense of futility which he gives to his protagonists and his associates, Mwangi is not only distorting the truth about the freedom struggle in Kenya but is also proving himself to be a prophet of doom who holds no vision of hope for his readers. One may recall here, a similar situation portrayed by Ernest Hemingway in his For Whom the Bell Tolls. Robert Jordan, the protagonist, like general Haraka, is mortally wounded and

52. Ibid., p.123.
is awaiting his death. But instead of wailing about the futility of it all, he is ready with his machine-gun to stop the fascists who are pursuing his fellow fighters. Lying in wait, he goes over his past:

I have fought for what I believed in for a year now. If we win here we will win everywhere. The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it. And you had a lot of luck, he told himself, to have had such a good life. You've had just as good a life as grandfather's though not as long. You've had as good a life as any one because of these last days. You don't want to complain when you 'been so lucky. I wish there were some way to pass on that I've learned, though. Christ, I was learning fast there at the end.

What a contrast with general Haraka who regrets about the turn of events after the D.C. had hit him:

The general went over the events leading to his joining the freedom fighters. Supposing

the D.C. had not struck him. What would he have been doing now? Would he have joined the Mau Mau or remained Chief and fought against them? Which path would he have chosen.

So this is what we find at the end of the novel: an unwilling general, who had the leadership thrust upon him by circumstance, leading a group of equally unwilling fighters, many of whom like himself, joined the fight to escape the law after committing petty crimes. Most of them even do not know -- nor do they care to -- the cause they are fighting for. Their loyalties at best are personal and a sense of fear rather than of conviction keeps them together. Their dismemberment is the direct result of lack of any clear thinking on the part of their leadership. This is the scenario -- completely negative -- that Meja Mwangi paints in his Carcase for Hounds which, however, has been hailed as the one showing with 'rare vividness, how Mau Mau was organised.' Nothing, as we have seen from the accounts of Kariuki, Njama, Kaggia and other freedom fighters in the beginning of this chapter, could be farther from truth about the freedom struggle and its

organisation. Carcase for Hounds is a travesty -- whole sale -- of the truth about the freedom movement in Kenya and is a betrayal of the trust that people put into their writers for portrayal of their history.

A Grain of Wheat by Ngugi Wa Thion’o is also a novel about the freedom movement. Through a series of flashbacks in the lives and experiences of his principal characters -- Mugo, Gikonya, Mumbi, Kihika, Karanja and Thompson -- all of whom reflect on it on the eve of the Uhuru, which is only four days hence, Ngugi is able to weave, extremely skillfully, a multi-faced but true 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 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, now a village hero, 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.

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 to go and cultivate his shamba. Our first impression of him is one of a strange old man who appears to be seeing phantoms where there are none: one who, like Hester Pryne in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, seems to be guarding something within him which he feels everyone is out to seek and unravel on this fateful day. Among the first persons he meets is Githua, a fellow victim of the freedom movement, who 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."

As we already know from the accounts of Kariuki, Njama, general China and Bildad Kaggia, the story of Githua is 56. Ngugi, *A Grain of Wheat*, op.cit., p.4.
the story of thousands who were disabled during the struggle and Githua's remarks put Mugo in a mood for reminiscing the cruelties of the white man, the utter senseless killings and tortures that they indulged in. Passing by the hut of an old woman, he 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.

The last sentence - Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead - seems to touch us with the same force as the

57. The episode is based on an actual incident in which a cousin of Ngugi's was killed in similar circumstances.
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 elder: 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 messanger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with sugar; his humility was touching." 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

There could not have been a more precise yet more forthright portrayal of that part of Kenyan history towards the end of 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. 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
61
house.

The description reminds us Indians of the Jallianwala
Massacre only four years later.

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 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, 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

61. Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat, op.cit., p.14. This is a
very interesting example of how Ngugi mixes fact
with fiction, presenting actual historical events
with the help of creative imagination.
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.

Once again, the last sentence — But he laid his on earth, our earth — exposes the twin designs of the colonial British 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 young men 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 and not out of petty criminal acts as is suggested by Mwangi in Carcase for Hounds.

Although 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, as Mwangi would have us believe in Caresse for Hounds 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 of purposes."

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 4 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."

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

Warui, the oldest of those who survived, recalls the role of Wambui: "Wambui was not very old, although she had

64. Ibid., p.17.
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, Njoro, Elburgon and other places in and outside Rift valley.

Several women had played a very heroic role in the freedom movement and through Wambui, Ngugi is paying 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.

The suppression of the movement, as observed earlier, brought untold miseries on a very large section of civilian population. 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, physical suffering during the emergency. Here is Gikonyo on his own and Mugo's detention. "Do you know what it was to live in detention? It was easier, perhaps with those of us not labelled hard-core. But Mugo was. So he was beaten, and yet would not confess the oath".

Being in detention was in many ways worse than being in prison because 'in prison you know your crime. You know your terms. So many years, one, ten, thirty -- after that

you get out'. But not so in detention where your being in
the state of hope and despair simultaneously, the very
suspense of being innocent or guilty gnaws at your vitals
every day, every hour, killing something within
permanently. Mugo, had suffered such a fate for years
while in detention. All this the village elders recall
while sitting at Mugo's place and waiting for a response
from him for their request to him to lead the Uhuru
celebrations. However, Mugo refuses to give the delegation
a firm commitment about his very participation in the
Uhuru celebrations, let alone leading them.

The scene now shifts to the D.O.'s office at nearby
Githima and Ngugi present the whiteman's response to the
Uhuru. Thompson, the D.O., a loyal British bureaucrat, too
cannot reconcile himself to this changed new reality and
has therefore decided to quit his job as well as the
country. He too reminiscences. 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

190
carefully hemmed, would gradually creep into a litter-filled compound."

Thompson also recalls another milestone in his career in Kenya: the strike at the Rira detention camp when he was the officer in charge. "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 in charge, Thompson's name was bandied about in the House of Commons and in the world press."

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."

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 anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything anything 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to whoever would take her place in this house.

Thompson is one of those who considered the British colonial expansion to be an act of moral crusade to civilize the world. The British, he believed, were like 'Prospero in Africa', in 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 civilization can be built on this violence and savagry. Mau Mau is evil: a movement which if not checked will mean complete destruction of all the values on which our civilization has thriven.

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 people.....Warui needed only a listener: he recounted the

70. Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat, op.cit., p.44.
71. Thompson plans to write a long essay with this as the title.
deeds of Waiyaki 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 Mahatama 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.

One has only to contrast this with general Haraka's reminiscences about his youth and the way he became a

freedom fighter, to know the difference between Meja Mwangi's portrayal of the freedom struggle and Ngugi's. In fact, in the above passage Ngugi has made use of the actual events -- struggle by Waiyaki and the Procession for the release of Harry Thuku -- as a background for his fictional characters like Kihika.

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 youngman 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."

74. For this see quotation at Number 33 in the same chapter.
75. Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat, op.cit., p.83. It may be of interest here to mention that Bildad Kaggia, one of the leaders of the Kenyan national liberation movement like Ngugi's Kihika, mentions Moses and Gandhi as his inspirers: 'My greatest "heroes" became Gandhi and Moses, Moses - because he succeeded in liberating his people and Gandhi as my guide to modern methods of liberation.' Roots of Freedom op.cit., p.55.
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.

Kihika is, in fact, a true 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 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?"

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.' 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. In contrast the speeches of general Haraka who had only heard about land and other problems from his little leader and repeated them parrot-like appear to be contrived.

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 77

lovers behind cold huts and prayed that their young men would come quickly from the forest or from the camps."

Unlike Mwangi, who shows general Haraka, Lieutenant Kimamo and others having serious doubts their cause, Ngugi shows them very resolute for their cause. "The detainees had agreed not to contest the oath, or give away details about Mau Mau: how could anybody reveals the binding force of the Agikuyu in their call for African freedom? They bore all the ills of the Whiteman, believing somehow that he would endure unto the end would receive leaves of victory". 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."

Even those who were left behind in villages - mostly women, old people and young children - were not spared the such torture. Mumbi Gikanyo's wife, recalls:

There were two huts. One belonged to my mother, the other was mine. They told us to

80. "Where were his allies, where were they? Would they come to his rescue? The truth dawned on him with shocking clarity. They were nowhere. They would not come and they never would come. They simply did not exist. They had never existed in reality." Mwangi, Carcase for Hounds, op.cit., p.102.
82. Ibid., p.116.
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.

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."

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, nor 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."

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:

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.

Once caught into the logic of surrender and collaboration, Karanja sank 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

86. Ibid., p. 130.
offered their naked bodies to him: even some of the most respectable came to him by night."

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."

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

88. Ibid., p.199.
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.

However, the novel is not as has been stated by both Ochola - Ojero, and David Cook 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 which 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 was singled out by Thompson for severer 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." 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 the 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 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 uphold 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 which went to pieces under

emergency through sheer physical separation for long periods. While focusing 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 sang 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 of state 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 which we analyse in the next chapter.