



2007

# Ngugi's retrospective gaze: The shape of history in "A grain of wheat"

Tej N. Dhar

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

## Recommended Citation

Dhar, Tej N., Ngugi's retrospective gaze: The shape of history in "A grain of wheat", *Kunapipi*, 29(1), 2007.  
Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol29/iss1/13>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:  
[research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

## Ngugi's retrospective gaze: The shape of history in "A grain of wheat"

### **Abstract**

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's engagement with history in *A Grain of Wheat* has been commented upon by critics differently. G.D. Killam (201) and Andrew Gurr (92) view it within the post-colonial frame in which 'received history is tampered with, rewritten, and realigned from the point of view of the victims of its destructive process' (Ashcroft et al 34). In their view, Ngugi's first three novels — *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, and *A Grain of Wheat* — provide his version of Kenya's history from the 1920s to the time of its independence. Ime Ikiddeh too considers Ngugi a novelist-historian, who focuses on key phases in the history of Kenya covered in the novels, but reads *A Grain of Wheat* mostly as a story of heroism and betrayal, of human relationships in a chosen situation (76–77).

TEJ N DHAR

## Ngugi's Retrospective Gaze: The Shape of History in *A Grain of Wheat*

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's engagement with history in *A Grain of Wheat* has been commented upon by critics differently. G.D. Killam (201) and Andrew Gurr (92) view it within the post-colonial frame in which 'received history is tampered with, rewritten, and realigned from the point of view of the victims of its destructive process' (Ashcroft et al 34). In their view, Ngugi's first three novels — *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, and *A Grain of Wheat* — provide his version of Kenya's history from the 1920s to the time of its independence. Ime Ikiddeh too considers Ngugi a novelist-historian, who focuses on key phases in the history of Kenya covered in the novels, but reads *A Grain of Wheat* mostly as a story of heroism and betrayal, of human relationships in a chosen situation (76–77).

Some critics discuss the novel within the context of the novelist's traditional use of history. Shatto Gakwandi considers it an example of the 'fictional recreation of history', a kind of 'historical novel' (109) which fails to deliver because it lacks thematic unity, makes infelicitous use of flashbacks, is deficient in characterisation, does not hold the 'plot and the political theme' in a coherent frame, and provides inadequate space for political leaders (118). Charles Nnolim writes that because it contains too many historical dates and characters, it becomes 'flawed by countless blind spots' (80). For W.J. Howard the novel reflects Ngugi's 'confusion between fiction and history': 'where the author is true to himself ... his work succeeds very well; where the personally involved historian is not edited or the history is transformed, the writing fails, through either uncertainty or obvious bad judgment' (119).

While the opinions of Killam and Gurr are too general to merit any comment, Ikkedah's analysis of the novel hardly evinces any consciousness of the problematic nature of the history-fiction interface. Likewise, Gakwandi overlooks the instability of the historical novel as a genre, the limitations and inhibitions of its character, especially when used in its most familiar Lukacsian sense of a kind of novel that comes to life only in a specific social and ideological setting.

Blaming Ngugi for mixing the factual and the fictional overlooks the very grain of the novel's being, for as a genre, the novel has constantly been evolving especially by taking the past out of its fixed confines (Bakhtin 16–27). The novelists have imitated, incorporated, and interrogated history right from the time the novel came into its own. Ngugi too does the same in his own distinctive style, for which he deserves appreciation and respect and not unwarranted censure.

To correct the failure of the existing criticism ‘to locate Ngugi’s texts within the contested terrain of Kenya’s historiography’ (2), James Ogude discusses his novels within the current debates on history and fiction, but by stating that ‘ultimately, the explanatory power or even the epistemological usefulness of literature depends on how close it approximates the historical truth which is its ultimate referent’ (3), he sets an erroneous standard for judging Ngugi’s effort. For he implies that there is an ‘historical truth’ out there — firm, solid, fixed, and immutable — and the novel, to be successful, has to conform to it.

Though Ogude makes use of the insights of critics like Hayden White, he ignores White’s proven view on historical reconstructions: that ‘there is no such thing as a single correct original description of anything, on the basis of which an interpretation of that thing can subsequently be brought to bear’ (127). Ogude also disregards the historians’ unease after the breakdown of positivist historiography and their dissatisfaction with ‘documentary reconstruction of a pre-critically conceived past’ and the limitations of ‘conventional historiography’ (LaCapra 139). That is why, instead of judging the novel on the basis of its conformity to the so-called ‘historical truth’, it is better to find what Ngugi does in the novel and judge its validity in terms of the cogency of his reasoning for doing so.

Ngugi’s involvement with history in *A Grain of Wheat* no doubt springs from his reaction to the coercive nature of imperialistic historiography, but it does not stop here. He makes an historiographic intercession of far-reaching cultural consequences. He takes a definitive position on what constitutes the true history of Kenya, and thus challenges the very basis of a leader-centred nationalist historiography. By looking at Kenyan history through forest fighters, the Mau Mau, and intertwining their activities with the everyday lives of peasants and workers, he is not merely illustrating the close bond between the two but also retrieving it from its fringe status, virtually reclaiming this subaltern history for the mainstream, and establishing his claim of what constitutes true history and how it should be represented. Since he considers freedom from colonial control to be a much more complex activity than is commonly understood, he also deals with the vital issue of a proper historical subject. A proper historical subject implies a person whose thoughts and actions are in tune with the requirements of the situation in which he or she functions; in the colonial setting, for example, a person is expected to work for the liberation of his people and not for realizing his private dreams.

Though Ngugi’s historical design reveals a strong imprint of Karl Marx and Franz Fanon, which has been widely noticed,<sup>1</sup> it is also embedded in his deep understanding of the pristine Gikuyu culture of Kenya, so ably represented by Jomo Kenyatta in *Facing Mount Kenya*. It is this double bind that largely determines the contours of the novel’s narrative, which is realistic to the core. Some of the characters are based on actual historical figures and some are purely invented, but both struggle with their past and make it a basis for living in the

present, thus providing for a blend of private and public histories that is radically different from its more fashionable varieties as, for example, in the novels of Salman Rushdie, who uses fantasy and grotesque to blend the two.

In Ngugi, history becomes the very fabric in which lives are woven in a complex intermingling, and where they are quite often in tension. His implicit view of history and historical change becomes the basis of his judging the private histories of individuals and taking an ethical position on individual efforts and aspirations. The ethical dimension, in fact, is so pervasive in the novel that some critics (such as Govind Sharma, *passim*) have elaborately analysed its religious texture, but the novel's secular resonances are equally important. This also lends the novel an extra edge, a fine dimension that is so rare in the African novels of the 1960s about the frontal clash between the individual and the collective.

Ngugi's involvement with Kenya's past is the very foundation of his being, for it provides him with the basis of 'defining himself in the mainstream of his people's historical drama' (Ngugi 1971 4). Voicing his repugnance for what he calls the 'romantic glimmer' of capitalism, he openly declares his cherished goal to 'Africanize and socialize our political and economic life' (Ngugi 1972 12). The crucial point here is that the past can be represented only on the basis of one's perception and understanding of it. That is why the retrospective gaze is the informing operative principle in the novel; it is also crucial for understanding its true import: 'I believe that it is only in a socialist context that a look at yesterday can be meaningful in illuminating today and tomorrow' (Ngugi 1971 8).

A direct consequence of Ngugi's gaze is that he sees the history of Kenya only through the common people, the peasants, and their brethren, the Mau Mau, whose misrepresentations were known to Ngugi, as can be seen in his response to Fred Majdalany's book on their activities, in which the Mau Mau emerge 'as something purely and simply evil, atavistic and something completely unrelated to the mainstream of African nationalism or any decent political sentiments' (1972 28). In Ngugi's estimation the Mau Mau are revolutionaries in the true sense of the word, with a clear-cut and well-conceived agenda: 'to drive out the Europeans, seize the government, and give back to Kenya peasants their stolen lands and property' (1972 28). This is a part of the dynamic movement of history and its course that Ngugi approves. Though ideological preoccupations often have a dampening effect on fictional art, for they can reduce characters into shadowy stereotypes (Al Marzui 170) and give the narrative a predictable turn, the force and vigour of Ngugi's passion is so strong that his ideologically steeped view of history does the opposite. It provides the basis for showing characters going through a real wrestle with their selves and experiencing a great deal of agonising suffering, which is one of the major strengths of the novel.

Ngugi's authorial remark, which functions like an epigraph in the novel, provides the most significant clue to his approach to history. If leaders like 'Jomo Kenyatta and Waiyaki are unavoidably mentioned as part of the history of our

country' (1967 vi), it is because they had a role at some time in the past, but now figure in the novel only as part of the background. By the time the struggle had entered its final and decisive phase, they were no longer the leaders that they had started out as. Their attitude towards the struggle, its aims, methods, and more importantly, its ultimate shape, had changed dramatically.

When Kihika, the young rebel who eventually becomes the Mau Mau leader, makes his first major speech in the novel, because Kenyatta does not show up, it is no chance occurrence: it is loaded with significance, for it is a symbolic takeover from old leaders who had compromised their ways and changed the very tenor of the independence struggle, resulting in many tragic happenings in post-independence Kenya. In a painful reference to this in the epigraph, Ngugi draws attention to the efforts of people who staked their lives for the cause, but the rewards were taken by others. One has only to read Ngugi's account of this phase of the Kenyan struggle for independence in *Detained* to know the full implications of this tragic betrayal (66–90). The worst and inglorious aspect of this was that these very leaders spread false stories about the Mau Mau and slighted their valorous part in the struggle. Ngugi's quarrel is not only with the British writers and historians but also with those Kenyans who, because of their 'mental colonization precipitated by both colonial and neocolonial education' (Mazrui and Mphande 165), wrote highly unreliable accounts of the Mau Mau and their contribution. So the novel looks at the struggle for independence with peasants as active participants, along with the Mau Mau, who were from among their ranks. One has also to bear in mind that for Ngugi the true process of history at that time was not merely to fight the colonial masters but also to set into motion the processes of decolonisation, which was much more than wresting political control, and which the so-called leaders had neglected.

It is for this very reason that the novel is largely an unravelling of the past of the people of a village who paradigmatically represent all the labourers and peasants of the entire country and their sacrifices and pain during the most important part of the freedom struggle, illuminating in the process the whole range of Ngugi's interests: his view of historical change, the assumptions underlying it, and a proper historical subject. In short, *A Grain of Wheat* goes beyond the bounds of traditional historical narrative, and investigates larger questions through the fictional mode.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the novel is that not only does it begin with Mugo, who has established himself as a leader of repute, but that he also dominates its narrative space. If the intention of the novel, as I have tried to show by analysing the full implications of the epigraph, is to focus on the role of the peasantry and the Mau Mau, why does the text foreground Mugo who, as the narrative eventually reveals, is no more than a discredited hero? If the thrust of the narrative is just to unmask his treachery, then Ngugi's narrative management is open to censure, for it destroys the very shape of the intended novel.

To overcome this difficulty, James Decker provides a postmodern reading of the novel in which he interprets Mugo's silence as a metaphor for its stylistic concerns. Because Decker considers Mugo's silence symptomatic of his lack of communication, a painful consequence of the oppressive colonisation, he writes that 'Mugo, then, equals the text' (45). Decker also contends that because his anguish, fears, and anxieties reflect the mental state of all the people of the village, 'Mugo personifies the village itself' (55); but this is not wholly true. Equating Mugo with the village goes against the very grain of the text's texture and structure. Mugo's silence has far more serious implications, both for himself and the society in which he lives.

There is no denying the fact that Mugo is central to the meaning of the novel, but for other reasons. First, in spite of several laudable qualities, including a tremendous capacity for suffering, he is not a fit historical subject. By concentrating more on his personal advancement than on the needs of his community, he fails to rise to the need of the hour. Second, his agonising wrestle with himself provides the basis for making sense of the efforts of several other characters who weigh preferences in their lives in relation to the turn of events. Finally, the texture of the novel confirms that Ngugi has drawn him as a foil to Kihika, who eventually becomes a Mau Mau.

In the march of events in the village, Ngugi portrays a set of individuals who represent different ideas and dispositions to clarify how their participation in the anti-colonial struggle acquires a meaningful purpose, but some, like Mugo, provide an insight through their own contrasting positions. If the Mau Mau exemplify Ngugi's confirmed belief in what Fanon calls 'absolute violence' as the one and only method for getting liberation, then it also follows that colonial subjects should be willing to cast themselves into a new mould in order to be the torch bearers of the process of decolonisation, which Fanon calls 'replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men' (27). Elaborating on this, Fanon states that 'it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them' (28). In fact, this is the only way in which they are transformed from 'things' into men and women. The overall frame of the novel testifies that Ngugi sees the struggle for liberation in the wider context of people's struggle to become worthy of being called a liberated people.

Two significant traits of his personality would have made Mugo an ideal person for fighting the colonial oppressors: his marked streak of violence, and his love for land, a value cherished by all oppressed Kenyans and praised both by Kenyatta and Fanon because, for the members of the tribe, earth is the 'most sacred thing above all' (Kenyatta 21), and in purely economic terms, 'the most essential value' for providing bread and dignity (Fanon 32). For Mugo this love is self-directed, because he sees it as a source for realising his dream of 'success and

wealth', which would force 'society to recognise him' (11). The evolving action of the novel illustrates Mugo's problem: he is too involved with himself and has little regard for the basic beliefs of his organic community.

If the system of education in the Gikuyu community, as Kenyatta tells us, puts great emphasis on 'a particular act of behaviour in a concrete situation' (105), then Mugo's is woefully inadequate, because he represents a psychology that is out-and-out Western. Fanon aptly describes it thus: 'the colonialist bourgeoisie had hammered into the native's mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is individual thought' (36). Consistently, and often with unbelievable vehemence, Mugo thinks of himself only as an individual whose dreamed goal is personal advancement, which collides with the needs of his society and the need of the hour. The values he cherishes may be laudable enough in themselves, but wholly inappropriate to the situation because they militate against the beliefs and values of his society where the cultural orientation is of a different kind.

It needs to be stressed here that Ngugi is not invoking any kind of fetishised atavism or nativism: he is only reaffirming that the cultural orientation of Kenya, which has to shape the march of history, has to represent a psychology that is not an imitation of the Western kind which leans towards individual-biased capitalistic order, but one which accommodates the dreams and aspirations of the society. This might look Marxist or Fanonian, but in its essence is one of the basic requirements of social organisation within the Gikuyu community: 'The selfish or self-regarding man has no name or reputation in the Gikuyu community. An individualist is looked upon with suspicion and is given a nickname of *mwebongia*, one who works only for himself and is likely to end up as a wizard' (Kenyatta 119).

Intertwined with the fate of Mugo is the issue of being a leader, of which his foil Kihika is an ideal prototype. Though Ngugi has relegated the old leaders to the background, they help to see the differences between them and the new ones like Kihika. He is loved by the people because 'he talked no longer in terms of sending letters to the white man as used to be done in the days of Harry' (18). This is not just a factual statement; embedded in it is an implicit critique of the approach and methods of old leaders, and of their views on how freedom could be achieved. If in the case of individuals, as with Mugo, it meant bending oneself to the needs of the society, for the country as a whole it implied bringing about a systemic change, and not merely a change of guard symbolised by the change of flag. In this respect, Kihika's comment comes close to Fanon's distrust of nationalist parties and leaders who do not stress the necessity of an armed struggle because 'their objective is not the radical overthrowing of the system' (46) which Ngugi has very much in mind. The leaders, writes Fanon, are 'violent in their words and reformist in their attitudes. When the nationalist political leaders *say* something, they make it quite clear that they do not really *think* it' (46). That is why, perhaps, in the subsequent revision of the novel, Ngugi substitutes the word



Movement for Party. Movement has not only a strong processional flavour to it but also a vigorous breadth, for it raises the vision of a huge mass of people, and, in this case, the peasantry, who Ngugi considers true revolutionaries. They say it in support of Kihika: 'what we now want [that is, after seeing what their leaders had led them to] is action, a blow which will tell' (18). Kihika too admits that 'Our people have talked for too long' (101).

Mugo's wrestle with himself and his eventual acceptance of the wrongs he did, have their counterpoint in the activities and growth of Kihika, the idealised leader who spearheads revolt against all kinds of authority. Events related to these are woven into a larger frame in which there are the British, who articulate their attitude and philosophy towards the natives, and people who took to the British by imitating their ways, either because they succumbed to their brainwashing or because they were convinced that the British would never leave their country. All these details are woven into the narrative not merely to fill the picture and to help appreciate the full implications of the Mau Mau mode of fighting oppression, but also to provide the background against which this response to colonialism has to be understood.

The arrival of Thompson, the British representative in Kenya with a dream and mission are brought into the narrative through his memory recall. Ngugi weaves strands of delicate irony in Thompson's passionately idealistic formulation of the ultimate goal of his stay in Kenya, for he considers the growth of the British Empire as 'the development of a great moral idea' which, even while positing equality among men of all colours and races, is no more than an imaginary construct. After all, the patronising peremptoriness implicit in the apparently high-sounding principle — 'to administer a people is to administer a soul' — (64) denies Africans their very right to be. Thompson also considers the Mau Mau evil and a threat to civilisation (65), an assertion that the novel vigorously interrogates.

Kihika's growth into a Mau Mau illustrates the duplicity in Thompson's views, for he directly experiences its basis in religious blackmail. The missionaries use the authority of the Bible to denigrate as barbaric both the natives and their cultural practices, such as circumcision. Kihika also understands that the civilising mission of Thompson and his kind did not permit any kind of resistance, for the parties organised for the purpose changed their character after their leaders were released from their prisons. The example of Harry Thuku, who led the struggle for a number of years, proved how the contact of the leaders with the British had turned their glowing fire into one of smouldering ash. Released from prison, Harry had 'come back a broken man, who promised eternal co-operation with the oppressors, denouncing the Party he had helped to build. What happened yesterday would happen today. The same thing, over and over again, through history' (122); and people, Kihika realised, could not live with this forever.

Kihika makes the people understand that the British had taken away their land and freedom and turned them into slaves. The slavish mentality could be

destroyed by violent action, as advocated by the Mau Mau: 'We must kill. Put to sleep the enemies of the black man's freedom.... If we are weak, we cannot win. I spit at the weakness of our fathers' (216–17). In spite of being a proponent of violent ways, Kihika spiritualises the mission of liberation by couching it in religious imagery. For binding people together, he invokes the images of prophets like Moses and Christ, and to instil in them a spirit of work and sacrifice, he inspires them by recounting the deeds of charismatic leaders like M.K. Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln. He uses religious symbolism to infuse a spirit of sacrifice in them and so spiritualises the act of defiance. Working for the liberation of the country is to 'become sacrifices for one another.... Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ' (110). Taking the Mau Mau oath is akin to 'water sprinkled on a man's head at baptism' (218) which transforms a person's character. The Mau Mau credo of action and sacrifice is exalted to the lofty heights of a spiritual mission: 'That's what crucifixion means today. Else we deserve to be slaves, cursed to carry water and hew wood for the white man for ever and ever' (218).

Ngugi is at pains to show that Kihika's mission and its ideological positioning meets resistance not only from the British but also from self-seekers like Mugo and colonial subjects like Karanja, who uses his influence with the British to oppress his own people. In doing so, he documents what was widely known and has been written about by the leaders, such as J. Kiboi Muriithi and Waruhiu Itote. What Ngugi dramatises through the narrative movement of the novel is the supremacy of Kihika; the inevitable surrender of self-centred people like Mugo; and the marginalisation of undesirable people like Karanja who virtually ends up as an outcast.

I have already discussed the psychological make-up of Mugo, the narrow walls of his dreamed future, and his desire to be cocooned from the strong winds of political change. Through a series of flashbacks into his past, for which Ngugi deserves credit and not criticism, the reader is shown the severity and compelling nature of his choices. When Kihika wins the hearts of his people by his impressive pleading of the cause they have to fight for, Mugo is filled only with revulsion and hatred: 'Something surged for release in Mugo's heart, something, in fact, which was an intense vibration of terror and hatred' (19). Any disturbing buffets from the world outside are highly annoying and irritating to him: 'Why should Kihika drag me into a struggle and problems I had not created?' (218).

When Mugo decides to hand Kihika over to the D.O., the reader witness his solipsistic withdrawal, which insulates him even from the call of his conscience. Ngugi's powerful rendition of what he felt and what he subsequently suffered also shows his superb understanding of the human psyche: 'For a time he [Mugo] experienced a pure, delicious joy at his own daring, at what he suddenly saw as a great act of moral courage. Indeed for him, at that moment, there was kind of purity in the act; he stood beyond good and evil; he enjoyed the power and authority of his own knowledge....' (226).

Mugo, however, is no monster; his elation does not last long. Very soon, the 'shock of discovery was so deep it numbed him. He felt no pain, and saw no blood' (227) and tuned into a stone. Caught in the atmosphere of arrests and imprisonment, he proves an indefatigable sufferer. Details of his arrest, imprisonment, and his refusal to confess are used by Ngugi to bring into the narrative many actual details of camps where people were detained tortured and even killed, but Mugo survives it all because he feels neither physical nor emotional pain. Other detainees do not know that he is beyond despair and pain, and they 'saw his resignation to pain in a different light; it gave them courage' (152). This raises his prestige in the eyes of the public and illustrates one of the ironies of history: that circumstances often throw up people who pass as heroic beings, although they are not. Keeping quiet over his shame, and distancing himself from societal affairs, Mugo lives the life of a recluse. The more he retreats into himself, the more his reputation grows till it touches legendary proportions.

Having withstood pain and suffering in camps, and received praise for his contribution to the freedom struggle, Mugo has another temptation: that of playing the role of a seer and a leader. He rationalises it by claiming that it is possible, and even reasonable, to wipe away a part of his disturbing past: 'Those buried in the earth should remain in the earth. Things of yesterday should remain with yesterday' (198). He also thinks that surviving the ravages of imprisonment has made him into a man of destiny. He has messianic delusions, which are highly ironic, especially in the manner in which he aligns his fate with prophets like Moses: 'I am important. I must not die. To keep myself alive, healthy, strong — to wait for my mission in life — is a duty to myself, to men and women of tomorrow. If Moses had died in the reeds, who would ever have known that he was destined to be a great man?' (224). Implicit in this is Ngugi's criticism of the actual political leaders, who thought that surviving their jail terms gave them the license to rule their people.

Fortunately for him, unlike the actual leaders of Kenya, Mugo fails to do so. The visions of his new role are continuously disrupted by the visits of Gikonyo, Mumbi, General R and others, who either involve him in conversation about Kihika and his betrayal or bare their own hearts to him. These visits continuously remind him of his past and virtually force him into making a public confession.

Thus we see that in Mugo, Ngugi creates a character of tragic proportions who suffers like a heroic being, bearing the agony of contending forces in his heart, but he makes it amply clear that people like him do not deserve to be historical subjects in Kenya. That is why even after Mugo makes his confession, there is no sympathy for him, no forgiveness. He has to pay for giving a free rein to his subjectivity, for pursuing dreams that are too private and beyond the pale of public necessity. He is a failure because he could not carry a cross for somebody else.

On a lower plane, and in a simpler way, Gikonyo is like Mugo. He too thinks like him, except that he is less ambitious and not so effectively inured to the world around him. In his keenness to see his 'Mumbi and take up the thread of

life where he had left it' (130), he does not hesitate to confess before the prison officials though he does not betray anybody. Yet when he sees her with a child, he feels hurt and realises that 'to live and die alone was the ultimate truth' (130). He drowns his despair in work, which enhances his respect in society; but it is only when he moves out of the narrow confines of his small world that he sees things differently.

On a lesser scale and at the lower end of the scale is Karanaja, an archetypal colonial subject, who is not only an agent of his master but also a slave in his mentality. His understanding is so clouded with fear and his desire to be known so strong that it is inconceivable to him that 'the coming of the black rule would mean, could never mean the end of white power' (45). Therefore, he chooses to stay with the whites, imitate their ways, cling to them with despicable obsequiousness, threaten his own people, and ignore the prophetic words of his mother: 'Don't go against the people. A man who ignores the voice of his own people comes to no good' (256).

It is only Kihika and General R who truly represent the kind of people who are fit historical subjects, and it is no accident that they belong to the Mau Mau, for in Ngugi's scheme of things they are the true makers of history. We have already seen that Kihika's political ideology is an amalgam of Fanonian principles and Gikuyu culture. General R's career, which resembles the career of many actual fighters who rose to high positions in the Mau Mau ranks, explains why in their kind of fight violence was essential, and why even some black people had to be killed. Though they were their 'own black brothers, [inside] they were white men' (250). It is through people like R and Kihika and countless and faceless multitudes who supported them, whose lives and activities form the main narrative of the novel, that the true liberation of Kenya came about.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, Adrian Roscoe 171–75; Alamin Mazrui and Lupenga Mphande 159–83; and Chidi Amuta 147–52.

#### WORKS CITED

- Amuta, Chidi 1989, *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*, Zed Books, London.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin 1989, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London.
- Bakhtin, M.M. 1978, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, U. of Texas P., Austin.
- Decker, James 1995, 'Mugo and the Silence of Oppression', *The World of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o*, ed. Charles Cantalupo, Africa World Press, Trenton, N.J. pp. 45–57.
- Fanon, Frantz 1967, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Gakwandi, Shatto Arthur 1977, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, Heinemann, London.

- Gurr, Andrew 1981, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature*, Harvester, Sussex.
- Howard, W.J. 1973, 'Themes and Development in the Novels of Ngugi', *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature*, ed. Edgar Wright, Heinemann, London, pp. 95–119.
- Ikiddeh, Ime 1984, 'Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: The Novelist as Historian', *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi Wa Thiong'o*, ed. G.D. Killam, Three Continents Press, Washington, D.C. pp. 67–79.
- Itote, Warihiu 1967, *Mau Mau General*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi.
- Kenyatta, Jomo 1965, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*, Mercury Books, London.
- Killam, G.D. 1986, 'Themes and Treatment in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's Novels', *Studies in the African Novel*, ed. S.O. Asein and A. O. Ashaolu, U. of Ibadan P., Ibadan, pp. 198–206.
- LaCapra, Dominick 1985, *History and Criticism*, Cornell UP, Ithaca.
- Mazrui, Alamin and Lupenga Mphande 1995, 'Orality and the Literature of Combat: the Legacy of Fanon', *The World of Ngugi wa Thiongo'o*, ed. Charles Cantalupo, Africa World Press, Trenton, N.J. pp. 159–83.
- Mazrui, Ali A. 1979, 'The Novelist as a Mediator Between Art and Social Philosophy', *Artist and Audience: African Literature as a Shared Experience*, ed. Richard K. Priebe and Thomas A. Hale, Three Continents Press, Washington, D.C. pp. 169–80.
- Muriithi, J. Kiboi 1971, *War in the Forest: The Autobiography of a Mau Mau Leader*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi.
- Ngugi, [James] wa Thiong'o 1981, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, Heinemann, London.
- 1972, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*, Heinemann, London.
- 1971, 'The African Writer and his Past', *Perspectives on African Literature*, ed. Christopher Heywood, Heinemann, London, pp. 3–8.
- 1967, *A Grain of Wheat*, Heinemann, London.
- Nnolim, Charles E. 1992, *Approaches to the African Novel: Essays in Analysis*, Saros International Publishers, Lagos.
- Ogude, James 1999, *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*, Pluto Press, London.
- Roscoe, Adrian 1977, *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge.
- Sharma, Govind Narain 1979, 'Ngugi's Christian Vision: Theme and Pattern in *A Grain of Wheat*', *African Literature Today: Prospect and Retrospect*, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, Heinemann, London, pp. 167–78.
- White, Hayden 1978, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, The Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore.