Chapter 4. NGUGI WA THIONG'O: NOVELIST OF THE PEOPLE

4.1 Introduction

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of the highly respected and most discussed African writers. Ngugi's fame rests mainly on his novels though he has also written short stories and has written and produced plays in English as well as his mother tongue 'Gikuyu'. Ngugi is very much a committed writer. He is fiercely aware of his role as an artist and also of the responsibilities attendant upon that role. Nor is he an ivory tower sort of committed writer but one who has participated in the socio-politico-cultural movements of his time and has willingly paid the price. Besides his creative writings, there is a considerable body of discursive writing which Ngugi himself calls 'explanatory prose'.

In the present study, I have concentrated mainly on Ngugi's novels which together make up an imaginative rendering of the history of his own people in a fictional narrative form. Certainly Ngugi's plays are quite important, too. But since my aim is to show Ngugi's journey from a state of exile to the attainment of a 'home' and since it is the narrative fiction of Ngugi that I find most congenial to this kind of analysis, I have confined the discussion to his novels.

Ngugi's career as a novelist spans a period of more than twenty-five years. The first novel came out in 1962

4.2 A Biographical Sketch

Ngugi wa Thiong'o was born in Kamiriithu village, near Limuru, supposedly on 5th January, 1938. (He himself is not sure of either the date or the month. All he is sure of is the year). His father Thiong'o wa Nducu was a dispossessed farmer with four wives and twenty-eight children to feed. In Homecoming Ngugi has described his early years of painful poverty. At the age of 9, he went to Kamaandura Mission school in Limuru for two years and then Karinga's school of the Independent Schools Movement (much like Waiyaki's Marioshoni in The River Between) in Maanguu village. From 1954 to 1958 he was at Alliance High school in Kikuyu which figures in his novels as Siriana Mission School. He was very good at studies and his success in the school certificate examination led him to Makerere University College in Kampala where he was engaged in many activities besides studying English literature. He was always an exceptional student and got his degree of B.A. (English) in higher second class in 1963. While at Makerere he married Nyambura, from whom he has seven children. The youngest, Njooki, was born on 3rd May, 1978 while Ngugi was detained in Maximum Security Prison for the performance of his play Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will marry when I want) on 31st December, 1977.

During his undergraduate days he drafted a novel which he initially titled as Black Messiah but which later became The River Between. While he was recasting this novel he
wrote *Weep Not Child* which was published in the following year and was, as a result, his first published novel. He also wrote at this time a play *The Black Hermit* which was put up for Uganda Independence Day in 1962. This was followed by a few short plays for the regular literary competitions of the University, which were later collected in *This Time Tomorrow* (1970).

While at Makerere he became the editor of *Penpoint*, a journal of creative writing, and became a key figure in monitoring the contribution of Makerere in the development of 'the young' East African literature. Among other English novelists Ngugi studied Lawrence and Conrad as part of his undergraduate studies and the influence of both of them on Ngugi is obvious. In the Preface to *Secret Lives* Ngugi recalls how Mr. Jonathan Kariara on reading Ngugi's first short story *The Fig Tree* (later titled *Mughomo*) asked him if he had been reading D.H. Lawrence. He had a short stint as a journalist in the National Group of Papers before he went to Leeds in 1964 to do his Diploma in English studies. Arthur Ravenscroft, his tutor at Leeds was so impressed by his creative use of the English language that he recommended him directly for M.A. by research which Ngugi ultimately did not complete. He, however, visited Damascus, the United States and Moscow which widened his mental horizons and gave him a better perspective of the world scene.

After his return to Kenya from Leeds in 1967, he was offered a special lecturership at Nairobi University. He accepted the job but resigned in March 1969 because of the
confrontation between the University — a student body at the University — and the Government. He preferred to stand by his social convictions and so resigned in protest against the Government. He gave his own reasons for resigning in a local newspaper 'Sunday Nation' as follows:

the failure of the college administration and a large section of the staff to make a clear and public stand on the issues that led to the crisis at the University College, the mishandling of the crisis by the same administration, and the consequent suspension, itself a form of victimisation, of five students. (2)

He went back to Makerere for a year as a Fellow in Creative Writing. Here he organized successfully a workshop for the writers. A collection of his short plays *This Time Tomorrow* (1970) was published. It was the same year when Makerere University English department was reorganising its syllabus of English literature and of World Literature — a process which Ngugi had sparked off earlier in Nairobi. This department, as a result of Ngugi's persuasive power and convictions, became the Department of Literature.

After the Fellowship was over Ngugi went to Northwestern University, Evanston to teach African literature and spent a year there. During his earlier visit in 1966 as a guest of honour at PEN Conference he had made some very scalding remarks about the condition of the Negro in America:

The Negro in America has been exploited for over 300 years and yet people will try and explain racialism as a psychological phenomenon. It is surely the economic
aspect of racialism which is of prime importance. The colour of skin is a convenient excuse for using state economic and political machinery to continue this kind of ruthless exploitation. (3)

Ngugi's argument, one notices, is very similar to the one used by the famous black militant thinker Fanon:

The effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:

- primarily, economic;
- subsequently, the internalization - or, better, the epidermalization - of this inferiority? (4)

In 1971 he returned to the Nairobi English department where as a chairman of the department he took up the demand for the reorientation of the focus of literary studies. He, along with his two colleagues, argued before the Board of Studies:

Just because for reasons of political expediency we have kept English as our official language, there is no need to substitute a study of English culture for our own. We reject the primacy of English literature and culture. The aim, in short, should be to orient ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa and then Africa in the centre. (5)

One incident goes a long way to show how Ngugi's ideological position was being formed. Upto this time he called himself James Ngugi, quite unaware of the implications of that Christian name. In March 1970, Ngugi opened his talk at the Fifth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa with the words:

I feel slightly uneasy standing before this great Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. I am not a man of the Church. I am not even a Christian. I
make that confession because I don't want to be misunderstood. I don't want to be accused of hypocrisy.(6)

Ime Ikiddeh states in the Foreword to Homcoming:

He (Ngugi) had hardly ended his address when a wiry old man visibly choking with anger leapt to the floor and menacingly warned the speaker to seek repentance in prayer. The old man said that the speaker was a Christian and the evidence was his first name. Now it struck him (Ngugi) that the old man had a point, and the name James, an unfortunate anomaly, had to go.(7)

In 1977, Ngugi's fourth novel, Petals of Blood was published at the hands of a minister of Kenyatta's government. Earlier the same year, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi was published, following the whirlwind production of the play. Later in the same year Ngugi collaborated with Ngugi Mirii in writing a play in Gikuyu, Ngaahika Ndeenda and from June to November 1977, he was deeply involved in the staging of the play at Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre in Limuru. After the first massive performance before an audience of over 2000 people the district commissioner cancelled the licence and the play was banned. The play states that in present day Kenyan society man's position is nothing but a direct variable of how much money and power he has. According to a local journalist the play 'attempted to interpret some aspects of modern Kenyan life to the average villagers in terms which the government authorities on the scene thought too provocative.' (8)

This was Ngugi's open confrontation with the neo-colonialism in Kenya and an important stage in his journey
towards 'home'. The matter did not end with banning of the play. Ngugi himself was arrested under the pretext that he was being taken to the local police station for some routine questioning. He, however, was not to return for nearly twelve months. He was released in December 1978, when Arap Moi became the President of Kenya after the death of Jomo Kenyatta.

Even during his imprisonment his morale and his resilience were high. He refused to accept the unjust and humiliating practices of being chained as a necessary condition for meeting the family or even when the prisoners were to be taken to the hospital for medical treatment:

At Kamiti, disease and family were the two most frequent means of tormenting the political detainees.... What I most remembered in these past incidents was that unpleasant cold foreboding that always preceded my every 'No' to oppression, but it was always a sign that I would not hold back the voice of protest. So when now the prison warder asked me to raise my hands for the ceremony of chaining and I felt the same foreboding I knew I would refuse. Which I did.

Fortunately for me, the abscess gradually healed. Must have been the medicine of willpower.(9)

About meeting his family he says:

Because of the intensity of emotion attached to it, the family can be used to break the political backbone of an unsuspecting detainee.... In my case, I had left Nyambura four months pregnant, and now a child, whom I could only see through the courtesy of photography and the post office, had been born. A visit would enable me to see her. I was also eager to know how the others - Thiong'o, Kimunya, Ngina, Ndiiucu, Mukoma and Wanjikuu - were doing at school and how they were taking the whole thing. My mother also. (10)
A few pages later he tells us that when the warden came:

I reiterated my position that I would not accept wearing chains as a condition of seeing my family. It was almost a repetition of the earlier scene. I walked to the gates, I refused to wear the chains. They refused to let me see my family. (11)

As the news of Ngugi's imprisonment spread there was a sharp reaction all over Africa and other parts of the world. There were demonstrations in London and indeed a delegation of writers and intellectuals went to Nairobi from Nigeria under the leadership of Wole Soyinka. But nothing worked.

The play Ngaahika Ndeenda was a remarkable experience for Ngugi. It was the first work he wrote in Gikuyu - a Kenyan language - in collaboration with another writer. In the manner of a genuine and living oral tradition of performing arts the original manuscript was modified by the peasants and workers from time to time to such an extent that the end product was quite different from the original draft. Everything was done collectively. Ngugi acknowledges the transformation he underwent between June and November, 1977 when the preparations for the performance were on. He thinks it was the true beginning of his education. He learnt his language anew. He rediscovered the creative power of collective work. He says:

Work, Oh Yes, work! Work, from each according to his ability for a collective vision, was the great democratic equalizer. No money, no book education but work.

Although the overall direction of the play was under Kimani Gecau, the whole project became a collective,
community effort with peasants and workers seizing more and more initiative in revising and adding to the script, in directing dance movements on the stage and in the general organization.

I saw with my own eyes an incredible discipline emerge in keeping time and in cutting down negative social practices. Drinking alcohol, for instance. It was the women's group, led by Gaceeri Wa Waigaanjo, who imposed on themselves a ban on drinking alcohol, even a glass, when coming to work at the centre. This spread to all the other groups including the audience. By the time we came to perform it was generally understood and accepted that drunkenness was not allowed at the centre. For a village which was known for drunken brawls, it was a remarkable achievement of our collective self discipline that we never had a single incident of fighting or a single drunken disruption for all the six months of public rehearsals and performances.(12)

Later the group reassembled in November, 1981 to tackle *Maitu Njuigira* (Mother Sing for Me), a musical play set in the 1920's and 1930's. The Kamiriithu group was ready to put up the performance on February 19, 1982 but the Kenyan authorities refused it permission to perform the play publicly. The group retaliated by making the rehearsals public and during the following seven days at least 10,000 people watched the rehearsals which were finally stopped by the Government.(13)

Kenya police razed the theatre and cultural centre built by the Kamiriithu villagers to the ground in March, 1982. There was an abortive coup in August, 1982 which resulted in the extensive suppression of the intellectuals under various pretexts. Ngugi himself escaped arrest as he was outside Kenya by chance. He has been living away from his country as a political exile since then.

Ngugi's first novel in Gikuyu, *Caithani Mutharaba-Inji*
was published in 1980. His own English translation of the book appeared in 1981 under the title *Devil on the Cross*. In 1981, he published two more non-fictional works, a collection of essays entitled *Writers in Politics* and a record of his experiences and thoughts while he was at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison entitled *Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary*. *Devil on the Cross* was drafted while Ngugi was in prison. His latest novel *Matigari*, which also he wrote in Gikuyu, is not even translated by Ngugi himself. It is translated by Wangi wa Goro.

Certain important details from Ngugi’s life have been recorded here because Ngugi’s journey cannot otherwise be effectively traced. Like Brathwaite, Ngugi also is a writer whose life, philosophy of life and creative writings are so deeply interlinked that they have to be studied together to trace his development or rather his transformation as a writer. Ngugi’s ideological development as a modified Marxist-cum-Fanonist is an integral part of his homecoming. Ngugi’s courage, honesty, resilience and total conviction are some of the very fascinating aspects of his volatile personality. He has given innumerable interviews and is extensively written about particularly after his detention without trial in 1978. He has truly become ‘a man of the people’ whose heart and soul are with the masses of Kenya so that his physical exile in post-1982 period has not in any possible way affected his successful journey back home which was complete, one could say, at the end of his detention. His latest book *Literature for the Revolution* (1992) is
translated from Gikuyu as he said goodbye to English as the language of his even non-fictional prose with *Decolonising the Mind* in 1986.

4.3 *Ngugi’s Three ‘Historical’ Novels*

The pattern of Ngugi’s growth has already been suggested at the beginning of this chapter. The first three novels form a trilogy tracing the history of Kenya from pre-colonial times to the day of Uhuru i.e. to 1963. (In this respect he is like Chinua Achebe, who also wrote a trilogy *Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* before he turned to the neo-colonial scene in *A Man of the People*.) With *Petals of Blood* there is a shift to the present neo-colonial scene. In *Devil on the Cross* the gloom deepens and in *Matigari* the Fanonistic solution through violence is suggested.

4.4 *The River Between*

*The River Between* Ngugi’s first novel, is deceptively simple. The story line is straightforward. Ngugi deals with the earliest phase in the history of modern Kenya stretching from the advent of the missionaries in 1880s to the circumcision crisis and the Independent School Movement in early 1930’s. Ngugi uses the facts of Kenyan history freely. Through this novel he wants to suggest that the Gikuyus and other tribes were not able to resist the European invasion because they failed to understand the nature of the challenge posed by the white man and his
culture and consequently failed to take the right decision.

The style of the novel and the presentation of the material in the novel once again reminds us of D.H. Lawrence and particularly his great novel, *The Rainbow*. The connection is not fortuitous, for, *The Rainbow* is a trenchant attack on 'industrialism', which according to D.H. Lawrence had corrupted the wholesome rhythm of life in England. The first part of the *The Rainbow* recreates, in a lyrical and moving manner, the agrarian life in the countryside of England before the malaise of industrialism set in. The three generations of Brangwens in *The Rainbow* help the reader to chart the advent, entrenchment and the consequences of the industrial revolution in England. Ngugi also has a similar scheme in mind. Only he replaces industrialism in England by the advent of the white missionaries and following them, the colonialism in Africa.

In *The River Between* he seeks to create a kind of prelapsarian picture of the Kenyan countryside valleys enclosed by ridges of mountains. Like Lawrence, Ngugi is very much in love with the countryside. In his 'explanatory prose' he gives ample evidence of how much the mountains, the valleys, and other manifestations of the Kenyan landscape mean to him. At times, he almost has a mystical feeling about it.

The first chapter of the novel focuses on the two villages Kameno and Makuyu on the two sides of the valley with the river Honia dividing them. There are no white settlers as yet in either of them. The alienation of land has not become a problem as the ridges are remote and people...
are left to themselves to live in the age old traditional way. Yet the novel is based firmly on the two themes manifest from the early days of colonization, particularly in Africa, namely: the conflict between the ancestral and the modern ways of living and secondly the conflict between the traditional religion and Christianity.

The protagonist of the novel is Waiyaki, a young Gikuyu. He is presented as an individual but at the same time Ngugi invests him with a symbolic dimension, too. Waiyaki is shown as one of the early Kenyans in whose case exposure to the western type of education imparted by the Christian missionaries produced a divided self. In this sense Waiyaki, like those other Kenyans of his time, could be regarded as a victim of the mission school education.

Chege, Waiyaki's father tells Waiyaki that he is the last in the line of Mugo wa Kibiro, the great seer, and informs him about the prophecy made by Mugo Wa Kibiro in the past that salvation would come to the community from the hills. It is given unto Waiyaki to be the carrier of this prophecy to its fulfilment. It is Chege again, who wants Waiyaki to go to the 'Mission place'. Waiyaki, Chege insists, must learn all the wisdom of the white man as also all his secrets but at the same time, he must be true to his own people and must steadfastly hold on to the observance of the ancient rites of the tribe.

The narrator tells us a few pages later that 'Waiyaki's absence from the hills had kept him out of touch with those
things which most mattered to the tribe.'(14) He had gathered ideas and notions which prevented him from responding spontaneously to dances and celebrations that preceded the circumcision. Obviously the impact of the Siriana school on Waiyaki during his formative years there has been very strong. The seed of doubt has been sown and soon it will produce a schism. A single minded conviction and an unquestioning acceptance of the ways of the tribe is not possible any longer. Waiyaki also absorbs some elements of Christianity as a part of the educational process. Waiyaki, like all the characters in Ngugi’s novels is a victim of his own situation and is unable to struggle against the forces that surround him. He is basically a dynamic and humane individual with a potential to lead his people. He possesses a charismatic personality with a hypnotic quality in his eyes. Yet the conflicting forces within him are too strong for him and his idealistic romantic vision ‘dual conviction’ and his dream of the possibility of co-existence of the contraries (the wolf and the lamb) is finally overpowered.

Two more characters are presented as Chege’s contemporaries. They are Kabonyi and Joshua. Chege is a traditional man. He belongs to a family of seers. When he urges upon Waiyaki to approach the white man in order to learn his ‘wisdom’ he is not aware of the seeds of schism he is thus sowing in Waiyaki. By contrast Kabonyi and Joshua have gone over to the other side quite early. They are among the first converts to the new faith brought in by
the white man. Kabonyi is soon disillusioned with the new faith and becomes the leader of the other disillusioned converts who break away from Christianity to form 'the Kiama'. The Kiama is a revived tribal council. It insists on maintaining the purity of the tribe. It insists, with a new fierceness, on the traditional mores, customs and rituals. The Kiama, as can be expected, imposes rigid orthodoxy on its followers and in this sense is an example of blind revivalism.

Joshua, who belongs to the Evangelical Church, remains an ardent follower of the white man's religion. His thoughts and actions are marked by a deep conviction. He regards a number of traditional aspects of the tribal life as 'sinful' because they are not compatible with the doctrines and practices of Christianity. For example, the custom of circumcision for him is now an abomination and anyone undergoing that ceremony is, in Joshua's eyes, committing a deadly sin.

It, therefore, falls to young Waiyaki's lot to make sense of the situation. Another character that faces the same predicament is Muthoni, Joshua's daughter. Though Muthoni is now a Christian she has not forgotten her native origin nor does she want to give up the native ways of life including circumcision. She also is a girl of 'dual conviction' who wants to be a Christian in the tribe, a real woman knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges. (15) Her insistence on getting circumcised according to the
traditions of the tribe produces a crisis in the community and marks a turning point in the novel. Her decision brings to the surface the conflict within the tribe which has so far been suppressed.

Muthoni sticks to her resolve to get circumcised and the ceremony is performed. Unfortunately the wound gets infected and she dies, significantly, while she is undergoing treatment in Siriana Mission Hospital. It is Waiyaki who takes her to the hospital out of his compassion for her. Muthoni's death triggers off a breakaway movement among the natives of the ridges, for in the wake of Muthorii's death the Siriana Mission School announces that it will not admit children who have undergone circumcision. The Christian Mission School's move brings into existence the Kiama — a strong revivalistic movement already referred to and it also gives rise to the Karinga schools.

In Waiyaki, the two contradictory forces that pull him in opposite directions produce a conflict around which the novel moves. Waiyaki wants to bring together the ways of his tribe and the ways of Christianity. He wants to preserve the unity of his tribe which he thinks is possible only through a modified revivalism, in which whatever is wholesome and life-giving in the traditional tribal life must be suitably retained. At the same time he wants to retain, and assimilate the humanistic vision that he has received from his contact with the white missionaries. The result is his striking a new path in the form of Marioshoni School. (This school represents the Karinga schools and the
movement for Independent Schools in the cultural history of colonial Kenya.

Once Waiyaki thinks of starting a 'new' school, he is completely absorbed by his mission of educating the masses. Like a man possessed by a sense of mission, he goes on starting more and more schools in the ridges. A noteworthy feature of these schools is that they are built with collective effort of the community. Waiyaki also becomes a member of the Kiama movement. It is, for him at this point, a cultural movement supplementing his efforts. He is, therefore, unaware and unmindful of the growth of the Kiama into a political movement. The Kiama, indeed, becomes an umbrella under which people can come together to start political agitations and seek redress through political action. Thus the second phase in the transformation of 'the valleys and ridges' has begun. The idyllic, static scene with which the novel opened has now given way to uneasy turmoil, a strange new kind of disturbance. The white man's administration has brought about laws and administrative procedures which are calculated to break up the age-old tribal practices. Natives in the valleys are increasingly being deprived of their lands. They are being forced to pay land taxes and their children are being denied education at the Mission school. In the changed situation, they know that education is the only alternative for their children and they are, therefore, grateful to Waiyaki - their children's teacher. They, at the same time, need something
more urgently - that is the political action. They, therefore, rally round the Kiama. Waiyaki is sincere in his desire to serve his people and he is totally dedicated to his mission of 'education'. However, he is confused in his vision of education as the only answer for the plight of his people.

An important aspect of Waiyaki's character, as Ngugi depicts it, is his 'mystical' inclination. Waiyaki is, after all, born in a family that traditionally functioned as the seer of the tribe. His father, it may be recalled, had made him aware of the important role Waiyaki was destined to play in the history of his tribe. Waiyaki is given to going off into the forest to a sacred grove and contemplate all alone. Here, we presume he achieves communion with the forces of nature and is able to look into the heart of things. In some ways, Waiyaki's wanderings - his visits to the sacred grove - are reminiscent of Simon - the Christlike figure in William Golding's Lord of the Flies. These visits and their outcome underscore the mystical, messianic aspect of Waiyaki's character.

He visits the sacred grove a second time. The first time was when he was a child and his father had taken him there just before his initiation ceremony. His second visit to the sacred grove gives him time to contemplate though actually he has gone to get a 'message' from the god and it suddenly dawns up on him that education and political action can co-exist. He realizes that the purpose of education is not merely 'enlightenment' as he had so far imagined but
also to make people understand that 'unity' was important in their political action and Nyambura was an integral part of that unity:

And all at once Waiyaki realized what the ridges wanted. All at once he felt more forcefully than he had ever felt before the shame of a people's land being taken away, the shame of being forced to work on those same lands, the humiliation of paying taxes for a government that you knew nothing about.

Yes, the Kiama was right. People wanted action now. The stirrings in the hill were an awakening to the shame and humiliation of their condition. Their isolation had been violated. But what action was needed? ... Now he knew what he would preach if he ever got a chance: education, for unity. Unity for political freedom.(17)

In spite of his strong ties with the traditional way of life the years he spent at Siriana have produced in him a spirit of tolerance. 'After all he himself loved some Christian teaching. The element of love and sacrifice agreed with his own temperament.'(18) Both Kabonyi and Joshua are, on the contrary, rigid demagogues and fanatics. The brand of Christianity introduced by the Evangelical mission is the intolerant doctrine of the Old Testament. It is stubborn and rigid Kabonyi rather than Waiyaki, who is a match for Christians from the Mission. This mutual intolerance and hatred widens the rift till it is unbridgeable at the end of the novel.

In spite of Chege's insistence that Waiyaki should not forget his people and should always naturally belong to the tribe, we are told early in the novel:
Waiyaki still felt uneasy. Something inside him prevented him from losing himself in this frenzy. Was it because of Muthoni? He wondered what Livingstone (his teacher at the Siriana School) would say if he found him or if he saw the chaos created by locked emotions set loose. And the words spoken! Even Waiyaki was slightly embarrassed by this talk of forbidden things. (19)

The 'exile' has already set in. Otherwise 'spontaneity' and not embarrassment would have been the natural reaction of Waiyaki.

Waiyaki's perception of his relationship with Nyambura is another example of how 'education at Siriana' has, to some extent, alienated him from his native bearings. During his interrogation at the Kiama, elders ask him 'This girl - Joshua's daughter - are you marrying her?' (20) In response to this, we are told:

Waiyaki rose. He was now really exasperated. What had Nyambura got to do with them? What? Could he not do whatever he wanted with his own life? Or was his life not his own? He would tell them nothing about Nyambura. (21)

Waiyaki's reaction is individualistic and is in keeping with the western doctrines he has been exposed to during his stay at the Siriana Mission School. The tribe always looks upon marriage as something that through the concerned families affects the entire community. It is, in short, the business of the community. (We are reminded of a similar situation in Chinua Achebe's short story "Marriage is a Private Affair"). To regard marriage as a private affair and the business of the individuals concerned betrays the colonised psyche.
Andre Gurr rightly observes that even earlier 'a chosen few' were going into exile in search for a 'higher consciousness' which would help to save the people in times of trouble. Quite early in the novel the narrator says:

For though the ridges were isolated, a few people went out. These, who had the courage to look beyond their present content to a life and land beyond, were the select few sent by Murungu to save a people in their hour of need: 'They became stranger to the hills. Thereafter the oilskin of the house was not for them.'

Waiyaki is probably one of those few. When the white presence starts dividing his community, he struggles on with 'a mission of healing the rift between Makuyu and Kameno; between Joshua and the others'. He fears that his mission of enlightenment through education would come to nothing if he stands by Kabonyi.

In the final phase of the novel we see that Waiyaki now regarded as a traitor is produced before a gathering called forth by the Kiama. The gathering is like the old tribal council; but in its new form it is part of the rabid, throwback revivalism represented by Kabonyi. Nyambura, who has been held in custody, is also produced. That Nyambura should be regarded as a traitor is obvious, for she is the daughter of hated Joshua. Waiyaki is a prophet, a seer disowned by his own people. He had struggled hard, according to his lights, to lead his people into a different kind of cohesive integrated society but his labours had been in vain. He realizes that the rift between the sections of his society would never be overcome, that the fragmentation
is beyond repair, as he stands along with Nyambura awaiting execution (for it seems certain that both of them would be removed from the scene) at the hands of the Kiama. That the Kiama must feel uneasy is also evident for when the meeting takes place those attending it are not able to meet Waiyaki's eyes:

An elder stood up. Waiyaki could not hear what he was saying for his mind was full of many thoughts and doubts that came and went. Waiyaki and Nyambura would be placed in the hands of the Kiama, who would judge them, decide what to do. It was the best thing and the crowd roared back 'Yes' as if the burden of judging their Teacher was removed from them. They went away quickly glad that he was hidden by the darkness. For they did not want to look at the Teacher and they did not want to speak to one another, for they knew fully well what they had done to Waiyaki and yet did not want to know.(25)

The novel begins with an idyllic picture of the valley lying between the two ridges Kameno and Makuyu - the valley of life. But at the end of the novel there is an ominous darkness:

The land was now silent. The two ridges lay side by side, hidden in the darkness. And Honia river went on flowing between them down through the valley of life, its beat rising above the dark stillness, reaching into the heart of the people of Makuyu and Kameno.(26)

So it seem that there is still life, possibility of dawn and a renewal of life.

Ngugi suggests in the novel that colonialism is a wholly alienating form, infecting the economic, psychological and cultural aspects of the society. It has destroyed the cohesion of the Kenyan society not only by seizing the land that belonged to the natives but by
introducing an alien education and culture.

By trying to obtain the best of both the worlds Waiyaki drives his people into the hands of the most obscurantist and sectarian faction of the community. Werner Glinga observes in his article 'The River Between and its Forerunners', 'The River Between is not a novel of leadership or education but of a protagonist who wants to lead his life against the tide of his time.'(27) To him Waiyaki is the forerunner of the colonial African elite. I, however, think Waiyaki has a saving grace. Towards the end of the novel when his heart struggles for a choice between the Kiama and Nyambura the insistent voice inside him tells him to run and go to Nairobi. 'You have now the object of your heart's desire... Run! Run to Nairobi and live there happily with Nyambura'.(28) But Waiyaki feels ashamed of himself. He knows that he cannot run away. The trace of elitistic response - 'self centredness' is present. 'The City' as the final haven of these uprooted souls is also present. But the ties with the tribe and the father are still strong.

Muthoni, who is the counterpart of Waiyaki in the novel, is also a character with 'dual conviction'. But unlike Waiyaki she is deeply rooted in the traditions of the soil and, therefore, there is, in her case, no fear of alienation in spite of her having embraced the new faith. It is noteworthy that she is not the victim of the white man's education and the consequent indoctrination through
it. She defies her father in order to get circumcised and faces death with courage and equanimity. She asserts her womanhood and the principle of androgyny—coexistence of masculine and feminine principles—which is at the core of all peasant cultures and which will get eroded as the country progressively comes under the grip of colonialism. The social status of the woman slides down continuously in Ngugi’s novels. But the writer has tremendous respect for women and he asserts that it is the women ‘the oppressed of the oppressed’ who have got the true courage, resilience and conviction to get rid of colonialism in any form. Muthoni is the first of these women. She wants to live in the state of nature. Her dream is to be a peasant woman leading life in harmony with nature. ‘I want to be a woman made beautiful in the tribe; a husband for my bed; children to play around the hearth’. (29)

Nyambura is Joshua’s second daughter. Waiyaki has known her since they were all children. But then he went away to the Siriana School. On his return, he is a participant in the ritual of circumcision in which Muthoni’s wound gets infected and she dies. Waiyaki happens to meet Nyambura and is slowly attracted towards her. Their visit together to the spot on the banks of the river where Muthoni’s circumcision rite took place is notable for its poignancy and so is their second meeting on the bank. Waiyaki expresses his feelings for Nyambura to her and asks her if she would marry him. Nyambura, of course, refuses Waiyaki’s proposal for the simple reason that her father
would not allow her to marry Waiyaki, a pagan.

In the meantime, however, the Kiama movement is getting more and more aggressively hostile to the white man and his lackeys. Joshua is, therefore, a hated figure for them. Waiyaki, though he sympathises with the Kiama is too liberal (which is to say that he suffers from the doubt that the other side may be in some ways right) and therefore perhaps even more distasteful to the hardcore, fanatic members of the Kiama. Waiyaki’s relations with Joshua’s daughter and his visit to the church mark him as an unreliable person. It is easy for the fanatics, when time comes, to brand him as a traitor. Indeed, Waiyaki’s visit to the church has been motivated by his desire to have a glimpse of Nyambura. He is seen coming out of the Church by Kamau, Kabonyi’s son. When Kamau sees Nyambura walking some distance away, he remarks (because he also is in love with her) that she is a very beautiful girl. Waiyaki pretends to dismiss the remark as if it does not matter one way or the other. However, the meetings between Nyambura and Waiyaki have not gone unnoticed and at a crucial point in the development of the novel, Nyambura is spirited away by Kamau.

Ngugi looks at the main characters involved in the disintegration of the community objectively. It is clear that the reader cannot easily identify the author with any of them, for he is critical of all of them and spares nobody. Joshua, Kabonyi and Waiyaki are all responsible for the rift and have to accept their due share of blame. The
novel offers a critique of hardline Evangelical brand of Christianity in the form of Joshua. His work is not only mechanical but dehumanizing as can be seen from his harsh and rather cruel reaction to Muthoni's decision. Some of the principles he practises are the ones he has not fully understood. We are told in the course of the narration:

Not that Joshua saw anything intrinsically wrong in having a second bride. In fact he had always been puzzled by the fact that men of the Old Testament who used to walk with God and angels had more than one wife. But the man at the Mission had said this was a sin. And so a sin it had to be. Joshua was not prepared to question what he knew to be God-inspired assertions of the white man.(30)

Joshua's obsession for the new creed does not lift him to a state of 'a higher consciousness' which would help him see beyond personal animosities. In his eyes the rise of Waiyaki as a young, intelligent leader of the tribe is a menace. Joshua's disowning both his daughters reveals his perverted nature. His sincerity and his twisted integrity are, however, presented with a certain degree of admiration and hence he is saved from becoming either allegorical or a stock figure.

Kabonyi, like Joshua embraces Christianity only to be disillusioned by it. The crisis brought about by the circumcision issue serves as a slap in his face. It is indeed representative of several such instances in almost all the colonial countries. Invariably, such humiliating incidents made the natives aware of their impotence and were the starting points of the movements like the Kiama. There
is another dimension to Kabonyi's character. He is the only person apart from Chege and Waiyaki, who knows about the prophecy that a saviour would come from the hills. Therefore, it appears that his acts are motivated by an overpowering sense of ambition. That also explains Kabonyi's disillusionment with Christianity and his consequent launching of the Kiama movement as also his violent dislike of Joshua and Waiyaki. Kabonyi is as much responsible for the disintegration that sets in the tribe as anyone else in the novel.

Nor can Waiyaki escape censure for the disintegration of the tribe, for though his very ardent desire to serve his people in their hour of need is evident, and is voiced again and again in the novel, he fails in achieving his goal, as the end of the novel makes quite clear. Waiyaki's heart is not free from 'doubt'. Even as a child he doubts his father's utterance that he will be the last in the line of Mugo Wa Kibiro, the great seer. Ngugi seems to suggest that Waiyaki fails to bring about a fusion of the old and the new, a new vision that can be worked out in the lives of his tribesmen, because of the doubt. To have such doubts which would enable a person to appreciate what is good in other cultures and ideologies may be a necessary condition but not a sufficient one to bring about a fusionistic vision.

The River Between is clearly meant to be a historical and political novel. However, Waiyaki is not based on any 'one' historical figure. Ngugi takes the name Waiyaki from a historical Waiyaki, the famous Gikuyu chief and warrior in
Kiambu, Central Kenya, who successfully fought the British in 1890s over the right to property in his area. He was betrayed by a Paramount Chief, was arrested at Fort Smith and taken to the coast but died when he was being taken to the coast. Ngugi has probably used the name for its historical significance.

The portrayal of Waiyaki, however, seems to suggest a closer affinity with a more recent and more renowned personality in the history of Kenya, namely, Jomo Kenyatta. Certain striking similarities between Waiyaki and Jomo Kenyatta stand out. Waiyaki's eyes are described as piercing contemplative eyes with hypnotic power. This is precisely how Jomo Kenyatta's eyes and the look in them has been repeatedly described. Jomo Kenyatta, too, came from a family of seers. During his second visit to the sacred grove Waiyaki gives vent to and crystallizes his innermost thoughts couched in assimilative rhetoric. The content of the vision is very similar to Jomo Kenyatta's formulation of cultural nationalism in the early 1930's. So is the rhetoric. However, the comparison must not be taken too far. For the needs of his novelistic design and the needs of his vision Ngugi places Waiyaki in an earlier period of Kenya's history. Therefore, Waiyaki seems to be a prophet born before his times and is, therefore, rejected by his own people. Jomo Kenyatta, in contrast, arrived on the Kenyan scene when the times were more propitious. He was, thus, able to start the Kikuyu Central Association and fitted the
issue of circumcision into a highly developed theory of
cultural nationalism. This made him 'the leader' of Kenyans
and a darling, a messianic figure for a long time to come.
The novel owes considerably to Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount
Kenya* for its anthropological and cultural details.
Passages regarding circumcision and the actual description
of the preparation and the ritual itself are taken almost
verbatim from chapter VI of *Facing Mount Kenya* titled
'Initiation of Boys and Girls'.

The lyrical quality of the prose is dominant in the
first half of the novel when the steady and peaceful flow of
agricultural pastoral life continues. There is a very
lyrical idyllic celebration of this life almost in the
middle of the novel, suggesting man's relation to the cosmic
pattern. The author then warns:

In the past few years things were changing; it no longer
rained regularly. The sun seemed to shine for months and
the grass dried... Perhaps it had to do with the white
men and the blaspheming men of Makuyu.(30)

Nature is brought in to bear upon the growing aridity
in the land, which is externalization of the spiritual
aridity. Ngugi had said in his interview with Dennis
Duerden that the importance of land 'is more than material;
it is not just because of its economic possibilities, it is
something almost akin to spiritual'.(31)

Fr. Livingstone, the Headmaster of the Siriana Mission
School, who exerts considerable influence on Waiyaki during
his formative years at the Siriana Mission School, was
probably inspired by Fr. Francis Carey of Alliance High School, which Ngugi had attended at the age of sixteen. Fr. Carey was a firm believer in the power of education to transform the world around us and he generated the same faith in the hearts of his pupils. Waiyaki's ardent faith in education, though certainly it was shared in other colonial countries by the socio-political leaders, is generated in him by Fr. Livingstone. Ngugi seems to suggest that Carey's faith in the power of education was perhaps exaggerated. He shows in The River Between that Waiyaki is, for all his zeal, enthusiasm and commitment, very much mistaken. Werner Glinga has cogently argued:

He (Waiyaki) is the first to misunderstand the possibilities of education ... While shunning all forms of politics and refusing even to support the Kiama actively, Waiyaki adopts one of the main tenets of such "good Europeans" as the headmaster of Alliance High School. Their tactics of persuasion and limited participation had a far greater effect on many Kenyans than any colonial administration could exercise.... This elitist concept of leadership attracts Waiyaki.(32)

Waiyaki is, thus, the first in the line of those characters in Ngugi's novels who become more and more irresponsible towards their own people till by the time neo-colonialism sets in they have lost all sense of social responsibility.

4.5 Weep Not Child

As one proceeds from The River Between to Weep Not Child, one notices that the worlds depicted in the two novels are recognizably different. There is a gap of about
fifteen years in the time scheme of the two novels. *Weep Not Child* is set in late 1945 or early 1946—almost fifteen years after the circumcision crisis of 1929-30, which was the most important factor in widening the rift in the Gikuyu society depicted in *The River Between*. The disintegrating forces of colonialism seem to have entered the basic unit of this society—the family. The novel is divided into two parts. Part I, 'The Waning Light' hints at the doom. The first chapter introduces us to Ngotho and his family. Ngotho is a dispossessed farmer working on the land which formerly belonged to him as a Muhoi or a 'Shamba-boy'. His land is now bought by a white man and he is reduced to poverty. Yet Ngotho's family has been able to retain its traditional structure and has been living in peace and harmony. Genuine traditional values are cherished, Ngotho is accepted as the 'head' of the family by both his wives as well as his children and his authority is respected. At the same time we are made aware that this family, like any other family, is trying to cope with the changing reality around it. Though within the family 'the order' is still maintained, at the level of the community it has started falling apart as new social patterns evolve. Mr. Howland 'the white settler', who owns Ngotho's ancestral land now, is the new man of 'status'. Next to him in the new social hierarchy is Jacobo, who has received the white man's education and who has embraced the white man's religion as a mark of his enlightenment. Jacobo is a 'loyalist' and as a reward for his loyalty owns a lot of land and is allowed to
grow cash crops like pyrethrum which are largely reserved for the white. He is a 'black' replica of everything the white man stands for, a man with 'a white mask'. He now owns the land where Ngotho has his own Thingira (a hut) and the huts for his two wives. Ngotho’s sons would have to seek other options of earning their livelihood since they are without their ancestral land. Ngotho’s three sons, Boro, Kori and Kamau from his first wife Njeri have not received any ‘schooling’. Bori was conscripted in the Second World War and has returned as a disillusioned angry young man, sulky and rebellious. Kori is forced to leave the village and work at an African tea shop (called Green Hotel) in the neighbouring Kipanga town and Kamau is apprenticed to Nganga, a carpenter and a man with his own land. Mwangi, Ngotho’s son from his second wife Nyokabi, has been killed in the second World War. Njoroge, the youngest child in the family, Nyokabi’s second son, thus, happens to be the first child to be sent to school to receive education.

Jacobo’s youngest daughter is Njoroge’s age and also happens to be his playmate as they stay in the same neighbourhood. Jacobo’s eldest son John is preparing to go to the U.S.A. and his daughter Lucia is a teacher at the school which Njoroge joins. Mwihaki, a class senior to him initially, takes it upon herself to familiarize him with the school atmosphere.

The life has been apparently flowing rather peacefully...
but the atmosphere is charged with tension. In the barber's shop men gather to listen to the wireless and to absorb the news of the world outside. (The barber, who also had been to places like Burma and India is strangely reminiscent of the cobbler in George Lamming's *In The Castle of My Skin*.) There is excitement afoot. There is a shoe factory in Kipanga. The peasants and workers go on strike for increase in their wages and better work conditions. It is when Jacobo appears at the village meeting as a 'peace maker' that Ngotho, in a flash, understands that the 'real enemy' is not only the white man but also the people like Jacobo who have sold themselves to the 'white' devil. Ngotho humiliates Jacobo in public by trying to attack him. The planned strike, however, fails. Ngotho loses his job as a shamba boy and has to vacate the plot on Jacobo's land where his hut stood. He has become shelterless and jobless in a single stroke. Nganga gives him land on his own plot and the problem is sorted out for the time being.

A short interlude before the second part of the novel quickly summarises the rapidly changing scene. There has been large scale disruption in the land. The leader of the popular Mau Mau movement, Jomo Kenyatta, has been arrested and the state of emergency has been declared in Kenya.

The tone of narration also suggests the change. The peacefulness and serenity have given way to violence and fear.

The second part of the novel 'Darkness Falls' offers a very vivid and authentic depiction of the Mau Mau resistance.
against the colonial rule.

During the emergency the white man and the loyalists join hands to crush the movement of the people against oppression and injustice. We meet Mr. Howland in the disguise of the District Officer (D.O.) and Jacobo as the home guard. Boro, who had always accused Ngotho for having allowed the land to be usurped, goes to the forest. Ngotho, though sympathetic to the Mau Mau revolt, refuses to take the oath from Boro as his traditionality would not allow him to take orders from someone younger than him. He resents his son telling him what to do. But inwardly he starts accepting the guilt of a father who has failed his children. He has also lost touch with the ancestral land. 'The communion with the spirits that had gone before him had given him vitality' (34) even when he worked on the land as a 'shamba boy'. He shrinks and withdraws into himself. The events have, indeed, left a deep mark on his personality.

Njoroge has been away at school, continuing his education, almost ignorant about the events that have changed his family's course of life. At this point, it is inevitable that he also gets involved in the nation's chaos. He has been called from the school by the authorities and is brutally tortured in order to make him confess (quite falsely) of having taken an oath. In this poignantly moving scene he learns that Jacobo has been murdered and Ngotho has confessed having killed him. In order to regain his respect in Boro's eyes Ngotho confesses the crime he has not
committed. Mr. Howland, who has been waiting for his individual revenge, castrates him, although he realizes that it was Boro and not Ngotho, who had murdered Jacobo. As Njoroge watches his father die, he realizes that 'education has not led him to the right path.' 'His family was about to break and he was powerless to arrest the fall.'(35)

Boro is reconciled with his dying father and goes to Howland's house and kills him. As the novel ends both Kamau and Boro are facing murder charges; Njoroge, a school dropout in the last year, is working in an Indian's shop. When Mwihaki does not support his plan to run away to Uganda, he decides to commit suicide but both his mothers follow him in spite of the curfew laws. Njoroge feels a sense of guilt of a man who has avoided his responsibility for which he has been prepared since childhood. Probably Njoroge's acceptance of his 'cowardice' at the end is the beginning of his change from a passive observer to an active participant.

Like _The River Between_, _Weep Not Child_ is also extremely concentrated. The deprivation of land was not a strong issue in _The River Between_. The white man's religion had started acting as a divisive force. In many African languages there is a saying, 'The missionary (the white man) had the Bible. We had the land. He took the land and gave us the Bible.' To quote from _Homecoming:_

Often missionaries became land owners and kept cattle on the stolen lands, and these flourished very well — under African labour. This on top of similar alienation of land by settlers made people see religion as something to blind the black races with while the white race stole
peoples’ national property. You know the popular story among our people: that the Mubia told people to shut their eyes in prayer, and when later they opened their eyes the land was taken. And then, so the story goes, the mubia told them not to worry about those worldly things which could be eaten by mouth; and they sang: Thi ino yakwa ndi mwihitukiri ('this world is not my home, I am only a pilgrim'). (36)

The process of giving the Bible to the Kenyan has already started in The River Between. By the time we arrive at the period depicted in Weep Not Child we sense that the resentment for the usurpation of land by the white settlers has reached a ‘menacing’ pitch. Historical documents support this. Paul Maina informs us that a quarter of the Gikuyu population were actually forced to vacate their lands by 1948. (37) The novel shows how the conditions were depressing and disgusting to the Kenyans returning from the second World War. Demands for political emancipation and the formation of the Mau Mau committee in 1950 were the inevitable outcome of this situation.

This short novel presents us three generations representing the past, the present and the future. Ngotho his eldest son Boro and his youngest son Njoroge represent these three phases in the history of colonial Kenya.

Ngotho’s generation, it is made clear, lacked the foresight as well as the determination to stand up against the appropriation of the land by the new black middle class and the white settler. This servile compliance to the white man’s demand has left a demoralizing impact on the generation—represented by Boro—the Mau Mau fighters. In spite of it, this generation has united, fought and even
conquered - only to be betrayed. The story of this betrayal (and the advent of neocolonialism) after political independence are the starting point of the next novel, The Grain of Wheat.

This generation of angry and frustrated men wants to hand over their strong will to resist and their ready acceptance of suffering to the generation represented by Njoroge, tomorrow's urbanised elite. What such people actually do, (or rather did) is tellingly discussed by Frantz Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth:

What is the reaction of the nationalist parties to this eruption of the peasant masses into the national struggle?... They make most of the manna, but do not attempt to organize the rebellion. They don't send leaders into the countryside to educate the people politically, or to increase their awareness or put the struggle on to a higher level....

The political leaders go underground in the towns, give the impression to the colonialists that they have no connection with the rebels, or seek refuge abroad. It very seldom happens that they join people in the hills. In Kenya, for example, during the Mau-Mau rebellion, not a single well-known nationalist declared his affiliation to the movement, or even tried to defend the men involved in it.(38)

The novel searches deeply into these issues by concretising the situation. In spite of his young age Ngugi has written about his white characters with sympathetic understanding. He also presents the well-meaning youth like Njoroge with a lot of compassion. It is the education and his faith in the lyricism of the Bible, which have turned him into a mere dreamer, devoid of any moral strength, courage or perseverance. His act of raising hands in
supplication to Mr. Howland's torture is symbolic. He has
dithered, has lost heart and has been put out of activity.
Why does this happen?

Ngugi's accusing finger points at the white man's
education and religion. Njoroge's estrangement starts very
soon after he starts his 'schooling', when a shirt and
shorts replace his 'calico cloth'. Because of his poverty
he has to remove his uniform while at home and use his
'calico'. Once, he shrinks at the possibility of Mwihaki
noticing him in his calico. Later in the novel he
feels ashamed of his ordinary clothes when he goes to meet
Mwihaki. Education has developed in him a sense of shame
about his own 'inferiority'. In fact, it has generated this
complex in him and yet every character in the novel sees a
'promise' or a 'key' to their economic problems in
'education'. When Njoroge gives the news to Kamau his elder
step brother that he would go to school he says, 'Get
education, I'll get carpentry. Then we shall, in the future
be able to have a new and better home for the whole
family'. Even later, at difficult times it is Kamau who
pays for Njoroge's education through his increased wages.
The world at school has been like a cocoon totally cut off
from the strife in real life:

Njoroge was often surprised by these missionaries'
apparent devotion to their work. One might have thought
that teaching was to them life and death. Yet they were
white men. They never talked of colour; they never
talked down to Africans; and they could work closely,
laugh and joke with their black colleagues who came from
different tribes. Njoroge at times wished the whole
country was like this. This seemed a little paradise. (41)

Immediately after these thoughts cross his mind he is taken for interrogation and is tortured. He remembers the serenity of his school. It is a lost paradise. He realises that education does not prepare one for the realities of life. It is irrelevant. The same is true of the white man's religion. 'Njoroge', we are told, 'came to place faith in the Bible and with his vision of an educated life in the future was blended a belief in the righteousness of God.' The Biblical image of Moses, who led the children of Israel from Misri to the Promised Land, is a recurrent motif not only in this novel but in all novels by Ngugi, but Ngugi describes this image from Njoroge's or Kamau's point of view when they think that Jomo is black men's Moses.

Njoroge is a dreamer. His education has encouraged his habit of dreaming. He puts his faith in Christ and prays regularly. When he is taken for interrogation the headmaster of his school looks at him with great compassion and asks him to put his faith in Jesus Christ. But when he is tortured Jesus does not save him and 'he fails to pray.' (42) Rudely awakened from dreams to reality, Njoroge is a wreck. He has no faith in himself and no confidence and courage to accept the challenge of the reality around him and thinks of escaping to Nairobi - once again an 'urban haven'. Mwihaki, more mature and rooted, refuses to shirk her responsibility. Njoroge is all alone. He wanders to the hill contemplating 'suicide'. We are told:
He recalled Ngotho, dead. Boro would soon be executed, while Kamau would be in prison for life. Njoroge did not know what would happen to Kori in detention. He might be killed... O, God - But why did he call on God? God meant little to him now. For Njoroge had now lost faith in all the things he had earlier believed in, like wealth, power, education, religion. (43)

The hard facts of life are too harsh for him to bear. Oblivious of his responsibility towards his two mothers, he prepares to commit suicide.

It is his mother, who comes looking for him in spite of the curfew and saves him in time.

In spite of the small size of the novel the effective character delineation is achieved through the character introspection technique. We are thrust into the minds of Njoroge, Ngotho, etc. The characterization is impressionistic and vivid - full of sounds, colours and emotions. The changes coming over the characters are suggested in a superbly economic way. For example, growing lack of communication - the immediate effect of the physical and emotional turmoil through which the characters pass - effectively suggest the growing 'loss of contact'. 'Boro is withdrawn' (44) 'Ngotho fears his own son and has no one to whom he can explain himself. (45) Mwihaki also feels the subtle change that has come over her father since he became a homeguard 'but now he is uncommunicative - the gun and pistol he carries make him a stranger to me' (46).

Yet another economical device is to use the same characters in different roles. Mr. Howland is the white
settler, who later on turns into a District Officer; Jacobo a landlord, becomes a homeguard. The coincidence would appear too neat and hence a little weak. But it brings out in fact the essential truth that Jacobo, the homeguard, is only an extension of Jacobo, the black elite/loyalist. Mr. Howland as a D.O. is also an extension of Mr. Howland the white settler. They are the hideous and grotesque external manifestations of the colonized and colonizer's psyches.

Loneliness arising out of the sense of being 'not at ease' with one's society had already started in The River Between. Here, in the generation represented by Njoroge it has reached a neurotic level resulting into alienation of psyche. In Weep Not Child Ngugi fuses Freudian concept of alienation of psyche with alienation of Land. In fact, in the trilogy he fuses Freudian alienation with the Marxist concept of alienation and by absorbing and assimilating Fanon's philosophy of 'violence for true decolonization' he develops his counter rhetoric of the wretched and the oppressed, which becomes more and more articulate in his later novels.

4.6 A Grain of Wheat

A Grain of Wheat is perhaps the most acclaimed of Ngugi's first three novels which together form a trilogy. Like its predecessors, A Grain of Wheat also has as one of its major concerns the changing scene in Kenya and its impact on the Kenyans. It brings the strand of history to the point in time when Kenya achieved independence. It thus
marks the end of colonisation and addresses itself to the serious question of what 'Uhuru' - independence - meant for the Kenyans.

The story covers four days before the Kenyan Independence Uhuru - and a day following it. Kenya became independent on 12th December, 1963. Thus, in time, we have moved on seven years after the concluding events in Weep Not Child. Though the action in the novel takes place over five days - three days covering the preparation for the coming Uhuru, the day of Uhuru itself and the next day covering the aftermath of the Uhuru celebrations, The events from the past are intricately woven into the present and are sometimes brought to bear on the future. This means that the novelist constantly goes from the present moment into the immediate past history of Kenya through the personal history of the characters involved. This necessitates a narrative technique which can be broadly described as the 'flashback technique'. One important advantage of this narrative device is that since we know the present, our looking at the past events is very much affected by our knowledge. Ngugi also makes use of the interior monologue. The events in the story are narrated from the point of view of the several characters involved in them. Thus what Ngugi does in this novel is to interlock the time.

David Cook observes that 'throughout the novel Ngugi weaves for us a pattern in time with present as the warp and the past as the woof'.(47) It is through the use of this unique technique that he forces us to go on continually
modifying our judgement of characters till the end and ultimately helps us to look at them with a profound human compassion and understanding. Since all the important scenes in the novel are presented through dual or multiple points of view they have gained richness and depth of many-sided experiences. We are reminded of the Japanese film director Akhira Kurosawa’s famous film *Roshomon*, which by describing the same event through four different characters brings home the point that there is no such thing as absolute truth; truth is always relative and therefore, there cannot be a final judgement. In short, it is not for human beings to judge. They should try to understand their own predicament as well as that of their fellow beings, particularly at a time when society has almost totally lost its cohesiveness. The novel makes a very strong plea for understanding human limitations and weaknesses. Only through a compassionate understanding, Ngugi suggests, will it be possible to create the New Earth (The post-colonial Kenya).

The novel does not have a central figure. It revolves around five characters. The story, as we have noted, is set at a time of maximum social upheaval and disintegration. The years of emergency between 1952 and 1960 have seen the height of disintegration and chaos, which have produced a peculiar sense of ‘isolation’ of individuals. The village of Thabai, where much of the action takes place, stands for the communal consciousness. It is, no doubt, almost a
character in the novel and is central to the events in the novel but more noteworthy is the fact that all the five main characters around whom the story revolves and Thabai village itself have been directly or indirectly involved in and affected by the state of emergency declared in Kenya. Once again the world presented in the novel is a sort of microcosm for Kenya on the eve of Uhuru. Mugo, Gikonyo, Mumbi, Kihika and Karanja have played various roles in the drama (the Emergency), the stage being Thabai.

The state of Emergency that was declared in Kenya tested the courage, bravery and values of the natives on whom it was clamped. It is evident that not all are equally brave, nor do all stand up to the terrifying pressure of the political oppression. Many break down, some even go over to the other side betraying their cause and their people. In the five characters, Ngugi is presenting a spectrum from the very brave and pure to the weakest who turn betrayers. Thabai suffers silently for whatever the men and women inhabiting it do. Of the five, Kihika had very early decided to join the Mau Mau movement and so had gone off into the forest. The remaining four had made compromises with the oppressive system one way or the other. They are thus living today on the eve of the departure of the oppressor with the burden of their 'bad faith' on their shoulders.

That the novel insists that we should not sit in judgement but rather understand and show compassion for human frailty is powerfully suggested by the narrator's
constant use of 'we'. The reader is thus involved in the actions of the characters and through listening is made to share their lives, for to listen is to understand and through understanding comes the sense of a shared humanity.

It is clear that a novel designed in this way is not very amenable to a compact summary and the total picture of what the novel is trying to do can be obtained by entering the inner worlds of the characters and by analysing the intricate pattern which, as it unfolds itself, lays bare the inner world of the characters. But that is not all. The novel also offers a creative interpretation of Kenyan history, celebrating once more the Kenyan masses, with whom the narrator/writer wants to be identified spiritually. Dr. Shatto Gakwandi thinks that 'A Grain of Wheat is a committed novel and defines a committed novel as 'one that looks into the future because of implied faith in the ability of a people to change their history'.(48) While it has been variously categorised as a political novel, a historical novel or a committed novel by critics, depending upon their definitions of the categories, all seem to agree that it is quite a complex work exploring the nature and causes of human frailty and failure, and expressing a very humane concern for social misfits. These people have been rendered misfits as a result of disintegrating forces of colonialism. With the political decolonization of Kenya there is only a faint glimmer of possibility of readjustment. There is a thin ray of hope that the future of the country can still be
made wholesome, healthy and cohesive.

Of the many acts of betrayals that take place in the novel, the most serious is Mugo’s. Mugo, who bears the name of the first seer of the Gikuyus to have proclaimed the arrival of the white man is ironically the worst victim of the colonizer’s psychological game. In his personal life also he has been an exile. His parents die young and leave him – their only child – to the care of a distant old aunt – a virago, who ill-treats him especially during her drunken bouts. This sad childhood has produced an acute sense of loneliness in Mugo. After his aunt’s death he is gripped by a strong sense of rejection and to gain self-respect and status in the society, he turns to soil:

He would labour, sweat and through success and wealth force the society to recognise him. There was for him, then, solace in the very act of breaking the soil.’(49)

The world Mugo creates for himself through his ‘covenant with soil’ is destroyed by Kihika, the Mau Mau activist, when he takes shelter in Mugo’s hut after killing Robson. Mugo hates this intrusion. Kihika appears to him like a quirk of malicious fate, sent to him to upset his plans and destroy his dreams. Right from his childhood he has shunned society and has kept contact with nobody. His philosophy has always been: ‘if you leave people alone, then they ought to leave you alone.’(50) ‘Why should Kihika drag me in problems which I have not created?’(51) He is afflicted and confused. But Mugo does not have the courage to turn Kihika out; at the same time Kihika’s continued
presence in his hut jeopardises his position. He is very much afraid of the white man also. 'If I don't serve Kihika he'll kill me... If I work for him the government will catch me. The white man has long arms.' (52) His dreams of a better future are shattered. His peace is gone. At one point, Mugo cannot bear the tension any longer and decides to let the white officials know about Kihika's whereabouts. After an intense inner struggle Mugo reports about Kihika to Thompson. Mugo had not liked the idea that he should as an individual suffer as a result of Kihika's action. But his act of turning an informer and betraying Kihika to the British brings about suffering for the whole community in Thaba1. The British burn down the entire village and the villagers must build their huts all over again in the restricted area. They are conscripted on the work of digging trenches around their own village. The village is ostracised and isolated as if in quarantine. Mugo himself does not escape the consequences. He also has to join the work-force digging the trenches. The village is thus humiliated and so is Mugo. While working on the trenches he sees the police beating up Wambuku (Kihika's girl though Mugo does not know it) who is pregnant - though not with Kihika's child. He runs to her rescue, is arrested by the police and sent to the detention camp. The British suspect that he is a Mau Mau sympathiser and has taken the 'oath'. Consequently and ironically, he suffers the hardest. He is shifted from camp to camp because he refuses to confess that
he has taken the oath (which he indeed has not taken). Finally at Rira, he gets involved in the hunger strike. The strikers are arrested and tortured. By strange coincidence it is John Thompson, who beats up the prisoners including Mugo. Eleven of them die. Mugo survives and becomes a hero. The notorious Rira incident ruins Thompson's career as a colonial administrator. Suddenly Mugo finds himself a legendary local hero. Here also fate seems to play an impish role, for, as is already noted, Mugo had always shunned society. He never wanted to be a meaningful member of it. The 'greatness' (the honour of being a hero) that the fellow villagers thrust upon him ill-suits him. For the villagers, ignorant of Mugo's act of betrayal, he is a bright example of human courage. The villagers invite him to lead the Uhuru celebrations as the chief guest and request him to be their new village chief. He is 'alarmed and confused' at the possibility of his involvement with the affairs of the village. He had never established any rapport with the people, and after his release from the detention camp he has not been able to revive his 'communion' with the soil. He is totally isolated and the overpowering sense of guilt eats into him so much that he almost goes mad and lives on the borderline of reality and illusion. Once again he goes through phases of indecisiveness not knowing whether he should accept the invitation and keep his past a secret or firmly reject it and avoid any contact with society. He even fantasies that to the few, elect of God, the past was forgiven, was made
clean by great deeds that saved many. He would lead people and bury his past in their gratitude. Nobody need ever know about Kihika'. (53)

The focus now shifts to three other characters in the novel - Gikonyo, Mumbi and Karanja. The three had grown up together in the village and both Gikonyo and Karanja are attracted towards beautiful Mumbi. However, Mumbi chooses Gikonyo. He has is a Mau Mau activist and is arrested by the British. He has taken the Oath but he is also very much in love. So is set up the conflict in Gikonyo's soul. Gikonyo breaks down and confesses that he has taken the oath - he betrays his cause - because he cannot bear to be separated from Mumbi. So we see that just as the lure of economic security tempts Mugo to betray Kihika, the intense and passionate yearning for Mumbi leads to Gikonyo's downfall. He yields to the temptation of going back to Mumbi. 'She was his life. To him she had always been a symbol of purity' (54) and he longs to be with her.

At this point, fate once again decides to step in. He had confessed thinking that he would be released soon. But there is a delay which turns out to be most unfortunate for it destroys Gikonyo's dreams. We move back again in time to see what happened in the village during Gikonyo's absence.

Life has been very hard for the villagers, following the reprisals that the British had inflicted on the village. It has been particularly difficult for Mumbi to pull on. She has lost a brother, and her younger brother is a mere.
child. Her husband is in the detention camp. All these factors conspire to make Mumbi's life extremely miserable. At times they are forced to go without food for days together. After their village is destroyed she builds new huts by herself, there being no man to help her.

Karanja, who is depicted as a sincere friend, wants to help Mumbi. He has accepted the post of a minor official, and would like to help Mumbi in whatever ways he can. Mumbi, however, has firmly refused to take help from Karanja and has consistently spurned his silent advances. She is, however, forced to accept help from Karanja in the form of food. Her ailing mother-in-law and her own parents are dying of hunger and she cannot see them die without food. Karanja's gift of food is accepted but Mumbi remains firm in her rejection of his advances. Mumbi, we are told, puts up with her sufferings hoping that one day she would be united with Gikonyo once again.

There has been another instance of Mumbi accepting help from Karanja. Her younger brother Kariuki is selected for admission to Siriana Mission School. He needs a certificate from an official without which he will not be admitted. Once again Mumbi is forced to accept help from Karanja for the sake of her family. Later she curses herself for having accepted his help even at the moment of dire need.

In his capacity as a Home Guard, Karanja comes to know bits of information concerning the detainees in the detention camp. He happens to know that Gikonyo is soon to be released. He, of course, does not know that Gikonyo has
confessed that he had taken the Oath in order to get released. Karanja thinks that he ought to tell Mumbi the good news (though the return of Gikonyo would mean that he can never hope for Mumbi's hand). Mumbi at first cannot believe the news. But she is convinced when Karanja produces a list with Gikonyo's name in it. The news throws Mumbi in an ecstatic fit and she is overcome with joy at the prospect of being united with Gikonyo. She is at the same time deeply touched by Karanja's gesture. In a moment of weakness, when she is besides herself, she yields to Karanja. The act is again fateful. She conceives - which is the physical burden of her 'guilt' and she suffers for having been unfaithful and disloyal to Gikonyo.

But contrary to what Karanja's list says, Gikonyo is not released as the delay is quite a protracted one. The result is that in the meantime Mumbi, who is pregnant, delivers a child. Gikonyo on his eventual release from the camp returns to the village to find Mumbi with the child. It is for him the most painful evidence of Mumbi's betrayal of him. As can be expected, he refuses to listen to Mumbi even though she repeatedly tries to explain the child to him. Gikonyo has constructed around him an impenetrable wall. For him she was a symbol of purity much as Desdemona was to Othello, and like Othello Gikonyo humiliates Mumbi by calling her a whore, which leads to their estrangement.

By the time the Emergency is lifted (1960), everybody in the village is deeply scalded by the sufferings the
community as a whole has undergone. The struggle for survival - each for himself - has broken the traditional bonds among the individuals. Everybody has become uncommunicative, lost and forlorn and lives as it were, in one's own private prison. Everyone carries in his or her soul a deeply ingrained sense of guilt.

Mumbi is endowed by her creator with a magic or hypnotic power over men. As she presents the picture of the terrible times through which the villagers in Thabai went during the Emergency, Mugo suddenly realizes that the ostracization of the village was the end product of his act of handing Kihika over to the government. Mumbi's story and the unmerited sufferings which she had to undergo have a very deep impact on Mugo. He tells Mumbi that it was he who had handed Kihika over to the British and that his act was responsible for the consequent collective suffering. It 'released imprisoned thoughts and feelings and he told the truth'. (55) His act leads to his final public confession. Thus it is Mumbi, who transforms him:

Why was it important to him now, tonight, what Mumbi thought of him? She had been so near. He could see her face and feel her warm breath. She had sat there, and talked to him, and given him the glimpse of the new earth. She had trusted him and confided in him. This simple trust had forced him to tell her the truth.... Mumbi had made him aware of a loss which was also a possibility. (56)

In the end, he accepts his responsibility and makes a public confession. Ngugi takes us inside the mind of Mugo and elicits from us not only condemnation for his act but
also pity for his twisted psyche. At times, he reminds one
of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, who has been amply punished for
his crime through his internal suffering before he shows
courage and confesses.

The Uhuru celebrations are not full of pure delight and
ecstasy. Gikonyo and Karanja run in the races arranged by
the villagers. Gikonyo falls and breaks his arm. As he
convalesces in the hospital, Mumbi visits him daily as a
part of her duty. Gikonyo realizes how much he needs her
and expresses finally a wish to talk about the child. That
is indicative of his decision to come to terms with the past
humiliation and to bury it for ever. But Mumbi does not
agree. A new confident and mature Mumbi says:

No, Gikonyo. People try to rub out things, but they
cannot. Things are not so easy. What had passed between
us is too much to be passed over in a sentence. We need
to talk, to open our hearts to one another, examine them,
and then together plan the future we want.(57)

Gikonyo has long wanted to present Mumbi with a gift —
a wedding gift from the bridegroom to the bride. Somehow he
had not been able to do anything about it. He is a skilled
craftsman. As she goes away with sad but sure steps he
suddenly realizes that he wants to give her a stool to sit
on as the gift, a fine hand carved traditional stool with a
decorative figure on it. It would be the figure of a
pregnant woman. A woman big-big with child.

We must read this scene as symbolic of how Mumbi's
compassionate acceptance of life, her mature understanding
of human frailty and her determination to create a new world
out of the relics of the old world have a purifying effect on Gikonyo. His craftsmanship is rekindled into life and creativity and again the agent that brings about the transformation is Mumbi – the patient mother. Mumbi has really matured in the course of action. She hates Karanja for what happened between them. But she has accepted her responsibility as a mother of the child. She has looked after Gikonyo's mother and a close bond has developed between the two women. After her quarrel with Gikonyo she goes back to stay with her parents. When her mother Wanjiku after soothing her feelings tries to tell her that her place is with her husband, Mumbi tells her mother that if she is a burden to them she would go to Nairobi with the child and earn her own livelihood. Wangari, Gikonyo's mother, knows that Mumbi is a woman of strength and character. She scolds her son:

See how you have broken your home. You have driven a good woman to misery for nothing. Let us now see what profit it will bring you, to go on poisoning your mind with these things when you should have accepted and sought how best to build your life. But you, like a foolish child, have never wanted to know what happened. Or what woman Mumbi really is.’(58)

Wangari has put her finger on a sensitive nerve. It is Gikonyo's egotism that comes in the way, and makes him take a petulantly arrogant and childish attitude.

As it always happens in Ngugi's novels, the women characters are more understanding, patient and courageous. When Mugo confesses his crime, Wanjiku, Kihika's mother,
feels sad, not about Kihika but Mugo. "Wanjiku wept. ("It was his face, not the memory of my son that caused my tears" she told Mumbi later). (59) Even Mumbi is sorry that Mugo would lose his life but she is the one who recovers quickly from the mood of introspection and says to Wambui:

'Ve have got to live.'
'Yes, we have the village to build' Warui agreed.
'And the market tomorrow, and the fields to dig...'
Wambui...
'And children to look after' finished Mumbi. (60)

These women are aware of the intense irony embedded in the situation. 'Uhuru' has arrived but the legacy of colonialism persists. No one is untainted and free of guilt. We have to build the new earth and all that we need is simple faith in life and in future. The independent Kenya, you are made aware, will have the M.P.'s who will thwart the collective effort of the people's cooperatives, make private properties and drive and change cars - in short step into the shoes of the Bwana.

Like Soyinka's A Dance of the Forests, A Grain of Wheat also suggests that the moment of victory is not the moment for jubilation but the moment for introspection. The fractures and fissures caused by the European colonization are deep but the root cause for these lies in human nature. As long as human greed, selfishness and ironically enough, even excessive goodness exist, it is inevitable that the same colonial forces will appear in different masks. In the context of the novel this appearance is in the form of the new M.P. elected for the local self-government, who buys the
plot of land from the white settler, which Gikonyo and six others wanted to buy for cooperative farming. The moral based on Fanon’s ideology, is obvious: you cannot beat the enemy with his own rhetoric. It will be the rhetoric of the wretched and the oppressed. It is the women, the worst victims of colonialism and neo-colonialism through whom it will operate. Ngugi’s women characters are the ones who show courage, perseverance and the potential to offer this counter rhetoric, through which the true homecoming can be attained. It is a dream which has a solid foundation of stark reality, and its acceptance with a zest for life.

The real impact of colonialism/imperialism was the rejection or suppression of androgyny - the divine bi-unity, which is at the core of peasant culture. Gikonyo’s calling Mumbi a whore is a clear manifestation of this rejection. (Ironically again, it is triggered off by the frustration at the news that the M.P. has kept him waiting for the loan while he himself has already bought the land. Maybe Gikonyo realizes that things have not really changed. He still continues to be one of the oppressed and wretched and as it often happens imposes the same wretchedness on those who depend on him namely, Mumbi.) Mumbi, however, refuses to be a victim of this mentality. She shows courage and retaliates and asserts her dignity by leaving him immediately. Wangari, Gikonyo’s own mother shows the ancient wisdom when she suggests that home is built by both man and woman, out of whatever can be salvaged from the
wreck caused by the repressive forces.

The novel is in a sense historical, but the vision of history is mythical and legendary. In oral cultures myths and legends not only record the past but help continuation of culture. Ngugi is reinterpreting the past of Kenya through the Gikonyo-Mumbi myth. Mumbi emerges, as her name (the name of the primeval Mother of the Gikuyus) suggests a Mother figure. Initially Gikonyo and Karanja represent the contraries — the native and the colonized mind respectively — eager for Mumbi / Earth / Kenya's hand. Mumbi's choice of Gikonyo, the carpenter and creator, is clearly the choice in favour of the native. But ironically enough, during the detention Gikonyo undergoes a subtle change. He comes out a changed person. Before the emergency when he had started working as a carpenter he did not grudge if people did not pay him for his work or even when they paid in instalments. His mother would tell him, 'You know if they had money they would pay you' (61) and he agreed. When Mumbi asked him about the charges for the repairs of a panga he said, 'Don't break your heart over that. That is nothing.' 'But you cannot work for nothing,' she says. 'I am not an Indian shopkeeper,' (62) he said irritably. But after his return from the detention exactly this is how he behaves. Once he has given a certain time limit he would not wait for his dues even for a day. He is exacting about his rates. He starts amassing wealth by selling vegetables and grain on a commission basis. This kind of marketing was the realm of women in the traditional
African society. So people laugh at him initially but begin to respect him as he grows his assets. It is this changed aggressive Gikonyo, who dares to insult Mumbi. In the change that comes over Gikonyo, Ngugi very perceptively and at the same time artistically suggests a cultural (androgyny → patriarchy) and an economic change. Gikonyo is 'estranged; just as Mugo is estranged from his own people.

Mumbi's momentary surrender to Karanja is symbolic of the colonizer-colonized game in which both the parties are guilty. Excessive warmth and hospitality of the Africans and their not being on their guard are important factors in the history of colonialism. Mumbi not only gives birth to Karanja's child but brings it up with love and care. She is a Mother. This mother-child relationship manifests that the colonial past cannot be wished away. In the cyclic model of history, the past affects present and, therefore, cannot be denied. Mumbi shows maturity and wisdom in accepting her own responsibility in her act and bears the consequences with courage. To Gikonyo, she was a symbol of purity but there is a realization at the end that purity of the pre-colonial ethos is gone. Life has enforced upon all of them the need to 'compromise' in order to live. Mumbi / Earth / Kenya cannot remain unaffected. What can be restored is the essence of the pre-colonial culture, namely androgyny. The legacy of colonialism has also imbalanced man-woman relationship by imposing male supremacy as a value. The counter-rhetoric will have to operate by restoring the
dignity of the woman. It is the woman/mother who will give birth to Kenya's future by accepting the reality as a grave challenge to be faced with humanity and deep compassion. Mumbi is the manifestation of that compassion as also of hope, patience and dignity.

In order that New Kenya be born, this final ordeal through death-like pain is necessary. That is what the title, 'A Grain of Wheat', taken from Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, seems to suggest.

Gikonyo's final acceptance of Mumbi with reverence and humility and his strong desire to see her pregnant once again symbolize that healthy cohesive future is possible if it is based on the unqualified acceptance of the present.

There is a dream of building a new future with the child which is not even conceived. This new future will build new Kenya using the counter rhetoric. There is a hope that - the rhetoric of materialism or capitalism - MP's continuation of the old game - will be rejected by Gikonyo and Mumbi's child. But will this happen? Since Gikonyo also is all too willing to be the victim of the game, though in a different form - the hope for a radical change is pinned on Mumbi - the woman, the mother and a symbol at once of the most glorified and worst oppressed of the species. The title bears a new significance even from this point of view. It is in the womb of the soil / Mumbi that a grain of wheat will die in order to germinate. That germination will give birth to New Kenya. This symbol of mother as a destroyer and creator (the symbol of Amba-Bhavani, who is
also Kali), which will assume increasing significance in his later novels.

4.7 **Petals of Blood**

The world of *A Grain of Wheat* is dark enough, but the world of *Petals of Blood* is darker still. Chronologically, the novel depicts the twelve years after Kenya gained independence. Before Ngugi embarked on this novel, which took him five years to complete, he had published a book of essays and articles, *Homecoming*, under his new name Ngugi wa Thiong'o. The views expressed in *Homecoming* have greatly influenced the themes of *Petals of Blood*.

In *Homecoming*, Ngugi displays his concern over the absence of the concept of a nation in Africa:

> In Kenya then, there is really no concept of a nation. One is always a Kikuyu, a Luo, a Nandi, an Asian or a European. I think this diminishes our strength and creative power. To live on the level of race or tribe is to be less than whole. (63)

In *Petals of Blood* he sets out to explore and build the concept of a nation. As if he were intent on casting off everything that underscores the lack of the concept of a nation, the names of the tribes disappear. In Ilmorog, the village where the action takes place, the word Gikuyu does not figure at all. All farmers are peasants or tillers. The Masais are called Herdsmen. Ngugi’s dream is to create a pan-African culture and the culture of the Third World, which will have needs of man at its core. He is fully aware of the forces that operate against this. Due to the
continuation of the capitalist, colonialist policy, 'Now there are only two tribes left in Africa: the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. (64) Though he uses the word 'tribes' in this quotation, it is obvious that he is thinking in terms of classes.

Ngugi has firm faith that literature is of course primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and the values governing human relationships. (65) In Petals of Blood he sets out to examine the impact of the new political and economic arrangements on the lives of four of his main characters. It is in this sense that Petals of Blood can be described as a political novel.

The novel is divided into four parts. Part I 'Walking' describes Old Ilmorog upto the point of the trek the villagers undertake to meet their M.P. in the city to confront him with their demands. (Chapters 1 to 6)

Part II 'Toward Bethlehem' describes the actual trek to the city and its immediate outcome. This part is not divided into chapters and is an uninterrupted piece of narrative.

Part III - 'To be Born' takes up where Part I left off because the first chapter in this part is numbered 7. It describes the brief period of tranquility and happiness; rains, good harvest, relief from the city - the last revitalization of the life in Old Ilmorog. (Chapters 7 to 10)

Part IV - La Luta Continua (Chapters 11 to 13) depicts
how the forces gather to annihilate the Old Ilmorog but also suggests at the end that the workers in 'Thengeta Breweries' have united to fight the injustice.

The epigraphs to these parts are also very significant. At the beginning of Part I there are two. One is the famous quotation from the book of Revelation Chapter 6 describing how the ones sitting on the white horse, the red horse, the black horse and the pale horse were given 'authority over the fourth part of the earth to kill with sword and with famine and with death'. The second epigraph, lines from Walt Whitman, give a similar message.

Part II has two epigraphs, both from William Blake. The second,

Pity would be no more
If we did not make somebody poor (66)

is very relevant from the point of view of the counter rhetoric that Ngugi wants to offer in the novel. Part III has three epigraphs. One is again from William Blake condemning adulterous love whereas the remaining two are taken from the Song of Solomon singing the glory of true love. They bring out the essentially ironical nature of the 'union' (in fact they drift apart) of Karega and Wanja, two main characters in the novel. Part IV also has two epigraphs, lines by Walt Whitman and Amilcar Cabral respectively. The Biblical, Blakean visions are merged with the Marxist vision of Cabral suggesting the direction Ngugi's search for a new home has taken.

The novel opens with visits by the Police constables to
Munira, Abdaulla and Karega. They are required to be at the police station in connection with a fire (an act of arson) and the 'murder' of three persons who lost their lives in the fire. A newspaper report of the incident says:

A man, believed to be a trade union agitator, has been held after leading industrialist and two educationists, well known as African directors of the internationally famous Theng'eta Breweries and Enterprises Ltd. were last night burnt to death in Ilmorog, only hours after taking a no-nonsense-no-pay-rise decision.

It is believed that they were lured into a house where they were set on by hired thugs. (67)

The newspaper is ironically called 'Mouthpiece'!

The trade union agitator is Karega, who is leading the strike of the workers in Theng'eta Breweries and Enterprises Ltd. Munira has been running a Primary School in Ilmorog for the past twelve years. Abdulla, a former Mau Mau activist, now a lame man, having lived a down and out kind of life, has settled down in Ilmorog and under the new dispensation is useless and 'unemployable', if not a nuisance to the regime. The house referred to in the report belongs to Wanja, who had set up a whorehouse in Ilmorog and had acquired both status and power in the corrupt set up.

Ilmorog is no longer a nineteenth century village - quiet and peaceful. Indeed, such terms as 'trade union agitator', 'industrialist', 'educationist', 'African directors of the internationally famous...' suggest an altogether different atmosphere and different concerns.

The opening of the novel, thus, effectively introduces the theme of social change, unrest, violence and destruction
by fire (which is symbolic, for it is only by burning the weeds that the soil is made fit for the sowing and the harvest). The changed ethos is also beautifully conveyed when the newspaper report goes on to talk about Gagarin and Armstrong in the context of rural Africa! The principal actors in the drama that is going to be unfolded are also presented: Munira, Karega, Abdulla and Wanj* are from Ilmorog - though each one of them has, in a sense, drifted to it - those who die in the fire are like weeds, the aliens or outsiders. They are the 'city' characters.

The fire and the trek to the city by the people of Ilmorog are the two most important events around which the plot of the novel develops. These are also the events which give tremendous scope to the characters involved for introspection and for self examination. An investigation automatically takes place and during the course of the inquiry and the interviews with the principal characters considerable light is thrown on the characters and the workings of their minds. The trek, a kind of modern-day pilgrimage, not only throws people together but through a process of action and reaction brings enlightenment to the participant characters as well as to the readers.

The police inquiry ends when Inspector Godfrey, a supporter of status quo, arrests Munira as being responsible for the act and detains Karega, who is believed to be a communist because he is a threat to stability.

Both the inquiry and the grand trek are meant to bring
out the dehumanization, and the new forms of tyrannical oppression under the neo colonial situation in Kenya after Independence. The participants in the trek from Ilmorog go to the affluent people in the city only to be turned away in a most inhuman manner. When Abdulla and Munira go seeking help for a sick child, they are rudely turned away. The man who turns them away thinks they have come to ask for work. They are summarily dismissed with 'hakuna kazi-no work'. In yet another instance a priest, after keeping them waiting till the service is over, launches a fresh platitudinous lecture on spirituality. Religion has become an arid and oppressive instrument. Greed stalks everywhere in the city. It is no wonder that the novelist remembers William Blake (who provides an epigraph). Greed divides the people and does not let the dream of 'one nation' come into existence.

Yet another incident bringing out the irony inherent in the neo colonial situation is the KCO oathtaking ceremony at the 'tea party' to which people are led by a kind of deception. It turns the solemnity of Mau Mau oath into a sick joke. Though it is not central to the plot it throws light on the eagerness with which the traditional culture is appropriated by the neo colonial forces.

Ezekiel Waweru, Munira's father, had become a Christian with a very specific materialistic ambition and prospered as a result of his conversion though outwardly he showed himself to be a devout Christian. It is not surprising, therefore, he supports the vandalized oathtaking at the tea party. And yet the same Waweru had vehemently opposed the
oath-taking during the Mau Mau movement on the grounds that such oath-taking was repugnant to his Christian beliefs! Waweru has clearly sensed how the wind now blows!

The story is acted out by a group of four characters from the city juxtaposed with four from Ilmorog. Like Thabai village in the previous novel *A Grain of Wheat*, Ilmorog also becomes a character in this novel.

The city group represented by four men includes Chui, an education administrator, Nderi an M.P. from Ilmorog, Ezikiel Waweru, a rich farmer and Kimeria, an entrepreneur. This arrangement reinforces the fact that the corrupt forces have pervaded every area of existence in post-independence Kenya.

The symbolic element in the novel is stronger than ever before and indicates that Ngugi will probably move to political fable very soon. The names of characters had always been symbolic in Ngugi's works. Even in the earlier novels the names of the white characters are suggestive of their moral sterility. In *The River Between* the headmaster at Siriana was Livingstone (a living stone). The white settler in *Weep Not Child* is Mr. Howland (how come the land belongs to you?) and the D O in *A Grain of Wheat* whom Kihika murders is Robson (a robber's son or a son who robs). In *Petals of Blood* the name symbolism is overt and assumes grotesque dimensions. The white characters (who have receded into the background) are Sir Swallow Blooall (blood sucker) and Cambridge Fraudsham (fraud and sham together).
Their black counterparts have equally sinister names. Chui means 'Leopard' (not a very pleasant animal in the African context). Nderi wa Riera means 'vulture - son of air' (a bird of prey). The names of the black characters that are central to the story and for whom Ngugi may have some sympathy are equally symbolic. Munira means 'a stump' or an uprooted lifeless obstacle. Abdulla's original name Murira means a 'mystery man' bringing out his cultural confusion. Wanja means an 'outsider' and Karega means a 'rebel', the one who refuses to accept. Obviously, the characters are going to assume greater significance in their social roles. This is not to say that they are not properly developed as individuals. All these characters have a richness and complexity which gains considerably through the continuous interweaving of the past, the present and future. The people and events are interdependent. This interweaving also gives historic coherence and a sense of the inevitable to the incidents that take place. It further enriches the texture of the story and adds complexity to the drama of sick capitalism in Kenya.

The characters representing the 'Ilmorog group' are all in a sense outsiders. All of them have come to Ilmorog - a drought and poverty stricken, forgotten village, to seek escape from their degenerate lives in the cities. Munira who according to many critics is the protagonist, has come to Ilmorog twelve years before the action of the novel begins, partly to seek an escape from his father's bourgeois conformist Christian existence in which acquisitiveness has
replaced conscience. His father Waweru's materialistic ambitions are fulfilled by all his children except Munira and his daughter Mukami, who as a gesture of revolt against her father's oppressive outlook commits suicide when it becomes clear to her that she would not be able to marry Karega, whom she loves. Munira is a manifestation of indecisiveness and is somewhat close to Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*. Munira's element is dusk - the period which belongs neither to the night nor to the day. He is drawn into a strike started by Chui while both of them are at Siriana Mission School but that also is not a well-thought out decision but rather an impulsive act. He then seeks his salvation in sex and love. His gesture of rebellion against his father is to marry Wanjiru - a pagan girl. But much to Munira's dismay, she embraces his parents' empty religion and has become 'Julia'. 'The temporary dream of an escape into sensuality had vanished on the marriage bed' (68). His coming to Ilmorog Primary School may be partly an escape, but partly it is an opportunity to prove himself. It is a school where no teacher has stayed for a long time. In his early days as a teacher, even Munira is driven by an impulse to go away from the wilderness. He, however, has gone and come back; has stayed there, and the villagers have come to respect him as 'Mwalimu'. Wanja, another outsider settling in Ilmorog, causes a fresh awakening of his inner turmoil. Munira is attracted to her precisely for the same reason for which he was attracted to Wanjiru - she is a pagan - though
he knows that she does not love him.

Munira’s reformist zeal is apparent in the efforts he has taken to make the school progress. Wanja and her grandmother Nyakinyua have given him moral support. His feelings about his own inadequacy, inferiority and loneliness are, however, so strong that he is easily overridden by jealousy and frustration when he realizes that Karega and Wanja are in love with each other. Out of personal vindictiveness he decides to get Karega dismissed though he himself had chosen Karega to assist him as an extra teacher. In his earlier acts he sounded like a 'positive' character but this last act cancels out all of them. He has been a reformer who allowed his principles to take a second place; that too at a very crucial point. He faces the utmost humiliation for his unjust act when Wanja offers herself to him after she accepts prostitution as a career for 100 shillings and treats him as her first customer. There is a deep irony here. Munira is attracted to Wanja for the wild pagan element that he perceived in her. Wanja, however, wants Karega for her lover. When Karega and Wanja drift apart and she becomes a prostitute she is no longer the woman that Munira wanted. She is just a commodity and a rather obnoxious commodity for Munira’s sensibility. During all this period Munira is overpowered by a sense of guilt and tries to find solace in a warped evangelical Christian cult led by Lilian, an erstwhile prostitute. That is the end of the reformer in him. It turns out that Munira it was who set Wanja’s wooden house on
fire. This again is an individual act and not an attack on the system. It is the destructive element in full play. It was he who had explained to his students why the petals of a certain bean flower were unusually red - petals of blood. It was because they had been eaten by an insect at the core. The same is true of Munira's life. It is eaten at the core by the insect of colonial forces the worst of which is represented by his father Ezekiel Waweru. Waweru had gone against his own father as a young man, had embraced Christianity as an easy way to prosperity to be attained in compliance with the white man, had refused to take the Mau Mau oath and be with people. Munira's attempt to stand against all this is defeated because he seeks his own salvation with the same weapon - Christianity. He is bound to be defeated.

As opposed to Munira, it is Karega who is the genuine reformer. He truly represents the wretched and the oppressed who must learn to resist oppression and reject the old world in order to create a new one. If the world that exists today is corrupt beyond repair and therefore cannot accommodate them, it must be destroyed. He has not been able to finish his education at Siriana. His mother Mariamu was a squatter on Ezikiel Waweru's farm from where she has been driven out. She dies in great poverty. After Munira dismisses him from 'Ilmorog Primary School' out of personal jealousy he wanders all over Kenya, works in several factories and even sells animal skins at the roadside.
Karega, supported by Nyakinyua, is instrumental in mobilizing Ilmorog's will for a march (trek) to the city in order to protest against misery and starvation. During the trek, the early colonial (and even precolonial past) is celebrated through the stories narrated by Nyakinyua and Abdulla. It is Karega who is responsible for this celebration of culture and tradition because it is he who inspires her as well as Abdulla. Abdulla's stories tell us about the glories of the Mau Mau struggle. Karega adores the lawyer in Nairobi who fights for the poor but stops working for him because he disagrees with his principles. "He had too much of faith in the very shrines created by what he called the monster" (69). Karega, however, thought that "That which is created by men can also be changed by men... but which men?" In Karega's mind, the men like the lawyer who put too much faith in the people's ability to see the wrong and repent are not the one's who will change this world. (70) Karega's meeting with Wanja after his return to New Ilmorog is also very significant. He tells her that "he is sorry that she is on the other side", referring to her decision to start a whorehouse. She cries after him to give her life, to give her a child. But he does not look at her. He feels that he is being callous but for him it is the only way. He is firm and sure. He is not tempted by the insidious form of what he is fighting against. He thinks:

Whatever you are, you have chosen sides. I don't hate you, I don't judge you... but I know that we cannot fight Kimerias by being them... by joining them. (71)
Karega is truly the leader.

Abdulla, the half caste and an inconsequential shopkeeper in Ilmorog, is unlike Karega but very much like Munira and Wanja - a self-exile. He is a gallant figure and there are many sides to him which are revealed through various situations in the novel. His personal history is linked with the heroic past of the Mau Mau movement. His present life in New Ilmorog is so inglorious that he is actually a representative of the down and out lumpen class driven to ignominy by the metropolitan culture. A lonely figure in the old Ilmorog, he undergoes a transformation during the trek and reveals his positive human potential.

We also come to know that Abdulla has picked a street urchin, accepted him as his brother and named him Joseph. One more of his humane gestures is his proposal to Wanja to marry him when he knows that she is entering 'whoredom'. It is no doubt ludicrous but very moving for it is a desperate gesture by a human being to another to save her from utter degeneration. In this Abdulla reveals a typical 'romantic' trait (helping a fallen woman) and it is also significant to note in this context that Ngugi portrays him as a 'lame' man.

His lame leg is a testimony of the betrayed generation but to put it in Wanja's words, 'It is as if he is carrying much suffering, not in his crippled leg, but in his heart.' (72) In depicting Abdulla as a freedom fighter Ngugi has for the first time softened towards the Indian presence.
in Kenya. It reveals his comprehensive vision. In Weep Not Child and A Grain of Wheat Indians were objects, perhaps rightly so, of contempt. They were nothing but the miniature replicas of the white man's oppressive forces but Indians who lived in Kenya for two or three generations were very much part of Kenyan scene and Ngugi's dream is Kenya which is not divided into races and tribes. His accommodation of Indians is in keeping with his dream revealed in Homecoming. Born of an African mother and an Indian father Abdulla suffers from the feeling of being a 'divided self'. His throwing himself in the Mau Mau movement brings him peace. His fight against the British as a Mau Mau activist had brought him a sense of meaning and had helped him, however momentarily, to heal the schism in his mind. Abdulla and Ndinguri, who is Karega's much older brother, are both betrayed by Kimeria, who reports them to the British. In the encounter that ensues, Abdulla escapes with a bullet in his leg. Ndinguri is arrested and is hanged. Abdulla's wounded leg has to be cut off rendering him lame. Once the struggle is over, romantically dedicated souls like Abdulla are misfits, for the imperialistic elements surface and become powerful. The accomplices of the oppressive system like Kimeria also find friends in the new system and soon prosper and become influential. Kimeria, who transported corpses of the Mau Mau martyrs becomes an industrialist in post-independence Kenya! Abdulla is revolted to see that, when he goes to seek employment so that he can support himself with dignity. He
is brushed aside as 'unemployable' while Kimeria enjoys great prestige!' Abdulla feels humiliated and hurt. He later says, 'I wanted to go deep deep into the country where I would have no reminder of so bitter a betrayal.' (73)

A case has been made out for Munira as the protagonist of the novel. Yet a more plausible case can be made for considering Wanja as the central character. The story evolves mainly out of her relationships with Munira, Karega and Abdulla. She is also a victim of the forces operating against her. At school she has been an intelligent and sensitive girl full of desire to do something for others. Her father, driven by personal materialistic ambitions introduces her to Kimeria, who seduces her and discards her when he finds out that she is pregnant. A dropout from school, she has no choice but to become a barmaid. She tries to go back to her father after her stint as a barmaid but he rejects her, calling her a whore. Even as a child she was lonely and insecure because of the constant tensions between her father and mother, her mother being a silent supporter of the Mau Mau and her father being its opponent.

In her childish rebellious anger she turns her back on home and falls prey to the evil forces in the society. When she realizes that she is being victimized time and again she escapes to Ilmorog to her grandmother in an attempt to heal her spiritually parched soul and make a new and honest beginning. Her unquestioning acceptance by Nyakinyua her
grandmother, is the healing touch. She has a capacity to throw herself fully into any activity she undertakes. She is genuinely willing to help those in distress and craves for a child. A sense of guilt for having thrown her child into a latrine has chased her all her life. Perhaps it is for this reason that she esteems Abdulla highly, for Abdulla has adopted an urchin as his brother and changed his life. To redeem herself from the nagging sense of sin Wanja helps Joseph, Abdulla’s adopted younger brother.

A very significant incident in the novel shows Abdulla informing Wanja that Joseph has topped the list of candidates in Siriana High School. The news makes Wanja so deliriously happy that she allows Abdulla to make love to her, accepting him as her lover. The incident reminds the reader of a similar incident in A Grain of Wheat where Mumbi yields to physical relationship with Karanja on learning through him the news of her husband’s imminent release from the detention camp. It is possible to see both these incidents as typical of Africans’ excessively warm and good nature and the physical union can be seen as a gesture of genuine appreciation of human kindness. It is also very significant that Wanja’s union with Abdulla takes place immediately before her house is reduced to ashes by jealous Munira. Wanja decides to play the capitalist’s game and to pay her oppressors in their own coin but there is a great energy and yearning for ‘life’ that preserve her dignity and sensitivity to the end. Driven by the circumstances which overwhelm her she finally decides to enter a capitalist’s
game 'Eat or be eaten'. The only commodity that she can offer is her body and so she trades it for money.

Ironically, through the disreputable profession she has been able to gain a social status and her freedom though she has lost her image in her own eyes.

In a profound turn of events her second meeting with Karega not only breaks their relationship but with it also her innocence also disappears. With her power over men she has become a temptress. The unpleasant city characters, namely Chui, Mzigo, Kimeria have all been tricked into coming to her wooden house so that she will trap them and set the house on fire. Indeed, she kills Kimeria and it is only by accident that Munira, mad with jealousy, sets her house on fire, which kills the other two and leaves Wanja injured. Ironically enough, Karega who has nothing to do with the fire suffers because he happens to be leading the strike against the 'industrialists'! In trying to beat the colonizer at his own game she has transformed herself into an oppressor. Her role now is that of a destroyer but nonetheless she yearns to be a mother and a creator. Her prayer is finally granted. As a result of her lovemaking with Abdulla, Wanja conceives and is pregnant. As she draws a figure (of Abdulla) to answer her mother's question 'Whose child?' her mother says after looking at the picture, 'Who... who is this... with... with so much pain and suffering on his face? And why is he laughing at the same time?' (74) (emphasis mine)
All along we believe that Karega wants to change the world and create a new earth out of the old one. Abdulla, a freedom fighter, a shopkeeper, a Thengeta bar manager, in turns and ultimately a totally dispossessed orange vendor and lame drunkard in tattered clothes, does not agree with Karega on the kind of his leadership. At the time of his interrogation, he tells Inspector Godfrey that he did not always agree with Karega:

I thought he was going too far in overstretching the importance of workers' solidarity aided by small farmers. What about the unemployed? The small traders? I believed and I told him so, that land should be available to everybody; that loans should be readily available to the small man; that nobody should have too many businesses under him - in a word, fair distribution of opportunities. (75)

And indeed, this is the news that Akinyi, a girl in New Ilmorog and a victim of the practice of child labour, gives Karega as she meets him after he is detained. 'The movement of Ilmorog workers... not just the union of workers at breweries. All workers in Ilmorog and the unemployed will join us. And the small farmers... and even some small traders...' (76)

In Akinyi and Joseph lies the hope for tomorrow - a better tomorrow for Wanja's child which she will nurture with love and care.

Once more there is, in this novel too, a celebration of 'the Mother'. Wanja's destructive role when she joins hands with those forces by starting a whorehouse is over. Her 'constructive' role begins. The mother earth that has been
pimped and prostituted by all evil forces is purified by her motherhood - the cyclic vision always keeps hope for a better tomorrow alive and the supreme manifestation of that role is the woman as the destroyer and the creator.

If placed between A Grain of Wheat and Devil on the Cross, Petals of Blood is clearly a novel suggesting a distinct shift in the writer’s attitude. In A Grain of Wheat our emotional involvement in the private inner worlds of Mugo and Mumbi is quite strong. As we come to Petals of Blood there is an equally strong demand from our conscience as well. Cook and Okenimkpe observe:

Some readers feel on first reading Petals of Blood that in order to stir our consciences and even to reach the ears of stubborn civil authority, Ngugi has relaxed his hold on individual private worlds and psyches. The essentially public nature of the themes, the fact that what in many works would be a background is here the foreground, leads to a certain restriction in literary range and depth. (77)

This is only partially justified. The characters that have come to Ilmorog as 'self-exiles' - Munira, Wanja and Abdulla are characters with depth and complexity and they emerge as highly individualized characters.

It is only when Ngugi depicts the city group that the novel assumes the dimension of a political fable. Of these Chui remains more or less in the background but we know that when he has to step into the shoes of Cambridge Fraudsham, the Principal of Siriana Mission School, he is even a stauncher supporter of the foreign values. He contributes considerably to the demise of old Ilmorog. For one thing,
he runs the school by proxy, being away from it most of the
time, having a good time in the city or in the Blue-valley.
Nderi wa Riera, the M.P. from Ilmorog, visits Ilmorog only
to ask for votes at the time of elections. He had collected
Harambee (a cooperative set-up) contributions from the
residents for introducing a water scheme which never
materializes. His mind is so distorted that when the
villagers go and meet him in his city office after the long
march with their genuine problems he thinks it a machination
of the opponents. He is the brain behind the K.C.O. and has
a hand in the smuggling of gems and ivory that goes on
behind the facade of Cultural Activities Centre. He is also
involved in sending pretty girls abroad as prostitutes.
Mzigo, the Director of Education, does not visit Ilmorog
even once while it is a neglected village. But after New
Ilmorog comes into being he promptly appears to have his
share in the 'national cake of corruption'. Ezikiel Waweru
so degrades himself as to make use of religion for his
own gain. The worst of all these and the most repulsive is
Kimeria. Before Independence he becomes rich by
transporting the dead bodies of the Mau Mau fighters. In
this role he is a part of the oppressive colonial rule. He
seduces Wanja by leading her to believe that he would marry
her and is responsible for her degradation. He also plays a
key role in the invasion of the countryside.

These city characters are presented mostly in their
sinister aspects and are not individualized. One reason for
such treatment would be that Ngugi in presenting just one
aspect - and thus making these characters flat - wants to suggest that with them the process of dehumanization is complete. They have become the new exploiters and oppressors. As such they are just agents of the changed setup - from which individualized actions cannot be expected. They cannot be 'round' characters, for they no longer possess the ability to surprise us. The exiles that have come to Ilmorog, are on the other hand still capable of changing themselves. They are, thus, still capable of surprising us by their ability to grow. That is a sign of humanity in them which merits an individualized characterization.

Ngugi employs all his literary skills to emphasize the wickedness and inhumanity of capitalism and its effects. Coarsening of emotions and hardening of hearts.

Ilmorog is an important 'character' in the novel. It also undergoes transformation in the course of the action depicted in the novel. With the Trans-Africa highway the old upright Ilmorog dies and the New one rises in moral ignominy. Setting up of a police post, a church and a government office completes the process of colonizing the old peasants in their own country. Thengeta the traditional wine only to be drunk on special occasions like circumcision or wedding becomes a commercial product. The poor peasants are lured into mortgaging their land and homes to get loans to buy grade cows which die. The land which belongs to the peasants is gone because the loans could not be paid back.
The changes that have come over Ilmorog (78) reveal that the new colonialism is not a shade different from the earlier version under the British:

Wheat fields and ranches had sprung up all around the plains: the herdsmen had died or had been driven further afield into dryer parts, but a few had become workers on the wheatfields and ranches on the earth upon which they once roamed freely. (79)

The words like ranches and landrovers tell us that it is American imperialism and the processes of exploitation and oppression are the same.

I have already discussed the symbolism in the novel in various contexts. The most dominant is the soil symbolism. The drought and aridity of the land in Ilmorog symbolize moral aridity as much as economic aridity. Wanja remembers the old Ilmorog of her childhood, 'So green in the past', she said 'So green and hopeful... and now this.' (80) This landscape assumes the same peaceful, idyllic, fertile aspect when there is good rainfall after the trek to the city and there is a new period of hope. The trek also makes Ilmorog famous. Consequently it is flooded with aid from various multinational corporate companies and city based social organizations. This, however, has an unfortunate effect on the character of the village. The new highway and the factories (the brewery is one of them) destroy the old peasant - nomad structure and introduce a new style of agriculture. This leads to the aridity in the landscape which is contrasted with earlier fertility. Man's spiritual degradation and dehumanization is thus reflected in nature.
The close relationship between man and nature is an important feature of the African world view and also of Ngugi's vision.

The narration is from the point of view of the third person narrator, from the various points of view of different characters but there is one more narrator present. That's the 'We' representing the 'collective consciousness' of Ilmorog. When old Ilmorog's soul - the shrine of Mwathi wa Mugo - is invaded that voice is almost silenced and later on the description of the New Ilmorog - changed beyond recognition - is offered by the omniscient narrator.

The Petals of Blood reveals that Ngugi is now firmly aware of his role in this rapidly degenerating society. In Homecoming while commenting on the Biafran-Nigerian situation he says,

I believe that African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country, and sing a new song. Perhaps, in a small way, the African writer can help in articulating the feelings behind this struggle. (81)

This is exactly what he seems to have set out to do. A concrete step he takes in this direction is educating the masses by being one of them. (i.e. shedding off the mask of an 'elite'). He knows that this can be done only in the language they understand - his and their own mothertongue. The next step in Ngugi's journey back 'home' is using Gikuyu for his creative writing. With Ngugi's next novel Devil on
the Cross he has decisively turned his face in the direction of his 'home'.

4.8 Devil on the Cross

Ngugi's fifth novel, Devil on the Cross (English translation published in 1982) unequivocally establishes him as the novelist of the people. In all his earlier novels so far the narrator/writer was always on the side of the people. In Decolonizing the Mind he even states:

In A Grain of Wheat all the main characters are of almost equal importance, and the people - the village people - in their motion in history are the real hero of the novel. (82)

In A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood the collective consciousness of Thaba1 and Ilmorog villages appeared as the narrator in the form of 'we'. Yet the usual pattern was the main narrator as an observer, who reported the complex reality depicted in the novel from multiple angles and left it to the readers to judge for themselves. With Petals of Blood, as we have seen earlier, Ngugi seems to be openly and squarely criticizing the newly rich elite class of the urban centres. His criticism of this class and the post-colonial situation in Kenya is truly devastating in Devil on the Cross. Here he knows with certainty what his message for the people is and he is determined to communicate it directly. His very handling of the form is as subversive as the content of the book. Yet the new experiment he carries out with the form does not reduce artistic merit of the novel.
Indeed, the impact of the novel forces the reader to revise his usual parameters of evaluating a novel, for they would be irrelevant in the case of novels like *Devi1 on the Cross* and *Matigari*.

*Devi1 on the Cross* was written when Ngugi was detained in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison from 31st December 1977 to 25th December, 1978. The first draft of the novel was written in Gikuyu and that too on toilet paper. The cause for his detention and the period of six months he spent in the community project before he was detained are very important in the conception of the novel.

The time he spent among the villagers helped him to really 'learn' his language i.e. to learn about the creative potential of the language and also about their history. It also revealed to him the fact that collective work can be creative and can generate a lot more strength and power. Indeed it can become an effective instrument in the ideological struggle, which Ngugi and others were waging against the oppressive neo colonial forces in Kenya.

In the context of my analysis of Ngugi's journey *Devi1 on the Cross* is very important as it marks his genuine homecoming. The journey started quite early, with his trilogy. But the literary form he had chosen - the novel - was in itself a creation of Europe and essentially a product of the middle class. The situation that prevailed for African writers who wrote in English was rather strange. Something answering the name 'novel' had started showing the signs of life somewhere in Africa and Latin America.
death of the novel' was not therefore the African writers' problem as it was in Europe and the U.S.A. But the brilliant minds of a Chinua Achebe, a wole Soyinka or a Peter Abrahams created a new tradition - the tradition of Afro-European novel. This new literary area of investment attracted international publishers. Ngugi himself admits that he was a part and parcel of this process or rather one of its products. (83) As he sat in Cell 16 of Kamiti Prison thinking how best to defy the intended detention of his mind and imagination the answer that naturally sprang in his mind was 'by writing a novel'. (84) His problem now was how to reach his people by breaking the barriers of literacy. The theatre or films would have been ideal means, but he could not use either of them.

Ngugi had been disturbed about English as a medium of his literary expression ever since the publication of A Grain of Wheat. In a student’s interview at Leeds, the question did come up. But Ngugi continued to look at the use of African language for creative expression as a 'possibility'.

It was his experience at Kamirithu which enforced an epistemological break with his past. To which tradition should he reconnect himself? To the Afro-European novel to which his novels up to Petals of Blood belonged or that of the African novel of which he had no previous experience. His answer was ready. 'I would reconnect myself not to the Afro-European novel of my previous practice but to the
African novel of my new commitment.' (85)

In terms of Ngugi's perception of his role as a writer this decision marked his 'homecoming'. His mind had taken a proper direction when he chose to write *Ngaahika*. Ngugi says:

After I had written *A Grain of Wheat* I underwent a crisis. I knew whom I was writing about but whom was I writing for? The peasants whose struggle fed the novel would never read it. (86)

In a challenge to the imprisoning authorities through the **Detainees Review Tribunal** dated 23 June, 1978 Ngugi concludes:

Kenyan writers have no alternative but to return to the roots, return to the sources of their being in the rhythms of life and speech and languages of Kenyan masses if they are to rise to the great challenge of repeating, in the poems, plays and novels, the epic grandeur of that history. (87)

By this time he was deeply involved in the problems of writing *Caitaani Mutharabaini* in prison. The problems of paper and the pen were somehow solved. Gikuyu is a language of short and long vowels and also a tonal language. Using the roman script to represent it had its problems. The greatest problem for him was how to use fiction itself as a form of language with which to effectively communicate with the audience (in this context the people he left behind). There were two inherent problems here - (1) his relationship with the form and (2) his relationship with the material, that is, the reality around him which he was to depict in his novel.
The novels he had written so far were written for the reader acquainted with the conventions of reading novels, particularly the modern novel in European languages. Would similar techniques be effective for his new readership? Would his use of Gikuyu dictate a different kind of novel? These questions forced on Ngugi a few decisions which show why Devil on the Cross is so different from his earlier novels, particularly Petals of Blood, which is very complex in every respect. Ngugi says:

I tried to solve the problem in three ways. I went for a fairly simple structure, that of a simple journey... The journey, the means of transport and the actual places mentioned in Nairobi and Nakuru would be familiar to many ordinary Kenyans. I also borrowed heavily from forms of oral narrative, particularly the conversational tone, the fable, proverbs, songs and the whole tradition of poetic self praise or praise of others. I also incorporated Biblical element - the parable - because many literates would have read the Bible. People would be familiar with these features and I hoped that these would help root the novel within a known tradition. (88)

The real problem, however, was whether using this form he would be able to hold the attention of the reader for long. They have better things to do than indulge in the beauty and familiarity of the form. Content with which people could identify themselves or which would force them to take sides was necessary. 'Context is ultimately the arbiter of form. A proper marriage of content and form would decide the reception accorded the novel'. (89) This raised the next problem - that of the artist's relationship to his material, namely the historical reality of the neo-colony. A writer's handling of reality is affected by his

311
basic philosophic outlook on nature and society and his method of investigating these. How can the writer sustain the reader's curiosity when, according to Ngugi, 'reality is stranger than fiction?' Ngugi gives several examples to illustrate his point:

Franz Josef Strauss's visit to the Independent republic of Tago in West Africa in July 1984 - The occasion was to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the unequal treaty imposed by King Mlapa III of Tago to establish the Kingdom as a colony of the Germans by millions of African people as the year of historic shame is being celebrated with pride by an African President.

Mobuto of Zaire in an act of supreme African authenticity, has ceded a whole territory many times the size of New Zealand in a West German rocket company. A group of African leaders recently begged France to send troops to Chad to protect French legitimate interests, threatened by 'imperialist' Libya. Moi of Kenya has given military bases to the U.S.A. without a debate in parliament with Kenyans only later learning about the 'secret' deal. (90)

How does a novelist shock his readers by telling them that these are neo-slaves, when the neo-slaves themselves are openly announcing the fact on the roof tops?

A writer has a recourse to images. Ngugi falls back on the oral tradition to give him these images.

Ngugi had always felt that the story of the good man who surrenders his soul for earthly gains (including knowledge as in the legend of Faust) had its roots in the lores of the peasants. This inspired him to tell the story of men who had sold their souls and the soul of the nation to the foreign devil of imperialism. That is how he came to write the novel Caïtâni Mutharabainî (Devil on the Cross)
in the Gikuyu language.

*Devil on the Cross* tells the story of Waninga and four others who travel in a matatu taxi from Nairobi to Ilmorog. Though, apparently, they have been thrown together in a fortuitous manner (being passengers travelling together), they find that they have something in common. They are all carrying with them invitations to a feast of thieves and robbers organized by the devil. At the heart of the feast is a competition to choose the seven cleverest thieves and robbers - seven of the most diabolic persons who have developed the art of robbing to the highest degree of sophistication. The competitors are required to stand in front of the assembled crowds of competitors and onlookers to tell their exploits and achievements so far in a bid to receive the crown. This competition forms the centrepiece of the novel.

The outline of the story is very simple indeed and the characters are neatly divided - the exploiters and the exploited. This enables Ngugi to drive home the point that the 'haves' in post-independence Kenya are all exploiters and the 'have nots' are the oppressed. The outrageous shamelessness of the exploiters is central in the sense that it forms the focal point of the scathing satire which reigns most of the novel. But that is not all that the novel has to say. By making Waninga, a secretary-cum-shorthand typist working in a Nairobi office and one who has very limited dreams and ambitions, the central character of the
novel Ngugi has eloquently offered a counter rhetoric of the wretched and the oppressed.

The first chapter of the novel which is meant as a kind of prologue to the story is very interesting from this point of view. In the very first section the Gicaandi Player - (a griot like figure from the Kenyan folk tradition and a prophet of justice) tells us that to some people in Ilmorog 'the story was too disgraceful, too shameful that it should be concealed in depths of everlasting darkness'. (91) To some others 'it was a matter for tears and sorrow' and should be suppressed so that we should not shed tears the second time. The Gicaandi player, however, knows that neither self illusion nor sentimental escapism is desirable. One must learn painful lessons by accepting truth.

The Gicaandi player then goes on to tell us that Waininga's mother went to him when dawn was breaking and with tears beseeched him:

Gicaandi Player, tell the story of the child I loved so dearly. Cast light upon all that happened, so that each may pass judgement only when he knows the whole truth, reveal all that is hidden.

Then he heard several voices saying,

Gicaandi Player, Prophet of Justice, reveal what now lies concealed by darkness'.

The Gicaandi player fasted without food or water for seven days at the end of which the earth trembled, the lightning scared the sky. He was seized, raised up and then cast down into the ashes of the fireplace. The voice tells him, 'Who has told you the prophecy is yours alone?'
The story begins with a song which says that the voice of the people is the voice of God and invites people to reason together about Jacinta Warungi before they pass judgement on their children.

Gicaandi Player then begins with a wish to tell how the Devil appeared to Jacinta Warungi but for that he must go back a little and narrate the story of Warungi's life. Gicaandi is also the folk musician - an artist of the people. It is interesting to note that in his recent collection of essays titled *Barrel of a Pen* Ngugi says:

> The arts then are a form of knowledge about reality acquired through a pile of images. But these images are not neutral. The images given us by the arts try to make us not only see and understand the world of man and nature, apprehend it, but to see and understand it in a certain way or from the angle of vision of the artist. The way or the angle of vision is itself largely affected by the margin of natural, social and spiritual freedom within which the practitioner of the skills (the writer, the musician, the painter) is operating. (93)

In short, Ngugi is now fully confident of his goal, of what he wants to achieve through his art. The detached observer/narrator presenting multifaceted reality and leaving judgement out of his activity as an artist is replaced by the musician who is a 'prophet of justice' and will speak for the people who are in his eyes 'God'.

The court of law, legacy of colonialism, will pass a certain judgement on Warungi. In fact, there is a suggestion that it has already been passed in her mother's expression 'the child I loved so dearly' (94) (emphasis mine) but Warungi will be judged anew in the court of the
peoples' hearts, by their collective conscience. It is this judgement which will be an effective weapon for the peoples' struggle for justice.

After putting the audience in this frame of mind the story proper, as it were, begins in the second chapter.

Waringa, the city typist-cum-secretary in Champion Construction Company, is dismissed from her job for rejecting the advances of Boss Kihara. On the next day her landlord demands higher rent and gets her thrown out of the house with the help of hired thugs. 'Why should it always be me? What God have I abused?' Waringa thinks. (95) As she walks along the crowded street she is about to be run over (or does she want to end the wretchedness by committing suicide?) by a bus. As she faints a stranger saves her. He asks her if she is ill. Upon his asking she told a typical story, the story of a girl called Mahua Kareendi: the girl gets involved with a boy, gets pregnant and is 'Kareendi of easy thighs'. She gives birth to a child and picks up typing and goes to the city where she cannot get a job unless she is ready 'to spread her thighs'. Ultimately boss Kihara gives her a job. Very soon she meets a university student and forms friendship with him. She has told him everything and he has accepted her. All that she dreams of now is marriage with this 'fairy tale prince' who has entered her world, and a peaceful family life. She has made up her mind that she will be faithful to him. One or two months later the boss starts making subtle but definite
advances and her refusal costs her her job. Her ‘Kamoongonye’ (young lover) also deserts her when he discovers that she is out of job. He hides this fact by assuming the traditional attitude to women, namely, assuming that she must be an easy woman and as such he will have nothing to do with her. We have met such characters quite often in Ngugi’s previous novels so that we are meant to take this as a sign of the young man’s weakness and impotence. At the end Wairinga asks, ‘So when will the Karendis of modern Kenya wipe the tears from their faces? When will they ever discover laughter?’ (96) As she prepares to take a bus to Ilmorog the young man hands her an invitation card to the ‘Devil’s Feast’. She is shocked beyond wits to know that a competition for thieves and robbers is going to be held at Ilmorog on Sunday. For her it is nothing short of a miracle.

As Wairinga boards Mwaura’s Matatu MMM 333 she finds one more passenger in blue overalls. When the bus is about to leave Gatuiria, a student from the University of Nairobi boards the bus. Some distance away the bus picks up Wangari, an old woman, and finally Mwireri wa Mukiraii, a small time industrialist. Wangari is a freedom fighter, but now she is a destitute so that she does not have even the bus fare with her. When Mwaura comes to know this he prepares to drop her in the middle of the road without any qualms about her age or about the fact that the road is surrounded by hills and jungles. Muturi, the worker, and Gatuiria share her fare and she promises them that she would
arrange repayment as soon as she reaches Ilmorog.

In the bus Wangari sings from time to time. Upon asking she tells them of her plight. She had borrowed a loan of 5000 shillings from Kenya Economic Progress Bank. The grade cow she bought with the money caught gall fever and the vet did not arrive till the cow died. Her land was sold. She then went to the city to look for a job and roamed from shop to shop and hotel to hotel without success. Finally one hotel owner phoned the police and had her arrested as a thief. The English judge asked her to defend. When she said she would help the police to find all the thieves and robbers she was set free on the condition that she would actually cooperate. Wangari's story of her experiences in the city is told, perhaps deliberately, in a manner which reminds the reader of Blake's famous poem 'London' which also deals with the oppression of the weak and the disadvantaged by the powerful forces of the 'haves' in the city.

Gatuiria, the young student, is doing research in native folk music. He is the son of a rich man but has kept away from his home for a long time.

In the course of this journey Warlinga's mind wanders to her childhood. 'She suddenly remembered the Rich Old man from Ngorika, Nakuru a long time ago and she felt her whole body fill with bitterness.' (97) She is interrupted by Gatuiria's question in broken Gikuyu. The narrator tells us here that Gatuiria at least was aware that slavery of
language is the slavery of the mind and nothing to be proud of. In the discussion Gatuiria, a student of Kenyan music and culture, depletes that the tradition of Gicaandi music is dying. Verses written on the gourd cannot be interpreted by young men of today. They have lost contact with their native traditions and hence what they will produce is without much substance. Gatuiria says that he wanted to compose a piece of music which would cover the history of the Kenyan people. He wanted the setting for the music to be a certain village before the advent of British imperialism in Kenya. He pondered over it for months. Suddenly a voice told him:

How can you compose music when you do not believe in the existence of the subject of your composition?' (DC p67) The voice said, 'You who wish to compose music in praise of your country, look for roots and themes in true stories.' (98)

Gatuiria reveals that he, too, has received an invitation to the Devil's feast. Wangani decides to join them in order to help the police capture the thieves and robbers as she had promised. At this point the man wearing dark glasses Mwireri wa Mukiraa introduces himself. He had started various factories but again and again he was ruined by the multinationals who undersold their products and thus drove Mwireri wa Mukiraa out of business. He says to others, after having heard their discussions:

It is your kind of talk that is ruining the country. That kind of talk has roots in communism. It is calculated to sadden our hearts and make us restless. (99)
Mwireri wa Mukiraii is presented as a Devil's disciple, eager to preach the Devil's gospel and convert more and more to the Devil's religion. His bearing and the tone are that of a modern day, professional preacher (like Billy Graham, the American evangelist). As the old woman and the worker Mutiri question Mwireri wa Mukiraii and as he brazenly and shamelessly preaches the gospel of greed, wickedness and exploitation of the disadvantaged we get a foretaste of the scathingly sarcastic assault Ngugi is going to launch on this new gospel that has so corrupted post-independence Kenya. A further twist to the ironic situation is given when Mwireri wa Mukiraii inspecting the invitations that Warlinga and Gatuirria have received announces that they are fake invitations. He then shows them the 'authentic' invitation card which does not contain either 'Devil' or 'Satan' but mentions only thieves and robbers. Mwireri wa Mukiraii is a modern day Devil's disciple and the Devil himself uses the Scriptures to his advantage. This use of the parable of the servants with talents is from this point of view very significant. The Bible and the Christian religion have been perverted and made into the antithesis of what they are in their original form. Mwireri wa Mukiraii's preaching to the fellow passengers, particularly the smooth and suave tone in which he preaches his diabolic gospel remind the reader of the fourth knight explaining his stand to the audience in T.S. Eliot's 'Murder in the Cathedral'. (100) Muturi introduces himself as a worker in
Champion Construction Company, the very company in the city office of which Wairinga had been working as a secretary till the previous day. He and Wangari cross-question Mwireri on his philosophy. The party reaches Ilmorog and visits the cave where they want to attend the devil's feast. Mwireri wa Mukirai is, of course, a competitor and the rest join as spectators.

Ngugi's experience at handling the dramatic medium reveals itself in this section. All the skills of the folk theatre and 'the public debate', a part and parcel of traditional oratory are used to present the scene of competition. Speeches or songs praising the heroes was another important aspect of folk tradition. Ngugi gives it a twist. The speeches here are speeches in self-praise.

Cook and Okenimkpe describe this as 'a full-scale set piece of ironic satire. It recalls Swift's exposure in Gulliver's Travels of the social injustices and calculated corruptions in his own society'. The savageness of the attack reminds them of Swift's A Modest Proposal.' (101) But considering Ngugi's statement on Kenyan reality quoted earlier in the chapter the social satire and irony are inherent in the situation. He is presenting it with the exaggerated and grotesque comic element, which brings out the disgusting aspects of reality. A further cutting edge is added to the 'dark comedy' when Ndaaya wa Kahuria, a small chicken-thief, is chased off the stage for confusing his own petty thieving with great feats of exploitation achieved by the rich and the powerful. Gitutu wa
Gataanguru, the first speaker, boasts of land grabbing and land selling. He has become rich by being a middleman. Kihahu wa Gatheeeca has made money by starting schools and advertising them as schools where white children learn. He fools people by displaying white plastic children playing which can be seen through the windows. He has appointed old and nincompoop white women to pass as headmistresses. Mwireri wa Mukirai has become rich by being a highly qualified black man used as window dressing by foreign companies. Nditika wa Nguunji has become rich through smuggling.

As these acts of self praise go on Wangari reaches the cave with the police. But to her great surprise the police inspector arrests her and apologizes to the master of ceremony for causing nuisance. It is a situation very much like the one in Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* or the novel of the same name and shows that these institutions also have turned more viciously oppressive than before.

In between Muturi has brought together the peasants and workers of Ilmorog to march to the cave and rout the whole assembly. This rout is symbolic of a full and final victory which belongs to the future.

There is a lot of satire and ribald comedy inherent in most oral literatures. A play on words, innuendos and changing the meaning of words through intonation are all available in the original Gikuyu but mostly lost in the English translation.
During the lunch-break the stories of Wariinga and Gatuiria are inset. Wariinga's tale is typical in that it is very similar to what happens to Wanja in *Petals of Blood*. She has been deceived by a Rich Old Man who lures her with small gifts and car rides and leaves her when she is pregnant. Wariinga's lot is no different from other girls like her. First the Rich Old Man disowns her and later on her boyfriend gets rid of her in a more or less similar manner. Ngugi's point seems to be that it is always the woman who suffers. Wariinga's rustic parents 'understand' her plight, support her during her pregnancy and look after the girl she delivers. But they are poor. That's why Wariinga is forced to turn to the city for her subsistence. In *Petals of Blood* it is the grandmother who accepts Wanja when her father disowns her.

The novel, however, does not end here. It ends two years later. We find Wariinga working as an expert motor mechanic in a garage and doing her diploma in mechanical engineering as well. She is full of new confidence and is respected by her fellow mechanics. She thwarts all advances of male customers with the help of her skill in karate. This new confident woman is the future of Kenya. She has learned through her painful past. She has shaped her present with great effort and is ready to fight every kind of injustice in order to preserve her self-respect and dignity. As a mechanic, we find her in jeans and with a tester in her shirt pocket. Over the weekend she becomes a beautifully dressed girlfriend of Gatuiria who has proposed.
to her. She and Gatuiriia go to his father's family because his parents are eager to meet her. Waninga looks amazingly beautiful in her traditional Gikuyu dress, her leopard skin sandals and necklaces of white, red and blue beads. As they walk into the courtyard they are met by servants in uniform:

Gatuiriia and Waninga are escorted towards a special room, where Gatuiriia's father, together with a select inner circle of elders, was waiting to receive them. (102)

The guests lined up on either side and clapped as Gatuiriia and Waninga passed by. As Waninga walks on the red carpet and then the green carpet and stands before Gatuiriia's father, her eyes meet the eyes of the Rich Old Man from Ngorika. Gatuiriia is asked to leave the room. The Rich Old Man attempts to buy Waninga over but life has by now taught her not to accept any injustice. She shoots the Rich Old Man with a pistol that Muturi had left in her custody before he was taken to prison.

Waninga left the room. She shot Kinaahu and Gitutu, whom she met on the way.

Waninga walked on, without once looking back. But she knew with all her heart that the hardest struggles of her life's journey lay ahead. (103)

Gatuiriia is not by her side as she walks on. He stands trembling on the brink. He has made an attempt over many years to break away from that group that perhaps makes Ngugi angrier than any other:
the petty bourgeois intellectuals at the University who
hide ethnic chauvinism and their mortal terror of
progressive class politics behind masks of
supernationalism, and bury their own inaction behind mugs
of beer and empty intellectualism about conditions being
not ripe for action. (104)

Cook and Okenimkpe observe:

In his final failure he (Gatuiria) acts as a terrible
warning to the bold student radical who backslides into
becoming of these petty bourgeois intellectuals at the
very time when faced with the chance of real action and
commitment. (105)

Waringa is a woman who takes on the heritage of
Muthoni, Nyokabi, Njeri, Mumbi, Nyakinyua, the Woman in The
Trial of Dedan Kimathi and - closer at hand - of Wangari.
She becomes the spearhead of Ngugi's long battle for women's
rights against 'those who like to denigrate the minds,
intelligence and abilities of our women.' (106)

The end is powerful, dramatic and extremely realistic.

Waringa, Ngugi's 'dreamchild', is a worker among
workers and yet a very feminine woman in love. Today she
may be a lone figure. There is in her act a suggestion that
tomorrow the persecution of the whole society is to be set
right by armed insurrection. This is a localized
presentation of an anticipatory day of revolutionary wrath.
That is why though she has acted alone she has the future on
her side.

In Devil on the Cross the satirical attack on the moral
corruption and the perversion of values is quite strident.
Readers familiar with Swift's or John Gay's indignation with
such perversion of values in the eighteenth century England
will catch echoes of Swiftian satire particularly in the presentation of the 'testimonies' at the Festival. Readers will also remember George Orwell and his 1984 where perversion of values is effectively conveyed by a distortion of language. A meaning diametrically opposite to what the reader is acquainted with shocks him into the realisation that language can be made into a potent creator of false consciousness.

Ngugi's decision to write in Gikuyu and for the Gikuyu speaking readers has affected not only the mode of narration but also the style of the novel. There is a profuse use of proverbs reminding us that the novel is written in a language where oral tradition is very strong and where the community easily falls back on proverbs to provide guidance and to clinch one's point in an argument, particularly an argument about a moral point. Proverbs are a repository of wisdom acquired by the tribe over centuries. But in Devil on the Cross we also note that the corrupt characters also use proverbs where it is easily seen that the Devil, just as one can quote the Scriptures when it suits him, can also 'appropriate' traditional wisdom and turn it upside-down. The proverbs are used throughout the text of the novel and those that are repeated several times appear like recurring images and thus impart cohesiveness to the text.

Related to the use of proverbs are the frequent references to the Bible. We see that the parable of talents is repeated. It is given a new - though twisted -
significance in the context of the novel. Mwereri... and the Master of the Ceremonies of the Feast speak in tones that are distinctly those of the new breed of 'professional' evangelists. They possess the rhetorical skills of an extraordinarily successful salesman. Only, their gospel is the gospel of greed and their god is none other than Mammon. These characters like the 'city' characters in *Petals of Blood* are sinister and the horror that the reader experiences as he listens to their smooth and suave wickedness is due to the fact that it is so shamelessly and brazenly presented as pragmatic and logical! The title with its obvious reference to Christianity makes the point which is central to the novel. Christianity rests on the belief that God sent his own son (Jesus Christ) into this world to redeem mankind of its sins. Jesus suffered for the sinners and accepted death on the Cross. Redemption of the sinful through the suffering of a single man is central in the Christian way of life and is probably the element that found a responsive soil in the hearts of the natives in Africa. Many tribes in Africa sincerely believed that the arrival of the Messiah or the Saviour was imminent. He would come into their midst and rid them of their miseries. This precludes reliance on one's own efforts to find salvation (freedom from wretchedness) and more importantly it prevents them from realizing the truth that human beings are capable of transcending their human limitations and of making superhuman efforts. Jesus Christ was a human being like them living in a violent ethos when 'tooth for tooth' was the
accepted way of life. Yet he was able to preach the gospel of love, of forgiveness and of 'turning the other cheek'. Orwell in an essay on Gandhi says more or less the same thing. Ngugi in rejecting this Christian belief in the divinity and sacrifice of Christ for humanity seems to insist that a people's redemption can come only through their own efforts. These people like Wariinga, Wangari or Muturi may be ordinary people bearing deep scars of injustice and humiliation but it is in them that the possibilities for a better world reside. The novel also makes another striking point in this respect. People may sometimes succeed in crucifying (eliminating) the Devil but there are abundant number of his lackeys who will take him down from the cross and resurrect him. The new colonial dispensation in Kenya is nothing but the resurrection of the Devil. It is against such resurrection that the wretched and the oppressed must for ever be on the alert without sentimentality, shunning all kinds of mystification. That perhaps is the meaning of the words with which the novel ends. 'But she knew with all her heart that the hardest struggles of her life's journey lay ahead'. (107)

4.9 Matigari

As we have seen Ngugi's development as a novelist till the Devil on the Cross shows a persistent desire to move away from the form of traditional novel and attempt daringly radical experiments to make it a suitable instrument for bringing about a revolution in the sensibility of the
reader. It is a part of a kind of programme of conscientising. In Matigari we see Ngugi attempting a most radical departure from the traditional novel. Thus he can now truthfully say that he will take over the novel form - essentially an imported, alien literary form - and 'appropriate' it on behalf of African peasantry and the working class. (108)

Ngugi’s stay as a political exile in the Netherlands and in England after the coup attempt in 1982 has further contributed to his determination to use the novel as a subversive form of literature.

Hansel Holumbe Eyoh, who interviewed him in 1986, asked him:

Recently, you seem to be taking interest in film. This reminds me about Devil on the Cross, because of the force and vividness of some of the images which you create. Could you just talk briefly about this interest?

Ngugi: I am very much interested in film as a medium. I feel film or cinema as a medium is very important for us to master. I find myself in a curious situation that I am living away from home, from my own country and I think that, if I want, in film I can combine my interest in the theatre and in fiction, to create something. In my new novel Matigari wa Njirugi, I have been influenced by film technique. (109)

This interview gives an important insight into a new Ngugi’s recent concerns and opens up a new perspective in our approach to this novel. In the interview Ngugi further affirms that he visualized the whole movement of characters as if he was standing behind a camera. He wrote each scene as if it was captured in a frame, so the whole novel became
a series of cinematic shots.

Matigari's impact as a novel owes partly to its being visually powerful and partly to its being a political fable even stronger in its attack on the corruption of values that post-independence Kenya has witnessed. The novel was not translated by Ngugi but by Wangui wa Goro. I therefore, discuss it very briefly below.

The characters, as usual, are representational. At the centre of the novel is Matigari - once a Mau Mau activist, who has since Uhuru become a legendary hero but who has never emerged out of the forest. Guthera, a girl who was forced to take to prostitution to survive the cruel and oppressive period of the Emergency. Her father was involved in the Mau Mau. There was no one in the community to support Guthera's younger brothers and sisters in the family. She had been treated like an outcast by her community, so great was the fear of the British reprisals. There are also the worker, a student and a teacher, Settler William's son and his cook John's son (representing the neo colonial side.) Each of the main characters by turn narrates his/her story. The novel is divided into three parts. Part I - Wiping Your Tears Away, Part II - Seeker of Truth and Justice and part III - The Pure and The Resurrected.

Guthera begins her sad story on page 33 and brings out the empty teaching of the Church. People fled from her because she was a terrorist's child. She would go to Church and return empty handed. Finally, she had to turn to
prostitution to feed her younger siblings who could not fend for themselves. Matigari then tells his story. He has remained in the forest even after the Emergency was lifted. Quite early in the novel he declares the purpose of his visit, 'And today is my homecoming. I want to bring my family together.' Matigari says:

Settler William's cook John Boy saved his master's life. We spent many years hunting one another in every corner of the land. I first killed John Boy. It was only yesterday that I finally got Williams and stepped on his chest, holding up the weapons of victory? The battle won I decided to come home and claim my house. (111)

But like many characters in Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross Matigari is disillusioned. 'It was Boy, son of John Boy who inherited the keys to my house.' (112) They blew the whistle and the police came for Matigari. Then he asks a direct question of the audience, 'Where is justice in this, my friends?' (113)

The worker then begins his tale. He says:

That inseparable pair has been oppressing us all this time. Every worker knows that Robert Williams and John Boy are like Twins - born out of the womb of the same ogre. And the whole police force is in the hands of these two. (114)

The reality has changed beyond imagination. People ask:

The country has its patriots. Have you seen them or are these rumours? People had said all along that they wanted to meet Matigari. Women coming from the river with cans would meet at cross roads and tell stories about Matigari. (115)
But when Matigari actually appears - a small ordinary looking man - the men turn him away thinking that he is a drunkard.

The situation in the country is very bad:

What frightened Matigari was the feeling that he was perhaps the only one preoccupied with what was happening in the country - indeed as if he was all alone in the entire country...and he did not know what was to be righted first? The condition which led the people to sin or the souls of the people who sinned? (116)

Very soon he finds the answer. The police come for him when he attacks Robert Williams and Boy. Guthera gets him released because the policeman would not let Matigari go unless she sleeps with him. Guthera's resolution of leading a chastelife is thus washed away. The street children from the shanties, Matigari and Guthera resolve to create a new world and Matigari says:

It is better to build another house altogether - a new house with a better foundation. But what I know for sure is that for as long as I am alive, I shall never allow Boy to inherit my house! (117)

Matigari is deeply moved by the depth of Guthera's and Muriuki's commitment to him:

As he recalled how Guthera had given herself as a sacrificial lamb for his salvation, a sharp pain stabbed his heart and he felt tears sting his eye lids. (118)

The student and the teacher do not join Matigari's camp. As we have seen in several of Ngugi's novels, they belong to the class that has sold its soul. The false bookish ideas have created a false consciousness in them.
which prevents them from seeing the horrible contradictions surrounding them. The student says:

Democracy here means first fending for oneself. So I will finish my studies first, get myself a job at the bank or... go to the U.S.A. and come back and start a private research institute. I will become a consultant for Western companies. (119)

That is now as in Devil on the Cross there is now an Orwellian twist to words like Democracy. Matigari thought to himself, 'There are two types of modern students, 'Those who love the truth and those who sell the truth'. (120) The teacher says, 'I am thinking of going to a country where, there aren't as many problems as here.'(121)

Matigari then goes to church. It is natural here that his thoughts should go to Guthera and her so-called sinful ways. He asks:

What sin has Guthera committed? Between Guthera and God, who has really sinned against the other? Who of the two should kneel down before the other and ask forgiveness? (122)

One of the street boys asks him, 'Are you the one whose second coming is prophesied' (123) but at about the same moment Matigari is in danger due to an informer.

Guthera's long statement at the beginning of the third part reveals a new awakening in her. She says:

All along she had allowed men to dominate her life. Whether it was the Father in heaven, her own father on the earth or the priest or all men who bought her body and turned her into a mattress except yesterday when she chose to do it for the end in which she believed (p 140). She declares, 'I want to do something to change whatever
It is that makes people live like animals, especially us women. (124)

Ultimately the street children, Guthera, Muriuki and Matigari resolve to build a new house.

The novel reads and perhaps is meant to be read like a fairy tale. Robert Williams and Boy are the Ogres. Guthera and others are the people oppressed and Matigari, the legendary hero, has appeared on the scene to save them.

The symbolism is broad and bold. The House Matigari has come back to reclaim obviously stands for Kenya. Building a new house is changing radically the economic-political scene. At one point when a meeting is to be held in the hall we are told:

The same dull atmosphere which had prevailed the country also filled the hall. It was neither hot nor cold. The murmuring of those assembled indicated neither happiness nor sadness. The electric light was weak, giving a kind of twilight. Nothing was clear. (125)

Obviously the twilight and the lukewarm temperature symbolize the 'limbo'.

At the end of the story there is a concrete message of the death of this world and creation of a new one. There was a rainfall and the gift of £5000 for Matigari's head was drifting away somewhere in the swirling river. The cyclic vision brings a promise of a new dawn. A true one. The new home is being built by the wretched of the earth.

The novel, at the formal level, has become very simple
and popular - an instrument for folk education. The presentation is also in the tradition of folk tales. The 'novel' is appropriated and fitted into the tradition of African orature/literature. Ngugi's journey back home is complete.

NOTES


6 Ibid; p.31.

7 Ime Ikiddeh, 'Foreword'; Ibid; p.xi.


10 Ibid; p.109.

11 Ibid; p.112.

12 Ibid; pp.76-77.


15  Ibid; p.53.
17  Ibid; pp. 142-143.
18  Ibid; p.100.
19  Ibid; pp.41-42.
20  Ibid; p.128.
21  Ibid; p.128.
23  Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, p.3.
24  Ibid; p.127.
25  Ibid; p.152.
26  Ibid; p.152.
28  Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, p.137.
29  Ibid; p.99.
32  Werner Glinga; p.225.
35  Ibid; p.120.
36  Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming*, p.33.
38 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), pp.91-93.

39 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Weep Not Child, p.40.

40 Ibid; p.4.

41 Ibid; p.115.

42 Ibid; p.121.

43 Ibid; p.134.

44 Ibid; p.84.


46 Ibid; p.94.


50 Ibid; p.221.

51 Ibid; p.220.

52 Ibid; p.221.

53 Ibid; p.146.

54 Ibid; p.129.

55 Ibid; p.195.

56 Ibid; p.266.

57 Ibid; p.280.

58 Ibid; p.200.

59 Ibid; p.252.

60 Ibid; p.275.

61 Ibid; p.90.

62 Ibid; p.93.

63 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Homecoming, p.23.
Ibid; p.xvii.
Ibid; p.xvi.
Ibid; p.5.
Ibid; p.203.
Ibid; p.288.
Ibid; p.327.
Ibid; p.73.
Ibid; p.255.
Ibid; p.338.
Ibid; p.320.
Ibid; p.343.
Ibid; p.106.
Ibid; p.281-82.
Ibid; p.280.
Ibid; p.107.
Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Homecoming*, p.50.
Ibid; p.70.
Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, p.71.
Ibid; p.72.
Ibid; p.73.
Ibid; p.77.
Ibid, p.79.
90 Ibid; p.79.


92 Ibid; p.8.

93 Ngugi wa Thiang'o, Barrel of a Pen, p.57.

94 Ibid; p.7.

95 Ngugi wa Thiang'o, Devil on the Cross, p.11.


97 Ibid; p.55.

98 Ibid; p.67.

99 Ibid; p.78.


102 Ngugi wa Thiang'o, Devil on the Cross, p.247.

103 Ibid; p.254.

104 Ngugi wa Thiang'o, Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary, p.xxi.

105 Cook & Okenimkpe, p.135.

106 Ngugi wa Thiang'o, Devil on the Cross, p.218.

107 Ibid; p.254.

108 Ngugi wa Thiang'o, Decolonizing the Mind, p.68.


110 Ngugi wa Thiang'o, Matigari (London, Heinemann, 1987)

111 Ibid; p.38.

112 Ibid; p.58.

113 Ibid; p.58.

114 Ibid; p.65.
115 Ibid; p.75.
116 Ibid; pp. 84 & 86.
117 Ibid; p.139.
118 Ibid; p.89.
119 Ibid; p.90.
120 Ibid; p.90.
121 Ibid; p.91.
122 Ibid; p.96.
123 Ibid; p.156.
124 Ibid; p.140.
125 Ibid; p.101.
126 Ibid; p.174.