CHAPTER - 2

COLONIAL KENYA:
INTERMEDIARY PHASE

'COLONIAL RACISM IS NO DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER RACISM'

-Franz Fanon.
CHAPTER-2

COLONIAL KENYA:
INTERMEDIARY PHASE

The present chapter intends to study Ngugi’s two novels, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977). Both the novels reveal the author’s dream of the new Kenya, where his people feel free to express their voice. The chapter reflects critical evaluation of the novels. *A Grain of Wheat* indicates that Ngugi is shaping his talent towards the thought, the imagery and the needs of a new Kenya. On occasions, this imagery becomes universalized as he moves deeper into the human problems rather than the immediate historical problems. *Petals of Blood* is the product of Ngugi’s deep association with Kenyan peasants and workers from 1970 to 1980. He admits:

> For me it was a decade of tremendous change; towards the end, I had ceased being a teacher and had become a student at the fact of the Kenyan peasant and worker. The result was my departure from Afro-Saxon literature in order to reconnect myself to the patriotic traditions of national literature and culture rooted among the people. This change was reflected in my writing of the decade; at the beginning in English but towards the end of seventies I had completed, *Caitaani Mutharabaini*, in Gikuyu language (Ngugi p7).

C. D. Narashimaiah argues in his book *African Literature comes of Age* that:

> African literature is first and foremost a literary activity. African novels are novels about Africa, which seek to tell the African story from the African point of view. They seek to dramatize to Africans and the world the peculiarities of African human condition and environment. All African writing is at once a literary piece, a social protest and a medium of political reassertion. African writers have produced some of the most enduring literary pieces by any standards in the world.
That these works have not been given the prominence that they deserve internationally is a part of the African story of the struggle for liberation and independence in all spheres of human endeavor.

Throughout Ngugi’s writings the binary oppositions can be noticed. Some of the prominent are:

- Dominator vs. Dominated
- Exploiter vs. Exploited
- Ruler vs. Ruled
- Cultured vs. Barbaric
- Human world vs. Animal world
- White vs. Black

The social, economic, political aspects of Kenya and English education have pushed him to revolt and protest through his writings. And he is quite honest in admitting the fact of his becoming a revolutionary writer, for the uplifment of the mass of the Kenyans, who had been subjugated and brutally treated with military power by the colonizer. His works have to be read against this background.

* A Grain of Wheat * is concerned with the celebrations of *Uhuru* (independence) in Kenya in December 12, 1963. It is a postcolonial novel of political, social, sexual and religious struggle of the period, when he had begun working, first as a reporter and then as a University Professor. In December 1977, shortly before the death of Kenya’s first President Jomo Kenyatta, Vice President Daniel arap Moi, who would later rule Kenya with an iron hand, Ngugi was detained for a year as a political prisoner for what Moi regarded as
the unsettling political message of Ngugi’s popular play *I Will Marry When I Want*. With the play, Ngugi turned his attention from Kenya’s emergence from British occupation to the political corruption of independent Kenya.

After his release from prison, Ngugi was unable to resume his University post. He left Kenya in 1982 and published exclusively in his native Gikuyu, because he viewed the structure of the English language as containing a European vision of Africa. Ngugi is regarded as one of the leading African authors of the second half of the 20th century.

*A Grain of Wheat* justifies that birth is destiny. Struggle is inevitable. The Lord disposes and until the very end of the novel destiny is therefore imposed on each of the imperfect village characters, rolling over them, grinding them into an ‘earth’ smoked gray like freshly dropped cow-dung, reminding them of dogs tearing the limbs off a rabbit and running ‘with blood-covered pieces’ in different directions.

Kenya’s history of the late 19th century and Kenya’s emancipation from the British rule during the 1950’s, are the story of *A Grain of Wheat* and that story is told through the complex interactions of Kihika, a Mumbi whom Kihika desired to be his sister their friend Mugo, who wrestles with his conscience even though he is revered as a hero of the resistance; Karanga, a quisling who becomes the chief of their village and runs after Mubi; and Gikonyo, the husband of Mumbi, who, after seven years in political imprisonment, rejects his wife for her single flaw. Primal emotions fluctuate and move them. The changes of point of view are abrupt. The effect, kaleidoscopically, is to create a picture of an entire society in turmoil.
It may be difficult for Westerners to bond with the central characters. Their actions may sometimes seem strange. There is no program to identify them and no roadmap for the gradually developing plot. But it is a wonderful tapestry. Ngugi creates the provocative politics and unravished images of Africa, which roll off Ngugi’s pen like the waves of a wine-dark sea. In Kenya, it was the armed insurrection of the so-called Mau Mau period.

*Grain of Wheat* pulls together two related hallmarks of Kenyan history; the Mau Mau war and the long-awaited independence. It is a story of heroism on the one hand and of betrayal on several fronts on the other. The exploits of the young leader Kihika add to the spirit of the resistance, boosting the courage and heroism of many, including the women of Tabai who are forced to build a new village in the absence of their men.

(King & Ogunbessan 213,210)\(^3\)

Eustance Palmer, commenting on the novel says:

The novel has not one, but about five centers of interest—Mugo, Gikonyo, Karanja, Mumbi and the White man, Thompson. It is the eve of Independence, and *Uhuru* demands unity; those men and women who presumably played heroic roles in preparing for the great day should come together to Kenya. But the eye of *Uhuru* finds all these characters plagued with guilt, shame and jealousy stemming directly from their activities during the Emergency; and these feelings threaten to mar the spontaneity and totality of their commitment to *Uhuru*. If they are to participate fully, if they are to be free and if *Uhuru* is to mean anything to them, they must resolve and reconcile these warring emotions and attitudes, and redefine their relationships with each other. Each is preoccupied with analyzing the motives for his actions during the Mau Mau Emergency, resolving his inner conflicts, doubts and fears, seeking to expiate his guilt and redefining his relationship to the other characters. Each character is painfully groping his way towards self-knowledge, Wangari, Gikonyo’s mother, says very succinctly to her son; but you are a man now. Read your heart and know yourself.

( Palmer: p26)\(^4\)
A number of works have been written on the violent phase of the Kenyan national movement. *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi is another landmark continuation of this phase. Here it is necessary to see the turmoil situation created in Kenya, which is the central theme of the novel. Some prominent reasons may be noted here. (a) The British governments enacted a law to take control of the territory in its hands and appointed a commissioner for the protectorate. The groups, which were fighting against colonial rulers, were being affected with this rule. (b) The British government's decision to bring in foreign settlers from Europe, Asia and South Africa further complicated the situation and made the freedom struggle not only a prolonged one but also a bitterer one. The Kenyans' insuffering and humiliation at the hands of both the settlers and the colonial government increased beyond limits. The freedom fighters had to end the brutal attack on the Kenyans through systematic planning of English education. Through Christian religion, which was pretended to behave like the 'safeguard' of the native 'heart of darkness'—people, keeping gun in another hand. This made Kenyans to take oath to flesh out anti-Kenyan forces. These drop outs were compelled to work on the white settlers' land for meager wages. The colour bar also made them intolerant towards the white.

The most violent phase of the freedom movement occurred between the years 1952 and 1957. It all began when the Britishers turned down the most moderate demands made in 1951. The basic reason had of course been the British government's policy of taking over the most fertile land from the Africans and giving it to Europeans to cultivate.

The educated Kenyans who actively participated in the World War II came home after the war. They could not digest the behaviour
of the White. Freedom fighters, educated Kenyans and the world war warriors came together and formed the freedom movement called Mau Mau. Mau Mau is a name with which they subsequently tried to damn the entire national freedom movement in Kenya, although as Kaggia says, 'we ourselves had no particular name for it in the early days.' The word 'Mau Mau' has no meaning in either Gikuyu or Swahili and there are interesting speculations about its origin. Some suggest that the expression was arrived at through transposition of the word 'Uma-Uma which means '-out, out' in Gikuyu. It referred to the desire of the Africans that the Europeans should quit Kenya. Another expression may be considered that Gikuyu word 'Muma' means oath. The Kenyan took an oath to struggle against the colonizers for freedom. The white police officer was unable to pronounce or spell correctly. He, therefore, created his own pronunciation, 'Mau Mau.

Another reason for the unrest of the Kenyans was the granting of Independence to India and Pakistan. It also inspired them to move forward in their freedom struggle. They revolted against their colonial master. Apart from the harsh and brutal measures taken by the government to stop the oath proved to be counter productive as more and more young people impatient for a change, took the oath. The freedom movement, contrary to the false propaganda unleashed by both the settlers and the colonial government, was the result of bad effects of colonization affection almost all the tribes in Kenya.

During the emergency, some 10,000 Africans were killed by the security forces and over 80,000 were detained in various camps. Here they were subjected to indescribable brutalities. No detainee was released until he had been passed along a security clearance.
channel known as 'pipe line'. Among the emergency casualties, which have not been recorded, are the victims of the 'pipe line' who were injured and permanently disabled by torture to extract confession. The movement brought to the force a number of truly trained soldiers by any standards of military warfare, to name only a few, Deadan Kimathi, Stanley Mathenge, Gitau Matenjagwo, Ihura Kareri, Manyeki Itote, and others. They were some who were constantly threatened by the British government, British soldiers and their helpers.

II

*A Grain of Wheat* was written at Leeds where Ngugi was a student and the prevalent radical atmosphere at the University of Leeds was 'systematizing' his thinking in relation to the issues of poverty, growing inequalities the world over and the increasing friction between capitalism and communism. His research supervisor, Arnold Kettle, who himself was a Marxist, also influenced Ngugi's thinking considerably. It was a few weeks before he started writing *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi stumbled on Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon's scientific analysis of colonialism in psychological terms and the theory of violence with an additional dimension of 'racism' in a colonial context, is yet another strong influence on Ngugi.

The novel has religious dimension with scope for destiny 'the will of God' and 'fate' the kind of jargon which is antithetical to a socialist/Marxist ideology. *A Grain of Wheat* fictionalizes the drama of colonial rule, Uhuru and betrayals at several stages preceding independence. Indrasena Reddy traces the origin and growth of the novel:
A Grain of Wheat is concerned with the egalitarian values of a people who seem determined to learn and cultivate the habit of living in harmony with each other in a spirit of mutual trust, respect and tolerance for one another. The novel urges the reader to examine his own inner self so as to discover his limitations and weaknesses with a view to correcting the same in the larger interests of the community. Ngugi's 'commitment' in the novels, his quest for a 'just society' and egalitarian values—remains the same throughout his career (p83)

In an article Themes in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: 1986, G.D. Killam finds:

"There are qualities of art and life in A Grain of Wheat which make it an enduring novel and which show that it possess Universal values characteristic of great works of art. But as with a good many enduring works of art, its initial impact is in its commitment to a set of ideals and to a community in which these ideals must become operative in the view of the author. As a novel of commitment it can be read as one of those works, like Petals of Blood, which seek to prompt men to action". (p202)

In A Grain of Wheat, Ngugi provides a more balanced blend of the colonial situation and his interest in human character by choosing a larger canvas and a more sophisticated narrator. The narrative alternates between the account of the rise of political insurgency in Kenya and of the lives of a group of people whom Ngugi draws elaborately: Mugo, Gikonyo, Karanja, Kihika, and Mumbi, to mention only the most important ones. Relating their lives to the larger political movement going on in the country, Ngugi enters into their minds and lays bare their desires, dreams, strengths and weaknesses. Although he takes a firm stand against the atrocities committed by the Whites against the blacks, he also offers an equally interesting account of the black psyche under pressure.

Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan write:

A Grain of Wheat pulls together two related hallmarks of Kenyan history: the Mau Mau war and a long-awaited independence. It is a story of heroism on the one hand and of betrayal on several
fronts on the other. The exploits only the young leader Kihika add to the spirit of the resistance, boosting the courage and heroism of may, including the women of Thabai who are forced to build a new village in the absence of their men. (p213,14)

Clifoord-B-Robson argues:

_A Grain of Wheat_ is a great advance in Ngugi’s development as a novelist, and this appears in the confident orchestration of the four different but interrelated betrayal and their consequent corrosion of selfhood—the four characters who had each been involved in the events that led to _Uhuru_ are now slaves to the mummeries of their own personal inadequacies. (p56)

When the novel opens, Mugo has already become a legendary. He puts up with sealed lips in detention camps; they praise his valour, stoicism, and fortitude. The narrator also hints that this is not the whole truth about him. We see that he lives under constant fright; routine questions of his friends prick him and every glance seems to pierce him. He avoids company and takes refuge in reticence. To put his present condition in perspective, Ngugi gives us some significant details about his uneventful childhood, his unhappy upbringing, and his dream of working up the social ladder through hard work and perseverance. And then Kihika enters his life and threatens to disrupt his fondly-visualized dream. He acts fiercely and impulsively by betraying him, although nobody knows about this. But the knowledge of his crime eats into him and fills him with a feeling of unease and fright. The climax is reached in his wrenching confession before Mumbi and his final admission of guilt before Mumbi. His final admission of guilt before the public culminates in the climax.

Mugo’s case is a fascinating study of a man who is so much involved in his private world that any intrusion from the outside is unwelcome. His love for his life, which he does not want to risk at
any cost, is so strong that he views his betrayal of Kihika as a sacrifice that God demanded of Abraham. Mugo's unmasking as a traitor colors the whole narrative with tremendous irony, which has serious political implications as well. A similar kind of complexity is woven into the lives of other characters, the novel more interesting psychologically. In this way Ngugi combines the political message of his novels with an engaging account of individual lives.

Ngugi introduces Mugo in the opening of the novel, in a solitary state, but he is very much bothered by many things. His physical features also indicate 'despair', 'the blanket was hard and worn; its bristles pricked his face, his neck, in fact all the unclothed parts of his body. He did not know whether to jump out or not; the bed was warm and the sun had not yet appeared'. (Ip) Mugo makes 'flash back' on the Mau Mau movement.

He also thinks about what they fought for, and what really they got, the fate of the freedom fighters. Mugo is an ex detainee. When he was in detention, his land was taken away by the whites:

Warui, a village elder, wore a new blanket which sharply relieved his wrinkled face and the gray tufts of hair on his head and on his pointed chin. It was he was had given Mugo the present strip of land on which to grow a little food. His own piece had been confiscated by the government while he was in detention. (p2AGW)

Mugo does not understand the meaning of Uhuru. Ngugi argues that the exploitative system was not changed even in 1963, as it is the year of Kenya’s political Independence.

And even in 1963, it had not changed much from the day in 1955, when the grass-thatched roofs and mud-walls were hastily collected together, while the Whitman’s sword hung dangerously in the forest. Some huts had crumbled; a few had been pulled dawn. Yet the village maintained an unbroken orderliness; from a distance it appeared a
huge mass of grass from which smoke rose to the sky as from a burnt sacrifice. (p3AGW)

Whatever might be the tall claims by the white about their giving development, civilization and culture to the Africans, Mugo hits back that their claims, proves wrong.

How are you man! How are you man! Glad to see you going to the shamba early. Uhuru na Kazi. Ha! Ha! Even an Sundays. I tell you before the Emergency, I was like you; before, I could work with both hands man. It makes my heart my heart dance with delight to see your spirit. Uhuru na kazi, chief, I salute you. (p3AGW)

The white man’s brutality did not spare even physically handicapped, like Gitogo.

He did not see that a white man, in a busy jacket, lay camouflaged in a small wood. Halt! the whiteman shouted, Gitogo continued running. Something hit him at the back. He raised his arms in the air. He fell on his stomach. Apparently the bullet and touched his heart. The soldier left his shot dead. (5pAGW)

Historically, Gitogo is Ngugi’s step brother.

Chapter two of the novel gives the arrival of colonizers. They came with soft coroner, preaching spirituality, religion and humanity. But

It’s origins can, so the people say, be traced to the day the whiteman came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands a magic witness that the whiteman was a messenger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with sugar; his humanity was touching. For a time, people ignored the voice of the Gikuyu seer who once said; there shall come a people with clothes like the butterflies: They gave him, the stranger with a scalded skin, a place to erect a temporary shelter. Hut complete, the stranger put up another building yards away. This he called the House of God where people could go for worship and sacrifice.

(10pAGW)
The tragedy of the indigenous people started as the white settlers bringing more and more white people and constructed 'permanent buildings'.

'Elders of the land protested. They looked beyond the laughing face of the whiteman and suddenly saw a long lie of other red strangers who carried, not Bible, but the sword. (p12, AGW emphasis added)

This naturally forced the natives to take up the guns. Waiyaki is one of them

'Waiyaki and other warrior-leaders took arms. The iron snake spoken of by Mau wa Kibiro was quickly wriggling towards Nairobi for a thorough exploitation of the hinterland' (12p)

Waiyaki became one of the prominent Mau mau men. The white settlers did not receive his involvement with movement so:

'Waiyaki had been arrested and taken to the court bound hands and feet. Later it is said, Waiyaki was buried alive at kibwezi with his head facing into the center of the earth, a living warning to those who, in after years, might challenge the hand of the Christian woman whose protecting shadow now bestrode both land and sea.' (p12AGW)

The readers are introduced to another freedom fighter, Kihika, one of the speakers. He is from Thabai. His words are stunning 'this is not 1920. What we now want is action, a blow which will tell'. He said as a women from Thabai pulled at their clothes and hair, and serenade with delight, Kihika, a son of the land, was marked out as one of the heroes of deliverance: Here Kihika 'unrolled the history of Kenya, the coming of the white man and the birth of the party.' Everyone noticed what Kihika spoke as he was considered as a man of knowledge, including, Mugo, Giyonyo, and Mumbi, Kihika narrated how the Kenyans have been misled by the colonizers. This is very important, because how the innocent people of Kenya
were exploited in the name of religion, language etc., Kihika unfolds the story 'We went to their church, Mumbi in white robes, opened the Bible. He said' Let us kneel down to pray we knelt down. Mumbi said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard.' (p13AGW) Kihika had a 'strong' voice, speaking with truth. He stressed on 'the great sacrifice'.

The Mau Mau freedom struggle created disintegration in the family, broken family broken nation-lost relationship. 'A day comes when brother shall give up brother, a mother her son, when you and I have heard the call of nation in turmoil'. (p15AGW) Kihika is known because he was instrumental in capturing Mahee-called White Highlands. The greatest triumph for Kihika was the famous capture of Mahee.' (p16AGW) Kihia became 'terror' for the whiteman.

The mighty exploiter captured Kihika at Kinenie Forest. He was tortured. "Kihika was hanged in public, one Sunday, at Rung'ei Market, not far from where he had once stood calling for food to rain on and water the tree of freedom". (p17) After losing great heroes of the Mau Mau movement, it 'remained alive'. The people are inspired by the marks of 'wounds' by Kihika. Gikonyo, after four years 'after returning home from detention, he was the richest man in Thabai. He started business and joins politics.

Ngugi recreates history through fiction by focusing his description on the contribution made by women, villagers, farmers: Wambui, who secretly supplied the arms to the Mau Mau fighters hiding in the forests.

'Wambui was not very old, although she had lost most of her teeth.

During the Emergency she carried secrets from the village to the
forest and back to the villagers and towns. She knew the underground movements in Nakuru, Elburgon and other places in and outside the Rift valley.' (p.19)

Old, young, children and women all whole heartedly participated in the struggle. The Mau Mau freedom fighters used to sing a song:

'We shall never rest
Without land
Without Freedom true
Kenya is a country of Black People.' (p.21)

All the common men and ex-freedom fighters have decided to celebrate Independence Day by honouring the fighter's dead.

“The Movement and leaders of the village have thought it a good idea to honour the dead. On Independence Day we shall remember those from our village and ridges near, who lost their lives in the fight for freedom. We cannot let Kihika's name die. He will live in our memory, and history will carry to our children in the years to come” (23pibid)

Koina, a leader of Mau Mau in the forest considers that Kihika's death did not create “any urgency for revenge. The biggest problem among the Kenyans is to find out the traitor”.

‘No my friend. We must find our traitor, else you and I took the oath for nothing. Traitors and collaborators must not escape revolutionary justice. Tomorrow you must go back to Githima and see Mwaura about the new plan. (p.27ibid)

Karanja is a messenger at Joint Thompson and Mrs. Dickinson. He is happy with the white people; even through they treat him inhumanely. “But on the whole Karanja would rather endure the humiliation than losing himself among the white people. He lived on that name with the power it brought. At Githima, people believed that a complaint from him was enough to make a man lose his job”. (p.36)
Mau Mau is considered by the white rulers: Thompson says:

‘Colonial Robson, a senior District officer in Rung’ei, Kiambu, was savagely murdered. I am replacing him at Rung’ei. One must use a stick. No government can tolerate anarchy, no civilization can be built on this violence and savagery. Mau Mau is evil; a movement which if not checked will mean complete destruction of all the values on which our civilization has thriven’. (p55ibid)

There were no jobs but they had to pay taxes. Exploitation continued: ‘Last Saturday, they came and arrested my man because he had not paid taxed. But how does he pay poll tax? He had no job. Our children have had to leave school because no money. (p61)

Ngugi makes it absolutely clear that he loves Kenya more than anything else: ‘What thing is greater than love for one’s country? the love that I have for Kenya kept me alive and made me endure everything. Therefore it is true, Kenya is black people’s country.’ (p65)

Ngugi, like Gandhi, is a mass leader and the masses were made to be free from all responsibilities to sacrifice to save the mother land and he says this through the character of Karanja: ‘Take the case of India, Mahatma Gandhi won freedom for people and paid for it with his own blood.’ (p94ibid)

And there is another interesting example, Ngugi considers Christ as liberator. ‘All oppressed people have a cross to bear’. Otherwise what happened to Jews will happen to Kenyas. So he advocates: ‘In Kenya we want deaths which will change things, that is to say, we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for me. We become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say that you, Karanja, are Christ, I am Christ. Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity to
change things in Kenya is a Christ. Christ then is not one person. All those who take up the cross of liberating Kenya are the true Christs for us Kenyan people.’ (p94ibid) Kihika considers white man as “He rules with the gun. The lives of all the black people of Kenya.’ (p96ibid) About half of the novel is filled up with the description of forest-life to refer to Mau Mau movement of prison life controlled by the white rulers. Mumbi had violated the sacred code of the husband and wife. “Mumbi had walked to another man’s bed, had allowed, actually held another man’s dangling thing between her thighs, her flesh, had rapturously welcomed the explosion of that man’s seeds into her. And this not once but every night for the last six years. She had betrayed the bond.’ (p117ibid)

Kenyatta says ‘Everyman in the world is alone, and fights alone, to live’. (p146)

Karanja became a thief. ‘Soon he proved himself more terrifying than the one before him. He led other homeguards into the forest to hunt down the Freedom Fighters’. (p147) Karanja betrayed the Kenyans.

“For in betraying Kihika, to the white man, Karanja had really betrayed the black people everywhere on the earth. (p153)”Africa, cannot, cannot do without Europe”. (166 ibid) ‘Burton had left Kenya for England. The new landowner was their own MP’. (169ibid) Ngugi intends to say that there is no change even after the British left Kenya. Rather the neocolonialists of Kenya have occupied their positions.

At the time of Uhuru celebration, it has been decided to kill Karanja as he betrayed his brother Kihika. Mumbi sends a message to Karanja. Mugo killed Kihika: “I wanted to live my life. I never
wanted to be involved in anything. Then he came into my life, here, a
might life this, and pulled me into the stream. So I killed him. (p185ibid)

The British divided the unity of Kenyans. “It was division among
them, why? Because a people united in faith are stronger than the
bomb’. (p191ibid) Mugo is in dilemma, he argues, “if you don’t traffic
with evil, then evil ought not to touch you; if you leave people alone,
then they ought to leave you alone’. (p194ibid) Kihika had everything,
Mugo had nothing. It disturbed him and made him jealous.

He lost sleep, and decided to kill Kihika. Mugo has a dream of
life, he wants to live better, happy, strong. He wants to buy more land.
He becomes greedy of power. ‘What is greatness but power?’

Mugo betrays the people. He made confession: “you asked for
the man who led Kihika to this tree. That man stands before you now.
Kihika came to me by night. He put his life into my hands, and I sold
it to the whiteman. And this thing has eaten into my life all these
years”. (p223ibid)

On freedom Karanja says, ‘what is freedom? was going to
detention freedom? was my separation from Mumbi freedom? Soon
after this, he confessed the oath and joined the homeguards to save
his own life. His first job was ion a hood. The hood—a white operations,
people would pass in queues in front of the hooded man. By a nod of
the head, the hooded man picked out those involved in Mau Mau’.
(p230)

Life and freedom become meaningless for Mumbi. The analysis
of the novel proves that, as long as there is lack of unity, there will
be mutual suspicion among them. Moreover this kind of mistrust,
betrayal, stabbing from the back—all these things, is common in
every country on the eve of first freedom day-Uhuru. In India also the same story is found. Ngugi comments on the two important aspects in this novel: First, on how the white people utilized the black people's disunity, faithlessness among them; and secondly, making them to sacrifice as Gandhi in India and Christ may not be real but ironical because no one was ready to preach before the white. The readers blame Kenyans as much as they do the British. Both are responsible. If they had maintained 'strong Unity' this situation would have been very different.

Even though India was also colonized and liberated the situation in Kenya is different from that of the Indian situation. In Kenya, the Europeans not only looted as much as possible but also destroyed their whole history, culture and life. They have been much more successful in Africa rather than in India. Hence, Gandhi had been successful. It may be noted that the neo-colonialists brainwashed blacks to occupy the positions once their counterparts—Europeans—enjoyed. The common people have not got what they wanted. Their pathetic life continues as usual even though they fought for a noble cause. Ngugi condemns this kind of attitude. He uses Christian philosophy to show the ugly reality of life through his writings. He uses 'Christ-Cross' many times to mean suffered oppressed, exploited, humiliated, and betrayed Kenyan mass.

III

*Petals of Blood* is an ambitious and meticulously worked novel. The reader begins to see early signs of Ngugi's increasing bitterness about the ways in which the politicians become the true benefactors of the rewards of independence.
Written in the U.S.A, Kenya and the USSR between 1970-75, *Petals of Blood* is widely regarded as an important traditional work of Ngugi's career, in which he moves from the anti-colonial critique of his earlier works to a condemnation of the neocolonialist regimes and the African Comprador bourgeoisie. Cook and Okenimkpe observe:

"*Petals of Blood* is the first of Ngugi's novels which is fairly and squarely about independent. *Petals of Blood* sums up African in English from 'its beginning to the present day.' Dr. Palmer uses the word 'epic'. He says: 'the novel is constructed on the grand epic proportions, but it is an epic, not just of the East African struggle, but of the entire African struggle".

(p202)"

The critics have valued the novel so high as an epic because it has the elements of an epic. The vastness of the plot of the novel helps the novelist in stretching the action of the novel over a long span of years from the Kenya of the 1940s, through the liberation struggle of the 1950s to the present day. The readers are taken further back to where Ngugi, in his use of myth and legend, conveys impressions of pre-colonial Ilmorog where barter system was there in terms of equivalent exchange of wealth and land and where the folk heroes, through their valor, might justly be described as heroes.

Ngugi's compassion for the people is apparent everywhere in his fictional world. He has said that he sees in the plight of his Kenyans, the plight of a larger number of people throughout the world.

I think what we're striving for is form of organization that will release this tremendous energy (of the people of East Africa) I think there is the danger of a black bourgeoisie blocking this energy of the people. This is not a problem of just the black bourgeoisie. But even more important in Africa, there is the problem of sheer economic development-the colonial government left Africa, especially Kenya.
or Uganda in a state of sheer primitive underdevelopment, so the
problem is clearer in these countries because of the smallness of
the countries. And also on the whole the economy of the country is
not always in the control of the people inside so there a lot of troubles
in East Africa; (204p-ibid)\textsuperscript{10}

David Cook and Michel Okenimkpe comment:

Ngugi exerts all his literary skills to emphasize the wickedness and
in humanity of capitalism and its effects. Hearts are hardened:
emotions are coarsened; minds are enslaved; the psyche is depraved.
Life becomes meaningless, a thing to be endured rather than enjoyed.
The negation operates at two levels. As individuals the poor are
trodden down and the rich are brutalized (even the nominally
religious) As a society, upright old Ilmorg dies and new Ilmorg rises
in moral ignominy (p100).\textsuperscript{11}

is set in Kenya but could be a prototype for a native culture anywhere
colonized, breaking free, then globalized which is an extension of
colonialism. It is easy to understand why the author was imprisoned
after the book’s publication in 1977. He presents a bleak view of what
the Kenyans got in the way of leaders after independence from the
white rulers. The novel depicts how the rich in making business with
the former white rulers and selling out their own people’.\textsuperscript{12}

The story opens with a brief introduction of the four main
characters Munira, Abdulla, Wanja and Karega. A triple—murder has
just taken place. Three leading millionaire government officials of the
city of Ilmorog were burnt to death on their beds. The readers are then
taken twelve years back in time when Munira arrived in the sleepy,
dusty village of Illmorog to teach in a school. The four friends meet
and we hear their individual stories about how they change over the
years but more so how the place called Illmorog changes, from a dusty
village to a modern urban center and the effect on the people who
lived there for generations.
There are many layers of meaning in this novel. It is a book about Africa, about the world history of black people in general, globalization, colonialism, and a murder mystery as well. The arsonist responsible for the triple murder is revealed to us at the end.

The detainees are Munira, a teacher, Abdulla, an itinerant trader, Karega, a trade unionist, and Wanja, a scarlet lady. The four protagonists go on to reveal issues such as corruption, politics, urbanization, social dislocation, colonialism in the emergency period and the African elite.

The main characters come to terms with the harsh disappointments of modern Kenya, a place, in Ngugi's depiction, dominated by corrupt businessmen and politicians who have quickly and conveniently forgotten the high ideals of the revolt they waged to expel the Britishers.

Munira, a school teacher, is sent there to set up a school. The book opens twelve years after his arrival when he is arrested in connection with the death of three leading businessmen in a suspicious fire. Much of the rest of the story is then told as a flashback, with Munira recounting the events unfolding from his arrival all the way up to the deadly fire. Among the other leading characters Karega, an earnest 'but unsophisticated school teacher', who evolves into a formidable union organizer.

Ngugi probably intends Ilmorog's transformation both as a metaphor and a microcosm of the moral decline of Kenya from the high hopes of post-independence to the business corruption and thuggery of a generation later. He contrasts the innocence and wisdom of the village with the political opportunism, religious
hypocrisy and rampant cronyism of modern Kenya. That is not exactly an original theme but Ngugi describes it as:

While I valued the book for its insights into dilemmas and disappointments of post-independence governance, I put it down more discouraged than uplifted perhaps it is unfair to ask Ngugi to do more than just paint the picture for us, but the novel would arguably have had a greater impact if it had given us greater hope and reason to believe that things can indeed change for the better (Webp3).

Like other creative artists, Ngugi is a product of his society and his political outlook is shaped by the cultural and social environment of Kenya and his writings reflect its shortcomings. Immersed in the post colonial African milieu, Ngugi can only offer hints in Petals of Blood about the international struggle necessary to achieve a democratic egalitarian society in Kenya and in fact, the rest of the world. Ngugi’s intelligence, integrity and passion suggest his great potential to overcome this political malady, which indeed afflicts the global progress.

Petals of Blood was received as a political ‘bombshell’ in Kenya and sold like hot cakes in Nairobi. Together with Ngugi’s play, I Will Marry When I Want, Petals of Blood was the work that led to his incarceration at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, Nairobi for one year. It is the last book written in English. Then, he decided to start writing in his mother tongue, Gikuyu. It is natural that if a writer writes in a foreign tongue, he won’t reach the common men, and workers of his land, because they do not understand the foreign language. The writer’s radical intention would not reach the natives. So one should go back to ‘the roots’ of ones language and culture to meet the challenges. Ngugi calls this ‘patriotic national literature’.
Only by a return to the roots of our being in the languages and cultures and heroic histories of the Kenyan people can we rise up to the challenge of helping in the creation of a Kenyan patriotic national literature and culture. (Ngugi: 1981)^

Ngugi offers a range of solutions to Kenya’s plight: Munira represents passive acceptance and the hope for redemption in the next life, while Abdulla puts his faith in his adopted brother Joseph and the coming generation, and Wanja decides to work with the system to her personal advantage. Ngugi criticizes each of these approaches by demonstrating their practical and moral weaknesses. Karega advocates spreading power and wealth as widely and equally as possible, thus creating a mutually dependent supportive community, which would no longer value internal competition or greed. This Marxist design offers the primary source of optimism in the text and is extended to personal relationships, the environment, and the international community. When Karega tells Wanja that they must build a new (Ngugi’s) society he means one in which the interplay of power and impotence is replaced by empathy and co-operation. His other three novels are also set against the historical background of the Gikiuyu tribe and Kenya. This consistent preoccupation shows that Ngugi does not disassociate literature from history. He considers it his mission to tell Kenyans about the real history of their country through his novels.

*Petals of Blood* is Ngugi’s theoretical reflection on economic and social problems. Is *Petals of Blood* just a projection of a theory? Can the book be read merely as a piece of ‘social realism’ with all the common flows of the genre that encourage simple allegory or over implication?

In December of 1977, the publication of *Petals of Blood* followed Ngugi’s arrest on vague Kafkaesque charges and he was held without
trial in Kenya. At that point, he began to write in his native Gikuyu, the language of Mau Mau resistance movement. He had found that this was one way to resist the cultural dominion of the West. Ngugi's fabulist, one might say, that it is a fantastical novel. *The Devil on the Cross* was the first to be written in Gikuyu when he was in prison.

Kenyan peasantry is the real actor in the novel. Ngugi recollects:

"It was a hard day's journey in the course of writing it, I would sometimes feel myself riding on clouds of sheer excitement". (*Writers in Politics: Ngugi: 94p*)

To most Africans, Mau Mau, in fact, was a heroic and glorious aspect of that mainstream. The basic objectives of Mau Mau revolution were to drive out the Europeans, Seize the government, and give back to the Kenya peasants their stolen lands and property.

"The British perpetuated violence on the African people for fifty years. In 1952, once the political leaders were arrested and detained, the colonial regime intensified its acts of indiscriminate terrorism, thereby forcing many peasants and workers to take to the forests. For about four years, these people, while little experience of guerrilla warfare, without help from any outside powers, organized themselves and courageously resisted the British military forces" (*HC: Ngugi: 29p*)

"One could say that if Christ had lived in Kenya in 1952 or in South Africa, he would have been crucified as a Mau Mau terrorist, or communist. The church then refused to speak up when oppressive measures where taken by the colonial Caesar, but spoke against people who rose up in arms against oppression . In face of a colour bar and discrimination against the black race the church only preached about heaven and the life to come". (*HC: Ngugi: p34*)

For Ngugi the church is a corporate body and institution and not the individual holders of the faith. Ngugi is primarily a University teacher by profession, writer by vocation and Marxist in his outlook. He calls his government not independent but neo-colonial:
“Chui, Mzigo, kimeria, Nderi Wa Riera, Ezekiel Wa Weru, the Reverend Jerrod and their fellows, we are seen as malignant and vicious, hypocritical and exploitative public officers: school administrators, legislators, Church dignitaries-Christians. ((Cook-Ngugi: An Exploration of his writings:p90)"

'ilmorog is invaded by European settlers and colonists, and exploited by Indian petty traders. Till after independence it is no more than a ravished, abandoned ghost of its former self. When the disillusioned and demoralized inhabitants imitate action to redeem the lost glory of their homeland, they trigger off a confrontation with city financers which forms the centerpiece of Ngugi's novel until the old Ilmorog is buried for ever beneath a promoter's paradise'. (p91)

The fourth full-length prototype is that of Karega. He is Ngug's prototype of the oppressed poor who learn to resist their oppression and envisage the reconstruction of society. He enjoys neither good education nor a decent stable in come, yet he optimistically and courageously fights for the righting of social wrongs'. (p97)

Ngugi exerts all his literary skills to emphasize the wickedness and inhumanity of capitalism and its effects. Hearts are hardened; emotions are coarsened; minds are enslaved; the psyche is deprived. Life becomes meaningless, a thing to be endured rather than enjoyed. The negation operates at two levels. (p100)

Munira's personality is thus related to the structure, texture, atmosphere and tempo of the novel from beginning to end.

'Wanja too has her contradictions. She is an intelligent and highly sensitive prostitute..... As a girl thrown upon the sexual market by
cynical exploitation, she is a victim of the collusion of social forces....She has all the protectiveness that Munira lacks. But Wanja retains her human dignity and integrity.'

'For a community or an individual, Ngugi looks to the past to provide a meaningful continuum with the present and the future'.

The romance between Karega and Wanja is a celebration of the happiness of the common people when fortune smiles on them. (p116)

David Cook & Michael Okenmkpe: *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of his writings* make the concluding remarks on the analysis of the novel *Petals of Blood*: 'But for the movement we can dwell on the fact that the end of *Petals of Blood* affirms Ngugi's bold and powerful attempt to combine the intimacy of the traditional novel with a public rhetorical manner in a new and perhaps itself artistically revolutionary amalgam in order to analyze social injustice and the human dilemmas it created, and to mark out the practicable path to social change'. (p118)

*Petals of Blood* appropriately deals with the situation in politically independent Kenya. The village of Ilmorog, like Thabi in *A Grain of Wheat*, is a microcosm of the whole of Kenya. All the four protagonists are being taken to New Ilmorog police station for 'just routine questioning'. But Wanja is in hospital with severe burns when a police officer arrives 'to question her'.

Through the special issue of the paper 'banner headline' Ngugi reveals the reason of their interrogation-summons.

**MZIGO, CHUI, KIMERIA MURDERED**

A man, believed to be a trade-union agitator, has been held after a leading industrialists and two educationists, well known as the African directors of the internationally
famous Theng’eta Breweries and Enterprises were last night burnt in Ilmorog, only hours after taking a no-nonsense decision. (p4-5)

The report continues to compliment the great contribution made by these three to the Ilmorog. The paper considers their death ‘an irreplaceable loss to Ilmofog. Godfrey Munira narrates the memory, in record of happiness in Ilmorog since his arrival there as a school teacher twelve years ago. Ngugi, besides his own omniscient interventions, allows the narration to pass into the hands of Karega, Abdulla, Wanja and Nyakinyua, the last mentioned being one of the oldest residents of Ilmorog.

Godfrey Munira arrived at Ilmorog because of two reasons.

'Some of us who had a schooling.....we tended to leave the struggle for Uhuru to the ordinary people. We stood outside.......the song I should say. But now, with independence, we have a chance to pay back....to show that we’d...did not always choose to stand aside....that’s why....well.....I chose transform to this. to Ilmorog.

The second real reason, his father Ezekieli Waweru-was a very successful farmer at Limuru and exploited his workers. His father was very proud of success of all his children except Munira who was a ‘failure’ and one of his daughters-Mukami, who had eventually committed suicide.

Munira recalls his relationship with Wanja and Karega, the day they came to Ilmorog. Munira recalls the days of meeting all the four at ‘Duka’ in the evening, he reveals that “My name is not Abdulla. It is Muria, But I baptized myself Abdulla. Now everybody calls me Abdualla” (PB:61)
The novel deals with how Wanja has been exploited sexually by Nderi Wa Riera, their M.P. They threatened to have them all arrested unless Wanja agreed to submit herself to his lust, in the larger interest, of course—despite protests from Karega and others.

"Wanja is an important character to keep the story united and forwarded. Her sexual exploitation is the result of the modernization of Ilmorog. She narrates her story to them, that she has been thrown away from Theng’eta Breweries then discovered the most important law in new Kenya: eat or you are eaten. So she had decided to exploit once again her sexual power and had opened a brothel to be even with the world". (Harish Narang: 104p)

"It has been the only way I can get my own back on Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria....I got with all of them now....I play them against one another...It is because only receive them by appointment. each wants to make me his sole woman... As for me its game of money....you eat or you are eaten (PB:293)

Although Petals of Blood is another landmark achievement of Ngugi, keeping the continuation of the way through his earlier works, recreating, reinterpreting probably—in proper direction—Kenyan history. For this purpose he doesn’t follow the European style of ‘single hero’ novel but multiple protagonists. He has done away with traditional method. This is because the Kenyan people—like any other people elsewhere, are not a uniform mass with similar aspirations and similar expectations from their own government.

Ngugi has chosen multiple approach and characters, perhaps for the same reason that the plot of the novel is very complex, narration within narration, growing and expanding like concentric circles in a pool. (p108)

Harish Narang in his book Fiction as Politics identifies three major issues. ‘Petals of Blood also represents a qualitative shift in Ngugi’s point of view about the three issues which form a common core underlying most of his novels namely the role of Christianity,
the western system of education and the alienation of land from the people’s not only during the colonial period but also in independent Kenya as well; (p109)\textsuperscript{20}

Harish Narang has rightly identified the three major issues:

In the name of Christianity, the black people were shamelessly exploited, their labour even sexual advantage: for instance: Brother Ezeielli in *The River Between* Mariamu-Karega’s mother. Joshua in *The River Between* is another example. Rev. Jerrod Brown in *Petals of Blood*; whose preaches everything doing nothing. When Joseph is taken ill on the way to the city, Munira and Karega approach his house for help. Instead a long lecture on God and his compassion but sends them empty-handed.

As far as education is concerned Ngugi is not very consistent but ambivalent about the role of education in Kenya socio-political life which characteristic of *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* Siriana High School or any other school—demands absolute subservience from its students. Those who opposed are being expelled like Chui, Munira and others. The second strike had seen the expulsion of Karega and some others.

The character of Chui is an excellent example of the permanent negative influence of the system of education. Some of the characters of Ngugi are disillusioned with this western system of education very early. Karega, Hawkins, and Joseph. Hawkins observes: “The education we got had not prepared me to understand those things: it was meant to obscure racism and other forms of oppression. It was meant to make us accept our inferiority so as to accept their superiority and their rule over us.” (165p)
The colonial administration had alienated the people from their fertile land, uprooting various African tribes, particularly the Gikuyu, the Masai, the Nandi and the Kamba in semi-arid lands. This had led to widespread protest, first peaceful and later militant. The Mau Mau was to make restoration of these lands to the Africans. People hoped that once the colonial rule is over, they would get their lands back by their own government. Of course their demands were legitimate, but soon the people were disillusioned even by their own government of Jomo Kenyatta. This government made various agreements with western countries, more and more land was taken away from the people to set up either industries or urban facilities for tourists.

The innocent inhabitants are hoodwinked by their leaders. Bank loans made easily available to the farmers for agriculture and cattle breeding activities. 'Progress! yes, development did come to Ilmorog. Plots were carved out of the various farms to make a shopping center. Shops were planned and people were asked to send in applications for building plots to the city council. A mobile van-African Economic Bank-came to Ilmorog and explained to the peasant farmers and herdsmen how they could set loans-only one condition: payments had to be regular, easy, it was a year of hope (PB 268)

One thing Ngugi makes absolutely clear before completing the reading of his fourth novel, *Petals of Blood* that the apprehension about a new class of politicians who were working in league with local businessmen'. (113)

It is through the character of Karega that the author raises visions of a renewed struggle-peaceful this time. Ngugi explores the continuation of the struggle in his later novels: *Devil on the Cross*, *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow* written originally in Gikuyu.

89
Indrasena Reddy: In his *The novels of Achebe and Ngugi*: 1994, remarks: 'Like *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood* is also a committed novel. It addresses itself to the politics of revolution and focuses its attention on the vital issues plaguing the nation at the time of Independence of Kenya in 1963, *Petals of Blood* seeks to survey the unpleasant events of the neo-colonial scenario of the country between 1963 and 1975'. (Harish Narang-86p)

Ngugi invests the marginal people with streaks of heroism—thereby emphasizing that the true saviors are liberators or are the people themselves in their collective wisdom and might. (87)

Karega is a teetotaler and he refuses to share even beer with other exiles. Wanja, despised, a fallen woman is a solace and strength to the other characters at crucial stages.

*Petals of Blood* depicts the flowering (petals) of a new egalitarian order brought about by struggle and sacrifice (blood). Two major motifs stand out in ushering the new world: religion and rebellion.

The renewal of a promising and prosperous ‘tomorrow’ as conveyed to him in prison cell by a girl, Karega’s hopes are rekindled’ (103p)

Nandita Sinha comments in the book *Ngugi and Mugo’s The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*: 2004, that Ngugi examines his characters’ past and present through flash backs conversations and confessions so that the whole of Kenyan history from the 1940s to the 1970s is touched upon:
"It is a haunting tale of lost hopes and dreams, of the legacy of colonialism in the shape of capitalist modernity-urbanization, industrialization, commodification of goods, sexual exploitation, the relentless pursuit of profit, rural depopulation and oppression. But once again, if there is disillusionment, there is also hope. At the ending, Wanja is about to have Abdulla’s child, which suggests hope of renewal for the people. (p18-19)"

Ramakrishna Rao ed. *Indian Response to African Writing*: says The African novel, in general, is known for its depiction of various cultural tensions and conflicts arising out of a clash between tradition and modernity, the real and the occult and so on”. (p79)

Ngugi attempts an extensive cultural interpretation through his novels by posturing, as his later works more tellingly relate an interrelationship between literature and history on the one hand and history and myth’.

According to Chidi Amuto in his book *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical criticism*: London: 1989, ‘in *Petals of Blood* Ngugi’s conscious socialist in a Marxian presents ‘In so many ways the Kenyan peasantry is the real actor in the novel. The turning of peasants into proletarians by alienating them from the land, is one of the most crucial social upheavals of the twentieth century’. “In general *Petals of Blood* is a complex exploration of human experiences, motivations and dilemmas in a historical context. While the concrete socio-historical canvas is furnished by Kenyan history and society from pre-colonial through the colonial and contemporary new-colonial periods, it is the interconnections among the lives of the four major protagonists-Munira, Wanja, Abdulla and Karega-that humanizes this canvas’. (p144)
The novel throws light into different realms of contemporary African experience as the forces of imperialism govern them:

"A conspicuous aspect of Ngugi's preoccupations with contemporary African socio-political reality is the searchlight which he throws on the close relationship between political functionaries in new-colonial Africa and imperialist economic interest". (P. 145-ibid)²³

Characters make reflection, introspection and projection. Through Munira, Ngugi reconstructs the phases in the development of Ilmorog from its small patrol beginning. Ngugi makes a paradigm, which is a titanic struggle. He tries hard to give a fitting answer to the hegemonic and myriad questions, generally asked that Ngugi has taken literature as a ride to make his ideology, at the cost of literary aesthetics.
NOTES:


10. Ibid: p204.


15. Ibid p94


