

**IMAGES OF DEDAN KIMATHI IN KENYAN CREATIVE LITERATURE**

BY

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE AWARD OF THE  
MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI.**

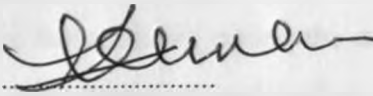
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**NOVEMBER, 2000**



# DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

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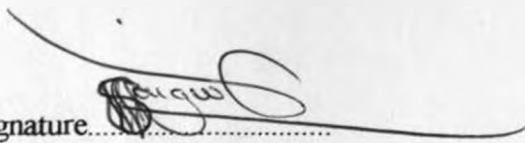
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the patience, suggestions and advice offered by Dr. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira as first supervisor in this study. Mr. Waigwa Wachira as second supervisor offered hints on the dramatic techniques in the two plays on Kimathi. I am also grateful to Prof. Indangasi for recommending me for a University scholarship which enabled me to undertake the whole course.

Away from the academic circles, the staff at the Kenya Archives merit mention for providing a friendly study atmosphere and availing whatever relevant information they could access on the Kimathi subject. Mr. Wanjau Ndiritu of Karunaini welcomed me and introduced me to informants familiar with Dedan Kimathi and the events of the time. Michael Githaiga of Kimathi Secondary School availed his unpublished 'Kimathi Waciuri' poem on the legendary freedom fighter.

The contributions of these people and the encouragement from others in the course of the study are well appreciated.

## DEDICATION

Kimathi and the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) left their imprint in the Kenyan history of resistance against oppression and injustice. This study is dedicated to like-minded progressive forces who resist the same in neo-colonial Kenya. Among these are patriotic nationalist politicians, scholars and students who have refused to acquiesce to the 'culture of silence and fear' by rejecting the lies, distortions or 'doctored' viewpoints intended to obscure the pertinent issues of the freedom struggle.

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## ABSTRACT

In the intricate relationship between history and fiction, it is often assumed that a body of fiction represents the values of a particular epoch. This sometimes ignores the inherent complexities when such literature attempts to portray the specifics with reference to historical characters or events. The fictive and factual vie for supremacy as the artist tries to balance the demands of art, history and purpose, providing unique challenges in art's creative reflection of history. The fiction on the emergency period in the 1950's in Kenya is a case in point, more so the works on Dedan Kimathi. Kenyan historians do not agree on the significance of Mau Mau. Interpretations are highly subjective in favour of conflicting perspectives on Kimathi's role in the Mau Mau struggle.

The conflicting images of Kimathi in fictional works published texts provide the justification of the present thesis. Three major texts - two plays and a novel, some songs and poetic compositions - portray Kimathi and the Mau Mau movement in different and conflicting images. The study examines the nature of these images and linkages in the various interpretations of Kimathi and the movement.

The research methodology has two components, library centred and a limited fieldwork component. The library component examines historical and literary critics' perspectives on Kimathi's portrayal and their insights into the subject.

The limited fieldwork focuses on songs and some written poems and views from sources acquainted with Kimathi and the freedom struggle to supplement the analysis of published fictional works. In the process, a comparative perspective becomes inevitable between earlier and later works. The generic commonalities or diversities are noted and given due recognition. The plays, the historical novel and the poetic compositions are, respectively, examined in different chapters.

The study uses the sociological approach to literary criticism as the analytical theoretical framework. The analysis reveals conflicting images as ideological statements of the economic and social forces contending for supremacy in colonial and post-colonial Kenya, with the artists as mouthpieces for these forces.

In the artist's sensibilities towards both Kimathi and the movement, one sees either unequivocal acceptance of cause or varying degrees of emotional/intellectual distance. Among the artists, Watene puts the greatest possible distance between himself and the "misguided" Mau Mau leader he perceives in Kimathi, while Ngugi and Micere applaud altruistic human and heroic virtue in Kimathi. In an attempt to settle the contentiousness of these extremes Kahiga chooses as his springboard the liberal accommodation ideology which Maughan-Brown sums up as 'balance'.

'freedom of speech' and 'the need to present all sides of the argument' (175). Kahiga extols Kimathi's heroism but paradoxically distances himself from the excesses of Mau Mau thereby validating the colonial and post-colonial order of things in Kenya.

In the final analysis, the study suggests that the debate about the images of Kimathi in the fiction of history of Kenya's independence struggle remains a gold-mine for further intellectual excavation.



## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Momentous events have throughout the ages elicited a multiplicity of convergent or divergent viewpoints in their interpretation. In Kenyan history there is a pronounced divergence of viewpoints in the interpretation of the armed anti-colonial resistance movement called Mau Mau among Kenyan scholars. The recourse to arms by the Kenya Land and Freedom Army in the 1950's was, according to a historian of the period, the height of unparalleled nationalist expression. In the words of Maina wa Kinyatti, the Mau Mau movement was "The Peak of African Political Organisation in Colonial Kenya". Other Kenyan historians like William Ochieng hold the contrary view that Mau Mau was merely a "Kikuyu affair" with little or no bearing on politics at the national level.

The colonial government and settlers of course viewed the movement as a manifestation of savagery and atavism. Governor Patrick Renison's "darkness and death" appellation of the movement in his protest against the impending release of Jomo Kenyatta in May 1960 is the most telling of the settler viewpoint. Kenyatta was, quite mistakenly, associated with Mau Mau and arrested with the onset of the declaration of emergency in 1952, and denied any linkage with the movement during the famous Kapenguria trial.

The sharp divide in the conflicting viewpoints is described by Mwangi Chege in the then *The People* weekly of December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1995 as a case of "double interpretation" in an article titled "Mau Mau and Kenyan Scholars".

The fiction on this historical event is equally replete with conflicting images. Watene's *My Son For My Freedom*, for instance calls the movement a 'Slaughterous Adventure' (45), while Meja Mwangi's *A Taste of Death and Carcass For Hounds* acknowledge the genuineness of the freedom ideals but tend to emphasise the 'obsession with violence' aspect at the expense of vision among the fighters. The more positive appraisals in works like Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* applaud the heroism of the fighters while agonizing over the betrayal of the ideals that inspired the forest fighters and struggling masses.

But it is in the fictional and non-fictional accounts on Dedan Kimathi, the leader of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, that one finds the clearest manifestation of the alluded "double interpretation". Kimathi and the Mau Mau movement are acclaimed as symbols and landmarks in the Kenyan and larger African liberation struggles in Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan*

*Kimathi* while Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* dismisses them as "misguided rebels". The conflicting interpretations in fictional works pose questions regarding the meaning of terms like liberation, the relationship between fiction and history, the nature of art and the role of the artist in society.

Kimathi is not unique in the portrayal of historical characters in fiction. Others like Shaka king of the Zulu, Kinjekitile and Julius Caesar appear in fictional works. There has also been controversy and disagreements about the portrayal of Shaka in fiction. Kimathi's fictional portrayal is subject of similar contentiousness.

The whole issue of this contentiousness and "double interpretation" in the fictional portrayal might be summed up by Mazrui's foreword to Buijtenhuijs' *Mau Mau Twenty Years After*. In the foreword titled "The Men, the Myth and the Moment," Mazrui points out that

The heroic and the mundane, the assertive and the timid, the rational and the confused, the effervescent and the insipid - all these contradictions manifested themselves on the men engaged in the Mau Mau movement, in the myths which animated them, and in the nature of that powerful moment in Kenya's history ... And images are sometimes captured in names, words and their associations (9-12).

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

There exists as intimated a rigid dichotomy among Kenyan scholars and creative writers' interpretations of Mau Mau. Ngugi in *Moving The Centre* sees the conflicting interpretations reflecting versions veering towards either "the real living history of the masses and approved official history" (98). In the latter case, Ngugi contends, Kimathi and the Mau Mau as symbols of principled heroic and unflinching resistance to oppression "have received total official neglect and distortion" (98).

The same view is shared by Maina wa Kinyatti, who argues in *Kimathi's Letters* that Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* is a distortion reflecting the colonialist viewpoint because it portrays Kimathi as "a lone sadistic dictator" rather than "very democratic ... like any other KLFA leader" (12) as indicated in records detailing his work and conduct as a leader. Conversely, Ngugi and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is dismissed by critics like Wanjala and Atieno-Odhiambo as a fictional "misrepresentation" which deviates from the (f)actual about Kimathi or Mau Mau's 'historical realism'. Drama scholar Waigwa Wachira in his "Reply to The Critics" seminar paper disagrees and dismisses Wanjala and Atieno-Odhiambo's reviews of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as "negative criticism", arguing that overemphasis on "historical realism" in art is an untenable demand because history-based fiction should be judged according to rules determining the mode of existence of a work of art.

The contentiousness in the two plays' images of Kimathi provide the rationale for Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*, a novel which claims to bridge the credibility 'gaps' in the "previous misrepresentations" by eschewing "historical distortion and artistic idealism". Kahiga's portraiture of another fictional Kimathi based on (implied) "historical realism" and (presumably) evocative of the "the real Kimathi" (306) is intended to put to rest the controversy arising from other portrayals and colonial propaganda, which are subsequently dismissed as having given "the wrong image of him" (128). There are also some oral compositions and written poems on the freedom struggle which present images of Kimathi reflective of one or the other of the conflicting perspectives.

One therefore sees Kimathi and Mau Mau as controversy ridden subjects in the historical and fictional spheres. Such questions regarding what constitutes the "real" or "false", the "wrong" or "correct" image of Kimathi or version of history arise and have proved contentious among historians, artists and literary critics. The relativity of the ensuing arguments and judgements illustrates the problem of interpretations. The relationship between history and fiction and artistic purpose in the portrayal of Kimathi present an issue that needs investigation.

## 1.2 Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine and understand the image of Kimathi in the fictional works. The study seeks to clarify the nature of the evocative images as projections of the artists' perceptions of Kimathi and concomitant interpretations. The study also aims to highlight the "social essence" in meanings the artists ascribe to the historical character and event. In the process, the study aims at providing a further critique of the fictional works on Kimathi.

## 1.3 Justification of the Study

The divergence of views among historians, artists and literary critics regarding the significance of Mau Mau is evidence that a subject like Kimathi is still a "gold mine" for interested researchers. Maughan-Brown's *Land, Freedom and Fiction* is a landmark study on the fiction on Mau Mau, but does not examine the fictional accounts on Kimathi. The creative works on Kimathi are worthy of attention because they provide 'insights' into artists' perceptions of Kimathi and the historical event.

Subsequently, we examine the value of the artists' reflection and interpretation of the people's past and present in order to determine the way art seeks to shape a vision for the future. The artists here endeavour to come to terms with socio-historical reality in order to further an

"understanding" of Kimathi and Mau Mau's significance as they perceive it. Haynes in *African Poetry and The English Language* points out that fiction on historical characters like Shaka has an inalienable linkage with the social purpose of art as a pedagogical tool in contemporary reality, especially and essentially because

If literature can have any bearing on political or social circumstances it is likely to be at times of crisis ... when people can be expected to reflect on the meaning of what they are doing and suffering ... what readers (or hearers) take from a work of art is affected by the attitudes they bring to it and the social structures within which it is experienced - the school, the political party, exile or so on (52).

Etherton in *The Development of African Drama* acknowledges this by citing *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as an example of the way literature is used to shape social vision. In his view "we must keep returning to the past in order to understand the future" (174). One is reminded of Paul Maina's *Six Mau Mau Generals* observation that "while hunger, poverty, ignorance, selfishness and an absence of a clear purpose remain unconquered, freedom is still a dream in the hearts of many" (ii). This illustrates the issue-base linkage between the history and literature on Mau Mau. The fictional works on Dedan Kimathi are equally, and even more directly, implicated in this respect.

The freedom struggle and especially the 1950's decade is an indelible landmark in Kenyan history. The many conflicting schools of thought on Mau Mau are proof this. Buijtenhuijs has noted in *Mau Mau Twenty Years After* that "the Kenyan public is genuinely interested in everything connected with Mau Mau" (62). Kimathi is inalienable from Mau Mau and is often considered as its very personification. The contentious interpretations of Mau Mau are acknowledged in statements like Buijtenhuijs' reference to the many "books with a very negative and openly colonialist image of the Mau Mau movement" (75), a claim repeated in Maina wa Kinyatti's and Waigwa Wachira's views regarding the fictional portrayal of Kimathi in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. Buijtenhuijs talks of the need to examine and see through the "historiographical smokescreen" (76). One might paraphrase and talk of the need to examine the interpretational smokescreen(s) in the fictional accounts on Kimathi.

These works have not on the whole received sufficient critical attention. Some are relatively recent in relation to the two plays which sparked controversy. One need not belabour the point that Kimathi's portrayal in fiction is a subject worthy of serious literary and scholarly attention.

An engagement with a subject as contentious as Kimathi and Mau Mau's portraiture in fiction requires open-mindedness in the ensuing analytical discourse. This essentially means that

one takes into account the many conflicting versions in history and fiction and view them as expressions of conflicting perspectives and interests when analysing the subjective content and images in the various literary texts. Mahood has noted in *The Colonial Encounter* that the work of art is the figment and expression of an “particular sensibility” (3). While this may imply a need to broadly examine the authors of the particular texts, the study places its focus on and gives due credit to the nature and *objective content* in the fictional texts on Kimathi and the ensuing image(s). In other words open-mindedness in this study is an endeavour to underscore Jones’ assertion in *African Literature Today* (Vol. 7) that any text “must eventually be judged by what it contains or what can legitimately be implied from it” (I). This aspect should be the point of departure irrespective of whether the critic empathises or not with the objective meaning in those texts. The premise is the realisation that the historical accounts and creative writers (will) endeavour to persuade us to imbibe various viewpoints the evocative images illustrating what Maughan-Brown calls the (presumed) “correctness of their two (supposedly) irreconcilably opposed view of Mau Mau” (227). The adoption of an open-minded approach is ingrained in the theoretical and hypothetical premises of the study.

#### 1.4 Scope of the Study

The major focus of this study is the fictional accounts on Kimathi. These are Kenneth Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* (1974), Ngugi and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) and Sam Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* (1990). A variety of songs and poems on Kimathi are also examined to understand the various images of Kimathi in Kenyan literature. Some historical accounts on the subject are examined for the ‘insights’ they provide on the subject. Reviews by literary and the views of historians on the subject are also taken into account. The study, we must however emphasise, is a literary investigation and not a historical authentication of these works.

Like Gikandi in *Reading The African Novel*, we reaffirm that ours are literary concerns and

that while any external knowledge we may have about the historicism and social background of the world represented in this works affects our reading of them, our judgements should ultimately be determined by our responses to their fictional entity (2).

#### 1.5 Limitations of the Study

The study examines only the available (published) fictional accounts on Kimathi. Because of the continuing research on Mau Mau, one cannot preclude the possibility of more evidence or new insights on Kimathi and the broad subject of the freedom struggle becoming available in future.

Colonial accounts like Ian Henderson's *The Hunt For Dedan Kimathi* have been countered or superseded by other 'insights' and 'alternative' views in accounts like Njama and Barnett's *Mau Mau From Within* and Maina wa Kinyatti's *Kimathi's Letters* (ed). Paul Maina's *Six Mau Mau Generals*, Shiraz Durrani's *Kimaathi: Mau Mau's First Prime Minister of Kenya*, Karuga Wandai's *Dedan Kimathi: A Tribute To a National Hero* and Kanogo's *Dedan Kimathi: A Biography* are the available variety of historical 'insights' on Kimathi. Poems like Michael Githaiga's (unpublished) "Kimathi Waciuri" and Maina wa Kinyatti's "Cenotaph For Dedan Kimaathi" in *A Season of Blood* are recent compositions, many years after the two plays. Even the famous "Song of Kimathi" itself has different versions as illustrated in the researches/collections by Kinyatti, Wandai and Pauline Mahugu's "A Literary Investigation of The Agikuyu Songs of Independence" thesis.

This makes it prudent to assume that not every available account, version or composition may be covered by this study. It is instructive that Burness' *Shaka King of The Zulu in African Literature* (1976) study does not include Kunene's epic poem *Emperor Shaka The Great* (1979), published after Burness' "conclusive" exhaustive study of the literature on the Zulu King. One cannot preclude the publication of other challenging works on Kimathi in years to come because there is still a strong fascination with the unknown details or aspects of the movement. That authors like Kahiga chose to dispute earlier works and embark on research to present the "real Kimathi" shows how complex the whole subject really is.

## 1.6 Hypothesis

The assumption of this study is that the images of Kimathi in the fictional accounts are projections deriving from the nuances in authorial ideology and sensibility on Kimathi and the Mau Mau movement. The conflict, it is assumed, cannot be simplistically viewed as antagonism between white and black considering that the post-colonial authors of the fictional works are African creative writers. The subsequent hypothetical premise is that the conflicting images of Kimathi in the fictional works are predicated on divergence in the ideological premises of the artists' perceptions of the historical event.

Concomitantly, it is also assumed that the fictional images and authorial voice(s) evocative in the works are reflective of the cultural, socio-economic and ideological structures that the works propagate, the artist's individual sensibility notwithstanding, or manifest in the same. Meszaros notes in the *Power of Ideology* that ideology is pervasive in all spheres of life and is

a specific form of materially anchored and sustained social consciousness... the various ideological forms of social consciousness carry far reaching practical implications in all their

varieties, in art and literature no less than in philosophy and social theory irrespective of their social political anchorage to progressive or conservative positions (10-11).

Such a hypothesis posits, to quote Gikandi in *Reading The African Novel*, a concern “not so much with overt intentionality, but with the set of values and meanings which underlie the authors’ reshaping of reality in their fictional universe” (2). The varying forms of consciousness, it is posited, account for the conflicting interpretations and subsequent images of Kimathi and Mau Mau in fiction.

## 1.7 Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the sociological approach to literary criticism as its analytical theoretical framework. Being socially conditioned, literature reflects the multifaceted nature of social reality perceived from multi-dimensional perspectives. Bottomore has noted in *Sociology As Social Criticism* that “sociological thought derives its pre-occupation and some parts of its general framework of presuppositions, its criteria of what is significant or valid, from the form of society in which it is carried on” (14).

This sociality of literary creativity is emphasised in Elizabeth Burns’ “Sociology and the theatre” essay in *Theatricality: A Study of Convention In The Theatre And In Social Life*. Burns sees drama as an expression of real life conditions, “the world of social reality becoming a play contrived by hidden, superhuman or impersonal forces” (1). Literary criticism examines how drama educates by “revealing the principles of selection and construction which seem to govern the individually created fictive worlds of writers-poets, novelists and playwrights” (2-3). The ensuing critique should show how “literary fiction” (3) reflects the

social milieu ... (as) part and parcel of the world of social behaviour and of the structure of society as a whole... a ‘theatre’ of social action and social values - an arena, among many, in which it is possible to study manifestations of social values, forms and conventions of society, and also images of social reality which people of different kinds and at different times have constructed for themselves (5).

Burns acknowledges theatre’s role in the creative “reconstruction of past conditions and their social implications” (5). Any criticism concerned with the “sociology of the theatre” (5), she points out, examines “the content, the theme, of plays, with different types of social structure and different ideologies” (6). Burns notes that this sociology of the theatre is capable of analyzing “the different interpretations that this themes are given at different times and in different societies, according to the social assumptions of the time” (6).

A sociological approach to literary criticism, as Amuta notes in *The Theory of African Literature*, examines the various aspects of the literary text as a product of the social environment, especially the way the literary text reflects "the complex relationship between literature and the equally complex set of relationships in its informing society" (8). Literary aspects are examined for their appropriateness and relevance for particular purposes, so that "beyond adopting the sociality of literature as a point of departure, a rigorous sociology of literature perceives the context of literature, its content and form as dialectically connected areas of comprehending the social essence of literature" (9). This critique becomes an analytical tool assisting us to understand and determine how or why a particular viewpoint promotes or hinders what Bottomore calls "the cause of human liberation" (15). There is the general consensus among literary theoreticians that art has a role, indeed a sacred duty towards this end.

Swingewood notes in *The Novel And Revolution* that "the writer extrapolates the significant structures of his group through a literary work... the writer expresses the consciousness of his social group at a particular historical moment... there is implicit within the method a mechanistic nexus of social group and social development" (24-25). The reference here is the inherent social vision that the author projects within the fictional content in relation to the social context of the work itself. The leading proponents of the sociological approach are literary theoreticians and critics spanning the spectrum of ideological inclinations. Amuta prefers a "rigorous sociology" based on a Marxist philosophical approach rather than the bourgeois one which buttresses neo-colonial literature and culture on the African scene. He proposes a "libertarian ideology" as a necessary break with oppressive bourgeois ideology. Escarpit in *Sociology of Literature* prefers an analysis encompassing "the study of the entire environment of the literary creation, distribution and consumption ... the exploration not of literature's content but its context" (7). J.P. O'Flinn in "Towards a Sociology of The Nigerian Novel" in *African Literature Today* (Vol. 7) calls for a comprehensive analysis encompassing the relationship between levels of literacy and economics, or existence of "an income sufficiently high to make the purchase of books feasible after the bare necessities of life have been catered for" (35).

While such factors do have a bearing on literary output and consumption, they do not override other critical ones. The artist's commitment often overrides economic considerations. Lowenthal argues in *Literature And Mass Culture* that "it is possible to conceive of a literature which remains faithful to knowledge and learning and interpret literary works historically and sociologically, avoiding the pitfalls of either descriptive positivism or metaphysical speculation"



(247). Achebe sees "the burning issues of the day" as sufficient impetus for creative writing, while Ngora in *Ideology And Form In African Poetry* acknowledges that the need to give expression to "the real conditions of human existence ... and struggles that have a historical basis" (30-31) is in itself a sufficient motivating factor. The study views the works on Kimathi largely as the artists' responses to the latter case.

Some proponents of this "social reading" of literary texts like Graham Smith in *The Novel and Society* aver that art for art's sake is a non-existent concept, long supplanted by the social purpose (8). Ngugi in *Writers In Politics* talks of the need to examine "the writer's honesty and faithfulness in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him, his attitude to those big social and political issues ... the attitudes and world view embodied in his work and with which he is persuading us to identify (74-75). Such attitudes crystallise into the conflicting evocative images of the same historical character like Kimathi when seen through different lenses by writers like Kenneth Watene, Ngugi and Micere Mugo, as well as Sam Kahiga. This illustrates the aptness of Schuckling's contention in *The Sociology of Literary Taste* that "man's attitude to things, his ethical valuations and emotional preferences are carried over into the direct expression in the art of things perceived through the senses" (14).

Different sensibilities are manifest in the artists' responses to the colonial and post-colonial experience. Onoge proposes a Marxist sociological approach to literary criticism. His "*Towards a Marxist Sociology of African Literature*" essay in Gugelberger's *Marxism and African Literature* cites the prevailing "crisis of consciousness in African literature" where varying "patterns, orientations and consciousness" (22) contend in the endeavour to portray the socio-historical experiences and the colonial legacy in African literature. Artistic expressions, Onoge argues, are "the products of a social praxis" (43). The Marxist sociological approach to literary criticism is seen as the appropriate critical sensibility, libertarian in orientation providing the best yardstick in relation to "the political criterion of excellent art ... art which serves the struggle of the people against their oppressor" (44). The danger of sacrificing the aesthetics of form at the altar of political sloganeering couched in artistic language is clearly a possibility here, but artistic finesse espousing reactionary content must be viewed as constituting a greater danger in relation to the question of "commitment" in African literature.

The view of this study remains that the literary criterion of good art notwithstanding, the "commitment" aspect takes precedence, not because art should necessarily inhere a political statement, but as a counter to the pervasive influence of the colonial legacy in African literature. It

is the artist's capacity, as Lukacs notes in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, "to look stark reality in the face" that matters more when reflecting socio-historic experiences. This is because "in literature, as elsewhere, a critical understanding of the present is the key to the understanding of the past" (95). Qualitative understanding and empathy remain overriding factors in this regard.

The sociological approach to literary criticism is thus (considered) an enabling theoretical framework affording the broad scope of examining various literary aspects like style, characterisation, language, structure, ideology and what bearing these have on the social vision of the artist(s). This approach, as noted in Pick's introduction to Escarpit's *Sociology of Literature*, affords a multidimensional scope which "appears to offer, if not solutions, then at least 'objective' and ranging perceptions which let us see old experience with new eyes" (5). The issue of literary aesthetics is not relegated to the periphery because this approach is equally "concerned ... with the content of literature, its nature, its structure, its artistic complexity" (6).

The qualitative and facilitative nature of the sociological approach to literary analysis is best summed in Graham Smith's *The Novel and Society*. Its essence, as Smith emphasises, is that

theoretical and practical criticism ... be brought to bear on specific works and writers in the conviction that a social reading of a work of literature is not a hunt for scraps of historical fact or information, but an engagement with issues that belong entirely within the fictional world ... the very richness of literature provides a wealth of readings of which the only final test is the illumination they provide (8).

The Kimathi subject in fiction is riddled with so many claims and counter-claims about "distortions", "correct" or "wrong" versions and images, making the sociological approach to literary criticism an appropriate analytical theoretical framework suited to the task of examining the fiction. Amuta and Onoge posit that with its various brands like "bourgeois sociological criticism", "radical (dialectical) sociological criticism", "Art for art's sake criticism" and even "cultural anthropological criticism" - this theoretical approach can examine works of art like the fiction on Kimathi from so many angles. Literary critics using it can, according to Amuta, analyse adequately the various aspects of the "solid empirical information on the social phenomena they see objectified in the literary works they analyse" (25).

One literary critic raises some "theoretical concerns" about whether the sociological theory can "include or exclude the individualistic bourgeois scholar in a study like this one" (2). Though apparently intended as a relevant question about critical objectivity, it veers towards partisanship (a charge levelled against this study). This is pre-emptive because sociological criticism includes among its tenets the scope to analyse not just those literary products foregrounded in

radical/dialectical points of departure but also liberal bourgeois ideology whose hallmarks include what Amuta in *The Theory of African Literature* sums up as “individualism, subjectivism and relativism” (18). It can examine what Ngara in *Ideology and Form in African Poetry* calls the various “ideological state apparatus(es)”, the modes of political and social control, as objectified and transmitted through literary works. The sociological theory can examine, as Goldman posits in *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, whether or how “the values of liberal individualism that were bound up with the very existence of the competitive market” (12) are expressed or validated within literary works, like “the category of individual biography that became the constitutive element of the novel”(12).

One cannot, however, be so imprudent as to ignore the dangers of obfuscation inherent in a “bourgeois-view” critique of fictional works in the light of Goldman’s observation that “bourgeois ideology, bound up like bourgeois society itself with the existence of economic activity is precisely the first ideology in history that is both radically profane and ahistorical. The essential character of bourgeois ideology, rationalism, ignores in its extreme expression the very existence of art” (14-15). Onoge warns that the dangers of bourgeois ideology in terms of masking issues are myriad, and that

confronted with two novels (or plays) inspired by the same theme, bourgeois literary criticism is unable to tell us in any scientific way, which treatment is more valid (58-59).

The contrary is the case when a dialectic sociological criticism is applied because the

critique of the social world outlook of African writers as represented in their concrete texts is ... able to indicate whether or not the conceptual representations and evocative images which infuse the social universe imagined in a writer’s poem, story or play, are progressive reactionary or reformist (61).<sup>1</sup>

It is therefore misleading when any literary critic proffers the suggestion, even if only implicit, that only bourgeois critique can present a valid exposition of social reality as objectified

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “reactionary” and “progressive” are part of ideological discourse both in literary and sociological theory and criticism. They refer more or less to a continuum in historical and dialectical materialism where ideas are viewed as interrelated. Thus when literary movements like romanticism cease to be relevant they became backward and were regarded as “reactionary” or conservative in relation to certain forward looking and therefore “progressive” ideas in subsequent literary movements. They are common parlance in political theory and even literary criticism. Writers like Watene use the term “reactionaries” in his *Dedan Kimathi* (68). This study merely acknowledges their use in art, literary criticism and other types of discourse like history, political science and journalism. Amuta’s *The Theory of African Literature* is a case in point where the terms are applied in pointing out existing “ideological formations” in the criticism of African literature. The blurb of Kimyatti’s *A Season of Blood* describes the writer as “a progressive Kenyan historian”. Wright in *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature* refers to the existence of “a critic who certainly qualifies, both in literature and politics, as a progressive” (2).

within specific literary texts like those on Kimathi. To infer that a different ideological sensibility cannot correctly unmask the objective reality in these (or other) texts is in itself the hallmark of compartmentalised thinking while levelling charges of partisanship notwithstanding. The contradictions, limitations and inconsistencies of the “bourgeois scholar” sensibility are glaringly evident in some of the critical pronouncements examined in the literature review.

The capacity of the various brands of sociological criticism to come to terms with the reality objectified in literary texts is differential. Rice and Waugh note the “Discourse and the Social” essay in *Modern Literary Theory* that some forms of criticism veer towards “supplementing the text with a moral discourse on character type, and this is a peculiarly nineteenth-century discourse... connotations in nineteenth century moral psychology” (245). Such an approach is hard put to address the more pressing task about seeking, as Eagleton suggests in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, to

translate the language of literature into that of sociology - to find the “social equivalent” of literary facts. The writer translates social facts into literary ones, and the critic’s talk is to de-code them back into (social) reality (44).

The question of partisanship on the part of the critic does not arise because (s)he is examining a given (fictional) reality, so that in essence

the author need not foist his own political views on his work because if he reveals the real and potential forces objectively at work in a situation, he is already in that sense partisan. Partisanship, that is to say, is inherent in reality itself; it emerges in a method of treating social reality rather than in a subjective attitude towards it (47).

The reality of colonial and post-colonial Kenya as portrayed in Watene’s *Sunset on The Manyatta* and Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood* touches on the freedom struggle. In their plays Kimathi is a protagonist accorded particular roles and projected for certain purposes. In the authors’ views regarding the meaning of independence after 12th December 1963, Watene’s Harry ole Kantai in *Sunset On The Manyatta* sees that the people’s suffering “had ceased” (230), while Ngugi’s rebel Karega in *Petals of Blood* condemns the situation of mass poverty when people “sing praises to skin oneness even while skeletons walked to (their) lonely graves”.

The playwrights, one expects, also creates images which validate either of these divergent viewpoints about post colonial Kenyan society. The sociological critique examines and proceeds to unravel how these images emerge and their social implications in the *context* and from the *content* of the in the texts. As Lowenthal so aptly points out in *Literature and The image of Man* in the context of imaginative literature

It is the artist who portrays what is more real than reality itself... It is the task of the sociologist of literature to relate the experience of the writers imaginary characters and situations to the historical climate from which they derive... to transform the private equation of themes and stylistic means into social equations (i-ii).

## 1.8 Literature Review

### Contentiousness Between "Historical Realism" and Fictional Representation

The interpretational divergencies in the literature on the emergency are the subject of Maughan-Brown's *Land, Freedom & Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya*, a study which examines the ideological bases and the resultant images in Mau Mau based fiction. Conflicting interpretations by European and African authors during the colonial and post-colonial period are noted. One is reminded of the cautionary statement by nationalists Bildad Kaggia, Fred Kubai, J. Murumbi and Achieng Oneko in the preface to Njama and Barnett's *Mau Mau From Within* that a common feature in white settler literature on Mau Mau is "an obsessive pre-occupation with the sinister and the awesome ... attaching to it an appellation that conjures up all the cliches about the dark continent that still cloud the European mind" (9). Barnett augments this cautionary statement by noting that settler literature on Mau Mau

reflected the partiality of their writers and revealed little if any objective understanding ... tended to present a one-side and distorted view of reality ... reflected the mood and perspective of most Kenyan Europeans, failed to reflect the outlook of the vast majority of Kenyan Africans, or render an adequate or balanced account of the revolution in question (17).

Settler accounts cited as examples are L.S.B. Leakey's *Defeating Mau Mau* and Ian Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi*. The perspective in Henderson's account has much bearing on the subject of our study because historians like Kinyatti see its imprint as patently evident in some of the fictional accounts. Henderson was the colonial security officer who organised the operation to capture Kimathi. *The Hunt for Kimathi* is the first historical account on Kimathi - from the colonial viewpoint.

Henderson views Kimathi and Mau Mau as forces disruptive to the serenity the settler had enjoyed for decades after Governor Charles Eliot in 1902 decided to turn Kenya into "a white man's country". In his article on the freedom struggle titled "How The Mau Mau Lost The Battle For Land" almost a century later in the *Sunday Nation* of May 28th, 2000, Karimi provides an overview, noting that

Eliot envisaged a thriving colony of thousands of Europeans with their families, the whole of the country from the Aberdares and Mt. Kenya to the German (Tanganyika/Tanzania) border divided up

into farms, the whole of the Rift Valley cultivated or grazed... 50 years later in 1952, the Mau Mau revolt took place with thousands of Kenyans battling against colonial rule and deprivation.

The white settlers in their effort to consolidate their grip on Kenyan land, continued to build their empire even as battles by the Mau Mau ranged in the forest right up to the late 1950's (17).

As part of the settler fraternity, Henderson's account is an outright indictment of Kimathi and the Mau Mau fighters. Nowhere are the political and economic causes of the violence forthrightly admitted. Like Carothers in *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, Henderson projects Mau Mau as a manifestation of African inability to cope with the psychological strain occasioned by the sophistication of Western civilisation. The charge of regression into savagery and atavism is evident in Henderson's "civilising" and "superior" race view. Relishing his position as a member of the 'civilized' white race Henderson makes the charge that

The Mau Mau movement which had brought bloodshed to Kenya, was a brand of the ancient and the modern ... Some Mau Mau leaders wanted to destroy the white man, others wanted to uproot every vestige of European civilization (12).

Henderson sees Mau Mau as an atavistic kind of nationalism seeking refuge in traditional Kikuyu religion. The closest he comes to acknowledging Kimathi as one with a political orientation representing an ideological force is the admission that although Kimathi "knew of the existence of the Soviet Union... the theory of communism and the subtleties of dialectical materialism meant nothing to him" (29). There is a deliberate reluctance to see in Kimathi and the Mau Mau the reality of a political-economic cause or the case of an oppressed people demanding back their rights and heritage. In his foreword to Abuor's *White Highlands No More* former Minister for Information and Broadcasting Jeremiah Nyaga has pointed out that

To thousands and millions of our people who have lived through it all, the term "White Highlands" means colonialism and all its many aspects. In a nutshell it would mean the struggle by the majority to wring power out of a minority of foreign origin - the right to be heard, the right to live and exist in their own country; and the right to determine their affairs and destiny (7).

This explains why Henderson focuses his emphasis on the nature of the Mau Mau oath(s) rather than the aims of the movement, described as an onslaught "against civilization" (13), and dismissed as one with no coherent plan of revolt, whose "objective was hazy ... The Mau Mau answer was to take to the forest, the traditional hiding place of the tribe" (13-14). The forests are subsequently described as a criminal abode and "the customary lair of those Kikuyu who wanted to escape from justice" (14). Henderson refuses to admit, like Rosberg and Nottingham in *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya*, that the movement "was indeed an integral part of an ongoing rationally conceived nationalist movement" (xvii), preferring to reinforce an earlier view in

Carothers' *The Psychology of Mau Mau* that the Mau Mau response arose because "the Kikuyu have a 'forest psychology'" (4). This is a deliberate distortion in the light of Rosberg and Nottingham's affirmation that because of the choice of guerrilla warfare tactics "the forests became the innermost keep, the ultimate point of resistance" (297).

The refusal to acknowledge this forms the basis of Henderson's portrayal of Kimathi as a fugitive from the forces of British justice and one with all the attributes of a Hitlente character. Description and insinuation are deftly manipulated, alongside other banal statements, to paint Kimathi as one unique in almost every negative way, incapable of conformity with the normal conduct of the average person. We are severally told of "Kimathi's misconduct ... causing trouble" (20-21) to all and sundry in his youth, one distinguished only by his "lack of scruples" (21). The inescapable admission that Kimathi was a member of KAU popular enough to have featured prominently in the rallies held by Kenyatta is only highlighted alongside allegations of Kimathi's penchant for "strong arm tactics against any opposition" (22) to himself or whatever he supported. In the process the legitimate constitutional African political activity before the emergency is criminalised, in retrospect, by association, as a precursor to Kimathi's later activities! African nationalist resistance and related political consciousness is similarly condemned. Kimathi's awareness "of the Egyptian terrorist activities in the Canal Zone" (23) is implied to be a manifestation of "criminal" orientation. In his attempt to divert attention from the moral legitimacy of the freedom struggle, Henderson dismisses Kimathi's correspondence outlining the aims and conduct of the liberation struggle by likening it to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (23). The analogy is of course quite misplaced because the vision(s) and inherent ideologies are diametrically opposed. Hitler wanted world conquest and German *lebensraum* (living space) by achieving world conquest and decimating other races, using fascist aggression. Similarly, a coloniser like Cecil Rhodes thought of British domination extending from the Cape (South Africa) to Cairo (Egypt), while Kimathi's own 'Cape to Cairo' vision was based on a different ideology oriented towards liberating the same expanse of land from British colonialism.

The need to obscure this aspect leads Henderson to paint Kimathi as an aberration in order to obviate examining the underlying issues. Thus while he finds it impossible to ignore the fact that Kimathi was elected the KAU<sup>2</sup> branch secretary of Ol Kalou before the emergency, he side-steps

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<sup>2</sup> The Kenya African Union, seen as the precursor to Kenyatta's KANU (Kenya African National Union) party in the constitutional approach to the attainment of African independence. Kagia has pointed out in *Roots of Freedom* that Mau Mau started the armed struggle because the constitutional approach failed to make any impact on

acknowledging the popular mandate given to Kimathi by the forest fighters and their civilian auxiliaries at the four day Mwathe Conference in Nyandarua forest in August 1953 and instead paints Kimathi as one who "made it his personal concern to see that no other 'terrorist' achieved sufficient popularity to become a competitor for his supreme position" (30). Despite his allusion to the many "mass meetings in the forest (where Kimathi) could stand before thousands of excited worshippers" (31-32), Henderson still skews and slants his account to portray Kimathi as a "megalomaniac" (33) obsessed with "senseless" bloodletting. Perhaps the most glaring contradiction is his description of Kimathi as "one of the most timid who entered the forest" (34) while still acknowledging that Kimathi inspired "courage and determination" (34) among the fighters he commanded because of his vision, personality and charisma. Henderson makes the diversionary explanation by attributing the latter quality as deriving from some form of mysticism, the stock explanation used by many European ethnographers and anthropologists to explain away "strange characteristics" of "the African personality". Co-author Goodhard calls Henderson an expert on "Kikuyu psychology" and the "Kikuyu mind", one who "knew their language" and "how their minds worked" (38). This self-acclaim however came to nothing in contact with Kimathi's ingenuity because it took betrayal by some of his close associates to capture Kimathi. Abour in *White Highlands No More* disputes Henderson's charge that Kimathi was 'cowardly' by pointing out that

At any rate, it is common knowledge that no coward can adapt himself to the strange, difficult life of the wild: living like an animal<sup>3</sup> and leading fearsome forest fighters successfully and defying the bullets and bombs of well trained forces from Great Britain for some four hard years (136).

Even where Henderson grudgingly concedes that Kimathi had "some positive qualities", it is only to lament that he was unable to use these "constructively", so to speak. He therefore chooses to regret the fact that although Kimathi "was certainly intelligent... school did not have a calming effect on him" (24), or certainly not in the manner the malleable 'educated' African was expected to echo the colonial 'masters voice'. The qualities that made Kimathi "an orator...

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the colonial government. Rosburg and Nottingham point out in *The Myth of Mau Mau: Nationalism in Kenya* also note that over the years "a nationalism of petition and constitutional protest ultimately gave way to a militant nationalism emphasising direct action in seeking a new political and social order" (xvi).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted here that Abour's reference is meant to indicate the capacity of the freedom fighters to adapt themselves to and withstand the tough conditions of the forest. A close analysis indicates that the sensibility in which the word 'animals' is used in Abour's account is quite different from the way it is applied in Watene's, Ngugi's and Micere's and Kahiga's fiction on Kimathi. In some of the accounts, the term is used derogatively. In Abour's and Ngugi's account, it refers to the animals as part of the natural environment rather than any implied characterisation of the freedom fighters



magnetic, compelling and irresistible" (23) are highlighted only as attributes that enabled him to sway the "gullible" many to his way of thinking, making them "misguided" fanatical adherents of Mau Mau political aims. With numerous contradictions, Henderson continually portrays both as forces representative of savagery which he calls the "evil past" (239) in Kenyan history after Kimathi's capture. Commenting on this eventuality Abour expresses the view that

what most wananchi are automatically lead to arrive at as we wade through this long war of words on the Mau Mau chief is that the publication of Henderson's account in 1958 was in effect a last minute attempt to convince his bosses that he deserved further honours and more promotion for gallant service in colonial Kenya, that he was held in highest esteem - above Kimathi - even by the subjected African people. He did not only expect, but he could not believe that he would be drowned within the next few years by the tides of uhuru the people were fighting for ... There is no doubt that Henderson hated Kimathi as a person. He also wrote his biased work when drunk with honours received in the colonial service in defence of the 'White Highlands' (136-137).

One can therefore understand the racial/ideological basis of Kimathi's portraiture in Henderson's account. As a white man and a colonial security officer, this self-proclaimed defender of "civilization" against the onslaught of perceived African "savagery" and "atavism" was also a settler with a coffee farm "just outside the small town of Nyeri... which stretched almost from the township line to the edge of the Aberdares (29). In such a position, Henderson would naturally view Kimathi and Mau Mau freedom fighters in a negative light because he and other settlers stood to lose if the Mau Mau achieved their stated objectives. Maughan-Brown places such colonial settler interpretation of Mau Mau in ideological context and notes that even the

terminology is ideologically important... Being able to classify Mau Mau as a Gikuyu 'civil war' lays the onus for the violence on the Gikuyu (or forest fighters like Kimathi) and thereby enables settler and administrator alike to slough off responsibility both for the bloodshed and the social conditions which fostered it (21).

It is interesting to see the view expressed about this colonial security officer who purports to give us the "correct" view of Kimathi in Kahinga Wachanga's *The Swords of Kirinyaga*. Wachanga oftentimes encountered Henderson during the meaningless 'negotiations' the colonial government initiated as a means to divide and weaken Mau Mau. Wachanga castigates this slippery colonial sleuth and describes him as

Perhaps the most cruel of them all... our greatest enemy, Mr. Ian Henderson of the Special Branch... He was a clever but very peculiar person... a treacherous man who always wore a smile. He allowed no one to question him when he gave false information... Based on information later given to me by a man who worked with Henderson during the emergency, it is my belief that he cheated the government of large sums of money. He was given the money to pay the many police informants, spies and Europeans we fought against during the emergency but he stole most of it. Ian Henderson was a most vicious man. We will never forget him and his evil deeds... We thank God that Kenyatta was wise enough to deport Ian Henderson from our country forever so that his evil footsteps may never poison our soil again! (161-162).

The paradox and dialectical opposites are evident: the man who describes Kimathi as an elusive "poison butterfly" (35) is himself viewed by a freedom fighter as the very personification of settler fascism and evil-mindedness, brutality and lies. Those with a libertarian orientation would correctly describe the settler experience as the "evil past" in Kenyan history -barring the same legacy of official lies, distortions, repression and police brutality in the politics of post-colonial Kenya.

Alternatively, Wachanga's 'insider' account in *The Swords of Kirinyaga* describes Kimathi as an outstanding figure who, "about five feet ten inches tall... was one of the heaviest persons in the Aberdares" (25). The outright denigration of everything associated with Kimathi in Henderson's account is basically refuted in Wachanga's praise of Kimathi's outstanding positive qualities, though he is critical of Kimathi's leadership style at the later stages. In Wachanga's view

The Field Marshal was a very clever and intelligent person. He was a great leader and orator. He could make people laugh while he was educating them. He would explain other nation's politics and revolutions. He did not have a deep voice, but he knew how to lead the people whether in debate or battle (28).

The unique mix of physical qualities and mental aptitudes that crystallised into this charismatic figure who attracted attention, admiration and respect are highlighted. We are told that

His eyes were like the eyes of a lion and he was like a giant in size ... He was as brave as a simba and as clever as Sungura. He knew how to write a propaganda letter that would deceive the government (26).

Kimathi's strategising, we are informed, led to spectacular successes against the colonial forces and increased his reputation and stature as a leader. But, according to Wachanga, this high popularity among the fighters appears to have waned in the later years of his leadership.

During the early part of the forest fight until mid-1954, Kimathi was liked and respected by all his Itungati (fighters). However, several things had happened by 1955 to change the affection to hate and distrust among most of his Itungati (26-27).

The reasons cited were Kimathi's increasing high-handedness, and his tendency to become "jealous and angry" when others appeared to challenge his authority, and his opposition to negotiations which some "renegade leaders" like Wachanga and Mathenge initiated with the colonial government without Kimathi's express approval. But Wachanga's alignment with 'Mathenge's camp' in the 'Forest Politics' does not blind him to Kimathi's stature and achievements and he avers that

Nevertheless, Kimathi was a great hero. He was a superb leader during 1952-54 and everyone wanted to meet him. Kimathi's fame had grown rapidly, and some actions

taken by others were attributed to him ... His name became better known as a result I believe the colonialists feared Kimathi more than any other forest fighter (27).

To 'authenticate' his account, Wachanga tells us that he was one of those who travelled widely with both Kimathi and Mathenge and recorded the actions, movements, numerous debates and lectures (31).

Wachanga subsequently dismisses as distortions those one-sided accounts by African and European writers on Mau Mau, arguing that

Most of the books written by Europeans have only praised the work done by the colonialist troops. They have not shown any of the work done by Mau Mau. To a degree the latter is also true of the books written by ex-Mau Mau. The story of Mau Mau has often been distorted as a result. The great work we did in those years in the forest is a marvellous one (31).

Whittier's assessment of the conflicting 'insider' accounts in the preface to *The Swords of Kirinyaga* praises Wachanga's more 'balanced' view vis-à-vis Njama's *Mau Mau From Within*'s assessment of Kimathi. In Whittier's view Wachanga is

naturally sympathetic to the struggles of the forest fighters but is not apologetic. There are some discrepancies with the picture painted by Njama ... It is only grudgingly that Njama sees any merit in the three "renegade leaders" or any fault in Kimathi or MACHARIA KIMEMIA ... Unlike Njama, Kahinga admits that the forest leaders were human and therefore fallible (x-xi).

This assessment demonstrates little more than the grudging white liberal admission of "some of the positive aspects of Mau Mau" while remaining firmly rooted within the bounds of colonial/settler ideology. Whittier's editorial assistance/ manipulation condones Wachanga's self-appellation as "a terrorist" (24). This inability to transcend the implications and connotations of what Maughan-Brown calls "the awesome power of colonial stereotypes and vocabulary" (200) must inescapably be viewed against Njama and Barnett's *Mau Mau From Within* unequivocal rejection of colonialist appellations which persistently

branded the revolution as Mau Mau and referred to our fighters always as spies, thugs, ruffians, gangsters, thieves, murderers, atavism barbarics, terrorists and greedy enemies of peace (436).

Colonial information services in the process praised the homeguards, loyalists and other colonial lackeys as 'security forces' and 'law abiding citizens'. Whittier candidly admits that the majority of European settler accounts had "their own biases... presented the official or government point of view and ignored that of the freedom fighters" (ix) and acknowledges *Mau Mau From Within* as "the benchmark of accounts of the day to day workings of the forest fighters' (ix).

Mazrui's "The Patriot As An Artist" essay in Killam's *African Writers On African Writing* sees the various historical accounts as "trying to put a stamp of social science respectability to the more spontaneous narrative(s) given by the participants in the Mau Mau movement ... interpreting the broader social implications" (80).

It is important to examine other alternative views, not only to illustrate the breadth of interest in the whole subject but also because novels like Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* rely heavily on such sources.

A notable example is Paul Maina's *Six Mau Mau Generals*, which outlines the personal history, outstanding deeds and contributions of the most prominent leaders of the armed liberation struggle. Among them is the (hi)story of a boy born on October 31st 1920 at Thigingi village in Tetu who later became the most renowned freedom fighter - Dedan Kimathi Wachiuri. Maina outlines the upbringing of the young boy who "grew into a rough and tough youth (who) could endure hardships without complaining" (125). Notwithstanding, or rather because of this, he commanded respect among his age mates at an early age, became "very influential and as a result made many friends wherever he went" (126). Later, as a pupil at Karuna-ini School, he proved intelligent and was "remarkably good in poetry and the English language" (126). This ardent "devotion to education" (128), and his later experience as a teacher proved important assets in his leadership of the freedom struggle. His acquaintance with the forest at an early age when collecting seeds to sell to the forest department while struggling to pay for his school fees was also equally crucial.

Maina cites Kimathi's acquisition of some military training in Kenya during the early years of World War II, though he did not have active service anywhere because he was, "after one month, dismissed for misconduct" (128) - allegedly because of failing to stick to the rigorous discipline demanded in the colonial army. In his article titled "The Struggle For Independence and the Rise of Dedan Kimathi" in *The People* daily of February 18th, 2000, Kinyatti clarifies that the so-called "misconduct" was Kimathi's refusal to acquiesce when he "saw how the white officers were treating their Kenyan recruits, often using very abusive language...he was dismissed from the army for refusing to take orders from a British commander who had used racist remarks against him" (111). Kimathi was definitely not ready to accept a slave mentality or colonial mind-set in the name of "military discipline." He thereafter held a number of jobs, including working as a milk clerk, before returning to his job as a teacher. The onset of KAU politics after Kenyatta's return from England saw Kimathi join the party "as a youth winger and organiser" (130), become an

ardent adherent and one "very popular among the masses" (130). He was elected as the KAU branch secretary of Ol Kalou in 1952.

Kimathi's activities as an oath administrator in the prelude to the declaration of Emergency are described; we are told that "he was a leader whom others looked upon for guidance in the struggle against the adversary" (131). Kimathi and those who accepted this role of preparing the masses for armed struggle knew the danger to their own lives when they set out to oppose the colonial government. They were, as Fanon notes in *Towards The African Revolution*, aware and accepted that "no man's death is indispensable for the triumph of freedom. It happens that one must accept the risk of death in order to bring freedom to birth" (95). But their sense of commitment and the ultimate trust the people placed on them far outweighed any fear regarding their personal fates.

The exigencies of the historical situation forced Kimathi to adopt an uncompromising attitude towards those perceived as enemies to the freedom cause. He therefore "became ruthless to those who opposed or refused to take the oath" (131). This should be understood in the light of Kanogo's observation in *Squatters and The Roots of Mau Mau* that "as far as the movement was concerned, an unoathed partner was (seen as) an enemy-a prospective informer" (146).

Kimathi, as Maina tells us, was noted for his zealous commitment to liberation and religion. Of this later characteristic, we are told, his "Holy Bible ... later held some special significance to him in his new life in the forest" (133).

The qualities that propelled him to the highest position in leadership hierarchy were the same ones evident in his youth. His position as "supreme leader of all the freedom fighters" (137) heading organisations like the Kenya Defence Council and the Kenya Parliament in the forest "made him extremely powerful and gave him the overall command of the forest and outside" (138).

The split with Mathenge due to leadership rivalry, the isolation of Kimathi from the main body of forest fighters, the colonialist hunt and eventual capture after betrayal by some of the surrendered fighters are highlighted. Maina derides as futile the British attempt to create a semblance of justice in the subsequent trial by the colonialist judiciary at Nyeri and the consequent "justice". Abuor in *White Highlands No More* equally pours scorn on the conduct of the trial, pointing out that Kimathi also realised that the trial was a mockery of the judicial process because "no preliminary inquiry was held before a magistrate to determine whether the prosecution had a *prima facie* case" (124). Charged and tried while was still suffering from the bullet injury occasioned at his capture, Abuor notes that Kimathi was acutely conscious of this glaring travesty against the dictates of natural justice. He refused, in his sentiments, to give credence to the

pretences the British made to give the trial the appearance of "justice taking its course" by dismissing the colonial witnesses as people who gave evidence because they expected rewards from the British. Abour notes that

it was inspiring to note with pride how the Mau Mau leader faced the tortures from his oppressors dauntlessly without confessing his guilt ..... It is indeed admirable that Kimathi had manifested his bravery at every stage of the proceedings while he was still undergoing medical treatment for a severe pain in the hip. The provincial surgeon had confirmed to the court that Kimathi had actually complained about this. He added that he thought Kimathi was telling the truth when he said the pain might interfere with his concentration. Nevertheless the Freedom Fighter leader wished that the trial proceed ..... The 'Marshal' wanted to see the end of everything before his premature death in the struggle for *Uhuru*.

And this happened. Although the Chief Justice had said that Kimathi should inform his counsel if he was unable to concentrate, the latter preferred to endure the pangs of his pain throughout the trial without complaining again to a white man! (124).

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, a play which dismisses in similar sentiment this "farcical" trial at Nyeri, occasioned acrimony when its detractors among literary critics and historians cited discrepancies between the fictional portrayal and factual "historical realism". Kimathi's appeal against the death sentence imposed by Judge O'Connor came to no avail. A subsequent appeal to The Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa against the summary dismissal of his appeal against conviction cites the many discrepancies and prevailing factors creating "much unnecessary prejudice" (19) against him in the case presided over by Judge O'Connor in November 1956. Judge Worley's dismissal of this later appeal is described by Kimathi's counsel as an act occasioning Kimathi "substantial and grave injustice" (22).

The existence of similarities and discrepancies between historiography and fiction are cited by literary critics like Amuta in *The Theory of African Literature* as the underlying reason for the "programme of historical reconstruction (that)... has been pursued by both progressive historians and literary artists... the rehabilitation of heroic figures who have suffered denigration and vilification at the hands of colonialist and imperialist historians and writers" (157).

The leading Kenyan historian in this respect is Maina wa Kinyatti, who in *Kimathi's Letters: A Profile of Patriotic Courage* disputes the colonialist distortions about Kimathi and Mau Mau based on the "Carothers - Henderson anti - Mau Mau theory" (xv). Reconstructing from authoritative "insider" sources like Njama's *Mau Mau From Within* and some of Kimathi's correspondence outlining the movement's aims and strategies, Kinyatti presents a different Kimathi to dispel the image of the "sadistic dictator" (12) painted in Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi* which he sees recreated at the fictional level in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. The Kimathi letters, we

are informed, provide insights into "Dedan Kimathi's relationship with guerrilla fighters, workers and peasants, his political understanding of the social forces around him; and his undying love for his homeland" (xv). Substantial quotations are cited from *Mau Mau From Within* to refute accusations of high-handedness levelled at Kimathi's personal conduct or style of leadership in order to illustrate that

Kimathi was not motivated by personal interests: his exclusive commitment was to the liberation of his homeland, and in this connection he was thoroughly aware that the only way to drive out the British occupiers from the country was through the unity of Kenyans, and particularly the unity of the guerrilla fighters (8).

Kimathi's central role as supreme commander and educator in struggle is hailed because

The nature of Kimathi's work meant that he was always on the move visiting guerrilla camps, talking to peasants, organising attacks against the enemy (4).

This is apparently a rejoinder to Henderson's labelling Kimathi a "cowardly" man always holed up in the forest, and a protest against Watene's portrayal of Kimathi as a self-serving individual. Kinyatti views such efforts as part of an official conspiracy of silence over the issues raised by the struggle, and especially the denigration of Mau Mau by some 'pro-colonial' Kenyan historians. Kinyatti is particularly riled by the continued use of settler and colonial records as "authoritative" or "authentic" sources while records which portray Mau Mau in a positive light remain bonded as classified documents in British and Kenyan archives until the year 2013. His acquaintance with some of these documents leads Kinyatti to the view that it is because of this aspect, and especially their damning revelations of the repressive measures and atrocities perpetrated by the colonial government and some of their presently powerful African collaborators that these documents are not made accessible to the general public. The available surviving records, Kinyatti says, enable us

to understand the dialectical relationship which existed between Kimathi and his men. It is clear from these documents that Kimathi was a popular leader ... that the guerrillas viewed and recognised him as their commander and leader (8)

This is Kinyatti's effort at countering colonialist publications, reaffirming his earlier view in *Thunder From The Mountains* that

Even to this day, despite concerted attempts by anti-Mau Mau intellectuals, the ex-Home Guards' and other unpatriotic elements to brand him as a "terrorist" and a "brutal murderer", he still remains one of the most popular leaders and patriots in Kenya's history. To the majority of Kenyans Kimathi is the symbol of principled resistance to oppression (6).

*Kimathi's Letters* in essence counters the portraiture of the depraved and diabolical leader derisively appellated as "Dictator of Justice" in Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi*. The two accounts illustrate the sharp divide in the racial/class ideological perspective in the broad literature on Mau Mau, echoed by African writers who subscribe to one or the other of the conflicting schools of thought on the movement. The broad picture of the correlation between denigration based on colonial settler ideology on the one hand and the positive (re)appraisal by the progressive vanguard of African historians and creative writers on the other begins to be clearer. Kinyatti's paper "Mau Mau: The Peak of African Political Organisation in Colonial Kenya" commends Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* for reflecting the latter position.

Recognising that the whole debate about the nature, significance and relevance of Kimathi and Mau Mau spills over from history into fiction, it is important to have a glimpse of the various schools of thought on the subject. Kinyatti calls them "The Imperialist and Christian School of Thought" by white settlers with its "darkness and death" view of Mau Mau as a basically colonial viewpoint, and "The University of Nairobi School of Thought" spearheaded by perceived "anti-Mau Mau intellectuals" who dismiss the movement as an ethnic "Kikuyu affair" rather than a nationalist liberation movement in the discourses by William Ochieng, Benjamin Kipkorir and Bethwel Ogot. The third group he calls "The Chauvinist Interpretation" by a clique of GEMA leaders who "deny the national character" of the movement by emphasising another ethnic angle in an attempt to "monopolise national leadership and to enrich themselves". In the Kenyatta regime, this last clique, as Avasaya notes in his article "Dedan Kimathi: The untold story", tended to reduce the freedom struggle to (populist) "slogans... meant to satisfy the psyche of the masses while buttressing the (positions of) self-promoted freedom fighters" (11).

The GEMA leadership has for all practical purposes been what Ngugi calls a comprador bourgeoisie. This pervasiveness of "tribal thinking" is highlighted in Philip Ochieng's article titled "Gema: Tackle tribalism not Kikuyu people" in the *Sunday Nation* of July 9th, 2000. Ochieng points out that

the fact that Gema has once been used to pursue the economic and political interests of a small power group around Kenyatta is not a commentary on the Kikuyu as a whole. It is a commentary - a sad one - only on that elite. But it does not mean that only the Kikuyu are capable of it... During the Kenyatta regime the Kikuyu masses were the most impoverished and oppressed Kenyans, victims of none other than Gema's activities, though Gema's economic enterprises were claimed to belong to the Kikuyu. We have seen the same phenomenon among the Kalenjin elite during Moi (rule). We would see it if a Luo, a Kamba etc. became president (7).



This recognition of the “internal tribalism” in the extreme disparity between the elite Kikuyu “Wabenzi tribesmen” and the poor Kikuyu masses when every Kikuyu was supposed to be “eating” underscores the need for a dialectical analysis to avoid camouflaging the issues affecting the broad masses of the people everywhere irrespective of the question of ethnicity. Kinyatti explains in *Thunder From The Mountains* that some of the greatest traitors of the freedom struggle are the GEMA homeguards, who, “after hijacking our national independence on 1963... are now in positions of power and wealth. (and) have made it their main job to silence mercilessly any Kenyan patriot who speaks or writes about this heroic struggle” (8). Kinyatti feels that patriotic Kenyan scholars should expose any distortions or smokescreen propagated by any quarter of society and that ethnic chauvinism should not be allowed to cloud the broad nationalist orientation of Mau Mau aims. In *Mau Mau: A Revolution Betrayed* he warns against any tendency towards a “reactionary pro-imperialist approach in a study of Kenya’s history” (7).

Historians of course have their objective biases. Though his *Kimathi's Letters* is aimed at countering the biased imperialist accounts and other ‘distortionist’ school of thought, an acquaintance with Njama's *Mau Mau From Within* might reveal Kinyatti's discreet avoidance of mentioning the particular instances where even unwavering Kimathi supporters like Njama at times found Kimathi rather overbearing. This was especially in the later stages when sharp divisions between the leadership exacerbated matters and hastened the movement's disintegration. In all fairness however, Kinyatti reaffirms the broadly democratic style of the KLFA leadership by pointing out that even “Kimathi was criticized when he took an incorrect line” (12).

Karuga Wandai in *Kimathi: A Tribute To A National Hero* also extols Kimathi's altruistic patriotism but takes issue with his style of leadership at the later stages, which appeared to have veered from the expected. Wandai points out certain instances when Kimathi's conduct complicated matters especially after the break with Mathenge. At this time, he notes, Kimathi's determination to single-handedly control matters showed a streak of high-handedness towards those who dissented, baffling and eventually alienating key supporters like Njama. Wandai acknowledges that Kimathi was under severe psychological strain at these crucial moments when it was necessary to keep matters under control during a difficult time. He however sees Kimathi's refusal to submit himself to the control of the parliament and his criticism of his remaining group of close supporters as having only worsened matters. Without attempting to paper over this aspect, Wandai is still more inclined to understand and sympathise rather than criticise, but does not shy from expressing the view that

Those few incidents showed a change in Kimathi, a brutal and frustrated Kimathi. The spirit with which he entered the forest appeared changed (20).

Wandai expresses the view that Kimathi in these later stages made "a mistake" (20) in those instances he disregarded the parliament's advise on certain sensitive matters, preferring to handle some issues in his own way, and uses this "sympathetic understanding" of Kimathi's "weak points" to extend "equal sympathy" to General China (Waruhiu Itote) who after being captured in January 1954 was later "given a pardon by the governor perhaps (in fact) after agreeing to co-operate with the British" (32). The argument that it is difficult to understand why China had to sell out but the temptation of living after surviving on being wounded were great" (32) justifying China's collaboration on the grounds of self-preservation ignores the self-sacrifice of thousands of lesser known fighters who in colonial detention or after capture still chose to stick to their oath of secrecy and commitment, suffering and dying without thinking of their personal fate(s) but the interests of the struggle. An article in *The People* daily of May 25th 1999 on Kimathi's fate by Irungu Ndirangu hints that General China was instrumental in the monumental betrayal of the whole struggle including the movement's military leader. Ndirangu points out that

Documents including old colonial books made available to *The People* point an accusing finger at a fellow Mau Mau general and one of his closest confidantes..... The documents are not overtly explicit, but they leave no doubts that General China may have become a turncoat and given away all the Mau Mau intelligence leading to the arrest and incarceration of thousands of operatives, activists and sympathisers of the movement..... He commanded the Mount Kenya Brigade while the supreme command was under Dedan Kimathi who was based in the Aberdares...

If indeed China turned against other freedom fighters, he may turn out to be the greatest traitor in Kenya's living memory... He gave away Kimathi's headquarters as Barafu 25 high up on the Aberdares. He even gave the officers of his Nairobi company (military) Ordinance 210 and where its officials were to be found... (and) gave away the military code language used by the Mau Mau (1-2).

This is acknowledged in Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi* which states that when General China was captured "on the 16th of January 1954... Ian Henderson was his principal interrogator and General china decided to co-operate. Securing the co-operation of General China was a substantial achievement" (40). Wandai credits Kenyatta for giving "valuable words" (33) of advise to General China before the fighting started, a contribution of which "Kimathi did not have an opportunity to listen to" (33). The failure to "benefit" from Kenyatta's "pragmatic wisdom" might explain why Kimathi and other captured generals like Kago were tortured but died without flinching!

This ignominious betrayal of fellow compatriots is alluded to in Avasaya's article titled "Kimathi: The Untold Story" in the March 1999 issue of *The Crusader*. General China and powerful homeguards in Kenyatta's regime are in the article viewed as the cause of the "distorted view" of Kimathi and the freedom struggle. Noting that General China was spared the death penalty while Kimathi was executed, Avasaya argues that

It will take a lot of explaining to convince anyone why a "General" of the Mau Mau was given a white lawyer, educated and flown out to military school (in Israel) if all he did was to fight the same government. This General also known as "General China" or Waruhiu Itote who was part of the cartel which sealed Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi's fate would not want Kimathi's name revived, his due honour bestowed or his remains duly interred in a national ceremony .... For forty-two years the cartel and their agents did all that was in their power to play down Kimathi's role in the struggle for freedom (11).

In the final analysis Kimathi's heroic stature and contribution impress Wandai and he takes issue with the "blurred" perspectives expressed by those scholars who downplay the nationalist orientation and impact of the movement by citing the overwhelmingly "Kikuyu" ethnic factor, pointing out that

The school of thought that narrows Mau Mau as a tribal rebellion are mostly those who do not want to read deeper into Mau Mau literatures ... They are those individuals who want to minimise the contribution made by Mau Mau simply because they do not want to appear to pay tribute to the Kikuyu people who were the majority in the movement ... If they take credit for the liberation struggle they take it first and foremost as Kenyans fighting for the liberation of their country (45).

Attempts to belittle Mau Mau achievements, Wandai avers, serve no purpose and are wasted efforts because "this is now an irreversible fact of our history and no amount of distortion will change it" (45). The movement's vision expressed in *Kimathi's Letters* is cited as testimony of his farsightedness and unflinching commitment. Wandai expresses the view that

Reading these letters by Kimathi, it is clear that he knew what exactly his movement should achieve, that is total liberation of Kenya and the attainment of independence and the return of the stolen land. He never lost sight of these two basic demands that have been the main objective of both KAU and Mau Mau (53).

Wandai's contention is supported in Rosberg and Nottingham's *The Myth Of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* account pointing out that

Throughout Kimathi's writings and speeches and in the reports of meetings held by forest groups, there is a consistent emphasis on the need for justice, on the possibility of reconciliation and the right to self-government (300).

A more patently ideological point of departure is seen in Shiraz Durrani's *Kimathi: Mau Mau's First Prime Minister of Kenya*. The focus is not so much the personal history of Kimathi,

but his essence and the Kenya Land and Freedom Army's example. In the contemporary quest for social justice, Durrani points out, "the debate about Kimathi and the Kenya Land and Freedom Army is even more intense today" (7). Durrani applauds Mau Mau as a correct ideological response to prevailing social-historical circumstances because it "was born ... grew and developed in direct response to concrete conditions ... faced with the reality of colonialism, it produced an ideology, its corresponding organisation, and activities which would combat colonialism" (6-7). Kimathi features prominently as fighter and leader because

his total commitment to the struggle and his understanding of the needs of the revolution ensured that the Kenya Land and Freedom Army kept up its offensive at the enemy throughout the period. Although it did not succeed totally in its struggle against neo-colonialism, it laid a theoretical foundation for its defeat ... It has left behind a legacy of struggle which is a lasting example to the youth and struggling masses today" (8).

Some of the movement's pamphlets in the early 1960's are cited to illustrate that continuing evolution of its ideology eventually incorporated the basic tenets of a radical "anti-colonialism, anti - neocolonialism and a proletarian world outlook in the struggle against the capitalist enemy" (35). Durrani particularly notes that the Movement had by this time acquired a broader perception of issues and seen through the masks of race and colour as camouflages for the real questions of political economy, hence the need "to place before the people a correct analysis of historical events and to emphasise on the need to continue the struggle" (40) to end all exploitative relations and "create a new society... a socialist society... with the welfare of the masses (at heart) rather than with the profits and privileges of a few" (41-42). There is no attempt to attribute the latter ideological dispensation to Kimathi, but the developmental projection in relation to the movement is clearly implied.

This 'forward projection' is applauded by "progressive" literary critics who view *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as a "more correct" fictional interpretation of Kimathi and the historical moment's essence in comparison to Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. The sticking point here is that even a patently historical account like Durrani's dares transcend the merely factual, accommodating projection in retrospect, so to speak. In the complex relationship between history and fiction, this aspect constitutes the sore point cited by some critics who continually harp on the question of "historical realism", often ignoring the broader interpretational parameters that art enjoys over history: poetic licence. This is evident in some of the reviews of the fictional works.

Chris Wanjala's "In Search of a Revolutionary Hero" review essay in the *Journal of Kenya Historical Review* is a case in point. Wanjala accuses the co-authors of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* of attempting to impose an interpretation lacking conformity with factual history. The authors, his argument goes, unabashedly project ideological 'falsehoods' in their attempt to recreate a historical character named Dedan Kimathi. According to Wanjala

In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* we see how the impatient writer can blow a shady historical character into extra-ordinary dimensions hoping to achieve his definitions of a revolutionary character. Ngugi was impatient with the Dedan Kimathi Kenneth Watene produced in a play of that name; he collaborated with Micere Mugo to create a Kimathi who is armed with an ideology, and revolutionary fire which Kenyan history did not witness in reality (389).

There is more heat than light here when Wanjala assumes the position of the knowledgeable historian armed with fact(s) applied in a "fact for fact" accounting of the fictional representation. The charge of "misrepresentation" is predicated on his disagreement with authorial ideology in disregard of the relationship between art and history. Belittling the authors' effort with the (ironic) argument that "historians will have to answer how national was the Mau Mau war of liberation" (390) Wanjala allows the ideological/ethnic divide sentiments on Mau Mau to cloud objective critical analysis, in the process branding one of the authors a "tribal chronicler" for producing a play

based on the Kenyatta Day Week, talking about the tribulations of one of the most heroic armed Gikuyu leaders of the movement described by Ngugi as a "glorious moment in Kenya's history" (390)

This digression from "issue base" to parochial standpoint continually blurs many otherwise "informed" and "scholarly" viewpoints on Mau Mau. There appears to be an undefined unease among some Kenyan scholars that admitting the movement's linkage and enormous contribution to the attainment of political independence is tantamount to according the Kikuyu or the so-called Gema fraternity a "free reign" in disproportionate claim to dominance in the national political and economic life. Kinyatti attacks this parochial perspective on Mau Mau as a diversion and blurring of the "people and issue base" nationalist orientation of the movement's ideology.

That Wanjala's ideological persuasion differs from that of the authors of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is understandable. But when he judges Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* as "a decidedly better piece of art than Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*" (390) without much in-depth demonstration of the two plays literary merits or demerits is pre-emptive critical verdict. The peremptory dismissal of the latter play begs some questions. No reasons, for instance, are given as

to why the movement and protagonist in Watene's play miraculously void themselves of the same "disagreeable" ethnic stigma which he so readily cites to disqualify Ngugi and Micere's play on the same subject! As "negative" and (therefore?) socially and futuristically "unacceptable" Kimathi and the movement's portrayal in Watene's play gravitate into Wanjala's ideological preference.

To argue, as Wanjala does, that Watene's play is more credible because it "exposes the weakness of the epic character" (390) like the Shaka and Sundiata epics is to misrepresent the nature of epic characterisation, more often accused of embellishment by downplaying the weaker sides of epic characters while highlighting their heroic virtue. Haynes has noted this aspect with respect to Kunene's *Emperor Shaka The Great*. It would appear that the "better" appeal of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* to Wanjala's sensitivity derives from its depiction of the protagonist's tendency to "sacrifice his personal morality ... to sustain his demoniacal power" (390) in the process damning and diminishing his (social) image value and that of the movement, while the socialist visionary he dismisses as "Kimathi the ideologue in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*" (392) can hardly be faulted for his principled stand against oppressive social forces. Wanjala is evidently more comfortable with the historical Kimathi fictionalised as villain rather than a political martyr, and must needs rail against the latter case as a transgression on "the rules of historical realism" (393-394) in the realm of art!

Wanjala's contention that the presentation of a one dimensional Kimathi as "a man without self-doubt, as Ngugi and Micere do, is to do what art cannot afford to do - namely, that art cannot deceive" (393) is to implicitly restrict art to 'documentation' of history where the twain meet. His argument that the contrary "betrays the writer's fidelity to artistic creation" (394) raises questions of what art is in relation to history. Wanjala (surprisingly) contradicts his own argument by citing (imaginative) fictional "evidence" by asserting that "from the play by Watene we can see that the white man need not have bothered probing the forest fighter in the forest; freedom fighters were going to murder each other to extinction anyway because of the oath they had taken" (393) while calling on historians to "mitigate" Ngugi and Micere's play! Talk of drowning your voice while raving at the adversary - or starting a race and then shooting your foot! his review of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* essentially reveals what Mbughuni's essay on East African drama in Killam's *The Writing of East and Central Africa* calls the onslaught on playwrights efforts from the category of "malicious critics" (254).

It is undeniable that Wanjala's critique does raise some relevant questions on the whole relationship between history and fiction, but it is notable only for its blistering rather than

enlightening criticism of the (artistic) purpose and ideological thrust of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. It is deficient of objective or broad comparative analysis on which to base the rather casual dismissal of a play like *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Indeed the hasty inclusion of the extra-literary dimension by calling on historians to "mitigate (Ngugi's) subjectivism" deviates from issues pertaining to the province of art. Wanjala's contention that Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* is "decidedly a better piece of art" cannot therefore be sustained or entertained without a broadly comparative analysis of the two plays and other creative texts on Kimathi, as offered in the present study.

In similar vein a prominent Kenya historian, Atieno-Odhiambo, takes issue with Ngugi and Micere's portrayal of Kimathi in a commentary titled "Rebutting 'Theory' With Correct Theory: A Comment on *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*". Atieno-Odhiambo accuses the authors of having "assumed a high level of class consciousness on the part of those who were fighting in the Mau Mau war" (385). The gist of his argument is that neither Kimathi nor the peasant masses whose rights he champions were sufficiently enlightened in the Marxist dialectical materialist conception of history to perceive themselves as members of an exploited class armed with a socialist ideology against colonial capitalism and imperialism! Subsequently, Atieno-Odhiambo in the commentary deigns to proffer a "correct interpretation of history ... based on a correct theory of existence" (385) conveniently ignoring the author's admission in the preface that they do not set out to reproduce Kimathi's historical trial at Nyeri but present "an imaginative recreation and interpretation" (viii) of Kenyan history from a particular class/ideological perspective. Atieno - Odhiambo's contends that

The problem for the authors lies in their failure to understand that the interpretation of a socio-historic institution such as Mau Mau starts from the realisation that socio-historical institutions consist of relations between people. Thus one cannot describe the historical reality by fictioning out relations between men where none existed (386).

This proposition in essence fails to appreciate that the (broader) business of art is imaginative (re)creation and fictioning out various preferences as Aristotle long ago noted about the poet-writer. The charge that in imbuing Mau Mau with a socialist consciousness the authors are "blurring history by wishing that this consciousness existed" (386) in *fictional representation* is therefore misplaced, as is his charge that the authors impose a socialist consciousness on Kimathi in outright opposition to what the historical Kimathi espoused. In his view

Any attempt to translate history into the feelings of one great man, Dedan Kimathi, leads to a pragmatic description of history: it leads to the authors' translation of what they wish to have happened in the innermost thoughts of Kimathi ... It is part of bourgeois scholarship to insist that the concrete can be located in the empirical individual in history and his given consciousness (386).

This contention equally fails to appreciate art's relationship to history and the nature of the fictive products. Interestingly, Atieno-Odhiambo's review is conspicuously silent with regard to Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* representation. Are we then to surmise that the proffered empiricist "bourgeois scholarship" commentary "authenticates" or "mitigates" Kimathi's image in the earlier play as the 'correct' portrayal? The sentiments in this historian's review also comes across as another instance of criticism that veers from highlighting the nature of artistic portrayal of reality. One sees this in phrases like "pragmatic description of history" and "empirical individual in history".

The view expressed in Atieno-Odhiambo's review of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is all the more contentious because it is essentially a demand for patent historicity in fiction and is completely at variance with the view in his earlier "The Historical Sense and Creative Literature" essay in Gurr and Zirimu's *Black Aesthetics* (ed.) which differentiates between the "comparative and analogical connections between the disciplines of history and literature" (81). In this (1971) essay Atieno-Odhiambo highlights the role of the "professional historian (82) concerned with "the subject matter of history" (82) and expounds on how this "serves the strategic role of being the link between the subject matter and the social purpose of history" (83). There is, he points out, the "crucial level at which literature and history fundamentally converge" (83). In this nexus he credits the creative dimension as the overriding one, arguing that

In both disciplines the imaginative process is important, even decisive... the imaginative process can be used as a tool of analysis and as a measure of quality in both disciplines. We are drawing closer, in the process of underlining the imaginative process, to tackling issues of subject matter... It can plausibly be argued that the subject matter of literature is the same as history i.e. man in society, either in his participatory or alienated condition or role... Working on the basis of history and literature as having social purposes this apparent confusion therefore constitutes a dilemma to the practitioner. And it is here that the individual genius both of the literary writer and the historian is called upon to transcend the apparent and reconstruct, again imaginatively (83-84).

Surprisingly, Atieno-Odhiambo negates this earlier contention with respect to the supremacy of the imaginative dimension in "a work of literary imagination" (92) in his review of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, even as he points out that colonial authors like Karen Blixen and Elspeth Huxley "have not hesitated to distort images where it suits their convenience" (93). He correctly points out that "in the context of creative literature" (94) these colonial writers were in effect trying to "conjure up images that were supposedly true to Kenya" (89) in the colonial situation using their "creative genius for social purposes" (92), and that

What they have done is to be very selective about just what facts to introduce into the argument ... As a result here we have two attempts to create an important past with convincingly different results.



Like true literary historians they are both very much involved in this process through imaginative identification (93).

The resultant self-contradiction in Atieno Odhiambo's conceding that colonial writers are entitled to the images they paint of reality in colonial Kenya through their (social) *imaginative identification* is remarkable in the light of his later dismissal of Ngugi and Micere's entitlement to an *imaginative* reflection of the meaning they prefer to impart into the image of Kimathi as part of the reality of the same colonial past or his relevance to contemporary Kenya. One is at a loss in deciding whether the charge of "opportunism" (388) which he so readily levels against the playwrights applies *more correctly* to his "rebuttal" of their play in the light of his earlier awareness and acknowledgement of the relationship between history and fiction. This displacement of the play from its correct sphere as a product of the creative imagination can only be logically interpreted as disagreement with authorial ideology, which in itself does not constitute a valid point (of departure) to dismiss the play since ideological biases are prevalent in both history and fiction. Ideological antagonism here, like in Wanjala's review, takes centre stage and cleverly masquerades as "informed literary criticism".

Atieno-Odhiambo's history-empiricist commentary is essentially a non-literary analysis of a creative literary product. He does not appreciate either the nature of art and artistic purpose with respect to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. There is no balanced or comparative analysis between the (then) existing creative texts on the subject and his commentary fails to clarify what aspects pertain to concrete history, artistic purpose and ideology in fiction. It illustrates the professional historian's inability to appreciate some salient aspects of artistic representation which, to quote Lukacs in *The Historical Novel*, "even the experts of neighbouring fields cannot be expected to understand" (198). Of course Atieno-Odhiambo understands but prefers "blurring" the whole issue in his rebuttal of Ngugi and Micere's play.

The excoriating criticism by Wanjala and Atieno-Odhiambo against *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* elicits a rejoinder from Waigwa Wachira, a scholar in drama. In his seminar paper titled "Dedan Kimathi: A Reply To The Critics", Waigwa disagrees with the "barrage of negative criticism" directed at this play intended "to sabotage its progressive content" (1) and which conversely applauds the "reactionary ideological position" (17-18) espoused in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*.

Through comparative analysis of content and dramatic technique, Waigwa illustrates the style of Watene's play as a "craftily calculated technique of somehow directing our sympathy to

(other) characters in his attempt to shift our sympathies away altogether from Kimathi himself" (2-3) This, he argues, is the author's sole preoccupation in the plot, language and dramatic technique. Watene's play, he avers, teaches us nothing because it generates stasis rather dramatic movement and development, showing the protagonist, characters and setting unchanged in all respects at the opening and close of the play. The prejudicial plot, Waigwa points out, is conveniently manipulated to "proof" Kimathi's culpability from the beginning. In essence, Waigwa argues, the play constitutes little else than "Watene's persuasively inveighing art of discrediting Kimathi" (3) and the whole freedom movement

Waigwa subsequently views its author as a colonial mouthpiece and the play a "distortion" and diatribe where "the double edged sword of his craft cuts both ways to include not only Kimathi but his supporters as well" (7) by portraying them as "the most consummate of villains who cannot by any stretch of imagination, be considered revolutionaries in the proper sense of the word" (8). The brazenly prejudicial characterisation mode against Kimathi including use of "previous circumstances" and Watene's obvious empathy with the Christian and homeguard collaborators' elicits Waigwa's view that

This play reads like a shabby script of cowboys and Indians where the problem is quite simply that of good Christian cowboys versus wild intransigent Indians (8).

Cited as proof are the play's dehumanising references to the fighters as "monkeys", "beasts of the forest" and "animals", terminology evocative of colonial racist vocabulary. Consequently, Waigwa rejects the whole play's "objectionable content" (20) and its images of Kimathi and the freedom fighters as unethical, lacking literary merit or basis in reality because its style

fails to involve us since we are unable as self-respecting Africans to relate to the clownish antics of these primates. Watene fails to hold us here totally since this spectacle is a thousand miles (removed) from our reality (17)

The blurb's claim that Watene "probes universal questions of ethics and morality while educating us directly about Kimathi and his role as military leader" is dismissed because in Waigwa's view the play reveals itself as "nothing more than an invitation by the author to an exploratory journey into the deep and deranged depths of the murky mind of a lone individual whose ways are many and twisted and who, may be through a quirk of fate, or through his strange and mystical powers happens to command, control and criminalise an unswervingly loyal band of "mere misguided rebels" (4-5)

Conversely, Waigwa sees *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as a play whose involving content and dramatic technique psychologically engage the audience in sharp contrast to the "stasis" in Watene's play. The "progressive content", even the non-conventional movements and varied scenes, make the later play a "psychologically sound unit" unlike the opposite case in Watene's, he argues. The "misdirected" preoccupation with discrepancies between "historical realism" and fictional representation are dismissed as predicated on hostile critics' reactionary standpoints and attendant narrow interpretations of history. From a more informed viewpoint then

We are unable to accept such a blinkered and blanket condemnation of this play for we find it totally unjustified on both literary and historical grounds ... We find it counterproductive to engage in the kind of debate that centres on the absence of the so called historical realism in the depiction of Kimathi ... Critics who quibble about this realism must tell us whose history concerns them so much ... The 'history' that emanates from the settlers camp is very different from the one that comes from the Karari Njama's of the other camp. (20-21)

Waigwa nonetheless concedes that historians are at liberty to comment on history-based fiction but adds that such commentaries are relevant only if they serve to "enrich our understanding of the work in question by the added dimension it introduces to the discussion" (21). The distinction should be established between historical discourse and works of the creative imagination because as artists and literary critics "we are interested in much more than a mere harvesting of the withered husks of dry facts" (22). Accordingly, works that transcend historical specificity do not transgress on rules of art or betray "the writer's fidelity to artistic creation" as implied in Wanjala's and Atieno-Odhiambo's reviews. Waigwa therefore applauds the people centred consciousness of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as the better and "more positive" interpretation of Kimathi's essence in Kenyan history and art.

Notwithstanding its insights, Waigwa's comparative analysis of the dramatic technique(s) of the two plays does not comprehensively illustrate the salient features of the conflicting images of the protagonist. It is more preoccupied with "mitigating" the (perceived) strengths and (ideological) 'positiveness' of Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* against Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. It does not examine or illustrate how the images of the protagonist emerge in the two plays. And a major work like Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* published in 1990 is time-barred and does not benefit from Waigwa's comparative appraisal (of the two plays) at the time he presented his seminar paper in August 1980.

These differences among scholars' interpretations of Mau Mau in history and fiction are widely acknowledged. The "problems of definition" noted in Maughan-Brown's *Land, Freedom and Fiction* are highlighted as deriving, on closer observation, from ideological standpoints where

The oppositions are clearly defined: Mau Mau either was, or was not responsible for bringing Kenya's Independence: Mau Mau was either a legitimate resort to violence on the part of a frustrated nationalist movement, or it was a purely tribal manifestation ... The 'historian's' position, the ideology of Mau Mau to which he or she subscribes, is determined by such factors as class, specific professional practice, participation or non-participation in the movement, relationship with the Kenya government and 'tribe' (i.e Gikuyu or non Gikuyu (21).

In *The Theory of African Literature* Amuta sees such divergences as "ideological formations" in literary criticism. It is perhaps fortunate in one sense that the authors of the fictional works on Kimathi and the sources/informants in our case have in common the "Kikuyu" tag. This aspect is crucial by way of releasing us from petty ethnocentric sentiments which, as noted, tend to cloud objective analytical approach, and leaves us to focus on the more important questions of ideology and qualitative artistic representation. Ngugi in *Barrel of a Pen* points out that the ideological factor is the key to understanding the conflicting portrayals of the Mau Mau experience because

The dominant nation or class recruits either from amongst its own or other ranks, an army of historians, philosophers, writers, journalists, in a word, intellectuals, who draw pictures of the universe corresponding to its material objective position. Those become its seers, visionaries or songsters, its intellectual force... The interpretation of Kenya's past, of Mau Mau, even of the significance of October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1952 is no different... It depends on who is looking at that critical event and from whose viewpoint or angle of vision (9).

Such focus is evident in Cook and Okenimpke's *Ngugi wa Thiongo: An Exploration of His Writings*, which analyses the development of Ngugi's vision. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is seen as an important landmark in the emergence of the authors' socialist vision. The critics argue, like Wanjala, that the play was a direct response to Watene's because the playwrights

were spurred on by their, or at least Ngugi's anger, against Kenneth Watene's play *Dedan Kimathi* which was acted in the Nairobi National Theatre and elsewhere earlier .... They may not even have questioned the data on which he based his play, though in a biography surrounded by myth and controversy they probably had doubts about some of his material. In particular they would have been angered by the presentation of Kimathi as ruthless and selfish (159).

The critics see the dramatic mode and articulation of theme in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as a radical departure from its predecessor, emphasizing as it does aspects like "the group emotion" (159) rather than the individual character/sentiment so pronounced in Watene's *Dedan*

*Kimathi*. In Ngugi and Micere's play, they point out, we see "drama... being moulded, somewhat crudely, into a social protest, a rallying call" (159), making *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* a more overt ideological statement than Watene's play whose weaknesses are perceived as the inherent ambiguities, contradictions and equivocation on the whole subject of the freedom struggle. In their view, this is the crux of the matter because

Watene clearly places dramatic emphasis on Kimathi's passionate revolutionary idealism, his charismatic leadership, his commitment to unconditional independence. But in placing Kimathi in complex human and historical perspective Watene also depicts what he saw as inevitable human weaknesses in Kimathi, and withholds any final evaluation of his achievements, of the Mau Mau campaign, or of the validity of claims and criticism made for or against the movement (159-160).

An acquaintance with Watene's technique and portraiture of Kimathi may lead a more "disagreeable" critic to take exception to their contention that "Watene is not neutral: he presents Kimathi as a heroic figure" (160) because a closer acquaintance with his play reveals the contrary. Their assessment of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* concurs with Wanjala's view that Ngugi and Micere's creation of a different Kimathi constitutes an ideological (counter) offensive. They point out that as

Ngugi and Micere ... developed their crusading socialist nationalism, the equivocal picture that emerges from Watene's play must have seemed to play down a cause for which they sought to blazon. Their ambition was to rally the aspirations of Kenyan workers stifled by the vested interests of the new black elite as effectively as by colonialists, and it might seem, more irreparably... Kimathi, a key figure was to be recreated as an inspiration and inciter to fresh positive action. For this it was not Watene's subtleties and historical balance that were needed. A crusade requires its heroes and flash points (160).

It is pertinent to compare this observation to Maloba's *Mau Mau and Kenya* viewpoint which asserts that

the play is not based on any historical evidence nor is it a factual recreation of past events... Mau Mau is reinvented by the Left in this instance and given new ideological attributes for the purpose of criticising the political economy of post-colonial Kenyan society. These new ideological attributes make Mau Mau a socialist liberation movement... It may be useful to recall that... Kimathi himself did not make this claim (174).

Maloba's view concurs with Atieno-Odhiambo's sentiments on the play, but demonstrates a broader appreciation of the(poetic) "art of the possible in art" dimension permitting invention of imaginative 'evidence' for a definite artistic purpose. His 'critical' appreciation in this regard surpasses Atieno-Odhiambo's

Cook and Okenimpke also view *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as art in which history is invoked and imbued with new meaning for "immediate social significance... It is easy to see how

impatient activists may feel with those who promote its (drama's) less militant possibilities seemingly at the expense of its revolutionary drive" (160). Subsequently, they point out, "for their own purposes, our playwrights also present a somewhat complex picture of Kimathi, with his contradictions and weaknesses" (162). They of course miss the whole point in their assumption that Ngugi and Micere's purpose was partly to sanitise or deodorize Mau Mau by 'rehabilitating' Kimathi because

Kenyan audiences must include many whose families suffered from the severities of Mau Mau and who eventually in some degree or other condemned the cause... Now the play asserts that Kimathi was essentially a humane man... The audience is being subtly persuaded towards a new positive reaction to all that Mau Mau stood for (163).

Anybody broadly familiar with the 'standing' of the movement in the view of the masses would disagree with this contention. The ordinary Kenyans' view of Mau Mau as a valuable contribution to Kenyan political independence stands, as noted in Maughan-Brown's reference to "the context of a general political climate in which a large portion of the population retained positive images of the years of struggle" (217). If Watene veers towards the Christian-loyalist view of Mau Mau, Ngugi and Micere reaffirm the viewpoint of the multitude of forest fighters and peasant supporters of the movement.

Though Cook and Okenimpke are cognisant of the striking differences in the two plays, they do not appreciate the essence of the overall (negative) impact of the portrayal of Kimathi in Watene's play. Hence their inability to see contradiction in acknowledging Watene's "presentation of Kimathi as ruthless and selfish" (159) and their (subsequently inconsistent) contention that "he presents Kimathi as a heroic figure" (160). The play's style, language and image of Kimathi imply the very opposite as will be evident in the ensuing analysis. One might also take exception to their allusion to "contradictions and weaknesses" (162) in Ngugi and Micere's portrayal of Kimathi in the light of the oft repeated charge by detractors that their play ignores Kimathi's supposedly weaker "human side" in favour of "embellishing" his heroic dimension.

The discrepancies between some images in the fictional works and alluded "historical realism" make the whole subject contentious. It is therefore necessary to clarify Wanjala's allusion as regards "the writer's fidelity to artistic creation" (395) by highlighting the linkage between history and artistic purpose in such cases. The quite pertinent questions raised regarding the role and position of the literary scholar examining history-based fiction are issues related to literary theory, especially the relationship between art (literature) and history because the discourse here is not about historical accounts but fictional ones.

Literature and history are, undoubtedly, complimentary bedfellows in *fictional texts* on a historical character like Kimathi. We must however continually bear in mind that Aristotle's view in *Classical Literary Criticism* that in such an endeavour we are dealing with essentially fictive "works of imitation" (35). The discrepancies posited between "Poetic Truth and Historical Truth" emphasise the basic difference between creative and historical discourse, noting that

The difference between the historian and the poet is not that the one writes in prose and the other in verse... the difference is that the one tells of what has happened, the other of the kinds of things that might happen. For this reason poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history, for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts (43-44).

Webster in *Studying Literary Theory* also points out that fiction is "the creative imaginative side of the our thinking" (22). The creative writer dealing with historical characters and events in time past therefore chooses

a convenient way of arranging (this) knowledge... as a way of ensuring that certain ideas and, more significantly, ways of understanding those ideas endure (22).

The issue of whether facts (historical truths) are to be found in art does not arise because the product of the creative imagination translates in the "intentional fallacy" (23). Creative writers like Mofolo in *Chaka*, Ngugi and Micere in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Kahiga in *Dedan Kimathi* candidly point out that though the characters or events they portray are historical, they have injected a "creative imagination" dimension in their subsequent fictional portrayal(s).

Mahood clarifies in *The Colonial Encounter: A Reading of Six Novels* that art is not to be confused with history. Both have a pedagogical role, but are not analogous, and if their purposes are confused by a failure or reluctance to note their approaches to subject matter, the result is that

It is in this teaching situation that the pitfalls of falsification, and in particular the distortion of history into the raw material of literature, or the debasement of literature into the mere documentation of history becomes most dangerous (3).

The subsequent "nature of truth" when the products of the creative imagination are blended with historical facts leads Gardner in her *In Defence of The Imagination* to the view that

the subjectivism and relativism that accepts any and every reading of a text as equally valid, and declares reading to be the personal importing of meaning into texts, removes criticism from all kinds of intellectual inquiry. There is nothing we can teach, and no distinction between true and false statements, or between understanding and misunderstanding..... In evacuating literature of determinate meanings, criticism must necessarily deny that its aim is the discovery of the truth.... The humanist must value his research by different but equally honourable standards, particularly by the contribution it makes, directly or indirectly, to our understanding of human nature and conduct, and human sensibility (20-21).

Mahood's view of "the work of art as the figment of a particular sensibility" (3) echoes Gardner's view that historical experience projected through the medium of literature

is something quite different from learning history at school from history books or from classes in social history ... Literature of all the arts has the power to take us back into what is felt like to live in past ages, and to discover certain constancies in human experience surviving through changes in ideals, beliefs, manners, customs, and social systems (45).

Thus, historical truth and fictional truth exists in different but interrelated realms. A literary scholar aware of concepts and terms like "verisimilitude", "intentional fallacy" and "creative intention" which are common parlance in literary theory cannot but be perceived as engaging in diversions if (s)he chooses to introduce non-literary issues in literary criticism. In his "Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Novelist as Historian" essay in King and Ogunbesan's *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, Ikiddeh affirms that

the creative process represents at one level a confrontation with the reality of history, past or present ... historical incidents provide at a conscious level the material from which the creative work is moulded ... through the medium and conventions of fiction... (these being) the deviations of view and emphasis which are the privilege of the creative writer (204).

Ikiddeh further points out that in fiction, one cannot be expected to "look for an agreeable factual account... it should be understood that the writer who merely reproduced commonly held opinions without an individual imaginative touch would hardly qualify as an interesting historian, let alone a novelist of any grade" (204-205). This argument rejects demands for "empirical (historical) data" in art by recognising the supremacy of the imaginative creation.

The primacy of the imaginative dimension is also by Echeruo in *Joyce Cary and The Novel of Africa*. Echeruo contends that "fidelity of reportage becomes of secondary importance" (3) in the artists' conception of the general or particular phenomenon. A creative writer, he points out, presents "a deliberately literary (though vivid) picture" (4), so that "fidelity to detail and truthfulness of report cease to be relevant critical considerations" (10). Even if the artist has access to historical facts, his/her "philosophical prejudice... bias or predisposition ... determines the selection, ordering and interpretation of evidence" (6-7).

Gupta in *Shakespeare's Historical Plays* also points out that "if a historical drama - or a historical novel - is a faithful transcript of the past, it will be more history than literature" (1). Shakespeare's success in similar endeavours, Gupta notes, "consists chiefly in his ability to create men and women who, if not imitations of reality, have the vividness of living characters ... in creating, with or without suggestions from history, new characters that are more real than living men" (7). He points out that while Shakespeare indeed "borrowed from the chronicles and other



sources... it would be rash to conclude that he merely gave a verse-paraphrase of what he found in his source books... modifications show that he transformed his sources rather than reproduce them” (27). The derivative premise that

History is primarily a chronicle of events, and that is why in history as well as in works of art based on history character is often subordinated to action or plot, and the inventive power of the artists partly controlled by recorded facts... Of course if history objects to such liberty, so much the worse for history! ... All historical dramatists (and novelists) ... have, therefore, to effect a simplification of historical forms and issues in order to focus on inner motives and impulses... they have to lay emphasis on the movement of events and changes in the background... Historical drama selects certain incidents which are often telescoped into one another, and as it cannot go into psychological subtleties characters are portrayed in broad outline rather than in minute detail. This simplification is suitable for didactic treatment... (71).

It is therefore misleading when a literary critic chooses to ignore the nature of the quintessential “literary picture” and proffers the argument that emphasising on this aspect in *literary criticism* amounts to “dismissing a discipline (history) from a position of limited information or none” or “telling lies in literature”, knowing well that history and literature have different ways of projecting experience. This contention cannot sustain validity when scrutinised from a literary theoretical premise, because the concept of the “intentional fallacy” in the sphere of art as explained by Webster, which precludes any intimation that factual truth (historical accuracy) as we know it be found in the fictional entity.

The prevalent “nature of the connection” between history and fiction is highlighted in Berger's *Real and Imagined Worlds*, pointing out that

The two terms, fiction and history, are obviously not comparable. Fiction usually means the story or the novel itself, a genre of literature, and not the events or characters described or analyzed in this genre. History, however ... can mean the events and characters in the record of actual social life, as well as the discipline or genre of writing that describes these events and characters ... The paradox of art is that creators find a way to satisfy the audience's and readers' desire for a combination of the recognisable and the unusual (162-163).

Kahiga therefore explains in the ‘author's note’ that his endeavour is to present what appears to him as “the real Kimathi”, through artistic style. This creative component is the contact between art and the historical subject. We have a situation where, as Berger notes

The novelist, mixing facts with his imagination, searches for information to learn about a community, a way of life, or an individual but nevertheless invents something to change what he learns or adds to it (164).

The ensuing fiction results in a kind of “compromise accommodation” between ‘fidelity to the concrete data of history and the exercise of the imagination’ (166), all the while striving to

balance and indicate the difference between "the writing of history and fiction without making them identical" (167). The imaginative "poetic license" dimension supersedes here because the supremacy of

fiction goes back to Aristotle and has not changed much since then ... fiction seeks a broader and more enduring truth than history ... allows the writer greater freedom to draw a moral, to make judgements ... Poetry, being a result of the imagination is unrestrained by the real world. It can give what history denies by "feigning" historical actions, thus satisfying man's desire for more virtue and greatness than is found in history itself (171-172).

Any attempt at "photographic realism" (175) thus militates against the nature of art, which calls for "poetic faith in the reader's willingness to allow the author to go beyond experience in order to create something that fits with his artistic purpose" (182). Mofolo affirmed that in his (*Chaka* certain discrepancies existed between historical accuracy and artistic portrayal and that the additions and omissions noted were part and parcel of the creative exercise "with sole aim of fulfilling my purpose in writing this book" (xv). This, as D. P. Kunene emphasises in the novel's preface, is "obviously the artistic one of enhancing the dramatic impact of narrative which, after all, is a history-based fiction" (xix).

Rosebury's "Objections From Historical Realism" essay in *Art and Desire: A Study In The Aesthetics of Fiction* similarly clarifies that while "in the case of historical fiction ... specialised knowledge may be required to distinguish between the 'primarily' true and the 'primarily' false" (30), the question of deception (art cannot deceive, Wanjala avers) hardly arises because the issue dovetails into a 'technical option among others, appropriate to certain evocative' purposes" (24). Hence "invention is at liberty to create x or not-x or any transformation thereof without transgressing its terms of reference (30).

"Fictioning out" (to use Atieno-Odhiambo's phrase) remains the province of the artist as long as it operates within art's parameters. In Rosebury's view

Fiction - let us say 'imaginative literature' so as not to appear to exclude the fictive elements in poetry and drama - is in fact the only mode in which a square moon or two-headed man might be stated to exist without a breach of convention, an offence against the purpose of the mode, being normally assumed to have occurred (32-33).

Lukacs in *Writer and Critic* also disagrees with the notion of "photographic imitation of reality" (31). The work of art, he argues, creates its own world, where "the apparently circumscribed world in the work of art and its non-correspondence with reality are founded on this peculiar character of the artistic reflection of reality... the work of art by its very nature offers a

truer, more complete, more vivid and dynamic reflection of reality" (36). In the process, categories like greater and lesser art emerge, evaluated from theoretical concepts governing the nature and purpose of art.

The question of whether truth is to be found in historical accounts or fictionalised history is subjected to lengthy argumentation in Lamarque and Olsen's *Truth, Fiction And Literature*. In the "Propositional Theory Of Literary Truth" essay, they argue that no "doctrine of literary realism has yet ... succeeded in establishing that it is a constitutive aim of literature to state truths in any sense comparable to that in which history, for example, aims to state truths" (321). They further point out that because of the nature of "literary works interpretations of general statements about human life ... bad literary works state trivial truths, falsehoods, or do not imply any statements about the 'human situation' at all ... (while) a successful interpretation is that which establishes with good arguments that a literary work expresses important insights into the human situation" (325-326). In essence, as they point out

judgements about interest are made with regard to content and are independent judgements concerning truths... So far no reasons have been given for rejecting the Propositional Theory of Literary Truths ... presentations of this theory give no positive account of literary practice which demonstrates that general propositions used to identify a significant pattern among the events, actions and characters of a literary work must be construed as true or false assertions... (or) the distinctions so central... between fact-stating and fictional discourse (330).

In the final analysis, the theoretical standpoint that Lamarque and Olsen affirm is that while examining the products of the imaginative process

literary criticism is not defined by a series of speculative issues which are debated with reference to canonical standards of truth and correctness... The issues of literary criticism concern aspects of literary works, and among these will be their handling of certain themes and concepts (332).

Salomon argues in *Semantics And Common Sense* that

There is much support for the view that art is a more viable medium than statements admissible under the rules of legal evidence for embodying "the whole truth... by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one underlying its every aspect a truth that can be both manifold and one violates the rubrics of both logic and ordinary cognitive discourse ... Judicious exercise of this licence may provide at least one way to do full justice to the universe: to tell whole truths by selecting parts of congeries of data, to reconcile logical opposites, to accomodate facts and feelings, discursive thoughts and inner certainties (125).

Achebe's "The Truth of Fiction" essay in *Hopes and Impediments* concurs with the aforementioned authorities on literary theory. In Achebe's view, art "cannot be a carbon copy of life" (95) and can dispense with the constraining exactitude of the factual in the service of a "more profound purpose" (96). The artist strives for "the closest approximation to experience we are

likely ever to get" (99). Achebe differentiates between categories like educative "beneficent fiction" and "malignant fiction" (101), the latter which attempt to pass off fictive products as actual truth rather than products of the imagination. Beneficent fiction, in Achebe's view

liberates the mind of man. Its truth is not like the canons of an orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice and superstition. It begins as an adventure in self-discovery and ends in wisdom and human conscience (105).

The common strand in these literary theoreticians' standpoints regarding the reflection of the historical in fiction is surmised in Berger's observation that over the years artists

modified verisimilitude, resemblance to the truth, in order to escape the worst features of the requirement to stick to the factual. Aristotle had raised the question in order to liberate the writer from such a strict adherence to the facts, to permit a portrayal of experience based on the imagination, to bring together the imitative and the ideal, and to use the truths of history as a basis of transcending it (74).

In his "Reply To The Critics" Waigwa restates this viewpoint, arguing that

history should not be used as the measuring stick of this play ... rather its failures or success should be gauged against rules determining a work of art ... it staggers the imagination when a literary critic of Wanjala's stature, who is supposed after all, to have mastered the rules governing literary criticism, abdicates this responsibility by calling upon historians to judge the merits or demerits of a work of art such as *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (29-30).

Amuta's *The Theory of African Literature* views this play as the vanguard of a more progressive interpretation of African history by artists rejecting the colonialist view and recreating history in "a project enlarged and ideologically corrected to symbolise the present struggle of Kenyan workers and peasants against imperialism and its many local agencies" (157). The liberties with poetic license are applauded because the play

based on the actual trial of Kimathi in 1956 ... explodes its specific historical predication to become a gigantic metaphor of the history of struggle among African peoples in the past and present, as well as a way of envisioning a future of triumph for patriotic and progressive forces (158).

The style of characterisation, especially Kimathi's delineation through symbolisation and dramatisation of the contending forces is seen as enhancement of Kimathi's image where

Colonialist violence is counterpoised against the liberation violence of freedom fighters; the law of the oppressor against the people's injured sense of justice ... In each case Kimathi is consistently portrayed as the champion of positive and progressive values (158).

The elements of satire and irony in the dramatisation are hailed for their appropriateness in educating the audience on the pertinent issues Kimathi raises. Amuta sees the play encapsulating a

dialectical exposition of the conflicting forces, applauding Kimathi's humanism, undermining the forces of oppression because

While the colonialist judiciary tries Kimathi for his patriotic and progressive stance, the whole of imperialism puts itself on trial by virtue of its relentless association with and espousal of negative and oppressive values (159).

The substitution of the conventional plot structure of Acts with 'Movements' combining with flashbacks and mime providing 'a continuum' (160) of dramatic activities highlighting "the dialectical complexity in historical experience" (160) is applauded as an effective style because in the process "Kimathi's heroic stature ... and its transformation into a metaphor for revolutionary action" (161) emerge as the dominant themes.

Arlene Elder's essay in *Moving Beyond Boundaries: Black Women Diaspora's* (Vol. 2) analyses *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* from both gender thematic perspectives. The preponderantly symbolic characterisation, which addresses "issues of both feminist and aesthetic import, integral questions that is, of genre, language, and the social function of the artist" (256) is viewed as one of the major strengths. The non-conventional style is seen as a major contribution to the play's dramatic effectiveness because the restrictive style of the "canonically - sanctioned", 'rational' well-made play and the chronological narrative found insufficient by contemporary women writers intent on expressing non-traditional experiences were also rejected by these African playwrights, influenced further by Gikuyu orature (257).

The prominence of the Woman complimenting Kimathi's heroic figure as "a socialist realist heroine" (258) in her dual symbolic roles of revolutionary heroine and 'mother' are hailed as appropriate reflections of "the bravery of women during the emergency" (259). This is cited as the differentiating feature in the two plays' portrayal of women characters and a crucial indicator of the authors' ideological orientation because

In Kenneth Watene's play on the same biographical subject, there appears traditional love interest and sexual rivalry among the female characters for Kimathi's attention. Since Ngugi and Micere explicitly reject earlier depictions of their hero, it is not surprising that in their play, no such romance exists. Their Kimathi depends on the Woman for military help and tactical advice ... she instructs Kimathi to discover his enemies and be courageous enough to eliminate them ... while the Woman has suppressed the 'woman' in her, Kimathi succumbs to the 'woman' in him, a weakness leading to personal danger and to endangering the entire struggle" (259).

The question of replicating "the actual Dedan Kimathi" (262) does not arise because "his role in this play is not personal... the source of this mode of characterisation moreover, is significant of the play's socialist purposes" (262-263). Consequently, for the artistic purpose

Dedan Kimathi can exist in the dual realm of historical reality and future projection ... certainly, the image of Kimathi is a result of their joint venture to portray the man, judged 'a genius in this struggle', but as importantly, 'to recapture the heroism and determination of the people in a glorious moment of Kenya's history ... (Kimathi's) qualities are transformed in the crucible of colonial oppression into the revolutionary spirit judged by the authors responsible for independence, and as importantly, for future triumph over neo-colonial imperialism (261).

It is nevertheless apparent that while Elder's critique of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is an informed and 'progressive' appraisal, it alludes to the playwrights' rejection of Watene's play without presenting a comprehensive comparative critique. It also falls short of overall inclusiveness in that though its publication date is 1995 after the three major texts, it makes no mention of Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*.

Mbughuni's "The Development of Drama in East Africa" essay in Killam's *The Writing of East and Central Africa* assesses *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as one of "Ngugi's most daring and mature piece of dramatic writing... as high as Wole Soyinka's best dramas, or those of Hussein or Fugard" (256). The aspects cited are the "mature dramatic style, clear vision and theme of political liberation" (256) including characterisation. The portrayal of the protagonist transcending the factual specific historical predication is perceived as the play's enduring thematic relevance, for

Despite the fact that the name of Dedan Kimathi and the many references to Mau Mau places the action of the play in Kenya, as well as the references to the struggle for land, Ngugi introduces other incidents, themes, ideas and thoughts which eventually enable the play to defy the unities of time, place and action within the context of the African liberation struggle ... It is such references that seem to project the struggles, and make the hero Dedan not just a Kikuyu hero but, like Kinjekitile, a leader and hero of all past, present and future workers and peasants (256).

This 'futuristic projection relevance' dimension does not appear to have received attention in Justa Wawira's review of Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*, which has attracted neither 'replies' nor 'rejoinders' of assent or dissent. (The number of historical treatises on Kimathi available by the time of its publication (1990) might have satisfied those critics interested in seeking verification or "mitigation" of its treatment of the protagonist!). Wawira's review of the novel in the Journal of Writers Association of Kenya Vol. I, 1992 sees authorial objective in writing it as primarily intended

to correct the historical distortion that seems to have characterised other works on the subject. One is reminded of Watene's piece of poetic rhetoric, and of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugi and Micere Mugo. It is as if Kahiga is disillusioned by Ngugi's artistic idealism in recreating the life of Kimathi (91).

The silent allusion to "restrained" poetic license and preference for "historical realism" in Kahiga's endeavour crystallises, in Wawira's view, into a "more down to earth" work where

The human Kimathi who previous writers enshrouded in mystery, is depicted as a leader of exceptional organisational skill ... as a well informed personality whose noble aims are most inspiring (91).

Wawira's contention that Kahiga (apparently) "does not fall into the trap of emphasising his ideals at the expense of reality" (92) and its implications will be analyzed in the light of the novel's overall effect. Its structural design, narrative technique and positive portrayal of the women characters through the narrator are highlighted as some of its strengths.

Except for this short review, Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* has attracted little critical attention. Does this (apparently) "non-controversial" novel in so contentious a subject provide the expected answers to questions regarding "distortion" or "embellishment" of the historical Kimathi in fiction? Wawira does not substantiate her view of Watene's play as "a piece of poetic rhetoric" or Ngugi and Micere's endeavour as "artistic idealism" with any attempt(s) at comparative analysis.

The foregoing review of non-fictional and literary critics' commentaries illustrates the contentious nature of the subject and issues in question. Underlying these sentiments are the nuances and sensibilities manifest in critical perspectives or authorial ideology.

It is possible then to appreciate Amuta's summation of the prevailing state in African literary criticism, especially the observation

if we examine the range of critical responses on the literature and art of a society across time or even in a specific epoch, it becomes possible to make discrimination among them in terms of ideological bearing ... It is therefore possible and in fact imperative, that the notations "liberal" "conservative", "radical", "leftist" and so on should also apply to positions which critics and their products assume. This is the class-ideological axis of criticism (14).

Charges of unrestrained "subjectivity" or biased "objectivity" in artists' and critics' viewpoints are therefore superfluous but likely to persist because of the rigid "iron cast" divergencies in perspective(s). How these aspects manifest themselves in the evocative images of Kimathi in the fictional works will be the focus in the following chapters.

### 1.9.0 Methodology of The Study

Preceding the close analysis of the core published texts in which Kimathi is portrayed is the initial review of related literature - the accounts and commentaries by historians and literary critics and former forest fighters like Kahinga Wachanga. The examination of these reviews, commentaries and appraisals of the fictional works by literary scholars from various disciplines form

the core of the library based component of the study. Issues on the nature and relationship between history and fiction are discussed in this section.

The analysis of the fictional works is undertaken from the viewpoint of a critical response to a continuum of interrelated but different artistic images and perspectives on Kimathi and the freedom struggle. The authors' implicit or explicit objectives are examined and evaluated. Their projected images of Kimathi are analyzed and discussed from such aspects as plot, setting, language, dramatic or narrative technique and ideological predication. This multi-dimensional analytical approach to the texts is adopted from the realisation the various stylistic devices singularly and collectively have a bearing on the type of image(s) manifest in particular texts.

It was viewed as necessary to examine the limited component of oral texts because whatever its generic category, oral literature is basically more social in composition, performance and transmission. The power of orature is acknowledged by Maina wa Kinyatti whose paper "Mau Mau: The Peak of African Political Organisation in Colonial Kenya" points out that the movement "used the folk poetry method of mass communication political literature in song-form, thus politicising in a short time a largely peasant membership condemned by colonialists as illiterate and irredeemably superstitious" (287-288). Kinuthia Mugia, a leading composer of resistance songs long before the emergency succinctly sums up the appropriateness of the song genre for teaching and mobilisation: "Rwimbo Nirutonyaga Makiria" (the song penetrates into people's hearts/minds more faster) in comparison to other genres.

Bynum also points out in Ben-Amos' *Folklore Genres* that in some Balkan communities "epic singing was an intimate social custom" (40). One takes exception to his Eurocentric view that the epic being a 'superior genre' could not possibly have been part of the African literary creation. This view is untenable, disclaimed as it is by the famous Sundiata and Shaka epics among others. Bynum does however point out that songs often crystallise into "cornerstones of civic education and literary tradition" (50). This observation will serve as our springboard in the examination of the songs and poems in which Kimathi features.

Topical songs, like the political ones, and are of course common in most cultures and are often composed in response to specific situations. Makouta-Mboukou notes in *Black African Literature* that

Songs are a poet's living construction, they are born in every epoch following remarkable events. Songs, then, can be dated and pinpointed in time and space ... have only a local existence (and) arise in a given moment ... songs always express a sentiment... The song composer expresses honestly what he feels and the people whose feeling he is expressing feel (20-21).



Finnegan has noted in *Oral Literature In Africa* that the Mau Mau were able "largely by means of... songs to carry out active and widespread propaganda among the masses" (285) effectively because of the "innocuous nature" of songs. The overtly political and propaganda songs, she notes,

can focus interest on the image of the leader and on the specific political aims of the party. Their effectiveness in reaching mass audiences in countries without a tradition of written communication cannot be exaggerated... (297)

Mahugu has demonstrated in her "A Literary Investigation of The Agikuyu Songs of Independence" thesis that the freedom songs span the pre-emergency period, the years of fighting and continue into the early post-independence era whose politics evoked the emergency experience to get popular support. Mahugu's study includes some versions of the popular "Song of Kimathi".

The singers and composers of the freedom songs were Kenyan people at different times and places during the anti-colonial struggle, whatever form it took. Kinyatti notes in *Thunder From The Mountains* that "in resistance to the complete destruction of their cultures and history and to the imposition of imperialist culture, the Kenyan people in the process developed a new anti-colonial culture which found expression in patriotic songs, poetry and dances" (3). On the whole, Kinyatti informs us that the freedom songs

eulogize Mau Mau guerillas in the forest for their heroism and express confidence and faith in the leadership of Dedan Kimathi ... they articulate the peoples' optimism that they will win the struggle against the forces of the (foreign) occupier (x).

Kimathi's role and place in the freedom struggle is the subject of several songs which, as Kinyatti notes, illustrate a completely different viewpoint from that expressed in colonial government and settler literature.

It was imperative then, from a research premise, to have some insight from "those in the know", so to speak, and for "the added dimension it introduces to the discussion" to quote Waigwa's words.

The oral texts not only highlight Kimathi but are also implicated in the ideological discourse. Kinyatti points out that they illustrate the people's view of Kimathi and the movement's "dialectical relationship with the workers and peasant masses on the one hand, and its principled contradiction with British colonialism on the other" (x). They are therefore, another valuable source contributing in "educating us directly about Kimathi and his role as a military leader" in a more direct way than the claim made in the blurb of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. The songs were

sung during the freedom struggle, predate the written texts and were "composed by the workers and peasants during the heat of resistance" (3). This was demonstrated by Mzee Gibson Gichuhi Gitahi of Karunai-ini in his singing as he educated the researcher, expressing his view of Kimathi, the freedom struggle and even his version of "The song of Kimathi" analyzed here.

The images in the songs are examined, like those in the published texts, in terms of the language, ideology and broad theme. Field work research has its surplus (and sometimes surprise) insights and components: Githaiga's unpublished "Kimathi Waciuri" poem would not have been available except for the venture in this component of research.

### 1.9.1 Collection of The Songs

While the broad category of the resistance songs touch on many subjects like land and freedom, those that specifically highlight Kimathi as a person are relatively few. Some versions of the famous "Song of Kimathi" collected by Kinyatti and Mahugu are examined or referred to in the chapter on songs alongside those collected by the researcher on a visit to Karunai-ini in October 1996.

The songs on Kimathi could probably be got from knowledgeable singers in any of those parts affected by the fighting, but the researcher felt a visit to Kimathi's birth place Karunai-ini was best suited to fill some gaps from those who either knew him or interacted with him in the course of the struggle.

### 1.9.2 Methodology for the songs

The researcher had initially thought of a "questionnaire approach" where respondents would be required to write down any song(s) they could remember about Kimathi. This approach was however reconsidered and dropped on realisation that some of the composers/singers might be non-literate. The logical view here was that even were they all literate, the "orature in performance" component would be missing if such a method was adopted. The researcher therefore settled for a field trip to seek out sources/informants from people acquainted with both the song(s) and the subject (Kimathi). It was taken into account that the existence of some recorded versions of the "song of Kimathi" by musicians like Joseph Kamaru could, while being informative, be a far cry still those versions sung by primary sources like the forest fighters themselves. It was some of these sources that the researcher set out to seek during a visit to Karunai-ini in October 1996.

The researcher sought details from some of the participants in the freedom struggle. Poignant memories about the pain and suffering, but also endurance, resilience and heroism could

be discerned from those like Wambui Ndiritu, Gitahi and Gachigua as they expressed their views about Kimathi and in the verses they remembered from the "Song of Kimathi".

The researcher listened keenly, asking for clarifications, details and their views of Kimathi as a person. Some of the events of the time like Kimathi's capture were alluded to by Wambui Ndiritu. The messages in the songs were recorded (Mr. Wanjau Ndiritu availed his cassette-recorder for the purpose). In this way Gitahi's version of the independence song "Kimathi will Come" and Mrs. Njachi's verse of another song on Kimathi were obtained. The researcher discussed (at the time) and later analysed their highlights.

Since the study also analyses the images of Kimathi in written (edited) versions like Kinyatti's *Thunder From the Mountains* it is pertinent to mention Kinyatti's methodology. The blurb to his collection says that this historian of the Kenyan freedom struggle "spent many days and nights in the homes of former Mau Mau guerrillas recording their voices as they sang... (and) translated most of the songs". But while Kinyatti's and Mahugu's studies cover a broader scope of the freedom songs, the present study focuses on those on Kimathi as the subject.

These songs and some poems written (later) on Kimathi by Kinyatti, Githaiga and the anonymous 'Patriot' in the March 1999 issue of *The Crusader* are analysed in terms of theme(s), style, images and projected vision in the chapter titled "The Poetry of Freedom: Images of Kimathi in Mau Mau Songs and Other Poetic Compositions." The highlights of this (comparatively) limited "field experience" in the search for the "song genre" sources are the contacts with the various informants.

On the day he set out from Nairobi on 15th October 1996, the researcher was lucky to make the acquaintance of Mr. Peterson Wanjau wa Ndiritu the assistant chief of Karunai-ini, at Ihururu in Muhoya's Location, Tetu. He was on that day accompanied by Mr. Mbogo wa Wanyiri, who said he was a step-brother to Kimathi. The two appreciated the researcher's interest in the songs or other information on Kimathi. Mr Wanjau welcomed the researcher and advised him to get accommodation at Ihururu that night. He came the next day and took the researcher to Karunai-ini to collect the songs/information on the subject.

The first was a visit to Kimathi Secondary School. Though none of songs on Kimathi were got from the teaching staff, a valuable contribution in the form of a written poem was made by Michael Githaiga, a Kiswahili/history teacher at the school. Githaiga said he wrote the poem out of inspiration after hearing the legends about Kimathi, and having read the Kiswahili version of *The*

*Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as a set text for the 'A' level literature examination in 1982. The poem is analyzed together with other songs.

More interesting was meeting people who had known Kimathi as a teacher or as a fighter in the forest. Mzee Richardson Gachigua recalled his days as a pupil at Karunai-ini School where Kimathi taught. Gachigua at times seemed to defy age attempting to demonstrate some of the exercises Kimathi made them do during P. E. sessions, after which he would rush to class for the next lesson before his pupils entered. Gachigua remembered some stanzas from the "Song of Kimathi" and strove to recall others by reference to the religious hymn of Jesus ascending the Garden of Gethsemane, from which, he said, the song of Kimathi derives its theme, which is now adapted for a political purpose. Though not a forest fighter, Gachigua was a dedicated Mau Mau Scout, taking messages to and from the forest among other duties at the time.

Beatrice Wambui wa Ndiritu, the mother of my host was herself a freedom fighter. She was more reserved but impressed the researcher as a fearless woman as she recalled some of her experiences in the forest with a group of fighters led by Wagura Wachiuri, Kimathi's brother. She talked of having met Kimathi, Mathenge and other famous freedom fighters at the time. She was later detained for one and half years at Kamiti prison after leaving the forest but had been released by the time Kimathi was captured. She fearlessly greeted Kimathi on the day he was captured when he called out to her in recognition. A homeguard turned fiercely on her demanding to know why she had done so.

**Homeguard:** "Ukugeithagia Kimathi umui atia?"

**Wambui Ndiritu:** "Ngumugeithagia tondu turari mutitu nake na ni mundu ota ni."

("Why did you greet Kimathi?")

"I greeted him because we were in the forest together, and he is also a human being like me")

It was indeed the common picture of the manacled Kimathi on the cover of the written creative texts (the researcher had with him the two plays) that brought back painful memories because of its implicit dehumanisation and criminalisation of the heroic freedom fighter. She sang the stanzas she could remember from the "Song of Kimathi."

Perhaps the most fulfilling experience was meeting Gibson Gichuhi Gitahi, reputed as Kimathi's most trusted bodyguard in the forest. It was only when he was introduced that the researcher recalled that he is mentioned in both Ian Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi* and Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*. Here was the living Gitahi, not the mere name or character in the novel.

As Gitahi sung some stanzas from the "Song of Kimathi" and others referring to famous battles like that of Tumu Tumu hill, the researcher was enthralled by this contact with the literary in the human person expressing living history orally, his imagination trying to capture images of the great experiences of battles fought and now recounted by Gitahi. Aware of the common "Kikuyu affair" tag given to the liberation movement by some Kenyan historians, the researcher asked Gitahi whether the constant reference to the "House of Mumbi" in some of the songs did not indicate a limited concept of freedom. Gitahi clarified that freedom was seen in national terms, and that Mau Mau forces were operating as far afield as Maasailand.

Another contributor to this enlightening trip was Mrs Jacinta Njachi, who remembered some songs they used to sing about Kimathi around 1958 when she was a pupil at Kagongo Primary School, Chinga Location, Othaya Division. The verse she remembered from one song went thus:

Ndathire na ya ruguru.  
 ii ya ruguru  
 Ngikora Kimathi anjeteraire  
 ii anjeteraire  
 Akinjitia marua ma igoti  
 ii ma igoti  
 Na nii ngimwira ndimarutaga  
 ii ndimarutaga.

(I went towards the west.  
 towards the west  
 I met Kimathi waiting for me  
 waiting for me  
 He asked me for tax receipts  
 tax receipts  
 I told him that I don't pay it  
 that I don't pay it.)

We reasoned about the meaning of the song. The direction west is towards Nyandarua Mountain and forest, from where the fighters were operating. The question of Kimathi asking for tax receipts was perplexing, for those who paid taxes were considered loyal to the white man's government. Mau Mau fighters and patriots defied the colonial government and refused to pay the taxes. We came to the conclusion that the song envisaged Kimathi as the protector of the forest and the security of the fighters, standing guard at the forest edges to scrutinize the identity of whoever approached to forestall the possibility of traitors entering the forest to betray freedom fighters. (Gitahi later clarified that Mau Mau supporters made financial contributions to help the movement's activities).

The year Mrs Njachi cites in reference to her song (1958) is significant: though Kimathi was hanged in 1957 the song uses the present tense in reference. Is it an unconscious expression of defiance against the fact of death in envisaging Kimathi still living and gallantly leading the struggle for freedom, the way Achebe invokes Christopher Okigbo as a symbol of hope in his "Don't Let Him Die" essay in *Hopes and Impediments*? One is reminded of Paul Maina's observation in *Six Mau Mau Generals* that "many people today refuse to believe that Kimathi was hanged. They still believe that he is alive (149). Colonialism surely could not have been so 'magnanimous' to its nemesis, but Wambui Ndiritu seemed to exemplify this stubborn refusal to concede even the historical fact of the (physical) demise of this symbol of resistance!

The researcher was also taken to the spot above Kimathi Secondary School where this legendary figure was shot and captured, just below the forest edge. The way back to Ihururu was the road on the Kahiga-ini ridge on which stood the Homeguard post where Kimathi was taken after capture. Githaiga's "Kimathi Waciuri" poem endeavours to capture and project the physical landscape of the place in its delineation of Kimathi and the freedom struggle theme.

The essence of the spirit of freedom which inspired Kimathi and other fighters struck the researcher as being very much alive at Karunai-ini. Away from the silent "passive" words in the "forest of books" libraries where versions by detached historians contend for supremacy, this contact with people who knew Kimathi proved more emotionally satisfying and exciting than that with the written texts. The 'educated' scholar was himself literally being educated directly about Kimathi in the medium of orature, stronger in its closeness and immediacy to the historical reality. This experience proved a valuable compliment to the knowledge derived from written texts.

The songs on Kimathi, Kinyatti tells us, tend in the main to highlight

Kimathi's unflinching leadership during the war and his fiercely militant political stance against the 'British/Christian/Taitai alliances ... in them he is recognised as the true leader of the Kenyan masses as well as the symbol of the country's heroism (5).

These songs on Kimathi will be the focus in the chapter titled "The poetry of Freedom".

This fieldwork component of the study analyses the oral and written compositions and their images of Kimathi. Some appear in both published and unpublished sources like Maina wa Kinyatti's *Thunder From The Mountains* and Pauline Mahugu's "A Literary Investigation Into The Agikuyu Songs of Independence" thesis. Karuga Wandai's version of the 'Song of Kimathi' appears in his *Kimathi: A Tribute To a National Hero* account. The images and the vision of the artists in these songs and the underlying ideology that are noted.

A brief summation is given at the end of the various chapters examining ideology and the image of Kimathi in the particular fictional works. The concluding chapter titled "Reflections on The Image of Kimathi In Literature" sums up the study. The significance of authorial vision projected through the images of Kimathi are the main focus here. This chapter also reflects on the artist's duty to society.

Except from the settler colonialist viewpoint, Kimathi is generally acclaimed as a figure of considerable stature among liberators. One sees in Kaggia's *Roots of Freedom* acclaim for Kimathi and other prominent Mau Mau generals who "distinguished themselves" in leadership or in battle. In his view, "the Mau Mau struggle, whether one likes it or not, will stand in history as one of the greatest liberation struggles. These heroes will be remembered by generations to come" (196).

The crucial focus of this study is the "nature of remembrance" inherent the disagreements in perspective and interpretation. Hook in *The Hero In History* notes that "there has hardly been a great period or outstanding individual in history that has not been handled differently by historians with varying attitudes towards the question" (19). He might well have included artists in the issue of interpretation.

Some Kenyan scholars (historians to be specific) exhibit an antipathetic disinclination to accept the Mau Mau experience as a landmark event in Kenyan history, especially the movement's contribution to the attainment of political independence. The divergences in opinion have already been noted. William Ochieng's review of *Roots of Freedom* in the *Journal of Kenya Historical Review* Vol. 4 No. I, 1976 dismisses Kaggia's account, lumping it together with others which he calls "ignorant and facile literature" (135) on the Mau Mau struggle, citing excerpts from Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* to buttress his contention. Kinyatti has, as noted, dismisses Watene's play as a 'distortion' and prefers the opposing version, Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. The two Kenyan historians cite these fictive entities to buttress their arguments, with their implications in the opposing viewpoints as regards the role and relevance of Mau Mau and Kimathi in Kenyan history and literature.

Buijtenhuijs in *Mau Mau Twenty Years After* (1973) sees the need "to examine briefly the image of the few 'nation-wide' leaders" (78) of Mau Mau. Dedan Kimathi is cited as the lead figure alongside Mathenge and General China (Waruhiu Itote). Novels on the forest fighters like Godwin Wachira's *Ordeal in The Forest* were in existence when Buijtenhuijs wrote his account but none had so far delineated a specific forest fighter as its subject. The first "literary picture" of Kimathi appears a year after Buijtenhuijs account, the play by Watene. It marked the beginning of the

controversy about Kimathi's image in literature because it was followed by other opposing versions and their images.

Irele in *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* avers that "the purpose of criticism resides in providing an understanding of the work through an elucidation of its multiple aspects as expressive of a creative intention" (16). This elucidation will be the endeavour as we move from this introductory "clarification of issue" preamble into an analysis of the images of Kimathi and the Mau Mau movement in Watene's play and later fictional works.



## CHAPTER TWO

### CONTENTIOUS IMAGES OF KIMATHI: WATENE'S *DEDAN KIMATHI* AND NGUGI AND MICERE'S *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI*.

#### 2.0 Kimathi's Image in the two plays

This chapter's discourse on the images of Kimathi focuses on the two plays, analysing the literary techniques the playwrights employ, like plot and language to create images of Kimathi or the Mau Mau movement. The analytical approach underscores what Camden's *Literary Views: Critical and Historical Essays* refers to as the "various ways of looking at literature" (vii) or the "many modes of literary analysis" (vii), illustrating that an examination of literary content can reveal "what the author was consciously trying to impress upon his audience" (47) and that "at (certain) times the dramatist wants to guide the audience to a particular point of view and an exact response" (ix). Bower's "The Point of View" essay on Shakespeare's art is worth quoting for the cautionary view that

drama imposes certain rules on literature written in its form... most laws of drama... have as their object the manipulation of the audience's point of view... the major dramatic problem is to convey to the audience, within the rules of the game, what the dramatist wants it to believe... (the dramatist's point of view) must be conveyed in such a manner that the audience is unaware that it is being manipulated into certain channels of belief... that indeed may become the very point of the play - the deliberate withdrawal of any attempt at dramatic control over the audience's reactions to, or interpretations of, the events (or characters) it is watching on the stage (45-46).

A close analysis will show that the playwrights do not altogether scrupulously pay attention to the rule regarding 'withdrawal of any attempt at dramatic control' in those instances when they appear to deliberately manipulate dramatic techniques to influence the audience towards their "personal sensibility" (45) in the way they view Kimathi and the historical experience from which the plays derive.

Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and Ngugi and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are accorded what might appear as disproportionate attention in terms of detail in this chapter. The discourse might appear tendentious, but tendentiousness is a style employed to validate the images of Kimathi in the two plays. The generic similarity makes it imperative that they be discussed in this chapter as a continuum in terms of the dates of publication.

After examining the literary techniques, authorial ideology is given attention under separate sub-headings, though it is implicit (or sometimes explicit) from the various facets like language, setting or general characterisation of the freedom fighters or Kimathi.

## 2.1 Broad Overview of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*

The first fictional account on Kimathi is the play by Kenneth Watene published in 1974. The multidimensional structured approach adopted analyses Kimathi's image as it emerges from several angles - what he says and why, what others say of him, and his relationship with his compatriots. The same approach is adopted for *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* from the broader thematic point of departure because Kimathi is more dis-individualised in the latter play.

Maughan-Brown's comprehensive study of the broad literature on Mau Mau in *Land, Freedom & Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya* makes reference to "the relationship between fiction and ideology, the use that is made of fiction, as an instrument of propaganda" (ix). Noteworthy is the observation that

discourse constitutes the objects which it pretends only to describe and to analyze objectively - it would be difficult to provide a better example of this than is provided by the discourse about Mau Mau... discourse is both interpretive and pre-interpretive... It is always as much about the nature of interpretation itself as it is about the subject matter which is the manifest occasion of its own elaboration (2).

The nature of interpretation cannot of course be abstracted from the prevailing values in the socio-political milieu within which the writer operates and which art propagates or seeks to subvert. Interpretation must, as Rice notes in *Modern Literary Theory*, "necessarily take a detour via the fictional world and its values, because that process embraces within its circle the 'concrete' or 'abstract' persons which the text stages" (66). In our case, Kimathi is the 'concrete' historical character 'staged' within definite fictive texts.

The blurb of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* describes the play as a work which "probes universal questions of ethics and morality while educating us directly about Kimathi and his role as a military leader". This presupposes that morality is an abstract and value free term without reference to the social, economic and ideological contexts. The nature of portrayal has a bearing on the material, moral and ideological base from whose viewpoint Kimathi and the freedom movement are perceived. Watene's *My Son For My Freedom* (1973), *Dedan Kimathi* (1974) and *Sunset On The Manyatta* (1974) constitute his views on the freedom struggle and the meaning he imputes into it.

While the other works by Watene are comparatively more innocuous on the subject of Mau Mau, his *Dedan Kimathi*, generated controversy because of its recreation of Kimathi in fiction. A broad overview of the play and its style in portraying both Kimathi are the subject of this chapter of the study.

The play, with its single scene described as "a fortified den in the forest", opens with charges levelled against Kimathi by a female compatriot who says he has a penchant or propensity to "destroy others" (7). Put in the position of the "defendant" Kimathi must either accept this (hitherto unsubstantiated) charge or 'justify' to the 'distraught' woman this aspect of conduct in his position as a leader with power over others. He precedes to do so.

**Kimathi** It was necessary.  
We have to protect ourselves  
From dissidents and cowards  
It had to be done.

**Lucia** Necessary! Necessary!  
Had to be done!  
Boooooooooooh!  
(Silence. She continues crying).  
You love Wahu, don't you?  
(7).

The explanation does not convince the sceptical woman, who now clearly sounds a warning bell about Kimathi. This prejudicial introduction conditions the audience against Kimathi and is intended to influence their perception of him throughout the play, viewed against the peremptory dismissal of his explanation regarding the 'necessity' of "destructive" action against a compatriot in struggle. This discordant chord jars against our associations of his name with the popular legends of heroic and noble deeds. The disagreement with his 'distraught' female compatriot apparently has more to it than her discomfiture with his unsavoury treatment of "others"; she complains that he prefers another female compatriot, Wahu. A now angry Kimathi dismisses her as a "nagging hussy" (8), and to rid himself of her irritating accusations orders her, before going off-stage, on a personal mission to

Go and pay my mother a visit.  
Go and find out whether she's recovered  
From that sickness of mind  
Which has of late enslaved her. (9)

So far, and in a comparatively short span of time we are presented with a "destroyer", "womaniser" and consummate egotist rolled up in one neat bundle in the person of one Dedan Kimathi, and left to wonder whether these are the innate ingredients of the character of the Kimathi of liberation fame, as the author is no doubt telling us in what initially appears as a credible dramatic technique.

Even while allowing for such aspects like the "immediacy" and "economy" of the dramatic mode compared to prose, the brief span in which we are asked to deduce so much about the protagonist clearly raises questions about how a credible literary judgement can be passed in so short a time for a character as central as a protagonist. This glaring stylistic anomaly raises suspicion regarding authorial intention.

J.L. Styan in *The Dramatic Experience* aptly notes that

A novel can pause in its career while its author draws attention to some detail he is anxious the reader should not miss.... A play on the other hand can only work through visible actors and what we hear them say and see them do... A novelist can, if he wishes, present a character virtually whole on the first page, but the playwright through his actor can give us only so much at a time, and for the most part he must demonstrate it (1).

Watene's style from the onset deliberately seeks to set the audience against the protagonist and leaves little room for credible "dramatic discovery" of Kimathi character in any other light as the play unfolds. It is notable that he is immediately removed from the stage after this episode to allow others give equally unflattering views of him. His conveniently manipulated return at the end of this first scene again only serves to "confirm", in utterance and behaviour, various allegations levelled against him in his absence. We are, before his return, told of his morbid obsession with mystical powers in his determination to remain the elusive and unchallenged master of his forest domain. He consults them, he tells his compatriots, to enable him foresee the future or avoid dangers because

The white man's god would never  
Reveal such secrets, even if  
I prayed in the most beautiful church  
Breaking bread and wine (24).

Strangely, this projection as a chronically superstitious man fails to explain (from a stylistic perspective) how the mystic powers do not imbue him with an unshakable sense of security and invincibility like Shakespeare's Macbeth. They also do not reveal the thoughts and intentions among his own compatriots beforehand so that he need not inquire about "what they were saying" (24) in his absence! An obvious attempt is now made to give credence to the earlier insinuations of romantic involvement and obsession with the female compatriots as Kimathi invites the "other woman" to "come, sit by side" (24). And as darkness falls, he is all too eager to leave the dangerous tasks of fighting to others while savouring comfort and relative security with this 'favoured' woman, whom he now invites to

Come with me....  
The bird of dawn will soon be singing.

Soon thick light will start to creep  
 Between dark silent shadows.  
 And when this new day  
 And its accompanying night are gone.  
 A crude offensive will be over.  
 And with it the departure of human souls.  
 Into the invisible empire of ghosts....  
 Come let's now hide away  
 And leave others to the approaching day.  
 (25)

This tendency in the author's style of drawing our attention to mainly negative attributes of the protagonist is what Waigwa Wachira calls "Watene's persuasively inveigling art of discrediting Kimathi" (3).

The image of Kimathi as one who relishes violence and bloodshed is well nurtured in the plot. When the "blood stained" (27) fighters return from their mission, Kimathi is presented vicariously enjoying their descriptions of the orgy of apparently senseless and unmitigated violence and congratulating them for a job "well done" (29). The casualties among them are casually, almost callously, dismissed in an indifferent attitude by an apparently uncaring leader.

**Kimathi** Tomorrow we shall bury them  
 Beneath the shadow of the tree  
 That faces the altar of sacrifice.  
 Let them be buried ceremoniously  
 And let the virgin soil embrace and kiss their bodies.  
 Fallen in the heat of our strife...  
 I see your shirt is torn and bloody  
 (28).

This acceptance of the violence is seen in his marked contempt for those who express soft "humane" feelings or are averse to the continuing bloodshed. When the sensitive "noble" Nyati relives the haunting memories of scenes of "senseless" slaughter, Kimathi orders one of the tougher breed of fighters to "take him away, Rhino. Take him away" (31).

The whole plot revolves around 'revealing' Kimathi as a 'murderer', reminiscent of the alleged penchant to "destroy others" (7). Its pattern of stated "intentions" and subsequent (purportedly dramatic) "revelations" that will ultimately indict Kimathi in Nyati's death remain the sole preoccupation in the rest of the play.

The clever technique includes making Kimathi condemn himself and his cause from his own mouth. Apparently in dilemma about what should be done about non-violent elements like the

Christians opposed to the movement, the often reticent and reclusive leader now surprisingly seeks the views of others -although the impression so far is that his tendency is to enforce his own.

**Kimathi** What shall we do to them?

Let me know your thoughts.

**Kimbo** Kill them.

**Kimathi** They are our people.

**Kimbo** They are our enemies.

**Kimathi** They are educated.

Many of them are upright and honest.

(30)

These soft feelings for "the enemy" in one apparently bereft of such for anybody perceived as likely to compromise the struggle in any way and whose removal automatically becomes "necessary" (7) run against the grain of his implied 'character'. They stand out as an outright contradiction in the sentiment of one firmly convinced that

We must not surrender to our frailties (32).

The only plausible explanation why the "upright and honest" adjectives are attributed to these opponents of the armed struggle is Watene's empathy with the collaborators of colonialism. Watene is at one and the same time praising their role while indicting Kimathi and the freedom fighters from their own mouth(s). Talk of the cleverness of technique and the liberties of poetic license!

The dominant image and corollary aspects that Watene paints and attributes to Kimathi are of one obsessed lust for power and the negative traits that go with it. While apparently having no quarrel with the freedom struggle, the compulsive obsession to convince us that Kimathi, under a carefully camouflaged cloak of patriotism and dedication to a worthy cause, is merely a megalomaniac (the term used by Henderson) is evident. This is done while purporting to portray Kimathi "with empathy and insight" - or so the play's blurb claims.

Throughout the discourse, a clever (almost classic) self-distancing style is employed to facilitate the indictment he heaps on Kimathi. This apparent "objectivity" will "reveal" Kimathi's innate character from the observations of his dedicated and trusting compatriots who are concerned with Kimathi's welfare and eventual place in history. Watene's crafty posturing that he is all the while trying to spare and salvage Kimathi's image from the misplaced, misdirected and undeserved vilification by his implacable colonialist foes is evidently intended to pre-empt suspicion on our part

about this authorial purpose. The paradoxical authorial self-distancing and its overall effect is evident in the following excerpt

**Rhino** Good... Good....  
 Well as I was telling Kimbo here  
 That should we at any time be overrun  
 Our most important duty  
 Is to protect the dignity of Kimathi  
 We know what he feels and thinks.  
 We also know they have done their best  
 To tarnish his name here and abroad  
 Calling him a ruthless dictator  
 And a man of no worthy principles  
 We must keep his secrets tight  
 So that if nothing else survives him  
 At least there will be some mystery  
 To protect his name from destruction.  
 (63)

This, evidently, comes conveniently long after the damage has been done in the plot's presentation of Kimathi as one meriting these negative appellations. It is implicit that only these few "misguided" followers remain "ignorant" of his (projected) 'real' nature. The unravelling of his 'innate' character will eventually remove the scales from their eyes with the ultimate revelation of Kimathi as "Nyati's artless murderer" (87).

His relationship with others is even more "revealing". Apart from the contemptuous dismissal of Nyati's weak traits, he orders the hitherto "favourite" woman fighter, Wahu, "to keep the strictest watch on that man just taken out" (32). She is now no more than a convenient object to be used for his "other purposes". Her devotion notwithstanding, he orders her to submit herself to Nyati and

..... be his woman  
 Go and woo him and please him.  
 I shall love you still.  
 Go and make him forget those eyes  
 Go now, go sleep with him.  
 And sleep with him tomorrow  
 And the next day and the next  
 Smother him tonight with your charms  
 Squeeze his worries out of him  
 And pacify his troubled mind  
 Go now. Go..... (33).

We are of course being asked to question whether this is another instance when "necessity" to protect himself and the struggle from possible betrayal are the overriding concerns or

if it is simply lack of consideration for others' feelings. The painful dilemma of the poor woman is evident, and the stage descriptions tell us that she "goes as if hypnotised", leaving Kimathi congratulating himself for his uniquely "persuasive powers" (33).

The image of insensitivity and obduracy thriving on the suffering of others is also well manipulated. When Kimathi dismisses "the peoples' messengers" sent to appeal to him to consider the option of a negotiated settlement to end the bloodshed and suffering, the decision is portrayed as an irrational, emotional and egotistic one based not on considerations of principled resistance against colonialism but obsession with sheer blood-letting. The blame for the violence and bloodshed is in the process shifted from the real causes like colonial repression, landlessness and exploitation and heaped on Kimathi, the obdurate leader unwilling to listen to any entreaty.

**Kimathi** How can you say such a thing?  
 Here we are, hair grown too long,  
 Our skins hardened by rough weather,  
 Our faces disfigured with scars  
 And our limbs aching with fatigue.  
 We've lost our brothers, our fighters,  
 We have killed, murdered for our cause  
 And soaked our country with the blood  
 Of her valiant sons and daughters.  
 No, my friend, independence that's won  
 In blood is sweeter and more precious"  
 (36).

This "insensitive" rejoinder to the suffering masses indeed makes the settlers look like saints in comparison to the alluded "dictator" (63) only too willing to prolong the suffering of his own people 'unnecessarily'. This imbibing of colonialist propaganda twists Kimathi's rejection of colonialism's "peaceful solution" offer, giving the impression of Kimathi preference for a bloody pyrrhic military victory in order to impose himself than risk being taken to task as culpable for "unnecessary" violence.

Rather than that I'll keep to the forest  
 Until I learn to see their shadows  
 Moving within darkness  
 Let me commune with the spirits  
 Who plant their flames in the air  
 Let me keep to the long night  
 Or else move out to the light  
 With glorious and long awaited victory  
 (38)



The settler, homeguard and other colonialist "security forces" now appear as the voice of humanity and reason, restoring sanity against the "primitive violence and senseless savagery" view expressed in Watene's earlier *My Son For My Freedom* and later *Sunset On The Manyatta*.

The various allusions to Kimathi's perceived destructiveness are carried in the preponderant use of the term "sacrifice", giving it the connotation of ritual practice. The common practice in African religion intended to ensure protection and support from the deities is interpellated as "unnecessary" human sacrifice. The dead fighters, Kimathi urges, should be buried

Beneath the shadow of the tree  
That faces the alter of sacrifice  
(28).

Nyati's death is given a connotation of "slaughtering" (74) the gentle soul later placed under "the stone of sacrifice" (85). Kimathi's reference to "disguised evils" (24) and the plot's revelation of Kimathi as Nyati's "murderer" (87) imputes the same appellation. Stage descriptions of "people who were killed by order of Kimathi" (69) and reference to his "guilty memories" (37) about Mau Mau victims including Christians and other "civilized" people who "are educated... upright and honest... have no defence, other than their prayers" (32) create images of mass murder. The fictive expressions here acquire an uncanny comparison with the sentiments expressed in Wiseman's *Kikuyu Martyrs* which sees the Christian victims as martyrs who suffered at the hands of these "evil men", as he calls the Mau Mau fighters.

The many words, images and references evocative of "darkness and death" are so preponderant that to dwell on them would detract from the brief. After Kimathi tells off the "people's messengers" and instructs his lieutenants to "see that they don't leave the forest" (38) the images is of a sadistic man as he vows to

find out who's leaked  
The secret way to our dens.  
I will taunt the life out of him  
Three long days I will suspend him  
Between the night and the day;  
Dangle him on that narrow brink  
That separates life from death  
I swear.....  
(42).

The rest of the play, predictably, sees him obsessed with the pursuit of victory, trusting the strange mystical powers for his own security. The paradox is that while he at one level

completely succumbs to this belief and yet is not as confident as Shakespeare's Macbeth who completely believes he is from any enemy. Kimathi here dares the enemy to

... bring blackened angels of hell!  
 I'll cheat them yet.  
 I'll call upon my powers to protect me.  
 I'll make them go round in circles  
 Like the great blind fools they are  
 They'll look for me and not know me  
 I'll pass before them without being recognized...  
 (38)

Yet he must needs hide like the hapless others when informed of the same danger, his vaunted boast notwithstanding - we are told 'he bolts off' (34) when he need not because he does not have to because of his claim to being invisible.

His life in the forest is a persistent nightmare and obsession with shadows, and his ever suspicious mind often imagines enemies within if those from without are not discernible. The 'humane' Nyati becomes the centre of his obsessive suspicion after the 'spying' woman reports his disposition.

**Wahu** He said that were it not for you,  
 He'd leave the forest and seek to start  
 His life afresh  
**Kimathi** He's lost it, he's lost it.  
 Nyati old man, you've lost it.  
 You're as good as dead now  
 I know I am in your way  
 Now that you have lost all hope of victory  
 He'd rather have me dead now  
 So that he might surrender with a clear conscience  
 He wants me dead! It must be him  
 Who spoke the way to our dens  
 And led those filthy dogs  
 To find our secret places  
 He's done it against the vows  
 He made before the oracle  
 (44).

The dearth of imaginativeness in style is evident in later allowing Wahu to reveal Kimathi's culpability, an anti-climax since there is no credible "discovery" after this insight into Kimathi's 'secret' intentions character inconsistency reveals itself when the same Kimathi so convinced of his capacity to outwit others agonizes over a 'secret' personal decision already privy to another.

**Kimathi** I will kill him quietly and swiftly  
 I will not even see his eyes.....

But she'll know it  
 Wahu will know it....  
 I'll cheat her. I'll use my power  
 I'll make her believe  
 The story I shall tell her  
 I'll make it appear as if  
 He surrendered in the night.  
 Then she'll hate him  
 She'll wish she never knew him  
 (57)

The later 'discovery' of Kimathi as Nyati's 'killer' through plot 'development' is hardly discovery through dramatic technique. Kimathi's exit from the stage with Nyati and his return after an interlude during which it is hinted he has killed Nyati offstage is so clumsily manipulated. Watene presumes the existence of further suspense even after Kimathi's telling revelation that his feared nemesis, "a white man who'll have his face blackened" (38) is possibly

The only one who now remains  
 To torment me in my dreams  
 (60).

This illustrates that the only consistency in the play's style is what Waigwa calls authorial "superobjective" of discrediting Kimathi in every conceivable way throughout the play. The design of the plot, serves the same end and is the most glaring illustration of this "superobjective". If the credibility of a literary style is evaluated from its effectiveness in capturing the audience's curiosity in discovering the author's creative intention through sustained suspense, Watene's style demonstrates little regard for this aspect in the portrayal of Kimathi.

## 2.2 Plot Structure and Effect in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*

The plot introduces Kimathi as already culpable. The unmasking or purported "lifting of the veil" as the blurb states violates conventional dramatic technique because Kimathi is (ironically) adjudged guilty in what Waigwa calls "previous circumstances" even before the plot "trial" through 'revelation' commences!

Lucia's accusation and Kimathi's initial exit, including followed by the manipulation of Nyati and Kimbo's observations are the first manifestations of this authorial purpose in the plot. After Kimathi's expresses suspicion of Nyati, one scout sees "him and Nyati walk towards the stone of sacrifice" (59). Kimathi's earlier soliloquy and his "you're as good as dead" (44) decision on Nyati becomes the focal point on which the rest of the plot revolves. There is no real suspense in Wahu's implication of Kimathi after the 'discovery' of Nyati's body because she is already privy to

his intentions in this earlier soliloquy. The suspense supposed to precede "revelation" and resolution in the play from a logical and stylistic viewpoint, lacks credence. The ever watchful Scouts 'revelation', though clumsily manipulated, translates into the only instance that comes close to authentic dramatisation of the preponderant dialogue in the play. After Kimathi and Nyati walk off-stage, the watchful Scouts spy on the goings on:

**2nd Scout** (laughs, then improvises)  
 Shhhhhh... We are about to discover  
 Something very important  
 What?  
 Where the night meets the day  
 And what a bloody battle they fight  
 To determine who rules what part  
 Of time!  
 Understand that?  
 It's just a little bit too clever.  
 Who rules what part of time.....  
 (58)

Shortly afterwards an emotionally exhausted Kimathi returns without Nyati, wondering why others "look at me like that" (60). There are the hints of a strenuous and haunting psychological experience. The (supposedly) as yet unsuspecting Wahu offhandedly (but ominously) refers to the nether world elements need to "feast upon their morning sacrifice" (61) after Kimathi's mention of their hand in his fate. The question of the missing Nyati's whereabouts dominate the plot's supposed suspense in the rest of the play. Suspicion of Kimathi, the "killer" at the opening is built up with the Scouts' references to "slaughtering" and "pools of blood" at the "swearing stone" (74). There are implied 'pointers,' that "only Kimathi escorted him" (76).

The ultimate "discovery" is (predictably) followed by Kimathi's manipulated self-indicting admission that it was "necessary" and "had to be done" (83). This replication of the play's opening scene has the two scouts dragged into validating of circumstantial 'evidence' used by the plot structure to indicate the too "obvious" implication of Kimathi's culpability. There isn't much imaginative creativity in falling back to the simplistic logic however crafty manipulated in vilifying Kimathi. Note the conventional logic suitable for effective persuasion in the ensuing dialogue.

**2nd Scout** He was not alone when he stumbled.

**1st Scout** Of course he was not.  
 You know he was not  
 Kimathi was with him.  
 Kimathi was the last man to see him alive.

**2nd Scout** So he knows why Nyati died

1st Scout I didn't say that  
 Why are you putting words into my mouth?  
 What's wrong with you? (92)

The use of this simplistic deductive logic probably accounts for Ngugi and Micere's adoption of the contrary plot structure in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* to counter Watene's all too obvious design to implicate Kimathi negatively. The stylistic weaknesses are so glaring even an inexperienced literary critic will balk at this invitation to surrender all doubt without having previously been invited into any challenging "willing suspension of disbelief" engagement in the process.

Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* provides a classic example of what Maughan-Brown calls the "fictional techniques used by (colonial) authors in interpellating readers' assent to the settler view of Mau Mau as the 'obviously' correct one". In such cases, he notes certain 'terminology, selected spokesmen and plot' (127) are manipulated towards the intended end. Plot is singled out specifically as uniquely effective because it is

undoubtedly a rhetorical device. Indeed it is the key controlling device through which an author ensures that the myths which he or she subscribes to are shown to be the 'truth'. It is rhetorical because it carries out a tendentious 'validation' of the position of one or other side in whatever ideological dispute has been carried on ... Thus the author can invent a character, allow the character to propound racial myths, apparently dissociate himself or herself from the character, and implicitly from the myths and yet construct his or her plot in such a way as to show that the character was right all along (131).

This 'tendentiousness' is notable in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. The only difference is that while the characters in settler writings are purely fictional, the protagonist here is supposed to be the specific historical person of the same name. Kinyatti's argument against the ensuing image by of Kimathi in Watene's play by recourse to historical evidence - objectionable as it may be from our position as critics of the fictive product circumscribed within the bounds of and by rules pertaining to fictional realism - is to be understood as a demand for art to depict the 'empirical individual in history'. So too is Atieno-Odhiambo protest against the fictional 'misrepresentation' he sees in Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. We shall examine how other angles of projection are skewed towards the same end in view in this earlier play.

### 2.3 Watene's Image of Kimathi as a Leader

The opening scene encounter presents Kimathi as "leader by default", which is supposed to explain his morbid fear of "others". Though aware of the risks and hardships the course he has

taken entails, he appears to have little will power capacity to cope with the challenges that history and circumstances have placed on his shoulders, his resolve notwithstanding. When his devoted lieutenants readily credit him with "unequaled" (48) personal capacity and organisational skill, Kimathi seems to assert the contrary in psychological posture.

**Kimathi** A good army need weapons.  
 Good weapons need money.  
 It's hard to build a good army.  
 Even if we had a chance  
 (48)

That a leader with such doubts still remains obsessed with achieving either "triumphant military victory" or alternatively "at least ... spiritual victory" (68) over the vastly superior and technologically sophisticated British military might is strange indeed, seeing that it seems to overawe him. He appears doubtful enough to countenance the thought that it might after all be misplaced wishful thinking to ever contemplate victory. The self-doubt is so deep-seated in his psyche that it persists even in the face of encouragement by his "more confident" compatriots that ultimate victory over the British is possible.

**Kimathi** If we could leave the forest  
 And walk into a free country  
 That would welcome us with pride  
 Then we would not have fought in vain  
 Oh Rhino, brave heart,  
 What a difficult path we chose!  
 What a wounded name would follow  
 The footsteps of our generation!  
 But let it be.  
 What time of the night?  
 (48)

This dim view is supposed to explain his readiness to dispatch others to the netherworld on the slightest suspicion of or display of weakness -apparently to cover up his own. The ultimate question posed, therefore, is whether Kimathi has qualifications for any place in remembrance when "the general mass of the people will give honour to the deserving, as is the wont of historical justice" (63). He appears more like a leader who has turned liberation movement into a self-serving opportunity. The various instances when he tends to dominate the stage and lecture others with high-sounding "rhetoric" on the tenets of freedom are interjected with irony as he sometimes "roars at them, suddenly, powerfully" (64) as they cower in silence and fear. The lone unconnected figure among "his own" is at such times not averse to compulsive approaches.

**Kimathi** Speak! Say something!

Do not let the silence of the night  
 Close in on my soul.  
 Don't let these dumb trees  
 Listen to the echoes of my conscience.  
 Speak of the precious blood  
 That will feed the fountains  
 Of social justice in our land.  
 Speak and help me silence  
 These insistent whispers  
 That reach me from nowhere  
 Speak!  
 (64).

Their silence, implicitly, stems from awareness that dissenting is a costly gamble. They are indeed at a loss as to whether they should speak or not in spite of this open invitation. He talks at them rather than with them as the audience wonder, bemused at this contradiction between verbosity and "real substance" in the man himself. In the process the liberation tenets he so eloquently expounds on in lofty language translate into self-indictment.

My friends,  
 To live in freedom and dignity  
 Is a right of every man.....  
 But to strive for these in the face  
 Of armed and vicious oppression  
 Is a test for the advocate of both  
 To overcome and install the two  
 Is a victory for the greatness of man (65).

There is more exposition than dramatisation in this lofty rhetoric. In almost all cases Kimathi comes across as one against everybody and, ultimately against his own interests by the very nature of his conduct and thinking. This discrepancy between conduct and rhetoric of statement is intended to make the audience see his cause and utterances as so much hot air. The moral high ground of the forces against colonial injustice is turned topsy-turvy into indictment of Kimathi, perceived as the oppressive force within his forest domain. Colonial and prospective neo-colonial oppression are indeed white-washed craftily in Kimathi's ensuing dismissal of the 'warped' quality of British injustice. He is aware that in both epochs patriotic sentiments will be criminalised and the utterers

... be tried for sedition and treason-  
 Like the British would love to hang me  
 On fictitious accusation of murder.  
 But the truth is that they hate me,  
 .....  
 They hate me because I dared challenge  
 Their abuse of human justice.

Their shameless pursuit of oppression.  
 But why are you so quiet?  
 (66)

The reticence on the part of his compatriots implies their unease with Kimathi in light of the whereabouts of the still missing Nyati.

But by far the most blatantly paradoxical projection is seen in Kimathi's momentary contemplation of giving up in the middle of the struggle to search for personal salvation. This comes in one of his soliloquies, a moment of intense torment when doubts overwhelm the lonely mind that cannot get succour from within or without.

What if I run off to a far country?  
 What if I give up the pursuit of victory?  
 Then I would outlive their malice  
 Return to an independent country  
 And live in freedom and dignity  
 But what dignity in cowardice?  
 I am a soldier, not a misguided terrorist  
 (67).

One is at a loss to decide whether this is the earlier obdurate leader determined to pursue military victory at whatever cost, convinced that "the only thing is to fight to the bitter end" (37). He is now the paradox which Waigwa describes as Kimathi's transformation into "a walking contradiction" in Watene's crafty style. The unfathomable mysterious "strange fellow" (41) whose solitary nature provides the plot's rationale to for "unmaking" while running the gauntlet of the play's purported lifting of "the veil which history has drawn over Kimathi" can now hardly stake any credible claim to "aspire to true nationalism" (68) with his motley group of "mere misguided rebels" (78). But he must still, (true to projected character here) be ever-ready, urging that all

... should, at this moment of trial  
 Rededicate ourselves to the aims  
 That have been the beacon of our hopes  
 Rhino, our people look upon us  
 With certain anticipation that we  
 After years in this heartless jungle  
 Will return to them and help them realise  
 The purpose for which they have suffered  
 We must not let them down, Rhino.  
 We must help to justify and ennoble  
 Their striving, their immense sacrifice  
 (77).

Implicit in this self-indicting rhetoric is the hint that the thousands of people in and outside the forest are equally "misguided" in placing their hopes and faith on this leader and his band. The



now emboldened author presents Kimathi as desperately trying to pre-empt the "objective" judgement of history by urging for a sympathetic view of himself

To help disprove the vicious lies  
That have been told about our people  
(78).

Kimathi and the fighters are all through projected in images which disparage any genuine claim on their part to virtue or nobility, what with the irrefutable "proof" provided by their actions in this play. Kimathi's call for principled commitment to the ideals of freedom is, subsequently, placed in outright juxtaposition to this "nature of the Mau Mau" as he exhorts that

It is a nation of disciplined men  
And women you want to build.  
Men who when they take up a cause  
Will stick to it, upright and incorruptible.  
You've had the best training  
During your operation in the forest.  
You've known what it is to suffer,  
To cling to your fight  
However hard and long the road.  
You must not give in to the ways  
Of those who play the game of politics  
Whose main interest is their personal fortune.  
You must carry on the spirit  
With which you rose to fight  
So as to protect our country  
From being sold to our enemies  
By greedy, spongy-handed profligates.  
(78-79)

Yet, a few moments later, this implacable foe of colonialism is, paradoxically, unreservedly praising Chief Muhoya for warning him against his own forest compatriots whom he will soon view as his worst enemies. Kimathi in the process is seen distancing himself from their "suspect" loyalty in preference for this 'friendship' with the colonial agent. Such instances of barely masked sympathies with colonialism all too often might achieve the opposite effect with a keen "dramatically conscious" audience. Note the supreme irony evident in Kimathi's expression of gratitude to the colonial chief rather than his own compatriots when he says

But thank you, chief, for warning me.  
You wear the crown of the Queen of England  
Which outwardly shows you for a traitor.  
But I know that inside  
You are a true son of the land.  
Rhino, keep away from my path  
And let the labours of your mind

Steer a course away from my exploits  
 Let solitude be my companion  
 And darkness my greatest protector (83).

The last two lines are consistent with Kimathi's obdurate stance that he would rather "keep to the long night" (38) but certainly inconsistent by implying the Kimathi would find the advice from the colonial chief consistent with his own nature and intentions, without arousing the very suspicion that forms the core basis of his character and survival instinct in the forest! Kimathi would in the circumstances *naturally* suspect a breach in his "security cordon" in the physical or psychological sense, and distance himself from such "outside forces" or influences. We have noted that it is the suspicion of such influences that in the first place lead him to the decision that Nyati has to be got rid of. Kimathi is here again the "walking contradiction" mentioned in Waigwa's analysis of Watene's play.

What constitutes the climax of the isolation and vilification of Kimathi in the play is the "discovery" of Nyati's body and the replication of Kimathi's usual "it was necessary... had to be done!" (83) explanation when confronted with this knowledge by the "privy" Wahu. His apparent 'insensitivity' in the ensuing mourning of the "noble" and all "too human" (90) Nyati should, it is expected, wipe off the last vestiges of any sympathy for the "murderer" (87) in the recess of even the most incredulously doubting minds in the audience.

**Kimathi** He was noble  
 Who said he wasn't noble?  
 For his nobility I loved him.  
 For his humanity I esteemed him.  
 For his love I revered him  
 But his spirit longed to be free  
 From the hot pursuit of victory  
 Therefore I killed him (88).

The repetitiveness of this new "admission" of killing and clever allusion to earlier "guilty memories" (37) in the ensuing cacophony of self-justifying statements imputing moral guilt are supposed to "clinch the case" against Kimathi. Note the repetition of his earlier self-justification that

Nyati had a treacherous disposition  
 He was a weed that had to be destroyed.  
 (84)

The even more rhetorical desperate appeal to be understood is put across as a normal instance of the guilty pleading "mitigating" circumstances, such as

What else was there to do  
 When the choice was between

His life and mine?  
(87)

And the self-justification is eventually compounded with the admission that

Therefore I killed him (88)

Kimathi has been in the plot's sequence transformed into the unconscionable villain gloating over a heinous act in apparent sadistic delight, implying his "twisted" mind (23, 97) way of thinking. The ultimate "revelation" in the ensuing soliloquy shows him savouring (t)his "heinous" deed, and acknowledging "evil aforethought". This hitherto unfathomably strange man, the author implies, is evil incarnate. Note the "ultimate unveiling" of his "inner mind" of his "inner mind" at this point as he contemplates his deed.

Yet, how sweet and comforting ...  
He loved me and I killed him  
That is murder, evil murder (90).

There is however, the evident (self-)contradiction here in Watene's crediting the apparently psychopath(ic) Kimathi the ability of self-revelation, self-evaluation and, even more surprising, self-criticism. In view of Aristotle's proposition that "if the person who is being represented (in fiction) is inconsistent, and this trait is the basis of his character, he must nevertheless be portrayed as consistently inconsistent" (51) Kimathi should in this state of mind here be devoid of any capacity for conscience or its collorary "human sensitivity"!

These self-contradictions in Watene's style and fictive product present themselves as discordant and self-annihilating realities even within their specially allowed "willing suspension of disbelief" realm in the fictional world, persistently deviating from and what Wanjala calls "the writer's fidelity to artistic creation" (393) Waigwa castigates this tendency of Watene "bending over backwards... even at the risk of breaking both his back and the rules of art" (14) in the haste to annihilate Kimathi arguing that "it does not follow that simply because a play is about psychologically unsound characters it must become an unsound psychological unit" (20).

These same inconsistencies are evident in other perspectives from which Kimathi is portrayed, especially as perceived by his "more objective" compatriots in the play. We will focus our attention to this "other" perspective.

## 2.4 Kimathi as viewed by "others" in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*

The prejudicial forest setting and the "others" with Kimathi are deftly manipulated to trumpet the same unflattering view of the protagonist. The apparently compromising conduct with the female compatriots and the imputation that Kimathi is not "a normal human being" but "a criminal... on the run" (8) are the overtones implied in the 'distraught' (7) Lucia's protestations against Kimathi's 'misconduct' and "harsh" control over others. The hints of rebellion against the "moral outrage" involved are contained in the allusion to this woman's protest against Kimathi's distinguishing characteristic, "his fury and show of power" (9).

But in her (assigned) role of 'revealing' him she only fires her own salvo against these "objectionable" characteristics before leaving the stage for others to 'elaborate.'

No, I'll do it  
I will do it and be free  
.....  
I'll do it and end this agony  
Of love that cannot be full.  
Dedan, Field Marshal, my love,  
Make haste and penetrate deeper  
Into this inhospitable shelter  
Of fear darkness and murder  
And softly my love, softly  
Before I return (9).

This is the implied 'jungle kingdom' where Kimathi's reign casts an oppressive shadow over those who must perforce live under the tight control of this mysterious and rather elusive figure. The two scouts reinforce the view of anxiety and expectation about what the future holds for those under him. In their blissful "ignorance" about his "real nature" they are still comfortable at this point. They express their conviction apart from playing their (assigned) melodramatic roles as "animal" characters who "jump from (tree) branch to branch" (15) that they should

**2nd Scout** They'll never catch Kimathi.  
**1st Scout** Not unless one of us  
Reports his ways to the homeguards (16).

They are apparently still oblivious of the 'danger' posed by this spine-chilling character. But his superstitious inclination and dependence on mystical powers are so marked that as to have caught their attention. His compatriots invariably come to this conclusion after his long absence because

There's a certain tree under which  
He carries out solemn rituals  
They say that the tree can speak

And flap its leaves as if  
 They were a thousand ears  
 They say that when he prays,  
 The tree changes in colour  
 And bears little flames  
 From the tip of every branch  
 (22)

They indeed see him as a "strange" man whose "ways are many and twisted" (23), and a strikingly rather "strange fellow" (41) in more ways than hitherto alluded. Natural phenomena like the aforementioned tree with its own strange behaviour are linked to his fate. The devoted Nyati's deference to and defence of Kimathi against any "wrong imputations" to his character therefore appear in sharp contrast to Kimathi's "ill-intentions" (52) against him. His incredulity when warned that he might be Kimathi's victim is turned into the rationale for 'revelation'.

Nyati What a lot of nonsense!  
 Kimathi would never dream  
 Of taking my life  
 He's my old friend  
 I fought under him in Burma  
 And when we came back from the war,  
 We started running a business together  
 .....

I know Kimathi well, too well.  
 You see that missing thumb of his?  
 I was there when he lost it.  
 I dressed the wound myself  
 How preposterous to suggest  
 That Dedan would even think  
 Of hurting me, his old friend?  
 (51-52).

Characters like Nyati are posited in this humane, positive light in order to highlight the "opposite" in Kimathi. They are, as Waigwa has noted, "treated sympathetically only in so far as they serve the author's purpose of further dehumanising Kimathi" (4) who views all and sundry "with suspicious eyes" (52). What is rather surprising then is that Kimathi, renowned for secretiveness, should express his intentions and innermost thoughts in front of the woman who will later "reveal" him as Nyati's slayer! After her spying mission on Nyati the dilemma of conflicting demands and loyalties is apparent in her inner thoughts.

If I let Kimathi kill him,  
 I shall betray a friend  
 And a comrade  
 .....

I shall woo Kimathi with all the womanhood

That's still left in me  
 I'll convince him before  
 He makes up his mind to kill (55).

This is her major misgiving about Kimathi's future stature. The other 'unknowing' compatriots ponder whether history's judgement will accord him due credit - without this awareness of his "misdeeds" perpetrated in this forest domain. It becomes, from authorial viewpoint, necessary to pre-empt any overestimation of the stature of one otherwise seen by these "unknowing others" as

Strong, invincible;  
 Unswerving in his determination  
 To see through his noble purpose (61).

This is predictably followed by myriad hints that he may after all have "strayed" from this purpose. The "nobility" is cryptically put to question by the woman "in the know" now preparing her more "ignorant" compatriots for the eventual shocking revelation lest history mistakenly confer on this shadowy figure "undeserved" honour. Note her attempts to forewarn and "enlighten" others with some hints of her own doubts in this regard despite their still strong convictions that he is a worthy man whose image is untainted.

**Wahu** What if they don't think  
 That he was such a great man?  
 What if some calamity  
 Shatters his consistency  
 And makes him prey  
 To some mean disposition?  
 What if they don't know  
 That his mind reached out  
 For the sublime in humanity  
 That love, equality and justice  
 Among the races of this country  
 Was his utmost desire?  
 (63).

The plot's later "discovery" that Kimathi is culpable in the "heinous" killing of the hapless "noble" Nyati and repetitions of the accusations made by Lucia in the opening scene, especially that "it was necessary" ... "it had to be done" (83) are implied as the ultimate truth regarding misgivings about Kimathi's nature and stature. Rhetoric is allowed free reign as 'incredulous' compatriots ponder loudly how they could have been blind to what should all along have been 'obvious' to all. The heightened mourning of Nyati's death is turned into unbridled vilification of the incomprehensible evil perceived in Kimathi. His ('mistaken') association with any 'noble purpose'

(61) is now obliterated. The 'others' - are (purportedly) spared through implied 'dissociation' in the presumed separation of Kimathi from the movement, his now disillusioned followers are flabbergasted at the volte-face they see (through) after "the revelation" of his culpability

Rhino: But why on earth could he have done it?  
 To what end could he have wanted  
 To destroy the very symbol of devotion?  
 Could he have done it for power, for security?  
 But he was powerful and secure with us!  
 Surely he must have trusted his own!  
 Could anyone of us here present  
 Mistrust his own flesh and blood?  
 Could anyone of us here present  
 Abuse the highest of all respect  
 Confusing it for calculated malice?  
 He was not sick: he couldn't have done it!  
 Why, I admire the man: his courage,  
 His determination and power of will!  
 He could not have done it, Kimbo!  
 We must believe that for strength and faith  
 For the sake of our pride in his greatness,  
 We must be satisfied with the sorrow  
 Of losing one we had dearly loved  
 And retain the glorious image of our destiny!  
 But o humanity, so frail, so fallible!  
 (96-97).

This acute agony and dilemma of a devoted believer in Kimathi's nobility and greatness is cleverly manipulated: the juxtaposition of injured feeling torn between the difficult choice of harbouring the view of the glorious image of his leader differentiate between "the truth... and the lie... the virtue... and the vice" (96) about Kimathi's nature. The audience is not long left for suspense because the woman "in the know," Wahu, now provides the "irrefutable" answer that

Suspicion murdered humility and love,  
 Kimathi murdered our dear Old Man  
 (97).

The accompanying glee at his capture by the colonialist hunters is tellingly reminiscent of the overtones in Henderson's account. The sky-shouted call to his hapless followers to capitulate implies they can no longer "mitigate" case or cause, what with the embodiment of the image of their struggle now demolished as a source of spiritual sustenance. "Surrender" is logically presented as the only alternative.

It is ironical that Watene posits a separation of Kimathi and the others but so readily enjoins individual 'case' and popular 'cause'. By enjoining the fates of the apparently innocent

others with that of the long "guilty" (37) Kimathi the presumed 'unmasking' of Kimathi reveals itself as a clever onslaught on the moral basis of the armed resistance to colonialist oppression. These others are, similarly, 'guilty' by association. And yet, as we have pointed out, he presents Kimathi almost in isolation in his relationship with the rest.

## 2.5 How Kimathi Relates With Others

The characteristic most conspicuously singled out for emphasis about Kimathi is his obsession with the pursuit of personal power. All else seem to be of little consequence in his thinking. His reliance on mystical forces substitutes for the "comradeship" his compatriots see so grossly undervalued by the solitary Kimathi. He is overly enamoured to the mystical elements because, as he tells them,

They give you power to order,  
power to control people.  
Power to see into the future,  
(47).

This defines his relationships with others in Watene's play. His quest for personal survival and the pursuit of his "triumphant victory" goal diminishes the worth of others, making it almost impossible to view them in any other light than as instrument for this end. Lucia, his "mistress" at the opening scene, complains "of love that cannot be full" (9). Those with perceptibly weaker mettle in his view or unable to measure up to the demands for this goal suffer his wrath.

Anybody who desires  
Anything less than triumphant victory  
Must be plucked from our midst.  
Nyati had a treacherous disposition  
He was a weed that had to be destroyed  
Be on my side. I pray you!  
(84)

This is his epitaph for the devoted Nyati, viewed with contempt because he lacks the necessary qualities for such victory.

Kimathi is as wary of his compatriots as he is of the colonial enemy, seeing everything "with suspicious eyes" (52). Though they have little chance of getting him because of his elusive nature, he is still haunted by fear of his own compatriots, who complain that he has no sense of comradeship with them because

To him  
The very air smells of betrayal  
He sees us with distant



Untrusting eyes  
(56)

The solitary figure is in the more lonely moments tempted to feel that others have left the whole burden of the struggle to him. At such times he huddles even deeper into himself. In these moments when the odds appear insurmountable his spirit wilts, and the unquestioning loyalty of devotees like Nyati does not count. The irony is that they remain so beholden to one with so little regard for them, like Nyati who feels that

Had it not been for the esteem  
In which I hold Kimathi,  
I'd break this green branch here  
And surrender in the dewy dawn,  
But not now, my friend, not now,  
I'll stay with him to the end  
(23)

His order to one of the women "to keep the strictest watch on that man just taken out" (32) when Nyati's human "frailties" (32) lay him open to suspicion illustrates this isolation. There is little to suggest that his instructions to this hitherto favoured and trusted female compatriot to get intimate with the "suspect" Nyati, arises from any "necessary" justification in the furtherance of the interests of the struggle. Indeed Kimathi's morbid suspicion which tends to view any meeting among his compatriots as a veritable "conspiracy" (58) against him even when they do so out of their concern for his whereabouts and welfare, in sharp contrast to the feeling of camaraderie he displays towards the Chief Muhoya with whom Kimathi appears surprisingly quite amenable. In one of the rare moments of some 'warmth' towards anybody Kimathi urges the chief's emissaries to

Go and send him my greetings,  
Tell him his message is well received,  
And I shall act upon it,  
Tell him I shall myself return the crown  
When I next visit my people.  
(81-82)

Kimathi readily accepts the chief's "beware of your own in the forest" warning, against the grain of his sworn compatriots' devotion in their oath

Of loyalty to God the Moulder,  
Loyalty to the blood of our ancestors,  
Loyalty to Kimathi, and our cause.  
(13)

This loner, we are supposed to infer, hardly needs any enemies because he is (apparently) his own worst enemy. The lengths to which the fear and suspicion of his own drive him are seen as he raves and rails at them after the discovery of Nyati's body. His is less the mourning but more of seeing the enemy in their midst. He is unable to see that it arises from their painful realisation that in suspicion has destroyed their common trust as compatriots. It is Wahu who receives the sharp edge of Kimathi's tongue as he rails at the 'unreliability' of his own in the forest as he justifies the killing of Nyati.

You want me to sit and watch them  
 Conspire to betray me  
 To pave way for those who hate me  
 To commit me to trial  
 And sentence me in utter iniquity!  
 Don't stand there and condemn me!  
 Can't you see that I've to come through?  
 O victory, victory, victory.....!  
 You are all conspiring to betray me!  
 All of you, you filthy cowards!  
 Beware those that are close to you.  
 He said:  
 For they will lead you to the swollen river  
 And will not show you the stepping stones  
 Turn your backs on those who claim to love you.  
 Give a deaf ear to their sympathies  
 And wipe not their crocodile tears  
 Thank you, thank you, Chief....  
 (89).

With this 'innate' nature, his constant preaching of lofty ideals like "true brotherhood among men: men of all races, creeds and colours" (78) come across as a mere parody of real patriotism, for there is no semblance of this with those he is presumed to have so much in common. He more often prefers to

Let solitude be my companion  
 And darkness my closest protector  
 (83).

This enigmatic human aberration prone to "abuse the highest of all respect" (96) is, therefore, viewed as one whose capture and demise will translate into salvation from the excesses arising from his well camouflaged "smallness of mind and heart" (61). He has, as all through, displayed a "Mean disposition" (63) towards the others.

This fictional reification in the process transforms Kimathi from the folk hero in the stories, legends and myths about Mau Mau into (the image of) one who subverted the historic

opportunity provided by the armed struggle to foist himself on a trusting people to whom he progressively becomes "a menace". The anguished mourning of the now 'betrayed' compatriots against "Nyati's artless murderer" (87) is the clearest pointer to this end. But the difference between the 'real' and 'merely rhetorical' aspects in style is notable; the tone of the hypocritical Ababio in Armah's *The Healers* is nowhere near Rhino's real mourning here. The sense of emotional injury is too real here to mistake the 'substance' in it for anything else.

Hear me Nyati, Old Man  
 Whoever it was that killed you  
 Will find no peace on this earth  
 Until the day he himself  
 Shall sink low with the pains  
 Of remorse that shall follow him  
 Beyond his neglected grave  
 And those of us who will remain  
 Will clamour with might for justice!  
 But what justice can we expect  
 When our hopes wilt to despair  
 And the vicious hand of oppression  
 Reaches out to exterminate us?  
 O priceless liberty!  
 (He bends down with despair)  
 (85-86).

The demonisation is compounded by the image of a seemingly unmoved Kimathi impressing on them the futility of such mourning and urging Rhino to "spare your loving for those who are still living" (86) because Nyati "died so that others might find a better life" (87). The implications, of course, are that Kimathi means nothing other than his own life, first and foremost!

This image of Kimathi as the supreme egotist abstracts him not only from his close associates (compatriots still?), but also from the struggle in which he is (fore)grounded, whose essence will subsequently be annihilated alongside Kimathi's image in this play. He will, in Watene's crafty style, play his part in the self-annihilating outcome of his view about what the freedom struggle is all about.

## 2.6 Kimathi's View of The Struggle

The idea of liberation from white colonialism is apparently not anathema to Watene's sensibility; it is Kimathi's *modus operandi* that he finds rather disagreeable. The real strain in the attempt to accord some grudging "credulity" to it all coupled with jitters about Kimathi's prospect of victory as he inspires the freedom fighters. In his words here

The days cannot be very far

When our people shall walk upright  
In light and pride

.....  
O my friends,  
The thought of an independent nation  
Ruled and run by our people,  
The black citizens of our land,  
Moves me tremendously. Perhaps  
We might yet march out of the forest  
In victory, crowned and installed  
(32)

The vision places emphasis on African nationalist control of political power. The whole issue now revolves around the question of choice between empathy with Kimathi and the perceived diabolical lot the recesses of the forest, or the "educated... upright and honest" (30) 'civilised' politicians spear heading "the progress of politics outside the forest" (69). Kimathi's recourse to armed struggle, from the authorial abhorrence of violence makes him a "misguided terrorist (67) "tainted" with the "sins" of bloodshed and tyranny over "his own".

His views and actions are presented in this light as outrightly contradictory. The glaringly "irrational" act of rejecting the constitutional offer brought as "good news" (34) by the people's messengers puts the spotlight on the obdurate Kimathi. In the process he is allowed to relegate himself into a "liability" and on "irrelevance" however valid his arguments appear

**Kimathi Party, party, party!**  
Party is old news!  
Did we not have a party  
When we first demanded independence?  
Did they not call us agitators  
When we chose peaceful means,  
When we asked to be treated  
With justice as human beings?  
We spoke through a party  
Which, as far as we were concerned,  
Was perfectly legitimate  
And did they not ban that party  
Arrest its leaders, and force us to this bloodshed?  
Party!  
And now their tardy humanitarianism  
In recognising our legitimate right  
Has to be considered a privilege!  
Tell me more!  
(34-35).

This peremptory dismissal of the peaceful "popular view" casts Kimathi in the image of a "blood thirsty maniac" (31) and as the stumbling block to the efforts of the African representatives

in the colonial Legco (Legislative Council) fighting for the ascendancy of the black man to power. It is this image that Ngugi and Micere's play will endeavour to counter by presenting their "too human" Kimathi. Watene's obdurate Kimathi claims to "aspire to true nationalism" (68) in spite of his apparent inability to create a sense of oneness with his own forest compatriots.

These increasingly reticent compatriots perceive his volte-face which also mirrors confusion in their awareness of the inherent contradiction between the essence of the "virtues" he preaches and what he represents in conduct. His fight against the misdeeds of the British is in the process appear as the very opposite of his stated liberating mission. Note his exhortation

**Kimathi My people**

I cannot overstress my appreciation  
Of your courage and the way you have resigned  
Yourselves to this difficult road  
To the dignity and self-determination  
Of the black people

.....

You have often heard me say  
That we are not fighting for everlasting hatred  
But for true brotherhood among men  
Men of all races, creeds and colours  
It is not right that we should be ruled  
Oppressed and abused in our land  
(77-78)

This doublespeak, we are supposed to infer, is perfectly consistent with the nature and character of the "misguided terrorist" (67) leader and his equally "misguided rebels" (78). The acute agony in the "All is wasted, wasted" (56) cry over an ordinary "mad (57) fighter's view of a sword as a "beautiful thing" (56) is seen as a reflection of Kimathi's earlier "independence that's won in blood is more precious" (36) view echoing Gacheru's self-indicting statement in *My Son For My Freedom's* as he embarks on this 'unnecessary' "Slaughterous Adventure" (45).

The image of the stoic leader steadfast in the face of adversity is progressively substituted with and overshadowed by its antithesis. The "disciplined" "upright" and "incorrigible" (78-79) tough breed of those forged by "the fire of patriotism" (25) that Kimathi so fervently seeks to create in others appears as a contradiction if one starts from Kimathi as the true inspiration of the same spirit. One now appreciates the fallacy in Cook and Okenimpke's contention that Watene "presents Kimathi as a (positively) heroic figure".

If *My Son For My Freedom* sets the authorial tone of a rather equivocal view of the armed struggle, the image of the protagonist in *Dedan Kimathi* is the patently unequivocal

statement that the Mau Mau leader and his followers were no more than a "criminal" (8) band of "misguided rebels" (78). The movement and Kimathi are thus diminished to the point of obliteration in terms of socio-historical significance. The perceived disregard for human life recurs in similar images in *Sunset On the Manyatta* of the fighters as "terrorists" engaged in "wasteful massacres" (40).

Throughout the play this process of reducing Kimathi and the movements' aims to a question of his personal "triumphant victory" (84) annuls the essence of the armed struggle as a liberating force. Their individual and collective sacrifices are also negated in a language replete with the same images and underlying sensibilities.

## 2.7 Language and Kimathi's image in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*

It is undeniable that phrases and other aspects of language like adjectives reflect the writer's overall attitude towards the objects so described in general characterisation or thematic exposition. The metaphors, similes, symbolism, alliteration and other features of language in *Dedan Kimathi* similarly reflect authorial sensibility towards Kimathi and the whole movement in this play. Language has power, or to quote Maughan-Brown "awesome power".

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* a character asks his master, "What do you read my Lord?". The master confidently replies that it is "words, words, words" (45). Words, whether spoken or written, are indeed potent weapons in the hands of artists.

The setting and single scene in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* is described as a "fortified den" (7) in the forest. The "associate meanings" are immediately invoked. The Concise Oxford Dictionary explains that "den" is 'a wild beasts' lair, or refuge of criminals and outlaws'. The charge that Kimathi is out to "destroy others" (7), the insinuation that he is not "a normal human being" but "a criminal... on the run" (8) indicts everyone and everything associated with him. The allusion to Kimathi as an outlaw is implied in the Scouts' reference to "the den of Kimathi" (16). This "strange fellow" (41) returns after communion with mystical powers and is manipulated to "confirm" a self-denigrating admission that

Devils they may be but still  
They say strange things to me  
(24).

His self-distancing from conventional Christian religion and linkage with traditional Kikuyu/African deities is probably intended to be uncannily reminiscent of Macbeth's consort with

the witches, whose assurances of his invincibility are replete with subtle loopholes leaving room for his eventual destruction.

The fighters' impending raid on a target is described as "a crude offensive" (25). This vulgar imputation has no connotation of anything remotely linked to the advancement of struggle for freedom or advancement of human dignity. Colonial counter-insurgency in all its ruthlessness is implied to be the more "civilised" and "refined" form and is indeed endorsed by Watene as restoration of sanity against the perceived 'primitive' and 'senseless' Mau Mau 'savagery' in both *My Son For My Freedom* and *Sunset On The Manyatta*.

The many allusions to Kimathi's 'destructiveness' appear in the frequent use of the term "sacrifice" giving it the connotation of ritual practice. The murdered Nyati will be placed under "the stone of sacrifice" (85). In attempting to outwit his hunters Kimathi exhorts that

We must pray and sacrifice to our gods  
So that they may continue to warn us  
Of such disguised evils  
(24).

The revelation of Kimathi as "Nyati's artless murderer" (87) thus implicates him with such "disguised evils". Stage descriptions of "people who were killed by order of Kimathi" (69) and reference to those Christian converts who fell foul of the movement as "educated... upright and honest... have no defence, other than their prayers" (32) implicates Kimathi and turns the Christians into "martyr(s)" (11). The uncanny similarity of Watene's sentiment and that in Wiseman's *Kikuyu Martyrs* condemnation of these "evil men" and Mau Mau as an "evil thing" (20) cannot be missed.

In Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*, the references to certain negative "distinguishing characteristics" of the dark races from the Eurocentric racist viewpoint - the shape of lips and noses - are also found. The approach of some unidentified people prompts an agitated Kimathi to ask a scout to check their nasal configurations and

See if they are long and pointed  
Or flat and broad like yours  
(34).

The scout promptly returns to report that they are "like mine... like yours" (34). The approaching strangers are not white soldiers but black people's messengers sent to entreat Kimathi to end the violence. The more patently denigrating descriptions are seen in instances where the fighters are made to compare themselves to "beasts of the forest" (10).

In a supposedly comic enactment the scouts urge one another to "stop being human. We are animals now" (15). Thus relegated and christened, or rather retrogressively Darwinised, into the "monkey" and "chimp" (17), they will refer to themselves by these terms throughout the play. Kimathi is not spared this animal connotations; as he leaves the stage, we are told that he "strains his head to the wings and then stalks off" (42). This bestialising is preceded by a description of one of the scouts' dream premonition' of Kimathi's eventual capture. One recalls his dream of ...leaping from tree to tree just like a monkey (40) while the other has the more ominous recollection

No, I dreamt of a more serious matter  
 I dreamt Kimathi had been arrested  
 There was weeping and wailing  
 Among the animals in the forest  
 And the monkeys led in moaning  
 They held each other by the tail  
 With one hand while the other  
 Sheltered their fiery eyes.  
 A strange dance it was;  
 Weird, mournful cries  
 Echoed across the green silence  
 (40-41).

This 'animal' self-identification is apparently so embedded and pervasive in their psyche that they refer to those from the more 'civilized' life outside the forest as "monkey(s)", "mongrel(s)" and "hyenas" (70) though these (others) have no characteristics of such regression. They even threaten to "hand them to the authorities" (70) in the forest - headed of course by Kimathi. And until they are humanised again through proper "rehabilitation" (73) or recant those gory Mau Mau oaths that apparently inspire them to orgies of violence they retain this (inherent/learned?) diabolical propensity to

.make monsters of still shadows  
 And weird devil dances devise.  
 (13)

The language used in describing Kimathi and the movement thus evokes the dread of evil incarnate where images of darkness and its associated perils and evils and all forms of physical and psychological violence pervade the play. Kimathi is viewed as the chief architect of "this inhospitable shelter of fear, darkness and murder" (9). He is in many instances depicted preferring darkness to light. As this abode progressively becomes more preferable to 'normal' life 'out there', he rejects negotiated "compromise" (37) and would

Rather than that... keep to the forest  
 Until I learn to see their shadows



Moving within darkness.  
(38)

In the face of the perceived conspiracies against him he is more than willing to accept this  
"darkness as my closest protector." (83)

He is filled with "dark fears" (67), lodged if the inference be extended, in a "dark" mind. Their collective dehumanisation will eventually turn the otherwise beautiful "natural environment" (40) into what Kimathi calls "this heartless jungle" (77). This personification of the natural phenomena is derived from the implied character attribute(s) that one Dedan Kimathi infuses into his surroundings.

This superfluity of negative adjectives and images referring to Kimathi, the freedom fighters and the whole theme of the armed anti-colonial struggle reveal Watene's obsession with vilification. Alliterative linguistic consonance connoting evil and destructiveness are closely linked in many instances. "Den", "dusk", "distracted" and "destroy" (7) compressed in the first stage descriptions and Kimathi's accompanying utterances are a mere hint of the overall manipulation of language in order to annihilate the protagonist and the movement's collective image as a "darkness and death" force. The author's compulsive pre-occupation with death as a motif is seen in a fighter's contemplation of his possible individual fate in an impending offensive

**Fighter** So we strike again tomorrow!  
This time I wont come back.  
I know it. I can feel it.  
I'll die. I'll not hear the guns  
Or the bullets flying above me.  
That's when I'll know I'm dead.....  
No, I will not even know it,  
For I'll be dead'!

.....  
And if I die, I wont see my sons.  
Maybe I should hide and go  
To say goodbye to them.  
No, if I die, I die!  
Just like that, I die!  
No more fighting, nothing  
(Enter the Scouts)  
(13-14)

This "die" is repeated five more times in the same page, with "dead" and "den" thrown in for good measure! The consonance of death, den, darkness and Dedan is too evocatively connected and implied throughout to be missed. There are details of gory scenes of killings as fighters regale

Kimathi with the "we killed the loyalists, Marshal, we killed the loyalists..." (30-31). these are complimented with descriptions of the fighters in such phrases like "bloodthirsty maniac" (31) "gangs of men" (46), "the mad one" (57) reflecting "terrorists" who are "covered with blood... All over, man! All over" (50).

Maughan-Brown has drawn attention to the language and images used in colonial racist literature on the Mau Mau, noting that

African brutality is stressed heavily in all the colonial accounts about Mau Mau... The myth of African brutality provided the ideological justification for the Rule of Law' display in colonial writings about "Mau Mau"(89-90).

Subsequently, he has no reservations in dismissing this purportedly "educative" literature with its glaringly racist overtones and prejudice against Mau Mau as "Nothing of Value". He sees close similarities in the fictional works of post-colonial black African writers who are unable to transcend or "free (themselves) from the awesome power of the colonial stereotypes and vocabulary" (200). In his view these

writers' unquestioning use of the settler terminology of "terrorists" "gangs", "gangsters" precludes the admission of any alternative interpretations of the movement and is one of the simplest devices where the writer defines his putative readership - those who can conceive of "terrorists" as "freedom fighters" wont read Ruark for entertainment (127).

This damning language and its attendant images are the norm in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and *Sunset On The Manyatta*. In the latter (novel) "terrorists" and "fugitive" freedom fighters are described as "seeking their drowned sovereignty in pools of blood and frightful scenes of heartless massacres" (40). The language and setting of *Dedan Kimathi* are not merely incidental value free expressions but deliberate association(s) of language and image, reflecting authorial sensibility towards the movement generally, and specifically applied to project its leader(ship) personified by Dedan Kimathi. The design of the play's language and its semantic implications also have an inalienable linkage to the "ideology predicate" underlying the sentiments and concepts.

## 2.8 Authorial Ideology and Kimathi's Image in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*

Ideology, as Meszaros has noted in *The Power of Ideology*, "... is a specific form of materially-anchored social consciousness" (10). It is therefore fallacious to assume that words or concepts are value free in any discourse, literary or historical. The artist or historian is a member of society and imbibes a particular form of such "materially -anchored" consciousness which in turn informs his or her ideological subjectivity.

In a theme as ideologically loaded as a liberation struggle, Clayton's purportedly value-free 'objectivity' in *Counter Insurgency in Kenya, 1952-60*, assumes a dubious distinction when his first footnotes declare that terms like 'insurgents' and 'security forces' are used... without implying any value judgement" (2). And we are expected not to question such 'objectivity' even when further informed that "the colonial government outlawed an organisation known as Mau Mau in August 1950 and subsequently described all insurgents and their activities by this term (2). The common term for these outlawed elements was "terrorists". One can, if (s)he likes to assume like Clayton that terms such as "rebels", "terrorists" and 'security forces' used in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* are equally value-free even with such insinuations like "criminal" (8) applied as direct references to some of the contending forces. Kenyatta's arrest and trial at the onset of the Emergency were a result of the colonial government's wrong assumption of his association with Mau Mau "outlaws"!

The dented image of Kimathi in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* can be best understood in the light of the political economy of post-colonial Kenya which retained the settler system while handing over political power to the emerging educated African elite which spearheaded the play's allusion to "the progress of politics outside the forest" (69). Maughan-Brown has noted that in essence

The whole development of the economy in post independence Kenya had determined an attitude towards Mau Mau which is largely out of sympathy with the forest fighters... The provincial administration and civil service which Kenyatta took over were entirely staffed by loyalists under colonialism and the administrative structure was inherited intact at independence. The administration was therefore, by definition, anti-Mau Mau (195).

Kimathi and fighters were perceived by these loyalists and labelled in the same way Watene sees them: as "misguided rebels" (78). Watene's profuse 'true son of the land' (83) praise for Chief Muhoya and vilification of Kimathi as "a criminal" (8) and "misguided terrorist" (67) representative of the forces of "darkness" (83) are glaring pointers of the author's ideological inclination. The terminology is consistent with the colonial government's and Kenyatta's view of Mau Mau, a movement (he) denounced as 'evil' during the Kapenguria trial and after his release.

The rooting for the neo-colonial political economy and its social structure is craftily voiced by the two freedom fighters turned in 'animal' characters in the jungle. They are interpellated with a distinct capitalist acquisitive instinct which runs counter to the logic that such "animal" characters apparently so comfortable in their jungle "natural environment" (16) cannot (credibly) have this rapacious appetite for expansive farmlands and sophisticated European lifestyles as stated in their preferences.

2nd Scout If we win in the end,  
 What will you take for yourself?  
 1st Scout A piece of land of course;  
 And houses and cars.....  
 I shall have a car,  
 The best in town  
 And drive around in pomp.....  
 Wonderful, don't you think?  
 2nd Scout: Yes, and eat in big hotels,  
 And drink whisky and brandy  
 I shall drink! Wont you drink?  
 (16-17).

Of course the natural act of eating in order to merely sustain the life process (like the starving Oliver Twist in Dickens's novel asking for more porridge) is understandable. But the images conjured in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* are, in all fairness, reminiscent of who, having an over-abundance of worldly gooddies for consumption, developed the (vulgar) habit some ancient Roman aristocrats of gorging themselves with delicacies and subsequently forcing themselves to vomit in order to continue eating. Watene's images of "greedy freedom fighters" are therefore not representatives of the starving freedom fighters in their *real deprivation* in the forest. The hoped-for land was nowhere to be found for these freedom fighters in the forest after Kenyatta promised to protect the white settlers who wanted to stay on "their land" after independence under a black man's government in his address to the settler community at Nakuru in 1962. The free market policy adopted to buy back the land stolen by the settlers at exorbitant prices precluded those like the freedom fighters who could not afford because they had no money and could not be given credit by the British government. The former forest fighters simply lost out. General Baimungi was killed in 1965 for resisting this land policy.

These images of the forest fighters with hunger for large pieces of land are in reality an allegory of the greed that characterised the emerging African bourgeois nurtured in the womb of the colonial regime and to whom the British handed over political power, as Kipkorir notes in his "Mau Mau and The Politics of Power Transfer in Kenya" paper. Watene's description is a prelude to his justification of the kind of society that emerged in independent Kenya in *Sunset On The Manyatta*, so well describe in Kibera's *Voices In The Dark* and Imbuga's *Betrayal In The City* as a "man eat man society" (45).

The fighters dream of leaving their forest 'natural environment' (16) to live a life of luxurious comfort perpetually 'feasting' (94) interestingly contradicts the implied view of their 'comfort' in the forest when they fail to express outrage when some of their compatriots plan to

burn that (settler) house (17) which they would obviously prefer to inherit intact. This runs against the grain and sentiment of their view about acquiring the same settler house!

Interestingly William Ochieng's review of Kaggia's *Roots of Freedom* quotes this section in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* in his peremptory dismissal of all fiction on Mau Mau as 'ignorant and facile literature', including novels, that purport to shed light on the Mau Mau struggle (135). His choice of this (fictional!) 'evidence' to support a historicist-empiricist contention is understandable when one realises the ideological linkage(s) between artist and historian here find convergence in a sensibility that damns Mau Mau as irrelevant to the Kenya freedom struggle. Jomo Kenyatta had himself set the tone of this ideological offensive against radical nationalism in his April 1965 attack on Kaggia for lacking "correct wisdom" because Kaggia refused to see independence as a golden opportunity to join the gravy train style of politics centred on "taking something for yourself", citing some of Kaggia's erstwhile detention compatriots who had imbibed such wisdom after Kenya's attainment of "independence" and put it to good use!

It is thus difficult, indeed impossible, to exempt Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* in its portrayal of Kimathi from the category of fictional works in post-colonial Kenya up to 1975 which Maughan-Brown categorises as anti-Mau Mau because they contain

the torsions of vocabulary and form... which... reveal their implication in the general ideological offensive which was then being developed by the neo-colonial bourgeoisie around the crucial question of the value to be assigned to Mau Mau in Kenyan national consciousness. An analysis of the novels of Mwangi, Mang'ua and Wachira will demonstrate that all three ultimately represented Mau Mau in just as negatively equivocal a manner as the politicians and businessmen whose political and commercial interests were most obviously served by the tactic of retrospective criminalisation of the movement (206).

Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* reflects this imbibing of the "Key Components of the Dominant Ideology" in post-colonial Kenya, including "The Kenyatta Myth, and the Rejection of Mau Mau" (190). Kanogo's review of Buijtenhuijs' *Mau Mau Twenty Years After* explains the myth as the Kenyatta regime's felt "need to underplay Mau Mau... in other words, rather than portraying Mau Mau as being at or near the centre of the independence struggle... the president (Kenyatta) is viewed as being solely responsible for the achievement of independence" (389). The same view is shared by the colonial metropolitan, which sees Kimathi the movement through the same ideological used in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. Ndungu Mugoya's "Forgotten Heroes" article in the *Finance* magazine of December 31<sup>st</sup> 1996 points out that

The Kenyatta land policy favoured the new African elites and particularly those who contributed the least to the independence struggle... Most of the beneficiaries of the fruits of independence turned out to be the infamous collaborators, homeguards and their sons who

having betrayed most of their kinsmen to colonialists had accumulated reasonable wealth and acquired a measure of education... (the) real heroes of Kenya's independence are either languishing in poverty or buried in unmarked graves (28-29).

One sees the uncanny linkage between the (underlying) ideology of the 'Kenyatta land policy' and Watene's ready consignment of Kimathi to 'his neglected grave' (85). "The Kenyatta myth" ignores the relevance of Mau Mau at the core of the national freedom struggle. Avasaya's article titled "Kimathi: The untold story" in *The Crusader*, of March 1999 highlights Kimathi's predicament. Avasaya notes that

No fate of any Kenyan nationalist evokes more emotion than that of Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi Wachiuri. This could be attributed to the shocking neglect of his family as well as the role of his own colleagues in his capture by the British forces and subsequent hanging.... Nowhere in history does one see a nationalist betrayed by colleagues, neglected by historians (until recently) and unrecognised by those in authority (9).

Watene's fiction provides the "literary exposition" of the ideological framework underlying this official treatment of Kimathi and the *real freedom fighters*.

A cursory perusal will reveal that notwithstanding their obvious generic differences, there is a definite sense in which *My Son For My Freedom*, *Dedan Kimathi* and *Sunset On The Manyatta* constitute a sequential trilogy outlining Watene's ideological sensibility towards Mau Mau. The moral (if one views it as such) deriving from *My Son For My Freedom* is that those who live (or resist) by the sword should as well perish by the same. In *My Son For My Freedom* Gacheru faces 'justice' from colonialist security forces, paying with his own and his son's life for embarking on this "Slaughterous Adventure" (45) after rejecting "wise" counsel from such 'moderate' loyalist elements like Karanja. *Dedan Kimathi* with its gleeful "Surrender! Surrender now! Surrender!" (97) crystallises into a rhetoric about the "meaninglessness of it all" in calling for the capitulation of the remaining freedom fighters after Kimathi's capture.

*Sunset On The Manyatta* shifts the focus from the jungle setting of *Dedan Kimathi* and becomes the denouement of the play's allusion to "the progress of politics outside the forest" (69). The rejection of Mau Mau's violent approach in *My Son For My Freedom* because "this is not the only way" (17) is also evident in *Sunset On The Manyatta's* vociferous condemnation of the forest fighters as "terrorists" and "fugitive(s)" (39) with images portraying them creating "pools of blood and frightful scenes of heartless massacres... wasteful massacres" (40-41).

In the 'trilogy' the profuse praise for the homeguard and Christian collaborationist elements contrasts sharply with the outright vilification of Mau Mau. The brutal homeguard in *Sunset On The Manyatta* is merely a good 'law and order' conscious 'government man' (38) while

the "educated, upright and honest" Christian loyalists in *Dedan Kimathi* are in this novel as only 'pragmatically' acting in the interest of "their own protection under the ruling hand. Perhaps they were humanitarians and could not stand wasteful massacres" (41). Colonialist violence against the struggling people is casually justified and the burning of the people's houses explained away with the phrase that 'the government was punishing those who had sheltered the deceased' (41) Mau Mau 'fugitive' (39). This agent of 'mere anarchy', after being 'mercifully' spared the prospect of being killed by 'enraged peace-loving citizens' is summarily executed when his head is shattered by a "clean rifle shot" from the aforementioned law-abiding 'government man'.

Even where Watene apparently seems to concede that Mau Mau fighters might after all have 'had a cause' (239) in their pursuit of freedom, he still laments that 'they did not understand it from the point of what you call civilized human beings' (239). These 'savage natives' then must needs have 'sense', 'sanity' and 'civilization' hammered into their heads through soft. Methods like Western education, or where these fail, be bludgeoned into submission by the homeguards and Ian Hendersons of the 'superior' European civilization!

No one, ideally, should have any quarrel with Watene's quite valid protestation against colonial injustice, where the subjects peoples were expected to "sweat for their masters without raising a finger" (41). In colonial Kenya, we are informed, the black people

were sick of fear of the white man and his gun. He did not promise anything more than endless servitude. They knew, deep inside, that their lot was servitude. They knew, as well, that they were human (42).

To affirm this human dignity, the freedom fighters whom Watene calls "terrorists" took up arms against this oppression, following in the footsteps of the Iregi generation which in the 1830's rebelled and overthrew the harsh rule of the previous generation(s) of Kikuyu elders. It is therefore paradoxical that Watene's philosophical exposition in this novel later veers towards persuading the same people who so valiantly fought against the white man's oppression to accept a replication of the same situation in post-colonial Kenya as normal simply because the leadership is black. To paraphrase Watene's own terminology in *Dedan Kimathi*, this "weird" and "twisted" logic is best summed up in Avasaya's "Dedan Kimathi: The Untold Story" article in the March 1999 issue of *The Crusader*, where the writer points out that "according to Kenyatta all they (freedom fighters) wanted was a black man as leader of this country and a Kenyan flag and nothing else"(11).

Accordingly, Watene's protagonist in *Sunset On Manyatta*, the young anglicised Harry ole Kantai, replaces the detached pacifist 'neutral' Neighbour in *My Son For My Freedom*. Harry (who

prefers his English name until he repudiates it at the end of the novel as token recognition of his 'Africanness') is completely "baffled by ... those others who due to some strange influence ... took it upon themselves to fight, to demand and to kill, took it upon themselves to hope endlessly for a mystery gale called Uhuru which would sweep them and cast them to yonder gates of wealth and power" (94-95). Subsequently the (supposedly populist) expectations of black Kenyans are expressed as "*Uhuru na Kazi ... (and) Uhuru na Kenyatta*" (94).

The ensuing vision of a merely black leadership fits well with the aims of the British-designed 'independence', described in Rosberg and Nottingham's *The Myth Of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* as intended to take care of settler interests by, among other safeguards, instituting a type of "land reform" with only a slight shift from "creating a two-fold elite-mass division to a three-fold stratified (social) structure consisting of an elite, a settled peasantry and a labouring class" (305). This arrangement, as the British knew, "would be fundamentally unacceptable to (those) nationalist leaders committed to breaking that system" (306). In his July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2000 article in the *Sunday* explaining "Why Odinga and Kenyatta Parted Ways," Anyang Nyong'o *Nation* notes that

Kaggia was the first to resign from the Kenyatta government over the land issue. Odinga and many others followed suit. In the manifesto of the Kenya Peoples Union (KPU) and the party's ideological document - the Wananchi Declaration - land occupied centre stage. KPU was not against private ownership of land as such. It did not oppose, however, KANU's policy of allowing gross inequalities in land ownership that satisfied the acquisitive instincts of the nascent capitalist class while pauperising large sections of the Kenya peasantry. Today's poverty in Kenya dates back to the inappropriate land policies that were adopted in the 1960s and that were opposed by the KPU ... In his book *Not Yet Uhuru*, Odinga lamented the neglect of "the common man" by the state in the midst of impressive economic growth figures of the new nation in the 1960s. It looked as if Kenya was bound to be a nation where rapid economic growth would lead to the affluence of a few while the majority wallowed in misery (15).

Kenyan society was by 1974 polarised along these class rather than racial lines, and Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and *Sunset On The Maryatta* seek to rationalise the mere "*Uhuru na Kenyatta*" view because the euphoria of a decade earlier occasioned by "the lowering of the Union Jack and raising of the Kenya flag" (124) had not brought the expected social equity in 'independent Kenya'.

The link between *Dedan Kimathi* and *Sunset On The Maryatta* in ideological exposition is notable in the distinction between the 'misguided terrorist' "forest approach" to the politics of liberation and the 'civilised' constitutionalist method described as "the progress of politics outside the forest" (69). The "meaningless rhetoric" of the condemned protagonist in *Dedan Kimathi*



appears and is set against the stark parallelism of the novel's praise for the fly-whisk waving politicians who sway the masses with "hilarious tunes of nationalism" (101). The independence politicians, like Watene's Kimathi who "aspires to true nationalism" (68) also preach against "the rich (white) minorities (responsible for) the wounds that the black man had suffered at the hands of the colonial regime" (123). Independence is described as "political freedom" (125) to preclude any critical analysis of the political economy of neo-colonialism. The loud condemnation of the white man's and injustice" (95) ignores the rich black minority comprising of the gobbling Kimerias, the predatory Chuis and the burdensome Mzigo's of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, or the grabbing Kiois of *Ngahika Ndeenda* in the new found independence. Unlike the 'disagreeable' Karega in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, Watene's Ole Kantai in *Sunset On The Manyatta* does not have "much food for thought except that ever growing Africanism that was slowly forming the greater part of his sub-conscience. He had slowly started loving everything that was African and generally disliking everything that was foreign" (215). Harry, we are told, "had acquired the spirit of nationalism in which nothing else other than the great black nation mattered" (237). The 'independence' expectations of the emerging African bourgeois are succinctly thus expressed as

"We will be able to own large shambas" said one.

"Everything will be under our control" said another (95).

The vision of a mere change of guard derives from a rather simplistic rationale that during classical colonialism discrimination on the basis of skin colour is the most perceptible form of injustice. Watene's ole Kantai, like those in *My Son For My Freedom*, *Dedan Kimathi* and *Sunset on The Manyatta* therefore sees "the great disease that afflicted the society" (84) and is accordingly

full of dislike for the white man... A white face started to become a hateful face. It symbolised selfishness. A white man seemed to represent the authority of injustice... a white man got paid more than anyone else, regardless of whether he did the same work or even less work... The Post Office was a white man's establishment and therefore it was a place of injustice. The government was the government of the white man therefore it was an injustice government. The white man formulated the law, and therefore the law was unjust. The whole country reeked with injustices. So ole Kantai joined the silent cry of the oppressed (95).

The conventional logic is that once the white man is visibly removed from the official management of state affairs, every vestige of injustice associated with racial discrimination automatically disappears. The selfishness of the white man will, supposedly, be substituted by some form of "social justice" arising from black African rule, so that Watene's protagonist in this novel is happy that

Independence came and was hailed by everyone ... the lowering of the Union Jack and the hoisting of the Kenya flag. It was a great moment in the history of the black man in Kenya and in the whole continent. Ole Kantai was fascinated by the number of people that were there to witness the overhaul of colonial rule (124).

There is no critique of injustice thereafter because it cannot conceivably exist within the paradigms of such a vision. The protagonist is therefore immediately removed from the local scene and taken to Germany for “further studies” in order to obviate the need to examine any social injustices in the emerging neo-colonial situation. Suffering the white-hot heat of German racism, he can look back home with nostalgia as the ideal place and feel that

Africa was home.... the only place that Harry knew, where life was real. What could be more real than a knot of labourers slowly eating the ground before them with their hoes, while they laughed about jokes derived from their suffering? But they need not laugh only about their suffering. There were moments when they forgot their suffering within the very suffering. This suffering had become their (way of) life, and therefore had ceased. What could be more real than a pack of hunched twisted beggars creeping through the streets and stretching their hands to receive? The sun shone every morning and warmed their dens for the coming darkness... With the coming of freedom, which was called Uhuru, a new breath had started to vibrate in the lives that had been beaten down to almost sterility... Yes, those people had cause to rejoice (230-231).

Condescending charity is thus presented as the solution to the problems of poverty in neo-colonialism, a sop against the betrayed hopes of real freedom, including economic freedom. Those like Okot p'Bitek disinclined to agree with Watene's view that charity to the dispossessed creates satisfaction point out in *Artists, The Ruler* that

men and women are happiest when they (freely) participate. Receiving can be a humiliating act. Beggars are not the proudest of men (67).

Against p'Bitek's view that only invalids, the sick or children need be recipients simply because they are either incapacitated or too young, Watene posits his beggars more as part of the natural landscape than products of socio-economic forces (*what could more real*, as he so aptly notes). The labourers “slowly eating the land with their hoes” are imbued, with almost deliberate overtones, as enjoying their share and role in *uhuru* in this peculiar way. This ingenious description implies in a crafty way that the fulfilment of the dreams of the forest fighters in *Dedan Kimathi* “regarding eating” after *uhuru* have indeed come to pass!. *Kula kazi* in this our *Uhuru na Kazi* and ignore those like of Ngugi's rebellious Karega in *Petals of Blood* who complains that there are those who “drink people's blood and say hypocritical prayers of devotion to skin oneness and to nationalism even as skeletons of bones walked to lonely graves” (344) as jealous enemies of peace and development. Protect this our hard-won independence, Watene's protagonist might exhort.

The images evoked in the above extract are reminiscent of the cargo cult view, where the privileged citizen is viewed as some heaven-sent saviour from our earthly privations. There is no tone of conscientious revulsion at the reality of a citizenry reduced to beggars evident in Laban Erapu's *The Guilt of Giving* poem. Watene's beggars might perhaps even applaud the philanthropic acts without denouncing the plundering of those who (could) have reduced them to this pathetic state - unlike those in Kibera's *Voices In The Dark*. Watene's labourers are not imbued with the critical consciousness of the workers in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* who denounce exploitation and who, to use Watene's term are as "sick" (42) of black leaders' oppression as they were of the white man's. These latter would view the wholesale plunder of national resources by the political and business elite in the name of serving the people as the type of self-serving leadership described in Taban Lo Liyong's *Eating Chiefs*.

The strange twist then is that Watene abhors "servitude" (42) in colonial Kenya but implicitly applauds it in post-colonial Kenya just because the new masters are black. He denies his suffering labourers awareness, like Ngotho in Kibera's "The Spider's Web" story, that there exists "the irreconcilable gap between the classes" (138) and preferring, like the emerging bourgeois class, to "obstruct vision" (144) and "see things blurred" (145) like *through a film darkly!*

In the light of the later "alternative view(s)" in the fiction that dispute Watene's image of Kimathi and the armed struggle for freedom, it is important to quote the view expressed in the September 15th issue of *The Flame* magazine Vol. I No. I arguing that

Kenya's independence was a tragedy, mainly because it never benefited the people who had laid their lives on the line for it... Instead of laying the foundations that would have shielded us from crunching poverty, we inadvertently allowed the emergence of a crop of leaders who were bent on pushing us down the drain. The mistake those who were fighting for independence made was to fail to differentiate between economic and political independence. Indeed, between 1954 and 1963 - a whole nine years - the colonialist was busy preparing those who would take the reigns of power, in a clever plan to make sure that none of those who had gone to the forest to fight for independence or their offspring would get a chance...by selling the idea that the country needed educated leaders, knowing too well that those in the struggle had been denied the chance to go to school.

To succeed in this scheme, the colonialist made a round of missionary schools in search of "good boys" who would be (en)trusted with perpetuating the interests of foreigners even after independence (12-13).

These "good boys" are praised in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*, craftily in Kimathi's own words, as "educated upright and honest" (30), the Christian converts so set against perceived Mau Mau 'evil', and especially the savagery of the forest "bad boys". Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi will revisit this missionary factor in a rather disagreeable tone, as will Kahiga's Kimathi in his expressed reservations about the conduct of educated people during the freedom struggle. Naturally,

Watene's view of the forest fighters in *Dedan Kimathi* is expressed through the educated Harry Kantai in *Sunset on The Manyatta*.

Watene's vilified, captured, dead and buried Kimathi in "his neglected grave (86) has no place in the new political dispensation because he cannot give any charity to the beggared populace like the overlord in Liyong's "The First King In The World" poem who thrives in "secured satisfaction" (27) after a "brawny scramble" (27) and "a war waged" (28) and thereafter deigns to "distribute all the spoils" (28) to the henceforth dispossessed. Kimathi has no place in such a set up because, as Wahinya notes in his "Anger over Kenya's Forgotten Heroes" article in *The People* daily of 30th October, 2000,

Kimathi wanted bounty freedom and a better life for the future generations of this country. But no one in the political establishment later or today raised a finger when he was shot and hanged at Kamiti Maximum Prison (2).

The Kenyan political elite's discomfiture at Mandela's eulogisation of Kimathi's role in the Kenya freedom struggle at Kasarani on July 13th 1990 should be understood in this light - as sentiments against the dominant ideology of post-colonial Kenya vis-à-vis the nature of Kimathi's struggle. Watene's ole Kantai would have no time for a dead Kimathi, who in the novel's logic, has nothing to give to the needy beggars' in independent Kenya.

"Africanicism", the basis of Watene's presentation of the "black man's independence" as an Eldorado for all Kenyans, underlines his description of the deprived masses as "simple men who were poor and happy" (215). Harry Kantai Watene's protagonist, is now among the few privileged blacks, "living in a large, four-bedroomed flat that had a magnificent sitting room" (262) and happily married to "an intelligent, light-skinned Kikuyu girl who devoted most of her time to social work and the betterment of her people" (263). The implications are that there really is nothing to complain about now that (some) black Africans own land in the former White Highlands and live in European style houses - the expectations expressed by the forest fighters in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* - as well as driving the desired big cars!

This is the implied idyllic *Kenya in Uhuru*, the ideal *Kenya yetu. Kenya Nchi Huru. Hakuna Matata*. No perceived problems, even with the existence of that harsh reality J. M. Kariuki called "a nation of ten millionaires and ten million beggars" in the newly "independent Kenya".

Mahood in *The Colonial Encounter* notes that some writers are unable to empathise with the condition of the masses in those accounts where

the indigenous writer... is usually quite as distanced from the dominated side in the colonial encounter as the best expatriate writers are distanced from their dominating compatriots...the third world writer is again setting himself apart from the society he depicts (171).

Achebe's "The Truth of Fiction" essay in *Hopes and Impediments* warns that the greatest danger for art's role in society is that "if we starve it (the creative imagination) or pollute it the quality of our life is depressed or soiled" (101). In Achebe's view

A person who is insensitive to the suffering of his fellows (humanity) is that way because he lacks the imaginative power to get under the skin of another human being and see the world through eyes other than his own. History and fiction are replete with instances of correlation between indifference and lack of imagination... Privilege, you see, is one of the great adversaries of the imagination; it spreads a thick layer of adipose tissue over our sensitivity (102).

Kimathi and the freedom struggle are in Watene's works conceptualised within an ideology so riddled with contradictions that Watene can in one and the same breath be seen to praise the freedom struggle and yet see the enemies of the popular cause as "humanitarians (who) could not stand wasteful massacres" (41). Yet the same "humanitarian sensibility" negates the essence of humanism by accepting exploitative practices that reduce the Kenyan masses to the status of feudal slave labourers who the protagonist no longer sees "the disease that afflicted the society" (64) in Kenyatta's *black ruled* independent Kenya where the rallying "land and freedom" call of the forest fighters has conveniently been substituted with "*uhuru na kazi*" ("freedom and labour"). Without the white man visibly in power, the labouring populace nothing to complain about, can have the unlimited freedom to labour themselves unto kingdom come if they so wish!

Like Paton in *Cry, The Beloved Country*, Watene's *Sunset On The Manyatta* justifies exploitative capitalist policies as "permissible" as long as some condescending philanthropic acts of "giving something back", perhaps even "so little", to the people so ruthlessly exploited are part of public conduct purportedly in the interests of social welfare. In *The Challenge Of Nationhood*, Mboya talks of the need for African socialism "to ensure that the resulting pattern of our economy, as growth takes place, conforms to our ideas of democracy, social justice and social values" (103). The whole philosophy of African socialism in Kenya as Okot p' Bitek notes in *Artist, The Ruler*, was a farce and turned out to be "a most bizarre hoax" and "a disguise for naked capitalism" (94). In his foreword to *The Challenge of Nationhood*, Kenyatta pays glowing tribute to these "ideas and ideals which have been of great importance in the shaping of independent Kenya". Watene's *Sunset On The Manyatta* with its images of the happy labourers immersed in their commitment to Kenyatta's exhortation to dedicate themselves to the noble ideals of *uhuru na kazi* is a tellingly valid exposition for such a philosophical outlook..

The justification of this “all is well because blacks are now in power” vision is what Ngugi in *Barrel of a Pen* rejects as an obscurantist view, adopted by “some well placed Kenyans (who) will concede ...that patriotic Kenyans... fought bravely to end the colonial stage of imperialism domination... (while implying that) since the midnight of December 12, 1963, we have arrived at the best of all possible world systems (60). Watene is indeed loth to credit the forest fighters their significant contribution to this achievement, for, as noted in his *Dedan Kimathi*, he sees theirs as a chapter of “darkness and death”, a script written and enacted on the Kenyan scene by ‘deranged’ and “misguided rebels” from the depths of Nyandarua forest, and (probably) best forgotten in accordance with Kenyatta’s exhortation to forget the past after attaining “independence”.

There is, definitely, an undeniable congruence between Watene’s *Dedan Kimathi* and colonialist accounts like Henderson’s *The Hunt For Kimathi*, especially in terms of language and the image(s). Does the play qualify as “Nothing of value,” to quote Maughan-Brown’s phrase dismissing colonial settler literature on the movement?

There is a great temptation to dismiss it off-hand together with colonial literature because it downplays and vilifies a cause seen by many anti-colonial critiques like Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* as a unique example of truly heroic resistance against classical colonialism. Watene’s sentiment on Kimathi and the fighters as a band of “misguided terrorists” goes against the grain of nationalist feeling. Kinyatti’s dismissal of the play’s “distortion” of Kimathi’s nature as objectified in *Kimathi Letters* is to be understood in this light.

The point, however, is that the play’s image of Kimathi expresses the viewpoint of the “other side” (of the coin as it were) in a contest where the combatants see their cause as morally unassailable. The freedom fighters had their heritage to reclaim while the settlers also felt the land was ‘their’ property under colonial rule. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* says the violence of the freedom fighter is merely called forth by colonial government intransigence. Although he paints Kimathi as an obdurate and ‘evil’ character, Watene allows Kimathi to point out that it was colonial government response to peaceful methods that “forced us to this bloodshed” (35).

The conventional “ethics and morality” standards applied by Watene therefore leave so many questions unanswered, like the “moral” basis of

Is there blood thicker than blood  
 Like there is justice fairer than justice?  
 What is the truth and what the lie,  
 Which the virtue and which the vice?  
 O but it’s as well.  
 Let it be ..... Let it be .....

(96)

This endorses the pacifist approach in struggle *whatever the degree of injustice perpetrated on the violently oppressed*. The basis on which Watene premises the 'moral' perception of the 'evil' personified by the aberration he sees in Kimathi camouflages whole question of the causes of "Mau Mau evils". Waigwa points out that as they read Watene's play the settlers must be laughing all the way because its evocation of their viewpoint about such 'savagery' must leave wondering whether settler accounts were all that necessary if a black Kenyan writer can so effectively evoke the same images of Kimathi and the Mau Mau fighters without inviting the "white racist" tag to the writers.

Watene presents us with only one side in the perceived complex character of Kimathi and the colonial situation, what Peter Abrahams *A Wreath For Udomo* calls "a whiff of the subjective reality of colonial politics" (69).

There is, as we shall see, a distancing from Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* in the later fiction on Kimathi in what it is a dichotomous continuous strand of creative exposition on the essence of Kimathi from other perspectives analysed. In his preface to *Shakespeare's Historical Plays* Gupta provides a "springboard statement" from which we might adopt as we examine the treatment of the later responses to Watene's play, essentially that

in elaborating in the later chapters what I have ... said in the first, I have often had to take up the same situations and characters, and the basic argument has remained the same all through. This means that there have been occasional repetitions, though I hope that even where I have repeated myself I have been able to bring out a new aspect of a continuous argument (vii).

Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* employs, as noted, various stylistic devices to project the author's negative image of the protagonist. The whole portrayal of the freedom struggle from *My Son For My Freedom* through *Dedan Kimathi* to *Sunset On The Maryatta* rationalises the social structures buttressing the colonial legacy. The negative image of Kimathi as a destructive character, viewed by some as a "distortion" of Kimathi's nature and the essence struggle are what Ngugi and Micere Mugo set out to counter in their creation of a different image of Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

## 2.9 The Interface between Watene's Kimathi and Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi

There were, expectedly, bound to be some similarities in the implied character traits of Kimathi in both plays, arising from their predication on the same historical character and experience. But the *nature of interpretation* of such traits like his stubborn commitment to the Mau

Mau ideals would of course be expected to differ. Some expressions like “Tell me more” denoting Kimathi’s contemptuous dismissal of the “peaceful constitutionalist approach”, appear in both plays. There is, one would say, an dialectical interface between the two plays and their images.

Most of the critics’ observations on the two plays posit a complete separation and rigid dichotomy in the images of Kimathi. The generic commonality and historical derivation are undeniable in the sense of a particular historical character accorded certain attributes by the playwrights and other creative writers. What most literary critics have rarely seen is the interface between the diametrical oppositions in the images. In the interviews for his “The Drama of Francis Imbuga” thesis Gachugu Makini reports the leading Kenyan dramatist positing the existence of a rather striking interface between the two plays because, in Imbuga’s view “after page 34 of Ngugi’s play he was doing nothing less than re-interpreting what Watene had written. Because the sentiments were clear they agreed with what Watene was writing. Some of the lines are even similar, for example: we will sit at a conference table and then we shall be given independence” (309). This was in response to Makini’s question regarding the role of “ideology in art” (307). Imbuga’s contention forms the basis for examining the existence of an interface between the two plays as a prelude to the analysis of Kimathi’s image in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

The dialectical interface linkage, even in the apparent diametrical oppositions, is evident at specific points in the plays. In Watene’s case the lonely suspicious figure weighed down by doubts and anxiety about everything and everybody else is the “microcosm image” of his “deepest self” in the depths of the forest. He sums himself up as one in a quandary, seeing that

How like a hunted antelope I strain my ears and nerves

.....

(He sighs deeply)

The British hunt me down relentlessly

To send me to the gallows

My mother has run amok

And they torture my wife in the hope

That she will lead them to arrest me.

Those around me have grown faithless

And those that have faith I cannot trust

My guardian spirits forsake me

While my rituals lack their mystic power

My nights are thick with dark fears

That send me walking in my dreams.

Lonely solitude overflows my cup

And this whispering shroud of the forest

Seems to conspire to betray me (67).



This isolation and doubts about the possibility of anything other than “spiritual victory” (68) over colonialism will be nowhere in the steely determination of his up-coming “counterface” in the later play who entertains no doubts about himself and publicly informs his compatriots in the forest that the movement’s high command has

.sent emissaries to Ethiopia  
 To see if we can get a supply of arms  
 But I must continue to stress  
 That first and foremost  
 We must rely on our strength  
 As the most conscious,  
 The best organised fighting arm  
 of the Kenyan people  
 We must continue to make more guns  
 I want to see every warrior with  
 Hand grenades  
 Machine guns  
 Molotov cocktails  
 Every camp, every Mbuci, should have  
 Its factory  
 We now have excellent blacksmiths  
 who can make guns and machine guns  
 So you can’t tell the difference between  
 Ours and those captured from the enemy (67).

It is a matter of conjecture whether it is merely coincidental or deliberate design that the two opposing faces and postures of Kimathi appear in similar pages in the two plays. While Watene casts him as an isolated negative character, the prospective counterpart who replaces him in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* appears as a positive character, at one with fellow compatriots not despairing but engaged in “planting seeds for a future society ... in the forest (while) armed in body, mind and soul” (68) for the task at hand. Wanjala’s protest against the later playwrights (re)creation of Kimathi as “a man without self-doubt” is an indicator of the nature and image of the “upcoming” Kimathi. The hints are that like his creators, his ideological dispensation will be radically different from that of his predecessor in Watene’s play. Notwithstanding some similarities in Kimathi’s sentiments against colonialism in the two plays notwithstanding, this is the sense in which the playwrights in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* create a definite rapture with Watene’s play. The mere “re-interpretation” facets that Imbuga alludes to are in essence the interfaces of “Kimathi in the forest”, signifying at one and the same time the linkage and eventual rapture with Watene’s Kimathi.

## 2.10 The 'Negation' of Watene's Kimathi by Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi

The controversial portrayal of Kimathi in Watene's 1974 play was the impetus for the play seeking to counter the perceived 'distortion' and 'misrepresentation' in the 1976 publication of Ngugi and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. The playwrights' scant regard for Watene's version is evident in their preface. Njama's *Mau Mau From Within* is cited as a 'correct' (historical) source material for creative inspiration: 'Here was a man who had fought and lived alongside Kimathi, giving us a completely different picture from what colonial writers had left behind, like Ian Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi* (viii). For the two playwrights Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and its protagonist does not exist.

The play's perspective and corresponding image of Kimathi will be seen as the outcome of the artists' disillusionment with the dominant ideology and the "state of affairs" in post-colonial Kenya. Our examination will reveal how the artists manipulate language and other stylistic devices to counter the negative portrayal of Kimathi in the earlier play. It is of course debatable whether Ngugi and Micere only "coincidentally" started their effort towards creating a different Kimathi in 1974, the year Watene's play was published. What is undeniable is that the publication of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi's* in 1976 had a lot to do in terms of presenting a "counter-image" to neutralise whatever impact Watene's play might have had on in its Kenyan audience.

Plot has been identified as a major stylistic device used in the indictment of Kimathi in Watene's play. The plot structure of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is (diametrically) designed to counter the effect of that in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*.

## 2.11 Plot As Interpellatory device in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

The later play opens, not with a declaration of the protagonist's guilt, but his arraignment in a colonial court for contravening "Special Emergency Regulations" (3). The courtroom description reflects segregated sitting patterns for whites and blacks. This illustrates the myriad social injustices inherent in the colonial system along racial/class lines. In this atmosphere the technical charge of possession of a firearm read against Kimathi sounds hollow in view of the glaring travesty against the dictates of natural justice. The implicit moral invalidation of colonialism's case draws sympathy towards Kimathi. Aware that 'justice' based on the colonial "penal code" (3) will constitute nothing but mockery when white colonialism assumes the position of aggrieved party, is the prosecutor, judge and eventual executor of the case against Kimathi, we watch with real suspense for the drama to unfold, either to invalidate or mitigate this supposition.

Where the opening scene and "charge" in the earlier play mitigate against Kimathi, the converse is true in the later play. Our sympathies are here naturally evoked in favour of Kimathi and against colonialism, which is presented as the 'guilty party' in this case.

The specific charge of illegal possession of a firearm therefore comes across as a mere technicality selectively applied to criminalise those who oppose colonialism and its injustices. Whites cannot be charged with a similar offence in this or other circumstances, let alone face the even more remote possibility of being convicted. Colonialism and its lopsided system of justice are thus squarely placed on the spotlight. Kimathi's refusal to plead to the charge of "possession of a firearm.... without a licence... under special Emergency regulations, (3) creates the suspense and rationale which the conventional plot shall examine to unravel his dialectical relationship with the system that has put him on trial and the circumstances under which he is charged.

The subsequent dramatization of the black man's history and the various stages of oppression from the slave trade where people are sold for "a heap of trinkets" (5) and during colonialism remain the backdrop against which the defiant Kimathi of the opening scene continually features in the minds of the audience. Images of resistance to this oppression as "defiant blacks" (5) voice their protests and aspirations in the face of ruthless suppression now acquire meaning in relation to the charge facing Kimathi at the height of resistance. This is illustrated in the way Waitina, a white police officer, interrogates a poor peasant on suspicion of mere connection as "Mtu ya Kimathi" (7). The protagonist who has as yet not uttered a word in the whole drama is thus placed in context and identified as a member, leader and symbol of resistance against colonial repression. In the process, the question of his (presumed) 'guilt' or innocence pales into irrelevance or becomes immaterial in the context as we examine the nature of the contending social forces.

This depersonalisation of Kimathi precedes alongside a conscious effort to erase from our minds the negative image of the Mau Mau as propagated by settler writings or pronouncements. The deliberately selective choice of those allowed to use terminology denoting the conflicting forces is illustrative; white men like Waitina use the term "terrorists" (6) as expected, while the authors' stage descriptions refer to "two retreating Mau Mau guerillas" (6). The term "terrorist" according to the Oxford Concise Dictionary denotes "one who favours or uses terror inspiring methods of governing or coercing government or community", while "guerrilla" denotes "a person taking part in irregular fighting by small independently acting groups". The latter term, unlike "terrorist", does not criminalise the participant, and at the same time invites examination of the nature or justness of the alluded cause. It is significant that Etherton in *The Development of African*

*Drama* talks of "the so-called terrorists" (169) to signify his opposition to the implications of the term from the colonialist viewpoint.

This delinking of Kimathi and the Mau Mau from the criminalisation arising from colonialist and settler vocabulary is accompanied by the indictment of the whole colonial system. Satirical irony is applied effectively against colonial sympathizers whose loud denunciation only strengthens the audience's feeling of the justness of Kimathi and the fighting people's cause. An alternative between two government soldiers is used to illustrate this view. The second Kings African Rifles soldier's attempt to justify colonialist violence only succeeds in exposing its 'evil' nature when viewed against the 'positive' violence of Mau Mau.

**First Soldier:** [anger and cynicism fused]: Where are the terrorists who were supposed to be all over Nyeri? We've been patrolling all night without as much catching sight of a single one of them. Simply harassing innocent villagers. The way mzungu makes us thirst to kill one another!

**Second Soldier:** [irrelevantly. Viciously]: The bloodyfuckin' Mau Mau are finished without the bugger Kimathi!

**First Soldier:** What is the idea of arresting a whole village then?

**Second soldier:** [irritably]: For screening. These natives are very slippery, man. They are the same people as attacked the homeguard post last night trying to release Kimathi. But they will see. Their bloody Kimathi is appearing in court in Nyeri today. This afternoon he is going to get a proper court trial. Not like the ones he used to stage in the forest. See how fair Mzungu is? (12)

Of course the 'slippery' natives here become positive characters for their daring effort to thwart "Mzungu's" purported 'fair' "justice". The implicit message is that no one would risk their lives to rescue a real "fugitive" from natural justice!

The colonial government and settler myths about Mau Mau evil are debunked as the loyalist Kings African Rifles soldier overstretches his imagination of scenes where "angry mothers who have lost their husbands and children might want to tear that beastly Kimathi to pieces" (13). The first overt authorial statement in regard to the dominant image projected of the protagonist in the rest of the play now appears as this negative colonialist image of Kimathi is countered with the positive perception imbibed by the struggling masses where "Kimathi is a hero to the people" (13). Popular myths about him are invoked to hint at the image(s) that will emerge when he appears in the forthcoming trials.

**Woman:** Listen carefully. Dedan Kimathi has been captured.

**Boy:** So they say. But is it true what they also say?

**Boy:** [becoming really excited]: They say... they say he used to talk with God.

**Woman:** Yes: The fighting god in us-the oppressed ones

**Boy:** They say...They say that he could crawl on his belly for ten miles or more

**Woman:** He had to be strong for us- because of us Kenyan people.

**Boy:** They say.. they say he could change himself into a bird, an aeroplane, wind or anything.

**Woman:** Faith in a cause can work miracles.....

**Boy:** May be they only captured his shadow, his outer form...don't you think?...and let his spirit abroad in arms (20-21).

The hint that the playwrights' 'vision' (iii) will project issues beyond Kimathi's personal lifespan comes across. This projection is echoed in the Woman's strong conviction that Kimathi's spirit is indomitable, that "no bullet can kill him as long as women continue to bear children" (21). Significantly, the Boy, Girl and Woman remain unnamed and therefore symbolic characters with certain roles complementing Kimathi's throughout the play. Kimathi has now been defined and cast in a role from which we expect little or no deviation in the course of the play.

This is the preamble for Kimathi's second brief appearance in the courtroom scene. From his 'defiant' stance in the earlier appearances, we expect him to state his unflinching, unrelenting position on questions of freedom and social justice. The subsequent settler expression of 'moral' outrage provides the first full instance where the interplay of dialectical interrelationship is dramatised as the 'other side' presents its view of Kimathi.

**Settler:** [Pointing his gun at Kimathi as he is whisked out of the court and screaming at the top of his voice]: Bloody bastard Mau Mau. And the cheek! British justice has gone beyond limits to tolerate this, this kind of rudeness from a mad, bushwog. [shouting frantically to the already departed guards]: Hold it askari or I'll shoot you together with that bush communist. [shouting even louder while the audience in court gaze at him in terror]: Field Marshal/Prime Minister! Fucking black monkey. Listen, you'll die now, I'll teach you justice. [makes for the open door through which the guarded Kimathi has just left. Then abruptly, hysterically, he turns back and faces the tense court audience]

Critics like Waigwa and Amuta who see *The Trial Of Dedan Kimathi* as a better play cite this dialectical exposition of the nature of the antagonistic forces as its main thematic and stylistic strength. As the settler gives full vent to his anger in an attempt express his "moral standpoint" against Kimathi and Mau Mau the premise of his presumptuous moral superiority over Kimathi is exposed. The audience gets an insight into the anatomy of the settler mentality, to place issues, as it were, into "correct perspective", in order to illustrate the relevance of Kimathi's standpoint.

To understand the settler's role here, one must take into account that Kimathi's image in this play emerges from the sequence of "trials" he is subsequently subjected to. The settler's dramatisation of what Etherton calls "frenzied hate" (174) against Kimathi reflects at one level the nature of the opposing forces. Rosberg and Nottingham in *The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya* highlight the various the forms of physical and psychological torture used to make the

Mau Mau freedom fighter or supporter in detention “break his moral resistance to a lawful order” (342) and in the process implicitly confer on the coloniser moral authority against the Mau Mau cause. In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* the settler attempts to assert this sense of feeling of the “moral legitimacy” of colonial legal authority in order to obviate what Nottingham calls the “moral danger” (343), inherent in Kimathi’s prior assertion of moral strength of the Mau Mau cause against the coloniser’s transgression on the oppressed Africans when he first speaks in court. The settler’s sense of outrage against the perceived affront to “civilized order” by Mau Mau is based on a misplaced sense of his moral superiority as a “civilizing” agent.

I had cattle and sheep - by the thousands:  
Where are they now?  
I had acres of maize and wheat:  
Where are they now?  
I had a wife and daughter:  
Where are they now?  
Killed. Burnt. Maimed  
by this lunatic and his pack of bandits.

.....  
I had a perfect relationship with my boys  
They were happy on my farm  
I gave them posho, built them a school,  
a dispensary... gave them everything  
they needed  
They loved me  
Yes, at Olkalau they talked of  
my farm with awe: loyal, meek, submissive.  
Then that devil, Field Marshal, came  
Milk clerk, oath clerk, murderer!  
Poisoned simple minds  
led astray their God-fearing souls  
with his black mumbo jumbo  
My wife, my daughter my property  
Now, now, you'll die (28-29).

This heightened dramatization of anguish here almost echoes the really anguished mourning over Kimathi’s ‘misdeeds’ in Watene’s play. We get an incisive glimpse of the settler mind with its defence of “civilized” colonialism as Eldorado viewing Kimathi as an anarchist/spoiler. But the playwright’s sensibility turns it into a most biting bit of satire against colonialism as the white settler reels off his catalogue of charges against Kimathi and Mau Mau. The dramatic irony here is that the epithets against Kimathi from the settler’s mouth lose their potency and rebound against the supposed ‘righteous indignation’ tone they purport to convey. What we see is the settler’s ‘civilised’ barbarity laid bare, giving Kimathi and his cause the moral high ground against colonialism, a

position previously presented as hollow 'posture' and denied its real essence in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. The settler is allowed to reveal himself as the apogee of moral vacuity, the image he wants to create of the "terrorist" Kimathi.

The flexibility of the plot in the "Movements" allows for the forward and backward flow of events, designed to re-emphasize who Kimathi "really is... a genius in this struggle... leader of landless. Leader of them ... that toil" (61). These complimentary insights by the fighting Woman constitute part of the authorial voice and style in continually "educating us directly about Kimathi and his role". Where the women characters in Watene's play rail against Kimathi, the Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* counters the annihilation of his image in Watene's play, emphasizing instead his (symbolic) indestructibility. Indeed the Boy and Girl will, in the course of the play, mature as Kimathi's progeny in struggle even as the colonial court condemns him to physical demise.

## 2.12 The Image of Kimathi as Projected in Various 'Trials'

The plot structure sets the stage on which Kimathi and colonialism (will) wrestle at the ideological level. In the process the various 'trials' relegate the specific charge of illegal possession of a firearm to the realm of the irrelevant, except to the extent that it indicates Kimathi's involvement in armed struggle. The 'trial' of the reified Dedan Kimathi, arrested and arraigned before a colonial court, manifest the nature of the contending social-economic forces. The Kimathi who "remains silent, defiant" (3) at the opening scene will, in the Second and Third movements, express sentiments reflective of "us Kenyan people" (20), in the words of the fighting Woman.

Even before he speaks, the stage descriptions tell us that "Africans are defiant towards the settlers and the colonial authorities while appreciative of Kimathi's stand"(23). The courtroom scenes and that of lone Kimathi in his private "trials" remain complimentary to each other throughout the duration of the play.

When Kimathi finally speaks in the open court, it is to defy colonialism and its law, denying both any moral vantage point over him or the suffering Africans. He therefore ignores the specific charge and subsequently puts colonialism on the spotlight.

**Kimathi:** By what right dare you, a colonial judge, sit in judgement over me?

**Judge:** [Playing with his glasses, oozing infinite patience]: I may remind you that we are in a court of law

**Kimathi:** An imperialist court of law

**Judge:** I may remind you that you are charged with a most serious crime. It carries a death sentence.

**Kimathi:** Death.....

**Judge:** Yes, death....

**Kimathi:** To a criminal judge, in a criminal court, set up by a criminal law: the law of oppression I have no words(25).

This criminalization of colonialism is the first major step in the protagonist's symbolization. Kimathi dismisses the judge's arrogant assumption that settler colonialism and civilization are synonymous or that a judicial system can transcend the ruling state ideology, values and vested interests which rationalise its existence. Kimathi now questions colonialism's superimposed value system.

**Kimathi:** Whose law? Whose justice?

**Judge:** There is only one law, one justice

**Kimathi:** Two laws, Two justices. One law and justice protects the man of property, the man of wealth, the foreign exploiter. Another law, another justice, silences the poor, the hungry, our people (25-26).

This dialectical redefinition of meanings and phrases like "law and order" within the materialist conception of history concretise into a spring board from which the relevance of Kimathi's struggle in colonial Kenya will be projected into post colonial Kenya as a critique of the prevailing material conditions. Kimathi will indeed emerge as extra-ordinary in his understanding of the issues at stake in the course of answering the crucial question of " who really is Dedan Kimathi?" (61). In the context and duration of the play this lingering question will elicit an answer and corresponding image juxtaposed against that in Watene's way of "educating us directly about Kimathi and his role".

Kimathi's social and symbolic significance here is designed refute colonialism's claim to represent a higher state of things like "civilization... investment... Christianity... Order" (26). These supposedly superior concepts (purportedly) representative of higher morality will be questioned and henceforth Kimathi will

recognise only one law, one court  
The court and law of those who,  
fight against exploitation  
The toilers armed to say  
We demand freedom(27).

He will, in the ensuing 'trials' also represent and dramatise the struggling masses

beaten  
Starved  
Despised  
Spat on  
Whipped  
But refusing to be broken  
(26).



This section highlights the images and the vision so passionately evoked in David Diop's poem "Africa", where the "young sturdy tree" persists against and despite the harsh environment to give forth fruit with "the bitter taste of liberty". This defiance against all forms of emasculation is espoused from a libertarian Marxist/ Fanonian perspective examining and summing up the condition of the oppressed as Kimathi challenges and dismisses the colonialist notion of 'civilized' order and all its implications for the colonised masses.

**Judge:** There is no liberty without law and order.

**Kimathi:** There is no order and law without liberty.

Chain my legs,

Chain my hands,

Chain my soul,

And you cry, law and justice?

And the law of the people binds me:

Unchain my hands

Unchain my legs

Unchain my soul!

(27)

He has, according to stage descriptions, been brought to court "with chains on his feet and on his hands" (24), though his words here are to be interpreted metaphorically as referring to the issues of freedom and social justice. He will, in the rest of the play, consistently project this unwavering stance in furthering the course he has taken and the task he has set for himself. While in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* he is plagued by other weaknesses which "cloud... the vault of his dreams, causing his spirit to stumble" (62) so that "his consistency" (63) only appears in his 'strangeness', the series of "trials", *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* portrays him vexed and taxed to the extreme, but with all the indications that he will not waver from his stand.

These "trials" demonstrate the range of overwhelming odds and temptations he is expected to overcome. The intervals between them are interspersed with changes of scene and glimpses of other representative characters like Boy, Girl and Woman as Kimathi's allies, and the Banker, Politician, Priest and judge Shaw Henderson as colonial representatives. The artists throughout use Kimathi as their mouthpiece to expose the people's enemy in every historical epoch, and in the process inspire and educate us directly about courage and clarity of revolutionary thought and struggle with its underlying morality" in contrast to Watene's (purported) "educating us directly about Kimathi and his role as military leader". The fictionalised Kimathi here is the educator of the Kenyan people in struggle.

### 2.13 First 'Trial': Kimathi Versus Classical Colonialism

The first of the "trials" pits Kimathi against colonialist Shaw Henderson. Each (re)presents irreconcilable positions, interests and personalities. Kimathi first re-lives his youth, haunted by the apparition of his mentally disturbed mother agonizing over the fate of her sons, but insists that it was "right to choose the path of struggle" (32), the cost in family or individual suffering notwithstanding. Seeing the apparent chink in Kimathi's armour as the vulnerable spot, Henderson seizes the opportunity and attempts to "talk sense into your obstinate head" (32). Kimathi sees through Henderson's offer of "deals" reminiscent of the 'friendship' treaties that cost the African his land and freedom at the onset of colonialism. Scoffing at the promises of the proffered "magnanimity" if he capitulates, Kimathi exposes the tricky approach of this agent of colonialism, who now forthrightly "comes clean" about the nature of colonialism.

**Henderson:** Look, between the two of us, we don't need to pretend. Nations live by strength and self interest. You challenged our interests: We had to defend them. It is to our mutual interest and for our good that we must end this ugly war.

**Kimathi:** Wiles... Luring voices of poisonous serpents. Do you take me for a fool?

**Henderson:** It was the same with all the others. China, Gati, Hungu, Gacheru. And even Wambararia, your own brother! All our collaborators. At first they would not believe that I meant every word I said. But look, we have spared their lives.

**Kimathi:** H'm. You mean you took prisoner their lives! (34)

The collaborators, to Kimathi's mind, are "rejects"; he ignores Henderson's "friendly" offer and restates his place in the heritage of resistance: "Kimathi wa Wachiuri will never betray the people's liberation struggle. Never!" (35).

The 'horse and rider' analogy subsequently presented by Henderson as the natural pre-ordained order of things is also dismissed as lacking moral validity in its defence of social relations in the colonial system and its negatively skewed unchanging order of reality

**Kimathi:** There must be horses and riders, must there? Well let me be Balaam's ass then [chuckles]: Yes, the one who rejected his rider. [pause]: When the hunted has truly learnt to hunt his hunter, then the game of hunting will be no more.

**Henderson:** You don't keep your mind out of the forest for long, do you? What is the good of these blood-baths? Your people are the losers, Dedan.  
(34)

The ideological conflict in his favour, Kimathi is now dramatised as he comes to grips with Judge Shaw Henderson, the representative of classical colonialism, after evading all the clever traps and rejecting the implied 'magnanimous' offer to spare his life.

**Kimathi:**(angry, grabs him by the neck)

Life, my life. Give up my life for your life?

Who are you, imperialist cannibal, to guarantee my life?

My life is our People  
 Struggling  
 Fighting  
 Not like you to maintain  
 Slavery  
 Oppression  
 Exploitation  
 But  
 To end slavery, exploitation  
 Modern cannibalism. Out Rat  
 Go back to your masters  
 and tell them  
 Kimathi will never sell Kenya  
 to the British or any other  
 Breed of man eaters, now or in the years to come.  
**Henderson:** Warder! Warder!  
 (35-36)

This evocation of the Fanonian view of liberating violence freeing the oppressed from the mortal fear of the physical might of the oppressor shows the squealing Henderson on the retreat. Kimathi emerges victorious at the psychological level in this trial of wits and nerves. The fighting forces of the people represented by Kimathi have destroyed the complacency of the hitherto secure colonialist system. The uncompromising Kimathi will henceforth voice the issue in more overtly "ideological" language in the other 'trials'.

## 2.14 Second 'Trial': Kimathi Against Cultural-Economic Subjugation

The awareness that colonialist destruction of the subject people's culture has the most far-reaching consequence in annihilating individual and collective identity for more effective subjugation than armed oppressors now becomes the next point of Kimathi's assault against the colonial fortress. Kimathi presents his case against cultural and economic subjugation of the subject peoples. The aim is to reclaim the peoples' culture and identity as a first step towards repossession of their heritage. Kimathi places himself in perspective as he recalls the people's heritage of resistance to oppression after Henderson's departure from the cell.

**Kimathi:** Save your life. A colonialist my saviour?  
 Saved into neo-slavery. Listen to that my people!  
 Kimathi of Iregi generation.  
 I was blessed by a blind grand mother,  
 A peasant, a toiler  
 She imparted her strength, the strength  
 of our people into me.  
 I felt her blind faith, blind strength  
 enter my bones. Fire and light  
 Save my life?

Maybe that and this and that!  
 It is true that I have always wanted  
 to dance the dance of my people.  
 (36)

The Iregi generation rebelled against the harsh rule of earlier generations of elders in the 1830's and was invoked in Mau Mau songs to imply that the role of resisting oppression was now theirs. The accompanying dramatisation of "a sequence of dances by different people of Kenya" (37) which is disrupted by the white man and substituted with "one of fear and humiliation" (37) now illustrates the rationale behind Mau Mau resistance, with Kimathi as a central co-ordinator.

**Kimathi:** Oh my people!  
 How can we sing and dance like this  
 In a strange land?  
 How can we sing and dance like this  
 When water everywhere is bitter?  
 These were ... no, are the questions.  
 To wrestle with them,  
 I became an organizer of youth  
 We collected from the seven ridges around Karunaini.  
 Gichamu we called ourselves  
 And we devised new dances  
 Talking of the struggle before us  
 readying ourselves for the war  
 .....  
 We asked ourselves  
 How long shall we  
 Gichamu Karunaini youth  
 of Iregi Generation  
 Allow our people to continue  
 Slaves of hunger, disease, sorrow  
 In our own lands  
 While foreigners eat  
 And snore in bed with fullness?  
 (37-38)

This unmasking of Shaw Henderson's colonial manifestation serves as a springboard which allows the anguished Kimathi to see colonialism in other forms like the alienating individualist designed "development" and "progress" patterns propounded by its beneficiaries like the white Banker and his Indian counterpart in the play. Kimathi sees through the more subtle economic and cultural weapons of control which augment colonialism's physical repression because the masses are still sidelined by the supposed 'progress'. He subsequently dismisses their claims in the same way he does Shaw Henderson's argument.

**Kimathi:** And my people?  
**Banker:** Who are your people?

**Kimathi:** The oppressed of the land...all those whose labour and power has transformed this land. For it is not true that it was your money that built this country. It was our sweat. It was our hands. Where do our people come in your partnership for progress?

**Banker:** Toilers there will always be. Even in America, England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Japan... sellers of labour and buyers of labour. Masters and servants (40).

Kimathi rejects this "religion of enslavement" (40) as another face of classical colonialism. This sets the stage for his more interesting confrontation with their African elite progeny in the neo-colonial stage, where economic and cultural dependence will be exposed as another phase of colonialism.

### 2.15 Third 'Trial': Kimathi Against Neo-Colonialism

In this "trial" the authors manipulate the protagonist to dramatise their 'realization that the war which Kimathi led was being waged with even greater vigour all over Africa and in those parts of the world where imperialism still enslaved the people" (viii). Kimathi here responds to issues beyond his physical life which ended in 1957 and illustrates the playwrights' crusade against neo-colonialism, especially their misgivings that the mere attainment of "a black man's government" (39) without "colour discrimination" (40) is necessarily a solution to the social problems created by the colonial system. Kimathi's mental agony now is that colonialism can exist in various forms and in different guises. Kimathi, whose agony is comparable to "sitting on hot coals of trials and temptations" (44) now faces the black neo-colonial context, represented by the emerging black elite, the "African Business Executive, Politician and Priest" (44). Their contest with Kimathi now echoes the type of "vision" (viii) the playwrights have in response to the neo-colonial situation.

**Business Executive:** You know me. You know me. I have stood by you. Wa Wachiuri, It has been a long struggle. I've given money to the cause. My shop at Masira was an oath-taking centre.

**Kimathi:** I think I know of you. And many like you. We have travelled thus far, this road together. Thank you. A few of us fell by the way side. They were deceived by the enemy and became his homeguards. Spear bearers. But in the main, we have held together. Thank you for your, aah, cheque-book contribution to the struggle. Hereafter, We shall teach solidarity to a divided world.

(44)

For Kimathi, the issue is whether the impending "independence" will address the question of social justice. Kimathi can see through the colour smokescreen and realises that economic relations are the real issue rather than the question of colour. He would prefer a socialist model so that the masses can "seize back the right and the ability to make ourselves new men and new

women in our own land" (44-45). He sees the giving of more privileges to a few blacks as a mockery of the "real essence of freedom".

**Business Executive:** We have already won

**Kimathi:** In spirit, yes. The spirit of our people, their will to life, freedom and power... this will never be broken. Your words of confidence and faith in our ultimate victory makes these chains light as feathers. For more of such words, I can take more, more...

**Business Executive:** (impatiently): Listen Dedan. We have already won the war.  
(45)

But the obdurate Kimathi still rejects the burgeoning aspects of neo-colonialism and the bourgeois interpretation of independence. The playwrights now seize the opportunity to dismiss the common parochial interpretation of Kenyan history propagated by a cabal of bourgeois intellectuals and historians whose "Kikuyu affair" view of the Mau Mau war has been used to obscure the nationalist aims and vision of the movement. The playwrights in particular dismiss the bourgeois view of 'independence'.

**Politician:** We have been given two alternatives. We can get independence, province by province. Majimboism. As a token of their goodwill, they have allowed District and Provincial political parties Independence for Central Province. After all, it is we Gikuyu, Embu and Meru who really fought for Uhuru.

**Kimathi:** Would too you call the war for national liberation a regional movement? What has colonialism done to your thinking? (Pause: firmly but coolly): Hear me. Kenya is one indivisible whole. The cause we fight for is larger than provinces; it shatters ethnic barriers. It is a whole people's cause.

**Politician:** There! You speak as if you can read my mind. The second alternative before us, you see, is to receive uhuru as one people.

**Kimathi:** Receive uhuru! And since when did our people become beggars? Who are you? How can you decide for the people? Have they released our people from concentration camps? Have they released Jomo Kenyatta? Paul Ngei? Fred Kubai? Where is Achieng' Oneko? Bildad Kaggia? Kung'u Karumba? Are they out? Tell me more!

(46)

Kimathi here dismisses the nationalist unitary and federalist concepts as lacking validity because they circumvent and ignore the real issues raised by Mau Mau - real independence as power through resource - land and other means of production -endowment to the masses. The nationalist bourgeois of the immediate post independence period conveniently forgot the essence of the patriotic Mau Mau ideals. Watene's preferred constitutionalist "progress of politics outside the forest" (69) approach and its compromises at the Lancaster House Conference are now dismissed by the playwrights through Kimathi as the mere creation of "New Farmers, New settlers" Black skins, colonial settlers hearts...New Masters" (46). In other words, Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi sees it as a pale shadow of real freedom on the national scene. The Jomo Kenyatta idolised as the

possible black messiah in *Weep Not Child* has little relevance here because he will not address Kimathi's burning questions regarding "why poor men died in the forests" (47). Kenyatta's "national unity priority" political approach at the expense of Mau Mau ideals is now scoffed at as subterfuge downplaying the real differences between forest fighters and homeguard loyalists to cover up the issues of economics and ideological orientation.

The rejection of the Lancaster conference compromises is best expressed in the laconic statement by Njagi in *The Last Mau Mau*, pointing out that there was essentially no difference between the unitary and federalist concepts of independence because in terms of ideology neither had a place for Mau Mau ideals. Njagi points out, as later events illustrate, that

In a different class of "Spirit of National Reconciliation" even Mr. Ronald Ngala, the President of KADU (Kenya African Democratic Union) the political foe of KANU at independence, who was referred as the destructive "fly" was welcomed into the fold of KANU and converted into a bee" ... more importantly when the part of "flies" (KADU) under the spirit of unity and reconciliation joined the party of "bees" (KANU) in November 1964, its chairman Mr. Daniel Arap Moi served the (Kenyatta) Government in senior positions until September 1966 when he was appointed the third vice-president of Kenya (31).

In other words, the presumed ideological differences between the KANU and KADU concepts of independence were merely superficial, part and parcel of British "political engineering" to create an impression of attainment of "independence". Post colonial politics about the freedom struggle tended to largely downplay the contribution of the forest fighters as shown in the altercation between Kimathi and the 'independence' politician in response to Kimathi's question about the role, place and status of the forest fighters and general populace in the new political dispensation.

**Politician:** We all fought for Uhuru in our different ways. I think it is unwise... a little hasty.. divisive politics to single out certain people, certain classes as having fought for Uhuru. There are no classes in Africa. We are all freedom fighters.

**Kimathi:** The prize. I asked, the prize. Slaves. What is the prize for our second slavery?

**Business Executive:** We call it off.

**Kimathi:** Call. Uncall what?

**Politician:** War in the forest. Words will do now. They have already given us seats in the Legislative Council. Great victory.

**Kimathi:** Words, Words, Words. Game of diplomats!

**Business Executive:** Plead guilty. Save your life. Save lives. Join us.

**Kimathi:** Cursed minds! What revolution will unchain these minds! Out. Out. Neo-slaves. (47).

The sticking premises of Kimathi's obstinacy in the two plays are discernible: Watene's Kimathi aims for a personal "triumphant victory" in line with his individual ego, while Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi has the vision of a collective victory as the ultimate objective. He contemptuously

dismisses the collaborator -role of colonial Christianity because he sees no "difference between padre and settler" (49). Because of this, even the nominal superficial link with white Christianity must be renounced since the Africanised church's "vision" of (heavenly) salvation subverts the materialist linkages underlying the resistance to earthly oppression.

**Priest:** [excited]: Why? You saw the light. Admit, Dedan. You were once baptized.

**Kimathi:** Out with Dedan. I am Kimathi Wa Wachiuri of Iregi generation. No! Not your kind of light. In the forest I used to walk alone, meditations on the mountain tops. I have walked all the lengths of the land between Kirinyaga and Nyandarua

**Priest:** You were always a lonely, suspicious man. But then, some of your witch doctors betrayed you. Jesus will never betray you.

**Kimathi:** Betrayal. Betrayal. Prophets. Seers, Strange. I have always been suspicious of those who would preach cold peace in the face of violence. Turn the other cheek. Don't struggle against those that clothe themselves as butterflies. Collaborators (49).

Kimathi is not the "strange fellow" reverting to traditional religion as refuge in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi rejects the emasculating influence of colonial Christianity, confronting it with a more relevant liberating rather than escapist approach. He seizes on traditional religion as a relevant heritage to counter the priest's proffered "pragmatism of the movement" viewpoint.

**Priest:** Think of my words, my child. There is wisdom in realism.  
Enough is enough.

**Kimathi:** This is what I always feared  
How to discern our enemies,  
in black clothes, with sweet tongues,  
Chequebook revolutionaries!  
Go. Go. My trial has begun.

(Priest does not move)

I said Go! No, don't go (pause): Go  
Come to their jesters court tomorrow  
Deserters! Yes. Come tomorrow.  
You will hear my answer. Tomorrow...  
tomorrow... I said Go!

(Exit Priest)

Who are friends and who enemies?

Oh, the agony of a lone battle!

But I will fight on to the end

Alone....

Alone, did I say?

No. Cast out these doubts!

(51)

This unrelenting, stoic with no doubt is what critics like Wanjala have taken issue with, arguing that an almost superhuman Kimathi is not a credible literary creation because there must necessarily always be a weaker "more human" side even in heroic characters. Wanjala does not,



however, clarify whether in his view the opposite Shaw Henderson settler sadist character is a credible artistic representation of colonial mentality and conduct which would call forth the Kimathi-type fortitude in the course of resistance. We shall, in due course, clarify the linkage between Kimathi's portraiture here and the archetypal portrayal of the socialist realist hero(ine).

This third trial constitutes a summation of the image of Kimathi as the nemesis of all forms of oppression in various guises or historical phases. Because he does not and cannot capitulate to colonialist machinations, Kimathi recreated must, for purposes of ideological consistency, similarly resist the emerging neo-colonial order and remain a rallying point in the author's projection of the preferred 'relevant' vision for the post-colonial situation.

## 2.16 Fourth 'Trial': Kimathi As The Living Spirit of Resistance

This broader vision is projected effectively by applying poetic license to transcend concrete historical reality. Kimathi has won the psychological battle but is still mortal. We are therefore, after some brief interval, taken back to the harsh reality that the contest with the neo-colonial elite is still basically on the imaginative plane as a projection of his future relevance. In the plot's structure, there is the impression of a long, drawn out interval after the previous trials, before Kimathi faces Henderson again in the contest between the physical might of colonialism and his steely will to persist against all odds. Henderson expects a weakened Kimathi because of the preceding "trials" but this proves a miscalculation. It is a more confident Kimathi now confronts his persecutor, it would appear, over the course of time

**Henderson (Ironically):** Well, are you in a better frame of mind today, Field Marshal?

**Kimathi:** Never experienced greater calm (still looking away from him): Your envoys have wiped the mist from my eyes. Yes, I have a clear vision. I see...

**Henderson:** Wake up Kimathi. Stop dreaming

**Kimathi:** (turning round to face Henderson, fury in his eyes): What do you want from me? Sale of our people... Land...sale of my soul. For a badge from King George, or is it the Queen? (firmly) Shaw Henderson! Trader with peoples' lives!... Yes, self appointed saviour of our people. Listen and listen well. I will fight to the bitter end and protect our soil, protect our people. That is what I Kimathi wa Wachiuri, swore at initiation.

**Henderson:** It will have to be from the hangman's rope, Mr. Field Marshal.

**Kimathi:** Already sentenced am I? How is that for even handed British justice? (laugh loudly, scornfully)

(54)

This shift back to the physical reality of classical colonialism symbolised by judge Shaw Henderson serves two functions. It dramatises, at one level, the dehumanising violence of colonialism when confronted with liberating revolutionary violence represented by the chained

Kimathi, whose "spirit" (57) and that of Mau Mau must triumph over the fact of (t)his physical subjugation. The ensuing physical contest is to be viewed not so much as one between Kimathi and Henderson but between the social forces involved. The two are here merely symbolic. Kimathi has overcome all temptations to capitulate and is now composed enough to even taunt his colonial adversary, who progressively diminishes as Kimathi gains in stature.

**Henderson:** [hysterically]: Shut up! Or I will shoot you dead in this very cell. For the last time, Kimathi, where is Mathenge?

**Kimathi:**[chuckling scornfully]: What am I supposed to say? Aah, out there! In the forests of Nyandarua or Kirinyaga. Fighting you. Or shall I go up in one of your planes shouting: Surrender! Surrender! Surrender!

**Henderson** [infuriated]: One more chance and watch it now, man. Where is Stanley Mathenge?

**Kimathi:** [defiantly]:The second last chance? Yes. British justice. Look, its no use Shaw Hender..

**Henderson:** [hysterically, slaps him... once twice]: Askari!

**2nd Soldier:** [saluting exaggeratedly in panic]: Fande!

[Kimathi laughs a loud, scornful laugh. He pierces the soldier with fiery eyes and then spits in disgust.]

**Kimathi:** Rats!

**Henderson:** [slaps him again]: This is not your forest Kingdom: Remember that

**Kimathi:** [staring at him with eyes burning with fury]: If you are a fighter, unfetter me now. Let us face each other. Man to man. Let us see which wrestler fells the other, you coward.

(55)

Kimathi's scoffing at the thought or call to surrender here is the playwright's way of answering the closing sky-shouted call for the fighters' capitulation after his capture in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. The imminent psychological victory in Kimathi's refusal to surrender under the ensuing torture and to emerge only "broken in body... but not in spirit" (57) illustrates his famed resilience. The torture proceeds against the background of the "miming of black history (earlier enacted) going on" (56), and whose indomitable spirit Kimathi now symbolises. At the end he will still express contempt for the homeguard collaborators even in this weakened condition as he refuses to sign the surrender paper presented by Henderson.

**Kimathi:** (speaking in pain)

You traitors to your people...

Sellers of your own people... For what?

Your own stomach... A seat at the masters

table. A bank account. A partnership in business. Partnership? To rob your people...

A.....

(he takes the piece of paper)

This Henderson....(pause)

For four hundred years the oppressor

has exploited and tortured our people

For four hundred years, we have risen

and fought against oppression.

against humiliation, against enslavement of body, Mind and soul (tearing the piece of paper):  
 Our people will never surrender!  
 (throws the pieces in Henderson's face)  
**Henderson:** Gatotia! Soldiers! Take him  
 Back to the chamber  
 (57-58)

Kimathi's "that I will never do" (57) stance now translates into the "our people will never surrender" (58) position. While the sheer might of colonialism (really) prevails physically over Kimathi, his spirit of struggle infusing the fighting masses will continually haunt colonialism and its (neo-colonial) legacy. He will not be consigned to oblivion in the style of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*.

Etherton in *The Development of African Drama* sees these 'trials' as "a cumulative portrait of Dedan Kimathi" (168), emphasising Kimathi's indestructibility as a spiritual/symbolic force. Kimathi, as Etherton points out, acquires a Christ-like image for a temporal cause, and his suffering "reflects the paradigm of the sacrifice of the god" (175) through eventual martyrdom at the hands of his relentless persecutors. The play's style enhances Kimathi's image in this role so ideally that "the people's hero is in danger of being depicted as the people's god" (178). In this play Kimathi displays the superhuman fortitude associated with mythical heroes and fits in with the image of the ideal revolutionary hero.

The question of whether this is the "real Kimathi" is, expectedly, immaterial from the viewpoint of the stated authorial/artistic premise. Unlike Watene's purported 'lifting of the veil', the "willing suspension of disbelief" demand on the audience is hardly implied here because we have been conditioned to view the protagonist as an *artistic* representation of the playwrights' interpretation of the historical character's essence. Proponents of 'historical realism' may probably not be flattered by the (historical) 'mitigation' in Abuor's *White Highlands No More* illustrative picture of a composed Kimathi as he 'sits impassively in an invalid chair during his trial at Nyeri'. Nor, it would appear, the more telling observation by Abuor that 'it would rightly be said that he was a single person in Kenyan politics who was tortured to death in the liberation of his people without petitioning his oppressors for mercy' (143). The emphasis in either case centres on the ability of the stoic hero to withstand all forms of persecution for a noble cause.

## 2.17 Perspective and projection of The Image of Kimathi

This need to give credible artistic existence to the recreated protagonist is more evident in the Third Movement. The flashback here gives a glimpse of Kimathi in the forest domain. Myth and legend compliment each other in enhancing the artistic purpose to reveal further "who really is

Dedan Kimathi" (61) away from the cell and courtroom scene where we see him in most of the play's duration. The subtle hint of a counter-image to the protagonist in Watene's play is evident in the preamble to the forest flashback in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. This is illustrated in the way the fighting Woman educates the Boy and Girl about Kimathi's style of leadership in the forest.

He was a wonderful teacher... But above all, he loved people and he loved his country. He so hated the sight of Africans killing one another that he sometimes became a little soft with our enemies. (softly): He, Great commander that he was, Great organizer that he was, Great, fearless fighter that he was, he was human (Almost savagely, bitterly). Too human at times! (62).

The 'dictator' and 'murder' protagonist in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* is thus supplemented by his very opposite in this later play. Where Watene emphasises on his personal "triumphant victory", Kimathi's desire here is a people-based approach to the struggle for a collective victory. The interrogation of two captured British soldiers portrayed as enemies of the popular cause is illustrative. Unlike Watene's Kimathi, there is no contradiction between "rhetoric" and "real essence" in his character and conduct here as Kimathi questions the justness of their conduct.

**Kimathi:** Are you fighting for the working people of your country?

**Soldiers:**(They look at one another, confused, as if they don't know what he is talking about)

**Kimathi:** It's always the same story. Poor men sent to die so that parasites might live in paradise with ill gotten wealth. Know that we are not fighting against the British people. We are fighting against British colonialism and imperialist robbers of our land, our factories, our wealth. Will you denounce British imperialism?

**Soldiers:** (standing up straight, trying to master dignity):

We are the queen's soldiers!

(64)

His subsequent order for the execution of such 'imperialisms vermin' together with an African "mercenary" is cannot therefore even remotely reflect the implicitly "destructive" or "heinous slaughter" of Nyati and other "victims" in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. His conduct here is a positive act in accordance with the demands of revolutionary justice. Kimathi henceforth exhorts the popular forces to

Rise. Rise workers and peasants of Kenya

Our victory is the victory of the working people.

The victory of all those in the world

Who today fight and struggle for total liberation.

Long live Kenya people's Defence Council!

**All:** Long live Kenya people's Defence Council! (68)

For the playwrights, Kimathi is often only "too human" (62) towards others, a weakness which causes the momentary lapse in allowing 'human considerations' blur revolutionary ideological focus when he pardons some traitors out of sensitivity and kindred feeling. This proves fatal and a weakening of the struggle's 'revolutionary resolve', precipitating his own betrayal and eventual capture. His heroic stature is however redeemed by this knowledge through painful experience. For consistency, this more mature revolutionary hero will eventually scoff at the colonial court's death sentence while bequeathing his fighting spirit as a legacy to the oppressed masses. Kimathi 'mitigates' his conduct of the revolutionary struggle throughout by pointing out that

In the court of imperialism!  
 There has never and will never be  
 Justice for the people  
 Under imperialism.  
 Justice is created  
 through a revolutionary struggle.  
 Against all the forces of imperialism.  
 Our struggle must therefore continue  
 In the forest. I was sometimes plagued  
 by doubts  
 If I died today  
 Would our people continue  
 the struggle?  
 I would look at the braves  
 killed  
 I would say:  
 If I died today  
 Will this blood ever be  
 betrayed?  
 That was my Trial.  
 But now I know that  
 for every traitor  
 there are a thousand patriots  
 (82-83)

This is not the self-indicting tone in Kimathi's utterances implied in Rhino's mourning at the close of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. Kimathi and the fighting patriots here cannot contradict themselves in laying a morally credible claim to "the glorious image of our destiny" (97). The glee accompanying his capture in Watene's play is thus non-existent here. It has is not by calls for 'surrender' to the struggling masses, but celebration of the impending collapse of colonialism. Kimathi's "parting shot" valuable lesson in revolutionary wisdom is instructive in warning that

Know that your only  
 Kindred blood is he  
 Who is in the struggle  
 Denounce those who weaken

our struggle  
(83)

This message is imbibed in the ensuing 'People's Song and Dance' victory celebration. The hint of his immortality is stated in the 'Not dead!' (84) assertion by the Boy and Girl to whom Kimathi bequeaths his fighting spirit in struggle. Hence the playwrights' forthright admission that their endeavour is not intended as

... a reproduction of the farcical "trial" at Nyeri. It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement (viii).

The image of their Kimathi here does justice to the stated purpose. In his posture and stature, utterances, responses and attitudes towards and regarding these issues, he proves equal to his historical mission. The only perceived shortcoming is that Kimathi in this play cannot communicate with a large audience of this stated target group. In his later *Decolonising The Mind* essays, Ngũgĩ takes issue with the question of 'The Language of African Theatre', citing in hindsight the language medium here as contradictory because Kimathi in the play addresses the (mainly illiterate) forest fighters using the English language so that "the realism in theatre collides with the historical reality it is trying to reflect" (43). We shall now examine how the authors of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* endeavour to use this foreign language 'relevantly' to serve the "theatre of commitment" purpose and how it reflects their reified Kimathi.

## 2.18 Language And Kimathi's Image In The Trial of Dedan Kimathi

Marcuse has noted in the *Counterrevolution and Revolt* essay on 'Art and Revolution' that language in the arts is employed as a tool of liberation. He posits that "it is in the effort to find forms of communication that may break the oppressive rule of the established language and images over the mind and body of man (that) language and images... have long since become a means of domination, indoctrination and deception... the revolution requires an equally non-conformist language" (79-80). One sees in the latter play's language an admittedly more positive affirmation of the essence of the historical moment in images different from those in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. The style, design and effect of language here are intended to instil the concepts and tone of psychological, physical and ideological defiance against the forces that Kimathi has set himself against

When he speaks in the colonial court the learned "civilized" judge's sneering at Kimathi's incisive analysis of the colonial situation as manifestations of "the laws of Nyandarua Jungle" (26) is countered by Kimathi's rejoinder that colonialism is the more primordial jungle. Kimathi rightly points out that "it is there that you will find creatures of prey feeding on the blood and bodies of those who toil: those who make the earth yield. Us" (26). The "terrorist" Kimathi thus comes across as the more human. This can be viewed as the playwrights' rejoinder against Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* with its implication that Kimathi is not "a normal human being" (8) and its view of the freedom fighters as "beasts of the forests" (10). The Boy's education at the feet of the Woman is tellingly informative. In her words

The day you will understand why your father died, the day you ask yourself whether it was right for him to die so, the day you ask yourself: "What can I do so that another shall not be made to die in such grisly circumstances?" That day, my son, you'll become a man".  
(19)

The Boy and audience are being called upon to cultivate fortitude and a revolutionary liberating consciousness. The same language pervades the image of Kimathi in the play and the dominant theme, infusing and highlighting concepts evocative of

fight  
struggle  
change  
(27).

This is Kimathi's constant exhortation to his compatriots. He throughout sees himself as the rebellious "Balaam's ass... the one who rejected his rider" (34).

The Girl's words as an emerging courageous patriot would as easily have come from Kimathi's mouth urging steely resolve by purging the mortifying effect of fear or long internalised submissiveness.

Show fear, a tail in your mouth and they threaten thunder and rain. They humiliate you, insult you, injure you. Show that you are a human being: Struggle, fight back and it becomes their turn to run away, to flatter you, to try to make you their friend.  
(42).

The accompanying acquisition of indomitable courage and enduring strength are the spirit of resistance projected through Kimathi's image in the play, the spill-over translating into "the granite power of Kenyan people" (50). The images are cyclical and self-reinforcing as the people also draw inspiration from Kimathi's heroic image.

Where the language of Watene's play vilifies and criminalises Kimathi and the freedom struggle, that in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* rehabilitates, extols and ennobles both Kimathi and the fighting masses while vilifying colonialism. The reference to "the jungle of colonialism" and its "creatures of prey" (26) as forms of "modern cannibalism", and the settlers as a "breed of man eaters" (36) are pointers to the playwrights' distaste for colonialism. British soldiers fighting for the empire are "imperialism's vermin" (64), rightly condemned for their "murder... massacre... and plunder" (65) of the colonised people and their resources. Conversely, Kimathi and the forces fighting for liberation come across as the humanistic alternative, and are described in positive terms like, "hero" (13) "fighting god" (21) "brave warriors" (66) and "patriots" (83).

Kimathi symbolises these positive values in time past, time present and time future as the play's action breaks "the barrier between formal and infinite time" (2). His language is evocative of corresponding heroic attributes as he educates the audience about their heritage of struggle. He exhorts that

We must know our history  
 Especially the deeds of those  
 Who have always resisted  
 The rape of our beautiful Kenya  
 Who have always stood firmly  
 Against oppression and exploitation  
 I could sing praises to them all day:  
 Waiyaki, Me Katilili  
 Mbatiani, Koitalel  
 And vilify collaborators  
 Mumias, Wangombe  
 Karuri wa Gakure  
 Kinyanjui, Luka-  
 All those who sold us to foreigners to aid  
 their own stomachs and family store  
 We must learn from our past strength  
 Past weaknesses  
 From past defeats  
 And past victories  
 (67-68).

This ennobling language not only enhances Kimathi's image but also infuses the whole theme of resistance and portrayal of Kimathi. The consistency between image and style makes the play an effective "psychologically sound unit" (20), to paraphrase Waigwa Wachira. Amuta's a "gigantic metaphor of the history of struggle" (158). In his description of this play is evocative of the image of Kimathi arising from the language, style, and general characterisation. The stature, posture, resoluteness and ultimately differential images that come across in the (uncannily)



corresponding pages (67-68) in the two plays are striking reflections of the reified protagonist and authorial ideologies. An examination of authorial ideology and its implications on the whole theme, vision and linkage to the image of Kimathi and "associate issues" are necessary at this point.

## 2.19 Authorial Ideology And The Image of Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

It is obvious from the onset that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* does not countenance the view in Watene's *Sunset On The Manyatta* that the masses suffering had ceased" (230) with the coming of political independence, or the constitutional nationalist view that negates the role of Kimathi and the forest fighters in the earlier play. It is not within the scope of this study to examine the evolution of the authors' vision, but Maughan-Brown does note in *Land Freedom and Fiction* that "at the point when Ngugi came to take Mau Mau as a direct fictional theme the resulting novel (*Weep Not, Child*) did not achieve any notable rapture with the dominant ideology of neo colonial Kenya" (21). This indicates that Ngugi's later fictional works transcend his earlier ideological position. One sees some hesitancy in affirming the "positiveness" of liberating violence against repressive violence in *Weep Not Child* in sharp contrast to the view expressed in Ngugi's review of Madjalany's *A State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau* (1963) in *Homecoming*. Ngugi here avers that

Violence in order to change an intolerable unjust social order is not savagery. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust social order is criminal and diminishes man. To gloat in the latter form of violence, as Ian Henderson does in his *The Hunt For Kimathi* is revolting... Mau Mau violence was anti-injustice, white settler violence was to thwart the cause of justice. (28-29)

Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* fits within the ideological mould of this later orientation. The play places the historical phases of colonialism and neo-colonialism squarely in the spotlight.

By the time Ngugi and Micere Mugo wrote *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ngugi had veered away from the dominant 'bourgeois' ideology espoused by the Kenyan political leadership. His 1970 "Church, Culture and Politics" essay in *Homecoming* expresses his disillusionment with the economic and political trend in post- colonial Kenya. Ngugi observes that

After independence an African middle class was born. This class is busy grabbing land and business concerns at the expense of the peasant and working masses (36)

The entrenchment of this African elite and the eventual emergence of this state of affairs is the rationale behind the struggle for the "Second Liberation" in the early 1990's. Njeru Kathangu's

article "How We Suffered For Freedom" in the *Sunday Nation* of July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2000 clarifies this reality, pointing out that

Kenyatta had diverted the national political course, that of land and freedom, and was busy using the two main pillars of the freedom struggle to strangle the heroes of the liberation war and reward the colonial agents - the homeguards (10).

Kenyatta, lauded in Ngugi's earlier *Homecoming* as a "saviour" (29) and "a symbol of (those) social forces which could never finally be put down by the gun" (29) is in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* accorded less significance because he provides no answers about "why poor men died in the forest". Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi sees this betrayal of the ideals of the freedom struggle, but unlike Watene's Kimathi relegated to irrelevance in "his neglected grave" (84), the playwrights turn Kimathi into a new potent force as a symbol in the continuing struggle against the injustices inherited from the colonial past.

Kimathi therefore condemns the African Politician and Business Executive in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as a breed of "New Masters" (47). Ngugi and Micere imply that nothing has substantially changed. Kimathi's adamant opposition to the state of affairs in both epochs is seen in the implicit exhortation that the struggle against the tripartite forces of neo-colonialism, capitalism and imperialism must continue. The "vision" (viii) expressed in *Homecoming* where Ngugi calls on the church in Kenya to "reject capitalism, which has been found wasteful and inhuman" (36) is carried forward to the play, reflecting Ngugi's earlier call to the church to assist in creating a new social order based on socialist ideology because

With this (vision), and in alliance with the socialist aspirations of the African masses, we might create a new man freed from greed and competitive hatred and ready to realise his full potential in humble co-operation with other men in a just socialist society (36).

Etherton's *The Development of African Drama* acknowledges the playwrights vision in (re)creating Kimathi against the grain of the dominant ideology of post-colonial Kenya pointing out that

The starting point of their collaboration in writing this play is a shared hatred for capitalism as the cause of the continuing poverty and despair of the working masses and the peasants of the third world. The socialist view is then related to the struggle for independence in Kenya which culminated in the Mau Mau war, and which is seen by the authors not only as a war against colonialism and imperialism but also as a class war which is by no means over. The 'independence' won for Kenya in 1963 largely by the efforts of the masses was not synonymous with freedom for those masses... Kimathi, the leading general of that war becomes the focus of their interest... The playwrights use Kimathi's 'trial' at Nyeri as a starting point (167-168).

As the altruistic revolutionary hero Kimathi expresses the playwrights' vision because

Kimathi, through his social vision, is the validation of (the people's) future. Without Kimathi there is no future for the lives of the youth and the girl, the modern urban unemployed (174).

In ideological terms, Etherton points out, "this deep accord with the mass of humanity fundamentally opposes the self-interest of the oppressor" (175). This is demonstrated through the various 'trials' that Kimathi undergoes and his rejection of the oppressors, "creed of greed and injustice" at every stage in the play. He is waiting for a "new dawn" (26) and vows to "keep on dreaming till my visions come true and our people are free" (35) and to "struggle... until we seize back the right and ability to make ourselves new men and women in our own land" (45). These latter category of people will be the "creators of a new heaven on a new earth" (50). Kimathi is stubbornly devoted to this vision in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

The exercise of splitting hairs over discrepancies between the real 'historical ideology' espoused by Mau Mau and that 'staged' in the work of art need not arise when one takes into account that the play falls within the category of art commonly referred to as socialist realism. Hosking in *Beyond Socialist Realism* has noted that though

socialist realism was (and is) a hollow frame which the author filled out with products of his own imagination... there is no reason why (this) should necessarily prevent writers from pursuing within those ever present but vacillating frontiers genuine literary concerns' (20).

This 'literariness' escapes the appreciation of those critics obsessed with delimiting *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi's* "fictional realism" within the boundaries of "historical realism". This demand is objectionable from the viewpoint of both artistic purpose and literary theory.

As an ideological response, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* seeks to negate and subvert the neo-colonial political economy buttressed by Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. In his paper titled "Mau Mau And The Politics of The Transfer of Power in Kenya" Benjamin Kipkorir's points out that after the military suppression of Mau Mau, an educated African elite nurtured by the colonial state

emerged as the new and only practical alternative leadership in the wake of the Mau Mau emergency. Notwithstanding their (apparent) radicalism, the elites were moderates from the British point of view. It was therefore possible for the British to "do business" with them...The African leadership seated at the (Lancaster) round table conference was after the control of political institutions and not a socialist control of the economy. There would be room in the new Kenya for any of the European community prepared to address themselves primarily to economics and not politics (326).

In the ensuing state of affairs in post-colonial Kenya the freedom struggle ideals were completely irrelevant to the new political elite, and Kenyatta publicly dismissed Mau Mau as a

"disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again" in one of pronouncements. This is the patent image and ideological justification of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*.

As a (counter) response, Ngugi and Micere's 'socialist' Kimathi dismisses the "narrow nationalism" vision expressed by Watene's Kimathi, who expresses himself to the extent of, or within the limitations of

The thought of an independent nation  
Ruled and run by our people  
The black citizens of this land (32).

On the contrary, Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi sees beyond the limited idea of the "black man's independence" and advocates the need for a new struggle against the emerging black elite seen as traitors to the popular struggle in their role as agents of another form of colonialism.

This theme of continued struggle against neo-colonialism features prominently in Ngugi's later works: *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on The Cross* and *Matigari* have their protagonists -Karega, Wariinga and Matigari respectively - conceptualized within the socialist realist tradition. Jane Wilkinson's *Talking With African Writers* cites Ngugi's admission that there are echoes of Kimathi in *Matigari*, the novel's protagonist by the same name who returns after a long absence in the forest to reclaim his heritage (alienated land) after many years of African rule in 'independent' Kenya. Adeola James' *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk* similarly cites Micere Mugo's admission that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was a landmark "in terms of ideological orientation, and my complete commitment to the transition of our African societies, and the so called Third World, from capitalism to socialism" (93). This is consistent with their statement in the play's preface that "the most important thing for us was to reconstruct imaginatively our history, envisioning the world of the Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants and workers' struggle before and after constitutional independence" (viii). Kimathi is subsequently portrayed as the standard bearer of this struggle in both historical epochs.

The image of Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is thus conceived and operates within the socialist realist literary tradition. It is consistent with the stated artistic purpose. It is important to highlight what socialist realism as a literary tradition calls forth in order to appreciate how it has shaped the style and vision in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Vaughan in *Soviet Socialist Realism* points out that as a mode of creative expression this literary tradition rose from the need to address in literature

the great social changes at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth - the sharpening contradiction within capitalist society, the crisis in bourgeois culture and the rise of a socially conscious proletariat (85).

It is not within our scope to examine its development here, but to highlight its guiding ideological tenets in art. It is essentially

based on a direct relationship between the artists and the process of building a new society; it is art coloured by the experience of the working class in its struggle to achieve socialism... The broad ideological - aesthetic principles are those of ..... an organic link with the life of the workers and the expression of the most advanced communist ideas. These are conditioned by a number of other factors, such as the artist's ability to apprehend what is progressive and new, his ability to perceive reality with true historical optimism, his ability to combine innovation and the development of the best classical traditions, and his determination to express only the healthiest aesthetic tastes (88-89)

It is possible then to appreciate why their disillusionment with the capitalist ideology of post-colonial Kenya as objectified and validated within Watene's play prompts the authors of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* to use socialist realism as an alternative medium in art to express their vision of the way forward. Hosking in *Beyond Socialist Realism* highlights the pervasive mode of characterization in works written within the socialist realist tradition, especially the "inherited stock of themes, images and solutions" (28). The tendency (perhaps even 'tendentiousness') towards idealisation of *the desired* reality is seen as the hallmark of literary style in such works. Characterization is singled out as the key stylistic device where the hero(ine) of authorial vision is presented as the perfect role model for the end in view because

This is the purpose to which everything is subordinated. The positive characters have overcome, or they learn to overcome, their personal weaknesses, anything that stands in the way of unremitting struggle on behalf of this vision. Personal and private life is strictly regulated to the requirements of these public goals... Things and people are valued not for themselves but the extent to which they contribute to the purpose or help us to see it. Reality is viewed exclusively in the light of its "revolutionary development", for what it tells us about the magnificent prospects" and the great new world" that is to come. Realism in effect gives way to what Katerina Clark has called an "idiosyncratic neo-platonism in which the mere here-and-now is seen only as a figure of greater and more real reality that is to come (18-19).

This presentation of the ideal hero(ine) in fiction is patent in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, where the protagonist and the fighting Woman are almost faultless representatives of the forces ranged against colonial and neo-colonial oppression. Kimathi's image in particular fits the designated role. Though Ngugi is probably not as overt as in the later works, Kimathi's role here is geared towards what Bartram's "Literature and Commitment" essay in *Brecht in Perspective* (ed.) describes as the tendency towards "a romantic(ised) image of socialism" (88). The fictionalised ideal hero in such "politically committed 'dialectical' theatre" (89) serves the authorial

purpose in presenting “the image of the ideal society” (89). In Ngugi’s case *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is the precursor to this trend in the later plays like *Ngahika Ndeenda* and novels like *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*.

Some critics have taken issue with this nature of characterisation in Ngugi’s works, seeing it as an over simplification of a rather complex historical situation. Such a portrayal posits, Indangasi argues, a case of rigid dichotomies between only black and white (patriots and traitors), without any grey areas in between. In his “Ngugi’s ideal reader and the postcolonial reality” essay, Indangasi describes Ngugi as a writer whose putative reader(ship) is largely constituted of those “with socialist and anti-imperialist sympathies” (193). *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Ngugi’s later plays and novels are seen as cases where Ngugi’s “(has) embraced in a rather simplified form the ideas of scientific socialism as developed by the founders: Marx, Engels, Lenin and to a certain extent Mao” (196). This play and Ngugi’s novels on the Mau Mau experience are cited as examples where Ngugi “elevates the armed struggle into some kind of absolute” (199) by excluding other “non-violent” (198) forms of the nationalist struggle. Indangasi views the play and *Matigari* as “an unblushing endorsement of the cult of violence, misconceived as revolutionary thought” (199).

The writer’s position on the role of violence in a national liberation is given expression in works other than *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* or novels like *Matigari*. Alex la Guma has validated in his various novels the view that violence is a morally credible alternative in a situation where the black South African man is daily faced with violence from the white racists. The same was true in colonial Kenya.

Even without necessarily belonging to the category of “sloganeering” Marxist ideologues, there are those like Elisha Mbabu who in *From Homeguard to Mau Mau* readily point out that violence is an option forced on the oppressed people by the colonisers’ intransigence and refusal to heed other forms of entreaty. Faced with this situation Mbabu’s freedom fighter vows that

We shall throw these white monkeys into the sea; we shall fight them till the last drop of blood in our veins drips. Whoever betrays our cause will die a painful death, whether he be black or white. We shall take oaths till these white devils pay heed to our requests. May the God of Mt. Kenya deliver us from these impervious exploiters. We shall talk to them in the language they understand (12).

The freedom fighter here feels morally obliged to wage armed struggle and refuses to surrender his pistol to “a police officer” (13) when challenged by the latter to do so. Like Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Muturi in *From Homeguard to Mau Mau* feels he does not need “a licence that allowed him to possess such a weapon” (13).

Viewed in this light Indangasi's charge that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* constitutes the playwrights' "endorsement of the cult of violence" deviates from the real issues giving rise to violence. It also puts into question the role or commitment of the African writer highlighting the colonial and neo-colonial reality of a society in the throes of struggle against oppressive institutions and social structures. Our argument here is that while the *Trial Of Dedan Kimathi* is undoubtedly socialist in orientation, one cannot validly dismiss off-hand as "cult of violence" those literary expressions where the writer is positing the alternatives available in certain historical circumstances without inviting questions about what commitment really entails. A society faced with what South African poet Keorapetse Kgositsile's "New Age" poem in Feinberg's *Poets To The People* calls the oppressors' "baton boot and bullet ritual" (41) cannot be expected to urge passive resistance to the suffering mass of humanity forever ground to the dust. To such, Kgositsile aptly points out, one does "not talk... about change through chance of beauty" (41). Ruganda's *The Floods* and Serumaga's *Return To The Shadows* highlight Such works are not the oppressed people's response to state violence in a post colonial situation. Rather than being celebrations of the alleged "cult of violence" but literature which belongs more correctly to the category of creative expressions which Kangumba-Adyeri's "A Thematic Analysis of The Poetry of Struggle and Resistance From Southern Africa" thesis sees as an endeavour by the writers to

channel all their energies towards life-giving forces... to ensure the ultimate destruction of death-giving and death-affirming values of the colonial (or neo-colonial) system (vi).

The "cult of violence" charge against *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Indangasi is, in retrospect, a rather ironic twist, coming as it does from one who once told the author of this thesis that as a young boy growing up in Western Kenya during the 1950s, the young Henry in him hid behind a bush and threw a stone at the British Johnnies (soldiers), thus "making a contribution to the struggle" Evidently, Indangasi at that point in time had no reservations about the validity of liberation violence as a fitting response to the historical situation!

Kimathi in both plays is uncompromising in his opposition, in Watene's play, to colonial and other "reactionaries" (68), and in the later play to any political arrangements that would result in "creating a new colony" (70). He is, it is evident, a more outright and patently ideological mouth-piece in Ngugi and Micere's play than Watene's in terms of authorial purpose.

Whether this in itself makes Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* a "lifeless character" as Wanjala claims largely depends on whether he emerges as a credible literary character in the process. Does he dramatise the stated authorial "vision" (viii) in the play? If the yardstick is credible

dramatic technique the answer is definitely yes. Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi, understood within the play's literary tradition (socialist realism), is *artistically* more alive and credible than Watene's Kimathi. There are none of the glaring contradictions in the style of character and image portrayal so evident in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. In this light, whether Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi speaks like a socialist 'ideologue' in contrast to the historical "real Kimathi" is besides the point because the ensuing image and actions are consistent with the authors' stated purpose. There is no contradiction between the style and Kimathi's image as it emerges in the process. The interplay of dramatic techniques like mime, the varied scenes and movements make the play a more psychologically engaging literary entity.

In the thesis' view then, this play is the "decidedly better piece of art" compared its predecessor, contrary to Wanjala's claim in relation to the style in Watene's play. *The Trial Of Dedan Kimathi* is, to borrow Goldman's phrase in *Towards a Sociology of The Novel*, arguably the better and more "valid literary and artistic creation" (14).

Where Watene's style persistently lays itself open to question in the delineation of Kimathi as the anti-hero, the style of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* enhances the stoic literary hero in every scene. Kimathi here is a more credible literary creation. The uncompromisingly defiant, far-sighted, unwavering, "granite power" fighter and visionary 'then and now' Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* makes his more weak - knead , often uncertain 'walking contradiction' in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* a pale shadow. It is significant that while Watene's Kimathi alienates himself and others, Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi infuses his 'unity of fighting spirit' into his compatriots. As a socially integrated entity, he is not haunted by the fears in Watene's Kimathi. His healthy pre-occupation (rather than morbid obsession) is the people's future rather than his own. Watene's Kimathi is essentially self-destructing even before his capture, while Ngugi and Micere's 'peoples' Kimathi is (symbolically) indestructible in spirit. Even when confined to his court room-cell of the play, his presence or charisma is felt by others outside his immediate contact.

At the levels of ideology and character portrayal, one might draw parallels between Watene's Kimathi and the equally self-annihilating anti-heroes like Vautrin and Goriot in Balzac's *Old Goriot* as negative archetypes compare with Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi and Manuel in Jacques Roumain's *Masters of The Dew*. The latter set can be viewed as positive literary archetypes and are projected by their creators as integrative units in the social and historical realms of their operation and existence. They are carried forward in one form or the other- Kimathi by the Boy and the Girl of the play, and Manuel by the yet - to - born child in Anaise's womb. The two work's



essentially "not dead" (84,188) messages about their protagonist stand out markedly as beacons into the future against the fading of the former.

The opposing images of Kimathi in the plays illustrate the problems inherent in the double interpretation. Jones' *African Literature Today* Vol. 11 introduces the "Myths and History" discourse by pointing out that "momentous events and characters breed almost instant myths... of heroes and villains who in the centuries to come may be elevated (or demoted) into archetypes of good and evil and acquire a rhythmical co-existence with the seasons" (2).

The issue of mythification must be viewed in the light of Fiedler's *What Was Literature?* discourse. In the "From Ethics And Aesthetics To Ecstasies" essay Fiedler argues that

I certainly do not mean by myth "a damned lie" (though it is, to be sure, like all fictions, not gospel truth), nor do I employ the term as a good many others confusingly do, as a synonym for "ideology". No matter if used in the neutral term of a manner of thinking characteristics of an individual, group or culture" ... "ideology" always refers to thinking or ideas, i.e. what is conscious, whereas myth functions on the unconscious or preconscious level (129-130).

The playwrights are, in both cases presenting us with a preconscious image of Kimathi, theirs "being a deliberately human response" (127) as artists drawing from historical experience and influencing their audience towards certain interpretations. In the process they transform Kimathi into what Fiedler calls "a living archetype" (130). Cook and Okenimpke's reference to Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* as "a biography surrounded by myth and controversy" (172) points to the close affinity between known historical fact in the existence of a man by the same name who was a key player in the events between 1952-60, during the emergency in Kenya. Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and Ngugi and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are, in essence, a mythification of the real historical character inasmuch as their images are not carbon copy of *the real Kimathi*.

These fictive characters are imbued with attributes by their creators and are the subject of much contentiousness, though each image is intended by its creators to present a version of history. According to a character in Watene's play, the intention is to give credit to Kimathi and educate "the general mass of the people (in order to) give the honour to the deserving, as is the wont of historical justice" (63).

The problem (or rather the intriguing aspect) is that a writer has the right to create a myth about a historical character like Kimathi. The contentiousness, both from the historians' and literary critics' point of view is the nature of the artistic purpose in the ensuing "creative distortion". The intentional fallacy in art is a representative facet from a particular sensibility. The whole issue, in Jones' view, arises because

The writer and his reader are in greatest danger when the source of the myth - the historical event - is closest to them in time or personal involvement, a closeness which can reduce them to the level of prosecutor or defendant in an action; but as partisan accounts or narrow interpretations blur, special pleading fades into myth. Mythology can be mediatory, even therapeutic, by enabling man to suffer the intolerable, gaze on the terrible and sing of the ineffable.

Okpewho's "Rethinking Myth" essay clarifies the inseparableness of myth and fact in history-based fiction, arguing that historical characters or experiences are subjected to "a bit of fictive fleshing" (9). Thus creative writers like Watene, Ngugi and Micere, Mofolo, Kunene, Hussein and Shakespeare have a right to create or imbue or mythify their fictive Kimathis, Shakas, Kinjeketile and Julius Caesar respectively. Whether the subsequent fictive characters have any verisimilitude or merely approximate their historical derivatives is a matter open to debate. Okpewho however reaffirms that in such cases (re-)writing history is not the primary purpose because in fiction

a decision about the level of historicity will depend on the text we are looking at; this means theoretically at least, that if we have two texts of the same tale from two different communities or two texts from two different narrators within the same community - they may happen to occupy two different points on the continuum (like the Watene-Ngugi-Kahiga continuum here). The one with a greater tendency towards fact we would call a 'historical legend', while the other with a greater tendency toward fiction we would call a romantic legend (11-12)

The creation of myths around historical figures like Kimathi is an artistic necessity. Okpewho points out that because of and notwithstanding the fact that they "may be all too easily contradicted by objective information... the creative imagination of the narrator/writer does not have any constraints or obligations to a time-bound image" (13-14). What Irele calls the "creative intention" Okpewho calls the "creative consciousness" (14) and demands that this consciousness be "set in a recognised historical period and around some acknowledged historical figure" (while) breaking the time barriers, in the fiction. Cook and Okenimpe affirm the necessity for the use of myths in art's reconstruction of history, arguing that

Mythologising is not falsification. Selected images, events speeches and individuals embody certain needs of a people ... writers who develop national myths are using history as part of a continuing process which can help determine and shape the future by encouraging certain possibilities in society and perhaps discouraging others... The historical Kimathi is important to Ngugi and Micere Mugo ... his ideas and what he stood and stands for must be re-interpreted by the writers in terms of the different circumstances of the present time (173).

The archetypes in Watene's and Ngugi's plays on Kimathi are to be viewed in this light, wherever our critical preferences gravitate to in the projected images. But all too often, this right of mythologizing is relegated to secondary importance when the "mythical archetypes in the fiction

become contentious. The importance of what version of history is propagated by the fiction is too important to be ignored by the contending social forces, let alone then becomes the issue, literary critics. Comparisons with characters or events still fresh in those who witnessed events and experiences like the emergency, on either side illustrate the kind of outright literary partisanship alluded to in Jones' observation regarding the fictional archetypes.

The point, apparently, is that such archetypes give only one side of the history or character in question and not the whole story as it were. This, perhaps unconsciously, creates the need for round(ed) rather than the one-dimensional fictional character(s). The next chapter examines another fictional account of Kimathi which endeavours to 'demystify' the perceived archetypes. The rationale for a 'negation of the earlier fictional archetypes of Kimathi might be viewed from the logical premise arising from the need for a new departure. Rockwell points out in *Fact in Fiction* that

Even within the same national culture, a historical change in the class composition of the audience can lead to a startling reversal in the interpretation of a classic masterpiece (78).

There was of course no radical change in the dominant value system in Kenya in the years between the 1974 and 1976 publication of the two plays on Kimathi. The essence of Kimathi in these two plays, as noted, is in enmeshed in controversy. The blurb of Watene's play does indeed acknowledge that his *Dedan Kimathi* is a "controversial play". So is Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* judging from commentaries by various critics. Cook's *African Literature: Critical View* alludes to the "images and counter-images" (97) in the literature on the Mau Mau experience as reflected in Ngugi's *A Grain Of Wheat*. The implications of "re-interpretation of Kimathi" in the ensuing historical novel which rejects the two plays might commence from the question of whether it would be a purely new departure uninfluenced by the earlier conflicting images or a search for an acceptable synthesis between the images in these plays.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MODERATING THE 'EXTREMES': KAHIGA'S *DEDAN KIMATHI*

#### 3.0 The Rationale of Kimathi's Image in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*

The contentiousness about Kimathi's image in earlier fiction is the implicit rationale for the effort that crystallises into Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi: The Real Story*. In its implied rejection of the portraits of the historical character in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and Ngugi's and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* the title promises a serious endeavour eschewing the mythification of Kimathi in the two plays. The novel, Kahiga admits, was the outcome of considerable research in order to get as close as possible and evoke the image of what he believes to be "the real Kimathi."

Cook's observation in *African Literature: A Critical View* provides a relevant point of departure to our examination of Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* endeavour at presenting an all-round perspective on Kimathi. Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* is cited as a more sympathetic treatment of those involved in the emergency experience when Cook argues that

To see someone as a hero or a villain is always an over-simplification: it is to see him at one time, in one set of circumstances only; but a man is much more than one thing. In counter pointing various aspects of his characters in *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi calls on us to moderate callow judgements of the individuals with a more profound human compassion, not least because in a true summary we ourselves are in desperate need for this same compassion. This is his major theme... The links across time which play such an important part in the whole structure of the novel are of many kinds. There are the parallels and contrasts between similar events at different periods (97).

The point here we are making is that Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* implicitly seeks to negate the over-simplification of the earlier villain/hero dichotomy in the two plays and seeks to 'moderate' as a way of giving an all-round treatment of Kimathi and the freedom struggle.

This historical novel's qualitiveness will be examined in the light of Rockwell's articulated view in *Fact in Fiction* that "there must (necessarily) be another dimension to novel-writing than simple delineation of recognisable character and event" (90). Kimathi and the historical event are important in themselves, while and broader issues are that the essence that situates or appropriates them for contemporary relevance in fiction are of greater significance. Hugh Webb in "The African Historical Novel and The way Forward" essay in Jones' *African Literature Today* Vol. 11 sees the historical novel as an artistic response to "the particular alternatives of its times ... including articulation of social-political alternatives" (24). The historical novel cannot be confined to mere historicity, it must needs, in his view, be 'essentially a forward-looking work' (36). Whether Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* successfully runs the gauntlet in this respect will be evident in the author's

social vision. Some of the novel's strengths are its attempts at closer attention to Mau Mau historiography evident in its evocation of incidents described in Njama's *Mau Mau From Within* or other sources like Wachanga's *Swords of Kirinyaga*. The intention is to bring the audience closer to what Kahiga believes is the "real Kimathi" in this novel.

### 3.1 Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* in Creative Continuum

The collection of short stories co-authored with Kibera under the title *Potent Ash* and published in 1972 are Kahiga's debut into Mau Mau based fiction. They reveal the two brothers as potentially prolific writers whose insights into the theme of the emergency evoke the experience of the troubled times. Buijtenhuijs in *Mau Mau Twenty Years After* sees Kahiga's portrayal of the forest fighters in these stories as 'proof' of the author's potential for 'a (later) real resistance novel' (93). Stories like 'Esther' and 'Departure at Dawn' are as cited' examples pointing towards the possibility of a (future) challenging novel on the broad theme of the emergency. According to Buijtenhuijs

The only Kenyan writer who in my opinion could possibly write such a novel is Samuel Kahiga. In *Potent Ash* he published in fact two short stories which came very close to resistance literature. In these stories, forest fighters or their helpers in the Kikuyu reserves are the main heroes, and their image is definitely positive, although the author does not conceal their weaknesses. In Kahiga's case however, these weaknesses do not damage the overall positive picture of the forest fighters, because in a way, the author is so convinced of the moral superiority of his Mau Mau heroes and the justice of their cause, that a few negative shades do not matter any more. Kahiga can afford to mention them for they only make his heroes more credible (93).

Buijtenhuijs expresses the view that if Kahiga should 'one day come back to the theme of the forest fighters in a mature novel, the result could be interesting because Kahiga is certainly a talented writer' (95).

Does the anticipated 'mature novel' emerge in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* published eighteen years after *Potent Ash*? It all depends on whether one agrees or disagrees with Buijtenhuijs' assessment of the image of the fighters in the two stories. The thesis' view here is that 'Departure at Dawn' is not a positively unequivocal portrayal of the freedom fighters because Ndonga is passed off more as deranged fugitive than a clear-headed freedom fighter with a humanistic sensibility as he explains to the young school boy the reasons for the armed struggle. Similar aspects appear in Kahiga's hoped-for "mature novel" recreating Kimathi and the Mau Mau experience.

Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* is, undoubtedly, also an ideological response to the image of Kimathi in earlier fiction, an endeavour at projecting the presumably 'correct' image of "the real Kimathi" (306). Its blurb states that previous "attempts to portray his heroic and fascinating life have produced varying results, ranging from historical distortion to artistic idealism". This veiled reference to the two plays' portrayal of Kimathi constitutes an ideological assessment of the forces at work in the recreated image of Kimathi in the plays, with Kahiga implicitly distancing himself from the perceived 'extremes'. The underlying assumption is that the resultant "correct image" of Kimathi based on the "real story" will settle the whole controversy. Kahiga sees all earlier efforts as having only given us "the wrong image of him" (128).

The precarious premise of such assumption is that art can replicate a character or situation perfectly, as opposed to the Aristotelian 'art as imitation of men in action' view. It assumes the non-existence of subjective 'clouding' perception in the artist's personal or ideological sensibility. The fallacy exists in Kahiga's assumption that he is free from ideological influences when his novel on Kimathi and the movement is an ideological response to other ideological statements in artistic form. The attempt to give us an 'alternative' image of Kimathi in an account which Kahiga says follows "as closely to the facts as possible" ignores the pertinent fact that facts and events have never been interpreted in isolated abstract 'neutrality'. We have already pointed out that it is a fallacy to aver that interpretations are unrelated to value-judgement(s) as purported in Clayton's *Counter-Insurgency in Kenya* footnotes.

This 'background awareness' provides the springboard from which we proceed to examine Kahiga's implied objective 'balancing act' in the portrayal of the historical character. The novel, he informs us, is 'based on real events governing the life and times of Dedan Kimathi'. The perception and portrayal of Kimathi in the novel are analyzed as they manifest themselves in narrative technique, characterization and language, notwithstanding the difference between prosaic and dramatic technique.

The rejection of the implied 'extremes' in his perception of issues and mode of characterization in his *Dedan Kimathi* is revealed as a merely liberal all-accommodating perspective constituting nothing more than a sanitised version, reflective viewpoint of the dominant ideology in colonial and neo-colonial Kenya with regard to the Mau Mau movement.

This attempt at a 'new' departure steering clear from the vilification in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and 'idolisation' in Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and its overall effect is given clarity in the ensuing examination of the various aspects of Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*. The

inherent strengths or weaknesses in the portraiture of Kimathi through authorial ideology and vision are revealed in the process

### 3.2 Plot Delineation of Kimathi's Image

The flexibility of the narrative mode here is employed to subvert the opening 'prejudicial' introduction of Kimathi in the plays, which conditions the audience to a one-sided view. Eschewing the implied criminal fugitive lording it over others in the jungle of Watene's play or the faultless "too human" patriot and eventual martyr of Ngugi and Micere's play, this novel introduces Kimathi by giving hints of how he perceives his role and how others, friendly and not so friendly among his followers, perceive him. The purely fictional characters of Agnes Ndiritu, the main narrator alongside authorial voice and General Kabuku (who appears to have the attributes of the sly and slippery character of clever hare in oral narratives) largely substitutes for the actual known historical personalities who participated in the freedom struggle in the forest. This is intended to imply objectivity of viewpoint in the ensuing commentary by the fictive imagination.

The opening scene describes Kimathi's visit to one of the forest camps, or "mbuci", as overall commander "just to see how they are doing" (4). This initial introduction to the attitudes of various 'insiders' and their view of Kimathi's character and role as leader comes from the two main narrators who give us 'insights' into Kimathi. His stature and influence is emphasised from the beginning and throughout the novel. We are informed, on his arrival, that

At the mention of the name Kimathi, the three guards at the entrance of the camp were suddenly agitated and quickly conferred among themselves. Two of them walked down to meet Kimathi while the third hurried into the camp to warn General Kabuku of the Field Marshal's sudden and unexpected arrival (2).

The instantaneous effect is signified; we are told that one "could hear voices whispering excitedly, for the word had already spread like fire throughout the camp" (3). Kimathi, it is evident, is not an ordinary character.

This brief introduction brings together the narrators, Agnes Ndiritu and General Kabuku to express different views about Kimathi in the author's "all-inclusive" beginning to portray "the real Kimathi" (306). The story unravels with the apparent absence of authorial commentary to the point where Agnes the main narrator is sufficiently knowledgeable to "authoritatively" give the rather equivocal view given of Kimathi as he 'reveals' himself in the course of their interaction. The character of Kimathi progressively unravels before her eyes. Midway through the novel we are told that

Before coming to the forest her image of Kimathi had been of a man with a long sword going around the country like an angel of death, cutting down the enemy. Now she was getting used to the real man - a tired rather lonely man with books and a stack of papers, obsessed not with killing but organising the killing (128).

This double-edged perspective allows the author to incorporate viewpoints exonerating Kimathi from the colonial perspective of wholesale vilification while characterising Mau Mau as "a Movement of killing" (24). The "tired rather melancholy man" must somehow be distanced from the "killing" tag, which, we are told arises from the combination of colonial propaganda and 'misunderstanding' that created in the minds of "many outside the forest... the wrong image of him" (128).

The novel's plot thus conforms to the typical mystery story in which narration and authorial view combine through selected characters. After introducing 'the name Kimathi' (2) the plot allows a flashback to explain the question of 'how did it all really begin' (12) as background story of the main narrator, Agnes Ndiritu, whose proximity to Kimathi in the course of the story constitutes the detached authorial view which reveals his image alongside that of (later renegade) General Kabuku.

Unlike the dramatic "immediacy" in Watene's introduction and the heightened suspense in Ngugi and Micere's, Kimathi's story here emerges gradually. The electrifying initial influence of this "mystery man" with charisma and authority in the opening chapter is completed with the revelation of his admirable human and heroic qualities and the sometimes less than flattering observations by others. This proceeds to the point where enough is revealed for the main narrator to infer that the protagonist is an extra-ordinary "complex in a unit", so to speak, myths and legends notwithstanding. After 'closer observation' through two thirds of the story Agnes Ndiritu unravels enough to inform us that

I used to think that Dedan Kimathi was a kind of God, that he could change himself into a cat or a leopard. Now I know he is just a man... But he is not an easy man to know. He has changed. He has surprised me during this war - with his brain and energy and power to control men (225).

The pervasive viewpoint in this novel largely conforms to this position, whether at the height of Kimathi's power in the forest or when the odds appear to be ranged against him towards the end. We do not lose sight of him even when he is not the immediate focus, for all the story is somehow linked to him. The mystery element and suspense are sustained to the end, with one of his hunters alluding that Kimathi "is not an ordinary man, now I am sure of it" (323) shortly before his capture at the close of the novel.



This summation derives from the attributes imbued and expressed through the narrative technique, authorial view and general characterization of the protagonist. We examine these aspects to see the overall image that emerges from the text.

### 3.3 Descriptive Technique and Kimathi's Image

The narrative technique employed reveals Kimathi through the eyes of the main narrator(s). In the opening scenes Agnes gives us the first few hints of Kimathi's portraiture in the rest of the novel. The physically ordinary but in reality "no ordinary man" with the magnetic and forceful personality is emphasised from the beginning.

His face was handsome but nothing really special. His eyes were like any other young man's lingering with interest on a girl's bosom and legs. But still, despite all that, there was a strange magic around him that made all the people, both old and young, fear and respect him. They would laugh at his tiniest jokes, and hurry when he commanded (16).

This first insight into his 'broad image' is indicative of the two pronged approach used to reveal Kimathi's 'outer form' and how the author intends to present the real "flesh and blood Kimathi" who is yet to emerge. The fear-instilling "killer" and megalomaniac of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and the superhuman revolutionary hero in Ngugi's and Micere's play are temporarily eschewed to condition us to attention of detail in every description closely related to portray him.

The attempt to interpret and delineate Kimathi in the author's liberal ideology is evident at this early stage in the novel. He will not easily or instantly be revealed; he is the complex man with "a strange mixture of beliefs" (18) embracing modern Christianity and the traditions of his people. The traditional religion associated with evil and weird mysticism in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and the 'white' Christianity rejected in Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are thus allowed some meeting point to illustrate that Kahiga does not wholly subscribe to either view. Like the negritude writers, the need to salvage Kimathi's image from the 'distortion' wrought by colonial settler literature is part of authorial purpose, which is however still unable to shake off the influence of Christian/ capitalist ideology like the authors of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, where the playwrights allow their protagonist who has "spoken to the God of my ancestors in dreams and on the mountain and not once did he counsel me to barter my soul" (49) to highlight their "ideologically liberated" viewpoint.

This reluctance to be identified with white Christianity's view of African religion's strange "ways of the devil" view expressed in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* (24) leads Kahiga to settle for the middle position viewpoint. This perspective combines the mystical and revolutionary elements in

the protagonist's perception and portrayal. The initial insight into the nature of Kimathi's basic personality and compulsive obsession around which his conduct revolves is put across to appeal to the sensitive mind to accept the man and the justness of his cause. We are thus informed that

It was as if, in his fierce determination to lead the people to victory, he could not afford to ignore any power, natural or supernatural, that might help him in the overwhelming challenge that he had set for himself - freeing the land through armed struggle against the British (19).

This hint of the mixture of images prepares the reader for those aspects of Kimathi's character not revealed in the two plays. We are to accept not only Kimathi's stature in the great moments at the height of power and popularity among his compatriots but also the not-so-rosy but understandable 'human' dimensions in those circumstances when he appears to lose control either of self or matters towards the end of the novel.

It is the 'brighter' side of his image that is initially presented to the audience, deliberately, it seems, in order to pre-empt the negative prejudicial image the play by Watene imputes to his character in its opening scenes. The popular charismatic leader here has "the dashing looks of a young man but the brain of an elder" (18) while visiting the forest camps to assess the state of the fighters' readiness in carrying out the mission of liberating the people. It is a world of difference here from the leader who inspires fear and terror among his own in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. His (potential) conflicts with (any) others, if and when they arise will be based on his assessment of "how they are doing" (4) in the course of the war effort rather than personal antipathy or challenge to his supreme authority as colonial literature and Watene's play imply. Accordingly, the fear and resentment in Kabuku, the (later) renegade general is based on his own shortcomings because "he felt that Kimathi and his men had by now noted all that was wrong in the camp" (5).

The narrative technique highlights the positive side and leader image in the early chapters of the novel. The purpose, apparently, is not merely to solicit our identification with him as the hero presented through the narrator, but to dispel and pre-empt any suspicions of ulterior motives on their part when Kimathi's as yet "unknown" character dimensions are revealed in a different light by those who do not have a positive view of him. It is because of Kimathi's tough stand on discipline and efficiency that Kabuku as one of his 'victims' belongs to this category when he resents Kimathi's rigorous demands for good leadership. Before their disagreement, we are informed of this aspect lest we mistake Kimathi's role as leader with any other untoward dispensation.

These were all matters that Marshal would raise with Kabuku while he was here. Kabuku would have a lot of explaining to do, like all other generals who lacked imagination and initiative. Kimathi would be tough with him. He liked to remind people like Kabuku that this

was not an ordinary war and could not be fought by ordinary generals with ordinary means. Too many deaths had occurred due to poor leadership (8).

This is a crafty authorial way of avoiding replication of the "Watene construct" of Kimathi's image. It is because Kabuku and others will accuse Kimathi of "dictatorial" tendencies later that we are thus introduced early enough to this 'toughness' as an aspect of his style of leadership. Such ingredients then reflect his extra-ordinary positive characteristics as far as effective leadership is concerned. His conduct as a leader more than any other aspect forms the cornerstone of the overall image that emerges from the novel.

This 'effective leadership' quality is the basis of Maina wa Kinyatti's dismissal of Kimathi's image in Watene's play as a 'distortion' reflective of the colonialist perspective. Kahiga's "historicised" recreation also makes reference to the leadership rivalry between Kimathi and Mathenge before apportioning blame for this internal conflict, an aspect which Ngugi and Micere's play ignores rather than gloss over because for them Kimathi is more of a symbol than historical individual. Kimathi is again (although with some ambiguity, as will be seen) cleared of blame by his popularity and efficiency arising from the assessment of his 'superior leadership' calibre because

Whereas Mathenge had been elusive and difficult to track throughout his leadership, Kimathi had been the indefatigable communicator, keeping track of everybody, to make sure there was one united land and freedom army. Stanley Mathenge could barely write his name and did little communicating (18).

The nature of the 'Forest Politics' (145) of the movement constantly resurfaces until the very last few chapters which concentrate on Kimathi's efforts to evade capture. The focus on leadership quality persists so that even when the upbraided general Kabuku questions whether it is "only Dedan Kimathi who knows how to lead people" (50) the descriptive technique through authorial intrusion and observations of other characters including Kimathi's opponents provides an answer to this question. Sometimes, though, it is Kimathi's perspective of himself and how he relates with others that is highlighted. We learn that he "was widely respected by the people. Organising people had always come very naturally to him" (56). The grumbling general Kabuku also 'observed that the Marshal was a hard worker who did not want to be disturbed while working' (57).

As early as the second chapter in the novel, the author is confident enough to give the general impression that shapes the perspective of the overall image he wants to present of the protagonist. In the narrative style Kimathi from the very early chapters presented as the model charismatic leader. We learn that

Dedan Kimathi visited many more bushes in the last part of 1953. He noted and recorded the problems as well as the achievements of his many scattered armies, giving advice, exhorting the men to fight with courage and dedication for their land and freedom (61-62).

These tally well with the earlier description of the leader with a 'fierce determination' (19), later reinforced by "the picture of a man not willing to give an inch" (172). This is the closest the author comes to giving Kimathi an appellation akin to the uncompromising revolutionary hero image portrayed in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. The term 'revolutionary' (175) is however very sparingly used in the endeavour to distance and indicate the difference in interpretation from Ngugi and Micere's viewpoint. The author feels it imperative to clarify that he is not an 'ideologue' artist and is only dealing at the semantic level with what he views as "a serious revolt" (174) against British rule.

This is surprising because Kahiga, like most other liberal writers on Mau Mau, examines Kimathi from 'the cult of the leader' angle which is pervasive in novels like Meja Mwangi's *Taste of Death* and *Carcass For Hounds* and Godwin Wachira's *Ordeal in The Forest*. Kahiga's novel examines Kimathi as a leader and focuses less on the fundamental issues that cluster around the theme of liberation and social transformation as Ngugi and Micere do. "The dynamics of the movement he led" (author's note) is a dimension relegated to the periphery as focus on leadership style takes centre stage. The leadership wrangle between Kimathi and Mathenge is always part of the background as we are shown Kimathi. From the first allusion to the "rivalry and something close to hatred between the two leaders of the Land and Freedom Army" (17), the focus on the behaviour of leaders like Kimathi, Mathenge and Kabuku dominates except towards the end of the novel when Kimathi's fate becomes the centre of interest, as it were. Insights into the "leadership mettle" aspect underlies the author's perspective, a good example being the view that

The truth was that in any organisation, there could only be one supreme leader. Mathenge believed that he was that leader, and had not accepted the changes that had taken place in the forest during the past year..... Kimathi was already president, and he knew Mathenge hated second place. He had to be boss or nothing (174).

This is implied as Kimathi's train of thought, though authorial view presents this "Kimathi version" while portraying the two leaders' styles of leadership. Through this literary technique Kahiga infuses and 'hijacks' (like the previous authors) Kimathi's thoughts and imposes his own interpellations. For instance his projection of Kimathi's stream of thought places Kimathi ahead of Mathenge while assessing the calibre and acumen of the two leaders. We get to know that

There were people who liked Mathenge because he was a quiet peaceful man, but quiet peaceful men never liberated their countries. He had read about Hitler. He had read about

Mussolini. He had read about Napoleon, and he knew that there were certain virtues in dictatorship when a country was in the throes of revolutionary change. You can't please everybody and he knew he had enemies, the most powerful one being Mathenge (174-175).

The comparisons (or parallels) with historical figures considered to be on the 'wrong side' of the British Empire appear merely incidental and not analogous because Kimathi does not enjoy the conventional state power and privilege of the erstwhile European Fascist rulers and enemies of the British Empire. Kimathi is, at the descriptive level, apparently distanced from these in the context. Kahiga is of course aware of the analogy Ian Henderson draws between Hitler and Kimathi as objectionable phenomena whose 'megalomaniac' tendencies go against the grain of the 'civilized' British ethic, and Watene's "ruthless dictator" image of Kimathi. Mentioning Kimathi in the same breath with leaders in the bad books from the viewpoint of British imperial 'order' or 'civilization' does hint, as will be revealed, much of the ideological base from which he examines the leadership role and the image of Kimathi. One recalls Maughan-Brown's observation about the tendency of some post-colonial novels to highlight leaders' traits and conflicts at the expense the broad pertinent issues while pointing out that

Certainly there were divisions among the leaders of the forest fighters, but to reduce what were fundamental ideological differences to a matter of 'greed', personal ambition and petty jealousies is to take a line indistinguishable from that of the colonial novelists (215).

The issue of the freedom fighters portrayal as a 'greeding lot' is highlighted in Waigwa's protest against Watene's 'distortion'. Projecting the fighters in the forests as an avaricious lot, according to Waigwa, goes against the grain of their selfless spirit because of the (de)privations they accept and undergo. Their honed appetites for the (alienated) land and comfortable lifestyles of the white settlers as noted are merely Watene's way of discrediting their sacrifices in search of freedom. We have pointed out the congruence between Watene's view and that expressed in William Ochieng's review of Kaggia's *Roots of Freedom* as an illustration of the viewpoint of the ruling elite in neo-colonial Kenya in its crusade to rationalise and validate its political power and resource control at the expense of the now sidelined forest fighters.

The issue of whether the armed freedom fighter in the forest or his constitutionalist counterpart are a greedy category arises only if one defines 'greed' and proceeds to give the meaning a subjective and relativist interpretation. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines greed as "insatiate longing especially for wealth or food". A starving or dispossessed human being cannot therefore be seen as "greedy" while seeking nourishment or repossession of heritage. But if one assumes the presumptuous moral position of a settler like Henderson and others in the white

highlands, the tone of righteous indignation can be assumed at the 'untenable' demand by the dispossessed Africans that such land in Kenya, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) or South Africa revert back to the African "native". The settlers acquisition of a thousand (999) year 'lease' of such or other "Crown Land" (sic) is assumed almost as if he were part of the natural habitat. The idea of the colonial administrator like Charles Eliot or Settler Lord Dalmere being 'greedy' does not therefore arise from the settler's viewpoint; indeed African agitation for a return of the same lands is put across as an affront to the settlers' rights to 'private property'!

In some cases colonial government reaction to this "intolerable affront" was extended to seizing the remaining parcels of land in the so-called 'native reserves' from thousands of forest fighters like Kimathi, Mathenge, Macharia Kimemia and others who refused the call to surrender. The settlers, presumably, felt duty bound to do so from an unassailable 'moral' position to punish such "African greed" for white settler land!

Abraham's *A Wreath for Udomo* provides an interesting answer by exposing and deriding this perceived "'greed' for wealth and power" charge against the constitutionalist African freedom fighters by the colonial authorities who, posturing as "saviours" describe them as "demagogues who see us standing between themselves and the unrestrained exploitation of their own people... (out to) oppress and exploit their people with a ruthlessness that would make our so-called oppression look like heaven" (69). The leader of the freedom fighters in Abrahams' novel puts the whole issue of colonialism into perspective and in the process offers the alternative view validating the 'political agitators' view from a dialectical perspective

We have been accused of being negative and destructive (as Kimathi is in Watere's *Dedan Kimathi*. I am not ashamed of admitting that is so. I would begin to question my motives, my integrity, if you ceased accusing me of being negative and destructive. It is the traditional function of the most heroic sons and daughters of an invaded and occupied people that they should harass the enemy, blow up his bridges and trains, cut his communications, put sand into his machines. It is only the psychologically enslaved or traitors who behave otherwise (74).

There is in Abrahams' disputation no suggestion that the alleged "destructiveness" arises from some inexplicable instinctual 'greed' for power and wealth among African freedom fighters. It is, on the contrary, explained as the deep-seated and natural human spirit urge towards self-assertion an affirmation of dignity, often expressed at great cost in human suffering against entrenched oppression.

In *Not Yet Uhuru* Odinga expresses deep regret that "in Kenya today those who sacrificed most have lost out to people who played safe in our most difficulty days" (xii), during the state of

emergency. Odinga and Kaggia lost out to the clique surrounding Kenyatta, whose “vast edifice of self-interest” (250) also sidelined “the man in the street” (250), the ‘radicals’ and the forest freedom fighters who were rendered “irrelevant” in the new political dispensation.

These misconceptions about “greedy African freedom fighters”, need only cite the self sacrifices made in the general anti-colonial and in particular armed struggles like the Algerian and Kenyan ones to clear the whole issue. Fanon has noted in *A Dying Colonialism* that it is the freedom fighters’ demonstration of “unmistakable proofs of abnegation, of patriotism, of courage...a hardening, a determination to be equal to the historical challenge, a determination too, not to make light of hundreds of thousands of victims” (3-4) in all instances of the Algerian freedom struggle that eventually ensures victory for the fighters and the general struggling populace. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, the case of Mau Mau is cited, noting that “when the British government decides to bestow a few more seats in the National Assembly of Kenya (Legco at the time) upon the African population, it needs plenty of effrontery or else a complete ignorance of facts to maintain that the British Government has made a concession” (114). It was, as Fanon points out, the conscious and willing acceptance of many privations, sacrifices and stubborn resistance by the freedom fighters that convinced the British that Kenyans would never again acquiesce in oppression. Greed, cowardice and compromise were, on the contrary, the hallmarks of collaborators like colonial African clerks, the “tai tai” (tie wearers), not the freedom fighters. Watene’s attempt to impute avaricious characteristics to the freedom fighters in his *Dedan Kimathi* is therefore a diversion and distortion, an indirect way of justifying the conduct of the colonial lackeys he so openly supports in *My Son For My Freedom* and *Sunset on the Manyatta*.

It is, in essence, the individual interpretations of concepts like “pragmatism”. One may choose to see sense or wisdom in Kenyatta’s 1965 criticism of Kaggia for refusing to amass wealth like some of his erstwhile detention compatriots during the freedom struggle, or applaud Mozambique’s Samora Machel for sacking a former comrade in arms when he discovered the ‘comrade’s’ conduct as a provincial governor inconsistent with the socialist ideals that inspired the Frelimo fighters during their struggle. We are “digressing” only for the purpose of examining certain terminology in relation to subjective viewpoints. The interpretation of what constitutes ‘greed’ or ‘patriotism’ will at times be blurred, depending on whether the African intellectual’s critique retains or divests itself of what Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* sees as the lingering effects of a colonialist - designed education, especially “certain of his intellectual possessions... (including) his adoption of the forms of thought of the colonialist

bourgeoisie" (38). In his endeavour to clarify the issue, Odinga in *Not Yet, Uhuru* points out that in the Kenyan context, the freedom fighters cause has all too often

been distorted as the savage activities of primitive murdering gangs.... The sensational anti-Mau Mau propaganda of the period is a gross insult to the leadership of Dedan Kimathi and the brave men he led who defied death in a guerrilla army for the freedom cause in Kenya .... The propaganda against the Mau Mau as a "savage atavistic movement was .... so fierce that it infected even Africans. Only now in Kenya is it becoming possible to present a truer version of the events of this time (120-121).

It would appear that even for such well-intentioned artists like Kahiga out to dispel historical 'distortions' in the realm of fictional works (like his *Dedan Kimathi*), the 'intellectual uhuru' (in the sense of wrenching themselves free from the colonialist 'distortions' they are out to dispel) that should accompany political independence has not made as much headway against the colonial ideological fortress as Fanon and Odinga so fervently hoped when they wrote their accounts. This is evident in demands by some Kenyan intellectuals that we "revisit the issue of freedom fighters in capacity to be greeding". This suggestion that essentially reflects adoption of the colonial viewpoint in its incapacity to see, from the viewpoint of the oppressed the selfless sacrifices of the freedom fighters as opposed to self-interest of the nationalist bourgeois who later took political and economic power.

It is therefore necessary to illustrate, clarify and/or complement Maughan-Brown's contention about the inherent dangers in the liberal writers' all inclusive perspective and its impact on the image(s) painted of the African freedom fighters! Their perceived idiosyncrasies by colonialist writers is superimposed because Kimathi and the movement are oftentimes perceived through such lenses. Kahiga even takes the position of historian and at times seeing the movement's structural weaknesses responsible for its break-up as the personal weaknesses and conduct of its leaders. Though hesitating to vilify or apportion blame (apparently not to invalidate his endeavour by seeming like Watene against Kimathi) the Kahiga attempts to 'balance' by apportioning 'responsibility' for the consequences between the two major leaders of the movement. His view goes that

If Kimathi had started this disintegration by arresting Mathenge. Mathenge had sealed the army's fate by stubbornly refusing Kimathi's hand of peace. And now the Government was fighting an army without a leader, broken in spirit, short of ammunition, short of food and clothing.... There was no time to reorganise; it was almost a case of every soldier for himself and Ngai for us all.

And Dedan Kimathi, like his soldiers, was now on the run (287).



We are not begrudging any author the freedom to extrapolate from history and project into their fictional characters, we must nevertheless recognise that this ultimately interferes and at times compromises the presumably 'ideology free' objective of giving a 'balanced view' of Kimathi here. Kimathi's supporters and opponents in the course of the story are certainly not free of biases.

The following sub-sections examine how the liberal sensibility whose tenets Maughan-Brown sums up as 'clarity, restraint and rationality... the hallmarks of Western civilization/liberalism' (161) appear ingrained and objectified in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*.

### 3.4 Viewpoint Supportive of Kimathi's heroic Image

We have seen that the plot is structured and manipulated to indicate an implied departure and negation of the "wrong" image of Kimathi in colonial literature and other works. The initial emphasis is on the heroic charismatic leader with a liberating mission rather than the "killer" who creates fear everywhere in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. Our sympathy is naturally drawn to him who shoulders the burden of guiding the people to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. We accompany his visits to the forest camps and share his concerns as

He ran into all kinds of fighting groups, some as badly off and as disheartened as General Kabuku's but others very well organised and very gratifying. To those fighters with whom he was especially pleased, he gave promotion with small tokens of money, ranging from five shillings (62).

He has an almost magic effect in instilling enhanced morale and sense of patriotism in the fighting men, underscored even by his bitter rival Kabuku because the results are manifest among what would otherwise have been disorganized groups without him at the leadership helm. Subsequently, even his opponents concede that

One had to admit that Kimathi was quite a man. He had managed to mould an army out of raw material such as this (74).

His enemies' realization that Kimathi is better at leadership and organisation elicits from Kabuku the gallingly bitter recognition that

He is the great star of the Aberdares... Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi, the greatest star of all (113).

This reference to the image of the "bright star" is constantly used in relation to Kimathi and other outstanding fighters. The 'strange' leader in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* who keeps close to the shadows and prefers to have "darkness (as) my closest protector" (83) is now the leader unto light and salvation in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*. The jungle here is no 'den' but a secure and convenient

sanctuary from his enemies. He indeed asks his compatriots to "remember I am the light of Kenya and the torch in my life-blood is for setting our people free from slavery" (52). We are progressively being presented with the "correct" image to counter "the wrong image" (128) that eventually sees "the real Kimathi" (306) devoid of the negative connotations associated with his "forest den" image in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*.

This image of the guiding star continually crops up in the reader's subconscious especially in cases where Kimathi's less endowed opponents voice their unease with his ambition to remain unchallenged leader of the fighting forces. This 'alternative view' by his opponents is never allowed to mute or cloud his image as the brilliant and capable leader. Because his rivals do not really measure up, his stature and capabilities appear and are in fact enhanced in the process. Kimathi's two bitter opponents remain the reprimanded General Kabuku who questions whether it is "only Kimathi who knows how to lead people?" (50) because he favours his mentor, Mathenge. This question is cleverly answered when Mathenge voices his own complaints, succeeding only in exposing his personal weaknesses and pushing the case for Kimathi's position. We hear that

Mathenge's voice was now hard as he remembered how Kimathi had humiliated him ever since they came to the forest. Always the bright one, that was Dedan Kimathi... Even in the beginning, when the whole thing was just starting, and they had been close friends risking arrest together in the reserves, he could sense that Kimathi was a very ambitious man... With admirable manoeuvres Kimathi had ousted him as the overall fighting boss, and it had happened so fast that Stanley, too busy fighting in the thick of the Aberdares, hardly knew what had happened (144-145)

This admission of his brilliant and admirable qualities blunts the 'ambitious man' connotation to translate into 'capable man'. Mathenge knows only too well why he loses to Kimathi in the leadership rivalry. He admits to himself that

He was not a fool and he knew the importance of education. And it was true that he shied away from all those bright brains that surrounded Kimathi. The more he involved himself with them, the more he felt his handicap... Being illiterate was his biggest disadvantage in the cold war between him and Kimathi, for how did the saying go? The pen is mightier than the arrow. Mathenge hated losing but he knew he could never win against Kimathi with his education, love of power, and boundless energy in working out stratagems (147).

His attempts to create an alternative leadership and power base for the mainly illiterate fighters ends up playing into the colonialist trap in the so-called 'negotiations' which only weaken the fighting forces. Kimathi sees and opposes these miscalculated moves and is vindicated when the British abandon the 'negotiations', making the renegade leaders eventually realise that "they are

trying to trick us like little children, trying to disarm us without giving us Freedom' (273). Kimathi emerges as a leader of more foresight than the implied 'love of power' claim by his opponents.

The positive projections of his character are skilfully and deliberately built up, word upon word and description upon description, well into three quarters of the novel. Where certain weaknesses in Kimathi's personality or style of leadership are noted they are downplayed, explained away or simply deflected so that they do not register in any significant manner in the audience's estimation. When the not so flattering aspects of his character emerge, they are seen against the general background of those situations when Kimathi is under intense mental strain as the movement disintegrates due to betrayal by former compatriots or when Kimathi is reduced to the struggle for mere survival.

The bright star grudgingly conceded by his opponents remains the more conspicuous interpellation of the man who dominates the novel even where he is not the direct subject of the author's interest in certain chapters. Kimathi's forest diviner, Wang'ombe Ruga, presents what is perhaps the most enduring image of Kimathi's heroic stature. This occurs during a ceremony where Kimathi is anointed to the highest office of leadership with "the title of Sir Dedan Kimathi, Knight Commander of the East African Empire. A leader of leaders, an elder of the first rank" (249). The undoubtedly constitutes the peak of Kimathi's popularity among his forest compatriots, where all except the often absent Mathenge offer obeisance. The accolades heaped by the diviner Wang'ombe Ruga, as he places Kimathi in historical context are the most instructive. As he reflects on the earlier struggles against the foreign enemy, his stream of consciousness places Kimathi in perspective, so that

He saw in Kimathi the star that had risen in the darkest of the night to show the people the way. The old wars of bows and arrows had failed to drive the uninvited guests out of the country. But the young boys had grown up and talked to the white man in his own language of gun-powder. And they were led by one Dedan Kimathi, son of Wachiuri, who understood every trick of the white man and all his ways... He thanked Ngai for Dedan Kimathi, the guiding star, the brightest star of all (250).

Such evocations of the heroic image more often appear in the epic sub-genre of literature where the link with the supernatural is more emphasised. The appellation here links Kimathi with the cosmos, the supernatural forces that somehow always come to immortalise the epic heroes beyond their physical life span. Indeed Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* might have emerged as an epic novel were it not for the stylistic and structural weaknesses and the inherent ideological limitations in terms of overall vision. Kimathi is, however, at one point given this ultimate unequivocal linkage

with the supernatural, and allowed to transcend his individuality when as the 'light of Kenya' (52) he foretells and knows that he 'will shine in the day time, moonlit nights and in darkness also... for the present and future generations' (222).

Yet the conservative disposition of the epic unreservedly praising the unique hero at the expense of the broad masses translates into a weakness when examining the broad characterization of the freedom fighters. This is because of the ambiguity in the novel's liberal viewpoint which tends to glorify the leader while patently criminalising the movement, or at least its conduct of the war. This paradox in trying to separate or examine Kimathi (abstracted) from the movement without apparently manifesting contradictory positions reveals the author's dilemma about how to salvage Kimathi's image while damning some of the perceived 'excesses' or 'evils' of Mau Mau. But this will be examined from the basis of how the inherent ideology contradicts the portraiture of the heroic image.

One can foresee that these elements of compromise have serious implications on Kimathi's image and paradoxically run counter to the implied purpose of negating the 'distortions' in other portrayals. For the moment we concern ourselves with how the positive image and its pervasiveness are complemented by viewpoints (purportedly) 'independent' from the authorial one - and how the key stylistic device of negation in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* is directed here for purposes of affirmation.

### **3.5 The Influence of Kimathi's heroic Image in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi***

The common 'the cult of the leader' perspective so pervasive in liberal fiction about Mau Mau at times sees the fighters as a directionlessness, helpless and apathetic 'blind mass of the people' crowd unless they cluster around and draw inspiration from a central figure with strong leadership qualities. This is seen in Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* and Meja Mwangi's *Carcass For Hounds*, which have such characters in Boro and Haraka.

One sees a marked difference between the socialist realist writers who seek to imbue the masses with inherent power where their bourgeois and liberal counterparts exhibit a marked hostility, contempt, mistrust or deep suspicion of the masses or mass movements. The outstanding-leader image comes in handy for the liberal writer in such a dilemma. Kahiga's position and his focus on Kimathi comes across in his expressed view that the 'masses are unreliable and easily swayed' (240).

Outstanding leaders like Kimathi, Kago and Mathenge are emphasised at the expense of the broad mass of fighters, who are often portrayed as blind followers without purpose on their own, like "born idiots who had to follow somebody" (95).

Where the socialist realist perspective of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* highlights and compliments the fighting masses as corollary to the image of Kimathi, Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* has them as an appendage; when they join the renegade Mathenge even Kimathi sees them "like sheep without a shepherd" (277). Ngugi and Micere's *Kimathi* issue-oriented perspective which highlights the indomitable spirit of the masses irrespective of Kimathi's demise is here supplemented with leadership stature. Thus from the very beginning even Kimathi is viewed as one more concerned about his position as leader.

Kimathi had a big problem on his mind... He was not the undisputed leader of all these people. Out there in the towns and in the native reserves, the people only knew Dedan Kimathi, but here in the forest things were not so simple. There was another leader who was, by hierarchy, the overall leader of the forest armies. That man was Stanley Mathenge... (17).

This reductionism, a veering from issue-orientation to analysis of individual leaders, even one with the charisma and extra-ordinary stature of Kimathi, translates into diversion and is characteristic of the escapism pervasive in liberal fiction on Mau Mau. The tendency is, as Maughan-Brown notes, to reduce what were fundamental ideological differences to a matter of 'greed, personal ambition and petty jealousies" (215). Mazrui's foreword to Buijtenhuijs *Mau Mau Twenty Years After* notes the tendency in the discourses of liberal historians whose emphasis on "individual idiosyncrasies of participants... obscure the broader social phenomenon which the whole revolt signified" (9). One distinct advantage of the liberal viewpoint here is that we see Kimathi's full stature and its influences on others as well as the course of the events.

The 'cult of the leader' influence extends to those who are closely associated with him in the forest: leaders, soldiers and the rank and file of the movement. Lack of visual contact with him tends to enhance the magic of his aura on others. The narrator's parents' obedience to written communication from Kimathi is instructive as she ponders that

Perhaps it was because of those quietly worded letters of his that used to be slipped under her father's door by unseen men. Sometimes the letters were addressed to her mother.... After a letter her mother or father would go into action. They were the extensions of Kimathi's hands and Kimathi's brain and they did exactly as he told them (14).

Even those inclined to rebellious feelings like Kabuku are submissive while seething with humiliation when Kimathi sees their weakness. Thus Kabuku's acknowledgement that "You are the leader. If you say I go I'll go You are the leader" (59).

The most outstanding fighters are in one way or the other associated with Kimathi's aura and ability. The valiant, independent-minded and steely willed General Kago derives his legendary courage from Kimathi. We are informed that among others

One of the brightest stars was General Kago who, early on in the year had escaped from Kimathi's custody, and taken two hundred men to fight in the reserves.... This had turned out to be a great blessing for the movement, for Kago was the greatest fighter the movement had produced so far (86).

In the critical moments when the odds appear overwhelming, the fighters draw inspiration from the feeling that Kimathi will surmount them because "with Kimathi one felt a sense of real hope; if you died the Marshal would somehow make you immortal' (185). He resuscitates their morale, as they celebrate some of the notable achievements under great hardships; 'the tired fighters again marvelled at the genius and ambition of Dedan Kimathi'.... as they stared at the mighty hall their spirits were uplifted yet again by Dedan Kimathi's magic' (188). This feeling registers as the fighters inspect the Kenyalekalo memorial halls built to commemorate the important landmarks in the course of the struggle. They are generally impressed by Kimathi's continuous encouragement, by Marshal's love and dedication to his men" (184).

This influence of Kimathi's uniqueness affects not only his admirers; even those like Stanley Mathenge opposed to him were 'always slightly nervous, cowed by the Marshal's forceful personality' (286). Even when Kimathi becomes apparently powerless and on the run for survival, the 'genius' and 'magic' associated with his personality makes his opponents continually fear that 'he might even gather a new army, stronger than the one before and crush all his enemies' (332). Away from the centre of affairs, he has this strong hold on their psyche because "the shadow of Dedan Kimathi could be felt hanging over everything' (272). His hunters and all others "knew he was no ordinary man" (306). The narrator sees Kimathi "out-shinning all the rest... For there was no one like him and 'there could never be' (272).

Whether Kimathi is an 'ordinary man' or some kind of "a God" (225) is a question Kahiga never allows to be fully answered because to unravel him completely would dispel the mysteries, and the aura and myths which are invented to highlight his stature. The numerous descriptions like "Dedan Kimathi, half spirit, half man.... Dedan Kimathi man or spirit" (323) and as one who was 'now a legend in his life time' (312) are the closest description of Kimathi in the heroic tradition of

the epic characters. The epic hero dimensions implied distance Kimathi from the whole range of negative images inherent in the alluded 'historical distortion'. The inference leaves room to present the weaker 'human' side of his extraordinary character for the 'balanced view' counter-portrait rationalising the liberal viewpoint. The 'embellishment' implied in the alluded 'artistic idealism' portrayal in one of the earlier works is in the process supposed to have been eschewed.

This influence of his heroic image will, be interpellated in the epilogue which appropriates his relevant heroic past to justify authorial ideology in relation to post-colonial structures that run counter to Mau Mau ideals but purportedly derive moral/political legitimacy by linkage to the struggle Kimathi led.

It is apparent that it is very difficult to eschew either 'extreme' in the conflicting images. It becomes imperative for the balanced portrayal to affirm "limited dimensions" of each 'extreme' in order to rationalise the case for 'objective' portrayal in this novel. The paradox however, is that this in essence translates into a self-contradicting endeavour. We examine how this "balancing" and its outcomes manifest themselves.

### 3.6 The "Balancing" Alternative to the "embellished" Heroic Image

The novel's apparent negation of the perceived 'distortion' in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and the alluded 'artistic idealism' image in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* implied in the author's recourse to historical sources is intended to approximate a 'balanced'/'objective' portraiture of Kimathi. Whittier's view in the preface to Wachanga's *The Swords of Kirinyaga* is that "it is only grudgingly that Njama sees any fault in Kimathi" (x-xi). This is a good point of departure from which to examine how Kahiga presents the 'alternative' image reflecting the 'real flesh and blood man' (329) with both his heroic side and some human weaknesses. One is reminded of Wanjala's criticism of Ngugi and Micere's portraiture where "the stronger and more positive side of Kimathi is not checked by his weaker and more humane side" (394). Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* steers clear of emphasising this aspect for the overt ideological reasons of presenting the stoic hero in the face of every adversary and adversity.

Such tendencies are not unique in the fictional portrayal of historical characters. Haynes in *African Poetry And The English Language* notes Slater's criticism of Kunene for emphasising 'the entirely favourable image of Shaka' (54) by making Shaka appear "less blame worthy than has usually been assumed" (53). Haynes of course acknowledges Kunene's reasons for such portrayal

in *The Epic of Emperor Shaka*. Kahiga endeavours to avoid this "one-sided image in his 'balancing' of Kimathi's portraiture.

This balancing viewpoint sees Kimathi through 'different' eyes and feelings of those in close proximity. Two of Kimathi's closest followers, Agnes Ndiritu and her brother Theuri also even survive the war experience to express their view of Kimathi after his death. Agnes presents the heroic side and some glimpses into the more human "flesh and blood" Kimathi; General Kabuku, resenting Kimathi's popularity expresses the less flattering viewpoint on Kimathi without apparent authorial intrusion but is vindicated by the overall authorial verdict.

Kahiga presents the 'darker' side of this 'great star of the Aberdares' (113) by way of the 'objective' impressions Kimathi's opponents give. Sometimes a few of his admirers express some discomfiture with his conduct to create the intended impression of "balanced criticism". Kabuku, as the first critic is understandable, as his is the viewpoint of one uncomfortable with an efficient but demanding leader. His muted grumbling is delivered in the style of interior monologue.

Why couldn't Dedan Kimathi warn people before coming? Dropping in suddenly like a thief was terribly discomfiting. He felt that Kimathi and his men had by now noted all that was wrong in the camp (5).

Kimathi's projection in the saviour/hero/liberator image here is, paradoxically the preamble to his eventual apparently "ideology free" authorial verdict that Kimathi "was a man of God" (332) after his capture. The presumably 'safe ground' premise in avoiding replicating the earlier 'distortion' of Kimathi's overall image sets the pace while revealing his 'human' weaknesses.

The 'weaknesses' so revealed relate more to Kimathi's style of leadership. His unquestionable credentials on this score are unequalled by any other of the forest leaders; his "forceful personality" (256) is an invaluable asset in streamlining matters. The resentful Kabuku overlooks this in his first complaints, seeing Kimathi as overbearing when he suggests how Kabuku could improve his leadership and efficiency. Kabuku's wounded ego views Kimathi's advice as "unnecessary interference", seeing that

He has began dictating to me, like I knew he would. Ordering me to eat the meat of the wild beasts, which our forefathers forbade. Ordering my men to wake up at the sound of a bugle. Does he think I can't run my camp? (50).

This underscores the point that some of the "wrong" impressions have more to do with the common internal "petty squabbling" (45) among the forest leaders rather than any serious flaw in Kimathi's character and nature.



The ensuing 'alternative view' therefore revolves around the nature of forest politics and their linkage with "Kimathi's ruthlessly efficient world" (251). In reflecting on Kimathi as an enforcer of discipline, for example, we are told that the famous General Kago was once in "Kimathi's custody... was just about to be hanged when he escaped, for those were the days of severe discipline when raw peasants were being moulded into an efficient fighting force" (86). Even Kabuku feels that Kimathi "was quite a man" (74), despite his earlier complaints. Some of the other generals oppose Kimathi out of a feeling of inferiority in comparison to his organisational and leadership efficiency, but mask and personalise their antipathy because they are loath to admit it. Kabuku's attachment to Mathenge stems from such discomfiture.

Kabuku did not want to hear about Kimathi. He was interested in Mathenge. The trouble with Kimathi was that he always forgot that people were here in the forest to get on with the fighting, not to be treated like children by boys ten years younger. Kimathi was a mere boy compared to Kabuku (104).

This allusion to Kimathi's sometimes overbearing character still makes it clear that the opponent is more resentful of Kimathi's abilities and the consequent entitlement to a higher position in leadership hierarchy. Except for Mathenge's forthrightness, all of his opponents overlook and view Kimathi's strong impact as 'dictatorship' though it reveals itself as a 'diversionary' explanation. Kabuku's sentiments reflect authorial equivocation which implies the same discomfiture with this aspect in view that

Western Aberdares, therefore, seemed very much like a place for rebel Generals, disenchanted with the dictatorial leadership of Kimathi and his top aides - almost all of who could flaunt book learning, but didn't have much to show in the way of actual combat. They went around, inspecting, criticising, with knapsacks full of books on which to record losses, critical remarks and other nonsense (107).

The point comes across, but it apparently escapes Kimathi's less brilliant opponents that his education and brilliant top aides contribute to the efficient management of the movements affairs. This, paradoxically, translates into a compliment rather than the intended blistering criticism. Mathenge himself admits bitterly that he "shied away from all those bright brains that surrounded Kimathi" (147). He thus essentially endorses Kimathi's merit of leadership and corresponding position.

Authorial intrusion oftentimes comes in to exonerate Kimathi from such inferences that 'dictatorial' conduct on his part complicates matters precipitating the movement's disintegration. It is the short-sightedness of his main opponents who infuse an 'inferiority complex' mentality among the mainly illiterate fighters in attempts to isolate the enlightened leader that is responsible for this

eventuality. But Kimathi here is hardly the leader who in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* "never feared anybody's rivalry... (and) only sought to protect the struggle from betrayal" (33). He agonises over this 'misguided' endeavour on their part and expresses a dim view of the abilities of other leaders like Kabuku and Mathenge whom he views as the culprits because they "unfairly" challenge his leadership. As he ponders over these later developments we are told that

Dedan Kimathi tapped on his note-book, gripped by anxiety. All he had tried so hard to build for three years was about to fall to pieces in the hands of fools. In this forest fools were in the majority. And so the majority would align themselves with the Kenya Riigi, fall into a Government trap, and be led like sheep without a shepherd out of the forest into a captivity worse than before (277).

Interestingly, where Watene's Kimathi rejects negotiation from the personal 'triumphant victory' (84) premise and in Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi sees such negotiations as a betrayal leading to "neo-colonialism" (70), Kahiga's Kimathi views it as a case of capitulation to classical colonialism in a worse form. But the author fails to see that later day colonialism can be perpetuated with black faces at the helm if the institutional/ideological superstructures of classical colonialism remain intact.

The recourse to historicity is intended to allow the author to steer clear from charges of bias, although this becomes inescapable. In the reference to the Kenya Parliament in the forest and the powers it confers on Kimathi as the Prime Minister, Kahiga manipulates Kimathi's enemies to express reservations that it is 'just another of Kimathi's ideas calculated to consolidate his power and entrench himself as the supreme leader' (113). This is a view quite consistent with the colonialist one and Watene's appellation of Kimathi as a 'dictator'. The implied balanced 'alternative view' endeavours to salvage Kimathi by providing the 'rational' explanation of his intentions as contrary to the accusations made against him.

It made Dedan Kimathi groan, for the whole point of Parliament had been to have a closely-knit group of intelligent people who could meet easily and make important decisions for the whole of Kenya: a small group that could draft letters to the Government, carrying the authority of the black people (170).

This train of thought expressing Kimathi's view is intended as an answer to the complaints by opponents that 'somehow Dedan Kimathi had played his cards so cleverly' against them. Mathenge's view that 'all this business of ranks was started by Dedan Kimathi who is very fond of ranks' (143) points to the personal charisma and creative genius of Kimathi being misinterpreted by his compatriots as deliberate self-propulsion to dominance.

The alternative 'other side' of the heroic image crystallizes in the 'balancing' act where the 'darker' side of Kimathi 'the great star' comes to the fore. Authorial insinuation presents the less flattering aspects of Kimathi's character as forced out by sheer necessity in response to demanding or critical situations. When the movement comes under pressure from the colonial security operation combined with internal defiance to his leadership, Kimathi's previous composed and stoic demeanour fails to work its usual magic and in arresting Mathenge he acknowledges that the situation 'left me no choice' (255). He must, reluctantly appear 'dictatorial'. Mathenge's alternative view is that 'Kimathi was too stubborn and too proud' (258) to compromise or negotiate with anybody, let alone the British.

The split in the fighting forces is a psychological blow that turns Kimathi into one with "an awful mood" (261) and he momentarily becomes irrational in his thoughts and decisions, much like when Shaka loses control of his rational mind after the death of his mother Nandi in *The Epic of Emperor Shaka*. There is of course no outright analogy in character or historical situation implied because Kimathi is a guerrilla leader here while Shaka was a sovereign monarch.

The harshest criticism of Kimathi ironically comes from the main narrator, one of his staunchest admirers, when Kimathi appears indifferent to her pregnant condition, his mind elsewhere when all he has built is on the verge of disintegration. In her emotional state, the language and imagery used is almost similar to that Watene uses against his depraved protagonist. Agnes momentarily perceives Kimathi as "a heartless man. An unfeeling beast" (263). The notable exception here is that Kahiga brings into play the damage control exercise using such 'rationalising' explanations that in these trying moments Kimathi "was not himself. The strain of the last few weeks had been too much. He had very little sleep" (284).

These are the moments when Kimathi appears as one "who had become irritable and highly strung... went into a fit of temper when the other members of Parliament criticised him" (283), or when his personal wishes are challenged, "seethed with anger and humiliation" (285). He has now been transformed into a "sullen, brooding leader" (285). The almost superhuman hero who in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* overcomes every test of the vexed spirit momentarily disappears, though not overshadowing the still stoic Kimathi willing to fight to the very end even if "I end up with a hundred men, as long as they are good men" (282). This is a far cry from his consistent composure against the forces of colonial imperialism and its allies in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

Consequently, we neither have the obdurate megalomaniac of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* nor the stoic revolutionary of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Here is the mortal 'human' Kimathi

responding to the realities of the moment, at times, like Watene's Kimathi, exhibiting the normal human 'frailties' he detests in others in that play. The Kimathi of the later stages of the novel has a more subdued posture, the realities have taken their toll on his stature, as seen in his psychological demeanour. We are told that

The Marshal had been a great towering figure, sitting in an office with a typewriter, endlessly writing letters to his soldiers and supporters... Now he was reduced to a handful of ragged men, all in animal skins... Knowing he would soon be left with empty guns, he seemed to be relying more and more on prayer... As the net tightened around him, his faith in Ngai increased, not decreased: Kimathi the fighting man seemed to be more and more overshadowed by Kimathi the priest (304-305).

But if Watene's *Dedan Kimathi's* 'strange' mystic and dehumanised protagonist and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi's* stoic radical 'ideologue' are here substituted with a 'desperate' (308) Kimathi fighting for mere survival rather than outright martyrdom, the implied 'real flesh and blood man' (329) here still does not answer the question in the narrator's mind as to whether Kimathi is merely "human or... a saint?" (208). While Ngugi and Micere's protagonist attains heroic grandeur through dedication to the revolutionary cause, Kahiga's "real Kimathi" (306) still remains a mystery in the minds of most of his followers. Even towards the end he is still an almost mythical character with the many legends surrounding him. Perhaps the only good outcome of not completely demystifying him in this alternative view is that the mythical element and aura which is the material for artistic reification still leaves room for others interested in unmasking other aspects of his multi-faceted nature.

### 3.7 The Difficulties of 'Moderating' the Image of Kimathi

The nagging question still remains regarding whether it is possible to 'moderate' the image of Kimathi without substantially subverting "the essence of the man's spirit and the dynamics of the movement he led". Kahiga has of course the benefit of retrospect in the type of image he seeks to imbue his protagonist, the 'alternative' image being the inevitable compromise balance that will neither wholly conform to or reject the implied 'inalienable' core characteristics of the protagonist. The problem is essentially how the 'dictator' and 'murderer' image in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* will be rejected as a 'distortion' reflective of colonial misrepresentation and the ideal socialist revolutionary in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* distanced as an ideological 'aberration' of his creators. Kahiga implies that this latter is derivative of the co-authors' projected 'artistic idealism'.

This discomfiture with the perceived 'extremes' therefore leaves Kahiga with the only alternative available: to 'moderate' by presenting a "human Kimathi" in the heroic tradition,

circumscribed within parameters broadly acceptable to nationalist sentiment, but without sending 'dangerous' signals to the neo-colonial establishment. There is little more than room enough to 'rehabilitate' and 'humanize' Kimathi from the 'extremes', and in the process reconcile and assuage both conflicting perspectives within an ideologically 'stable' and 'acceptable' framework.

This is a task fraught with all the dangers and contradictions that inevitably arise when the liberal ideology within which the image of Kimathi and the theme of anti-colonial struggle are portrayed is assumed as the point of departure. If Kimathi is to be portrayed as one with the charisma and characteristics of a popular folk hero, Kahiga's "Movement of Killing" (24) tag essentially creates the tricky problem of separating the implications and connotation on the image of the leader. Kimathi must be deftly distanced from this negative appellation, the main narrator(s) must needs 'discover' the opposite positive dimension. The process of discovering Kimathi in a new image of "the real man -(as) a tired rather melancholy man with books and papers, obsessed not with killing but organising the killing" (128) culminates in the juxtaposed paradox of the apparently non-violent leader of a violent liberation movement. This reveals the author's discomfiture with the possibility of either distancing himself from or fully identifying with Kimathi's image. He therefore proceeds to present the man who before the violence begins 'used to feel that the answer to the African problems was violence' (55) as one ironically unable to accept it as a (morally) correct response to the colonial situation. The overtones of Watene's "walking contradiction" shifting blame to the British as if to exorcise some "guilty memories" now appear in Kimathi's self-justification of conduct. The obduracy and adamant posture are now replaced by a rational (self) explanation. He tells the world that when the agitation for independence reached its peak, British repression intensified, and, with the initial arrests and determination of the African leaders, Kimathi explains that

Shooting was started by British colonisers to kill the remaining African politicians who then ran to the thick bush to save their lives, like myself. British rulers exceeded bitterness and hunted us from one village to another. They shot to death the young politicians. Because of their actions, they caused many young men to run away to the bushes, where they still live even now (56).

The inherent dilemma can be felt: there is a strain here between acknowledging the reality of the negative aspects of violence and their linkage to the patently heroic image in Kimathi's stand against the British. It is tactfully circumvented by presenting Kimathi acting according to the exigencies of the historical situation which is, paradoxically, responsible for bringing out both the finest and sometimes negative traits in this figure who is "not an ordinary man" (323). The darker

shades of his character/ conduct are subsequently (to be) explained away - or at least understood in the circumstances.

Kimathi's "type of religion" is also ideologically interpellated and becomes a key device in the moderation/ transformation of his image in the novel. In its apparent departure from the two plays' images, we do not here have the diabolical 'ways of the devil' tag in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*; we now have Kimathi as a man with a political mission, merging the dual role of the altruistic temporal leader and a messianic figure who "preferred to think of himself as a second Jesus Christ" (15).

The 'criminal' fugitive in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and the socialist revolutionary of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are in the process (purportedly) negated. In place of the 'dictator' image Kahiga's Kimathi from the start offers assurance to some of his jittery compatriots that he is not to be feared (like Watene's Kimathi) because "nobody is killing you... we are here to discuss our problems openly" (41). He will, though under stress in later times of crisis become "the more angry... and suddenly he pulled out his gun, pointed it at the man and fired" (282). Like Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi, this is his view of Justice against a self-confessed "renegade traitor" in the forest. Though explained away as a 'stress' reaction, this (at least momentarily) negates Kimathi's implied "Jesus Christ" (208) image (or self-appellation); the forgiving gentle Jesus who restores the chopped off ear of one of his persecutors in the biblical scene of his arrest is certainly not like the angry Kimathi at this point in the novel.

These traits of the 'democrat' and the 'dictator' run counter to the implied 'moderating' of Kimathi's image and manifest what Maughan-Brown sees as the dilemma and weakness of the liberal viewpoint endeavouring to 'subordinate the events of Mau Mau to the wholly inappropriate notion of balance which will grant the movement the abstract right of revolt, but condemn it for exercising this right with the only weapon available to it" (218). This is seen in the presumably 'non-violent' Kimathi indicting himself in his criticism of others. A case in point where such criticism rebounds on himself is when he reprimands a Kiambu fighter, demanding better proof of dedication and struggle effectiveness "except the Lari massacre"? (200), an incident often cited in colonial records to illustrate the most gory image(s) of Mau Mau 'savagery'. Yet this same "real flesh and blood" (329) Kimathi must needs at the end still be cleared from the "Slaughterous Adventure" appellation of the movement in Watene's *My Son For My Freedom*, and Kahiga's own 'Movement of Killing' (24) tag. The persistent dilemma that the novel never really solves is whether we are to retain his image as that of a heroic figure untainted at the individual level, or if not so,

only in relation to the extent of his association with the otherwise 'negative' and (therefore) 'regrettable' 'excesses' of Mau Mau and some of his own human weaknesses.

Kimathi throughout comes across as "the picture of a man not willing to give an inch" (172) to the British or anyone else once he sets his mind on an objective. The problem, therefore, becomes one of accommodating and merging the traits of the popular charismatic and heroic figure with the obdurate man "who could not tolerate anyone who was not totally behind him" (306-307) without implicating the popular Kimathi as a 'dictator' because this colonialist viewpoint is an 'extreme' image (like Watene's Kimathi) which must be rejected. Yet the uncompromising Kimathi who after the final irreconcilable break with Mathenge swears "there will be no peace in the Aberdares until all my enemies die" (283) has a close resemblance to Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi* portraiture and the protagonist in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*.

Aware of such implications, Kahiga at times allows the 'alternate' all 'wonderful' and "too human" hero of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* to intermittently emerge and project his 'human' side in more subdued overtones. Where Watene's Kimathi dispatches to the netherworld his suspected enemies and leaves the mourning to "the weak at heart" (87) Kahiga's Kimathi is at times 'weak' and (therefore) 'human enough' to weep for the death of his committed men while accepting the inevitability of death in the struggle, though initially of the view that death in the cause of struggle is to be accepted as 'our true friend' (52). Unlike the 'one-sided' Kimathi in the earlier works, Kimathi here is susceptible to changes and now

Tears stung his eyes... Kimathi, in great sorrow, went to the office and wrote his tribute to W.G., who was now lying in a hole in the ground for love of his people (181).

It becomes difficult in the process to accept the later image, in the eyes of the main narrator's momentarily view of Kimathi as the "heartless man, an unfeeling beast" (263). There is a definite authorial discomfiture of linking Kimathi with the 'inhuman' Mau Mau aspect overblown in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. This is also seen in the way Watene's protagonist's soft spot for the female characters is downplayed here. But to avoid implying the purely "revolutionary fighters" platonic relationship with the Woman fighter in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* the 'flesh and blood' Kimathi here expresses subdued 'normal' 'human feelings' towards the attractive Agnes but still views her within the overall context of the task at hand. We are told he felt that

There was something fascinating about her. He thought: she combines some of the best qualities our women have. Obedience and humility plus an ability to bear great hardship with courage and without much complaint (34).

Why this 'human' dimension must be rationalised is baffling unless Kahiga unconsciously applies the same puritanical "ethics and morality" yardstick in Watene's play to his own otherwise positive Kimathi. The ensuing 'damage control' exercise is the inevitable 'moderate' viewpoint where such and other weaknesses are 'regrettably' accepted in the 'human' and 'heroic' personality. We are informed that

Deep inside he was a very romantic man. This was a side of him he did not want to display to the rank and file. He never kept a girl permanently because of the fear that it might lower his esteem before his soldiers. He took what he needed from them and then got them transferred, which was cruel but necessary (202).

The rationalisation presumably pre-empt's a possible "misreading" or "misinterpretation" that might besmirch the heroic image, as if heroes and heroines are devoid of such feelings that make it so necessary to rationalise their otherwise 'merely human' manifestations. The "it was necessary" stock phrase that Watene's Kimathi falls back on is uncannily replicated here, but as liberal apologetics for an otherwise positive hero.

Strangely, the later prayerful and 'desperate' Kimathi will not need such expurgation from transgressions; he will not even be merely human, but 'a man of God' (332) now almost devoid of human weakness in his recourse to traditional religion and/or Christianity as his refuge from his enemies. Kahiga interestingly allows Christianity and 'primitive' traditional religion as equals in moral force, but remains conspicuously ambiguous and equivocal about the type of religion defining his 'real Kimathi'. He is silent as to whether this Kimathi is to be viewed abstractly or as a symbolic representation of the materialist predicated and temporal struggle emphasised in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Kinyatti's *Thunder From The Mountains*. The frame of reference in such accounts like the latter cites a relevant "material Ngai who symbolised their class unity and solidarity, their patriotism and heroism, and their correctness in struggle... (and) not the Christian God who the imperialist and colonialists have created in their own image" (2).

The implicit "pick your choice" offer to the audience again illustrates the author's dilemma and the difficulties in assuming this 'balancing' 'middle of the road' 'moderate' liberal perspective in analyzing a phenomenon like Mau Mau or a related fictionalised figure like Kimathi. The 'objective' balanced portrayal seems an easy way to escape the earlier 'extremes' that tax the "willing suspension of disbelief" in reader's encounters with the fictive products of poetic license applied to the maximum, but creates new dilemmas because of its inherent weaknesses and contradictions in failing to state clear cut standpoints on Kimathi and the issues. The same applies to the case of Kimathi's self-perception, an aspect that we must now examine in reference to authorial sensibility.



### 3.8 Kimathi's Interpellated Self-Perception

The inherent liberal ambiguities doggedly persist in the interpretation and the subsequent quest about "who really is Dedan Kimathi", to (re)quote Ngugi and Micere's phrase here. That "he preferred to think of himself as a second Jesus Christ" (15) means that his acceptance of violence as a means of liberation precludes comparison with Roger Mais *Brother Man* protagonist who laments that "there was enough trouble in the world" (56). Kimathi here eschews the Christian pacifist view by his recourse to armed struggle.

The desire to distance Kimathi from the implications of the (putatively) negative images of 'savage' violence against "pacifist positiveness" are discernible and cannot be divorced from the context. The problem here remains the author's inability to interpellate, like Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi, the positiveness of Mau Mau violence against colonial violence. Kahiga's standpoint effectively translates into endorsement of colonialist 'law and order' violence endorsed in Watene's *My Son For My Freedom, Dedan Kimathi and Sunset on The Manyatta*.

The inherent self-contradictions are seen in the affirmation that Kimathi "rejected the term terrorist" (38), seen as a colonialist appellation to the freedom fighters. Yet he remains, like Watene's Kimathi, prone to what Waigwa calls the tendency to make 'statements that are in direct opposition to each other' (10). The essence of Watene's protagonist's self-indicting "I am a soldier, not a misguided terrorist" (67) statement is replicated by Kahiga's Kimathi as he rationalises his violent opposition to British colonialism. He argues that

I do not lead rebels, but I lead Africans who want their self-government and land... Terrorists are the people who commit evil deeds. There are always bad things done in a time of war. The Kenya Government has taught me to do evil things during this war. Strictly speaking the government is the one which exercises terrorism and has taught me to be a terrorist (173-174).

"Terrorism" is presumably a value-free connotation, without reference to 'good' and 'bad' here. It is unclear therefore what "sins" Kimathi with a Jesus Christ saviour image has to repent or apologise for before being transformed. The fighting "saints of our country" (48) allusion intended to distance Kimathi and the freedom fighters from the vilifying colonial appellations becomes self-contradictory because the conventional moral ethic premise has never conceived of saints 'tainted' with blood, their subsequent martyrdom often arises when they die at the hands of violent forces without themselves fighting back violently!

The overemphasis on the more "extra-ordinary" qualities that isolate him from others in the final analysis translates in to a kind of deliberate authorial self-censorship that blurs the vision

regarding what the broader implications of his image portends beyond himself. Kimathi dominates this novel as a "forceful personality (256) and "great towering figure" (304), viewed as the "great star of the Aberdares" who is "not an ordinary man" (323). For a visionary artist, the fall of "the biggest fig tree in the forest" (331) after his capture might indicate signification of near deification and immortality.

What then is the essence of the man and "the historical moment" in this novel's viewpoint? Authorial ideology provides that clue in the language, images and inherent vision. Does the novel crystallize into real 'resistance literature' because of or notwithstanding the heroic image of its protagonist? The links between Kimathi's image here and underlying ideology are at variance.

### 3.9 Authorial Ideology And Vision in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*

The implicit *raison d'être* in underlying the endeavour to provide a new insight into Kimathi and the historical moment is the stated need to eschew the "wrong image of him" (128) arising from the 'distorted' perspectives, ideology and attendant vision(s) in other works. The paradox is that in this endeavour to salvage Kimathi's image from 'distortion', Kahiga's sensibility and authorial ideology accommodates many aspects of what Kinyatti in *Kimathi's Letters* calls "the Carothers-Henderson anti-Mau Mau theory" (xv) - which from a considered 'progressive' perspective constitutes 'distortion' and misinterpretation (and misrepresentation) of the forces and issues involved.

The view expressed that "terrorists are the people who commit evil deeds... the government is the one which exercises terrorism and has taught me to be a terrorist" (173-174) by Kimathi here is merely one of the few manifestations of Kahiga's inability, like Watene, to distance or extricate himself from what Maughan-Brown calls the grip of "the awesome power of the colonial stereotypes and vocabulary" (200). The ensuing "ideological flaw" in portraying the image of Mau Mau, even Kimathi's is in many instances evident.

The discomfiture with a patently unequivocal image of a stoic and unrelenting Kimathi questioning all forms of injustice in any epoch as in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* explains from the inherent ideology and sensibility of Kahiga's liberal viewpoint why Kimathi has to be 'moderated' in terms of essence. The liberal sensibility eschews violence while the fascist and radical revolutionary psyche steel themselves for it as a necessity for maintenance or change of the status quo. The liberal is apparently not against the just cause, but violence as the means to liberation is anathema even

when other options prove futile. In essence then, the liberal stance legitimizes the status quo any time and is always, as Maughan-Brown has noted, "a variant of the dominant ideology".

This is evident in some of Kahiga's stories in *Potent Ash* where Buijtenhuijs sees Kahiga "so convinced of the moral superiority of his Mau Mau heroes and the justice of their cause" (93). The liberal sensibility is seen in their ambiguity, vacillation or equivocation when presenting the fighters' cause. 'Departure at Dawn' illustrates a rather cynical view in the way the young schoolboy views his 'fugitive' Mau Mau uncle Ndonga's argument that 'if we don't fight the situation will never be remedied' (86). Like the 'educated' Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child*, the young Karanja in 'Departure at Dawn' resents Mau Mau's disruption of orderly life especially his education. The scepticism against Ndonga's view that they are freedom fighters in action' against the colonial army is a viewpoint the young boy scoffs at.

I see, Karanja thought grimly. It sounds heroic. But all you blighters really do is to burn villages and kill other black men. The other day at Lali you brutally murdered lots of innocent folk. Black folk... If you fellows had been educated you would certainly know better. You have blood on your hands. If they come to shoot you its a fair game (86-87).

This particular episode of the emergency is alluded to in *Dedan Kimathi* as representative of the "nature of Mau Mau", drawing from such accounts as Majdalany's *State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau* which describe it in language evoking images of unmitigated savagery as "deeds unsurpassed in any inventory of butchery" (138), where the Mau Mau are painted as

slaughterers...savagely doing their work and the full horror of it can never be known... bodies systematically dismembered... the heaps of charred human remains...relies so charred that even hyenas would not touch them. Men to whom weeping does not come easily wept as charred ridge next morning... Such was the massacre at Lari... man's inhumanity to man (140,141-42).

The toll, put as "officially eighty-four two thirds of them women and children" (141) elicits Majdalany's comment that "Lari shocked and moved the world. Lari was the definitive horror by which Mau Mau would be measured" (147).

The issue, in our view, is not the casualty figures of this particular incident or whether Mau Mau, as described by Majdalany, set out "to kill with pangas and simis" (139). It is, ultimately, that Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* might, like Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi*, emphasise the aspect of "savage violence" to side-step the socio-economic causes of the Mau Mau violence and demonise the movement and in the process downplay or whitewash colonial excesses as civilisation's stand against the 'mere anarchy' unleashed by Mau Mau 'savagery'. In "Departure at Dawn" Ndonga is seen as 'a real terrorist' (82) and 'a dangerous gangster' (88) whose activities and existence are

inimical to any 'peace-abiding citizen' (87) like Karanja and his father. So much for Buijtenhuijs view regarding the 'moral superiority' of Kahiga's Mau Mau heroes in *Potent Ash!*

Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* with its "Movement of Killing" (24) tag reinforces Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi* which tells of the incident "when... two hindered Kikuyu men, women and children were cut down by Mau Mau terrorists" (40) against Ngugi's "Mau Mau Violence and Culture" essay in *Homecoming* which clarifies that the incident commonly cited by colonialist accounts propagating "the image of Mau Mau as something purely evil and atavistic" (28) was deliberately distorted. Ngugi points out that in reality "many of those killed were collaborators with the enemy forces and hence traitors to the African cause... (and) many innocent men and women were afterwards led to the forest and summarily executed by the government forces" (29). The colonial government of course put the whole blame for all these victims on Mau Mau, using the incident to demonise Mau Mau even in the eyes of the oppressed African citizenry.

The same sensibility towards (or rather against) revolutionary violence is manifest in *Dedan Kimathi*. The only difference is that with the benefit of hindsight (the oblivion of Watene's play by Ngugi and Micere's) Kahiga realises that Mau Mau (or at least Kimathi's name and popular reputation) can only be trifled with at the great risk of forfeiture of the writer's reputation in the Kenyan context.

Subsequently, the view of Kimathi as a heroic figure does not extend to the movement and the common fighter, who in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* is still viewed with scepticism, suspicion and distaste as the incorrigible perpetrator of 'uncivil' deeds against established order. Relishing his days of service in the 'orderly' British army while fighting for the Empire, Kabuku finds the 'chaos' (96) of Mau Mau against the grain of his natural 'civilised' sensibility: the movement is here seen as an outrage against 'order'. We are told that

In his civilian life he liked order and had been doing some very nice mixed farming and running a modest timber business (started with gratuities from the Second World war). The timber business had, of course, collapsed after Mau Mau started (96).

The linkages with the view in 'Departure at Dawn' are clearly notable because Karanja and Kabuku echo authorial viewpoint in their protests against the aberration perceived as Mau Mau. Indeed the later rehabilitated Kabuku, (like the 'educated' Karanja) would like nothing more than "to see them out of the forest... (seeing) what a mad senseless thing Mau Mau was" (299). In both cases there is an underlying reprobation of what might at first pass off as freedom cause acclaim.

Buijtenhuijs' fails to detect these subtle undertones that either criminalise or undermine the implicit moral superiority of Kahiga's Mau Mau heroes or the cause they represent.

Consequently, though Kimathi is spared the patent criminalisation of his image in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*, Kahiga's narrative is still replete with settler racist vocabulary criminalising Mau Mau. Some committed adherents are generalised as persons or bands obsessed with "nothing except killing... Just killing" (24). The profuse terminology variously referring to the fighters as "terrorists", "thieves", "gangsters" (96), "animals" (162), "barbarians" (103), "wild", and "savages" occurs too in many instances to be indicated for every page. The summation of a 'typical' Mau Mau general's 'valour' rendered in markedly gory images is illustrative.

Leading about a hundred men, he would swoop from the forested mountain on yet another errand of destruction that would leave dismembered bodies of sheep and men grotesquely scattered under the devilish light of burning houses and animal pens. This was Mau Mau. This was war as they wanted it. And Kabuku gave it to them (110).

This we are supposed to infer, is the common Mau Mau 'orgy of violence' (232) and modus operandi. Strange that "saints" "stars" "men of God" or liberators can (credibly) emerge from this 'diabolical' lot, except by some process of rehabilitation.

In contrast, the excesses of the colonial forces are presented in markedly subdued overtones. Atrocities by the British are downplayed in simple statements like "in this war, the British were not following their proud (read 'civilized') tradition of playing according to the rules. They wanted dead Mau Mau, not captives" (153). The lurid description of the destructiveness of Mau Mau "senseless violence" in the above excerpt is contradicted by the hushed description of colonial forces violence against the passive population and hardly evokes images reflective of what British historian David Anderson calls "Britain's Dirtiest War Of Decolonisation" in the *Finance Journal* of January, 2000. According to Anderson

One British Officer recalled even seeing prisoners being lined up against a wall and executed in cold blood by a white police officer. A former British soldier claims it was the practice of some of his colleagues to release captives and tell them to run. The Europeans enjoyed the "sport" of seeing how quickly they could "bag" the escaping prisoners. Killing Mau Mau "was like a turkey shoot".

The weight of the evidence suggests that such incidents were not uncommon. None was sanctioned by law, but no one involved in the security services at the time could have been unaware of this excesses. Historical records show that the actions of security forces were known at the highest levels of colonial government (20-21).

The estimated level of human qualitiveness in the combatants is rather telling: two white soldiers caught and "dismembered/slashed/slaughtered" by Mau Mau are described as bleeding real "human blood" (152). On the contrary, ninety-two captured and disarmed stripped Mau Mau

fighters cold-bloodedly murdered when mowed down by British machine-gun fire are presented as being of (implicitly) lower human calibre; we are told that 'as they fell, their *oathed blood* mingled and trickled down into Kayahwe river' (158). This is not merely a case of describing a battle scene, but a choice of moral judgement of the human worth of the combatants. Authorial sensibility here illustrates biases in relation to what Maughan-Brown calls 'the ethics of killing by recourse to aesthetic criteria... the colonial notion that killing with a bullet is 'cleaner' and therefore ethically more acceptable, than killing with a panga' (218). Viewed from such premises, belated authorial 'redeeming' statements like the admission that "a Mau Mau soldier fighting for his land was way above a British soldier fighting for a dying Empire" (224) hardly conceal this bias towards a patently pro-colonial interpretation of Mau Mau. The same damage control style perhaps accounts for the fact that the more humanised Kimathi here does not 'slaughter' like his predecessor in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*, he shoots when angry (282). Still, aspects of the Christian ideology that criminalised violent revolt against the colonial Caesar are still evident.

Even the attitude towards violence is skewed in favour of the white man: General Kago's razing down of a homeguard post earns Mau Mau the description 'animals' (162), while the British commanding officer who supervises the Kayahwe massacre of ninety two captured and disarmed freedom fighters is in contrast portrayed as the epitome of humanity. When he spares the lone survivor who falls at his feet begging for mercy after the hideous slaughter - sorry, killing - of his compatriots, we are impressed upon to note the outflow of humane, almost kindred feeling in this officer who was now "unable to pull the trigger of his pistol and drill a hole into the Mau Mau brain invitingly offered to him" (158-159).

This view of the white man's "excessive humanity" and "civilised restraint" is juxtaposed against the perceived stubbornness of the freedom fighters in their "unreasonable" demands. When the colonial government eventually deigns to talk to the freedom fighters in "Mathenge's camp" rather than the uncompromising Kimathi we are impressed upon to note aspects like the "humble" demeanour of the government agents - the senior police and military commanders who agree to meet the fighters and who "put all ... (their) efforts into the negotiations, displaying a great show of patience and often allowing themselves to be humiliated by the filthy, rugged, die-hard freedom fighters" (268).

Such observations (or descriptions) in essence serve the role of questioning the moral validity of the fighter's cause because, as Maughan-Brown has noted, it "invites the putative reader to invest his or her sympathy with the (apparently) beleaguered and self-sacrificing whites" (173).

This is especially so in the light of their portrayal as the ones using intent on a “civilized” approach in the attempt to find a solution to an intolerable situation causing pain, injury, death, suffering and loss to all and sundry, - rich and poor, black and white alike. It only needs some calculated concession on the part of the brutal oppressor to be viewed as disproportionately humane, while the opposing liberating forces who might scoff at and reject the proffered healing “hand of (re)conciliation” will be buffeted by all manner of reprobation. In such cases and circumstances, the freedom fighters’ rejection of colonialism’s meaningless concession might and indeed will be viewed as a case of insensitivity to human suffering by an otherwise “bloodthirsty” lot as portrayed in Watene’s *Dedan Kimathi*.

There is an implicit invitation here to view the freedom fighters as an unnecessarily stubborn lot taxing and making impossible demands” on the colonial government, even with the authorial explanation that the talks were obviously a trap to ensnare and weaken the fighters. With the white man’s apparently inexhaustible patience (predatory birds are always patient and scheming before swooping down on their prey) viewed against the fighters’ obduracy progressively puts the moral authority of their demands into question. A few pages later we are given the impression of a rather emotionally overtaxed colonial government representative who, “sounding tired ..... said he would forward the (fighters’ ‘preposterous’ demand of a meeting with the Colonial Secretary in England!) request to the Governor” (275).

The suffering caused by the war before this incident is placed at the feet of the freedom fighters, perhaps to push the case for the much needed compromise on their part. The use of psychological warfare where the victims of colonial oppression are tortured to breaking point in various ways and eventually invited or manipulated to turn against their own whose activities “stir trouble” and invite the wrath of the authorities’ is evident. The whose vicious repression which takes a horrendous toll in terms of lives and general suffering of the “passive populace” is blamed on the fighters as seen imbibed here in Kahiga’s viewpoint. Though he is fully aware of the effects of the villagisation programmes (the fortified emergency villages which herded the civilian non-combatant supporters of the forest fighters) and the ensuing scorched-earth policy to deny the fighters access to food in farms, Kahiga still blames the freedom fighters for visiting intolerable suffering on their kith and kin in the struggle. It is as if the armed struggle has no moral basis from the beginning. It is necessary to quote at some length what illustrates more than anything else the implicit authorial endorsement of the colonialist repressive counter - insurgency tactics and the eventual outcomes. We are told that

The villagers who had stood by the fighters for so long were on their last legs and were themselves half-naked and starving.... They were beginning to hate the fighters who were still in the forest and blamed them for the beatings, the hunger, the curfew and the forced communal duties... children continued to die of malnutrition, and the mothers, watching them die, cursed Mau Mau and whoever had started it.

When they reflected on the death toll, they realised that their own people had suffered the worst. The homeguard, the peasant and the freedom fighter were all brothers, denying in the agony of Mau Mau. Thousands of other brothers were locked up in the concentration camps. Surely it was time to stop the madness (240).

Colonialism is absolved of blame, elevated to and even allowed to assume a superior morality and self-righteous position of vengeful God against whom the rebellious natives have sinned thus inviting on themselves divine-type vengeance from "white gods" when blame for the suffering is laid at the feet of Mau Mau. This places the presumed nobility of the heroic struggle and its chief architect is a difficult dilemma for an author apparently convinced of Kimathi's correctness in struggle. The answer unravels towards the end of the novel, when, with the freedom army itself decimated by causalities, internal divisions and mass surrenders instigated through colonial propaganda, the captured, re-educated and 'rehabilitated' General Kabuku joins Ian Henderson's "pseudo-gangster" (298) squad to hunt down his former compatriots in struggle. Kabuku is now "convinced that the man who had caused all this trouble in the first place and who must be captured to end all the trouble in the land was Dedan Kimathi son of Wachiuri" (299), echoes Henderson's view of Kimathi "causing trouble" (21). The heroic Field Marshal is after all 'stained' with "villainy" despite Kahiga's apparent conviction to the contrary when he sets out to rehabilitate him by rejecting the image in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* as reflective of colonialist "historical distortion"! Authorial abhorrence and contempt for the "savage" and "primitive" manifestation of the freedom fighters violence eventually catches up with the apparently 'non-violent' organiser in the person of Kimathi.

The only saving grace Kahiga gives Kimathi at the end is to absolve him from 'Mau Mau guilt' as one who suffered for his people. Note, however, that in one and the same tone he praises and disparages the whole spirit of Mau Mau self-sacrifice as he allows Kimathi to think over it all a little before his capture. As he contemplates the few faithful followers who remain with him in this last moments we are told that

He wanted to tell them how much he loved them, but such words would be meaningless. What had his love for his people brought except death? His crime was that he loved his people and his land. So no more talk of love. Love was punishable by death. And like Jesus he would die. For loving too much (325).



The overtones here are not of a merely betrayed Kimathi but also a bitter Kimathi. Whence then this analogy with Christ who understood and accepted, without bitterness, that even the intensely faithful Peter (Gitahi here?) would eventually desert or forsake him at the critical moment? Kimathi's sentiment here, can only be as interpellated, can only derive from an ideological outlook embracing self-interest (material reward) as the expected end in view for motivation, which would subsequently view self-sacrifice (rather than the instinctual self-preservation urge) as "meaningless martyrdom" and waste of effort individual effort, contradicting the previous "fighting saints of our country" spirit of those inspired by the example of Kimathi as a leader enduring all suffering for the salvation of the people - as Jesus willingly did. This contradicts the "man of God" (332) view of Kimathi as one who, almost fanatically, accommodates a religious zeal in his temporal crusade of freeing the country from British rule! Although it is an understandable human response arising from their hate or fear of Kimathi, Kahiga allows Kimathi's hunters to celebrate Kimathi's capture with the similar glee as the "long suffering" compatriots in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*.

The sense of release from it all is captured in the feeling of his Mau Mau turn-coat hunters whom we are told, felt "unburdened of their fear of Kimathi were some had never believed would be captured." (332) is accompanied by "a deep sigh of relief" (332). Yet, as aptly noted, "the country was (still) firmly under British rule" (322)

The self-contradiction is clear because Kahiga regards Kimathi's overwhelmingly human positiveness expressed through co-narrator Agnes Ndiritu, who does not equivocate in viewing Kimathi as "her hero" (147). Watene's crafty technique in inveighing against Kimathi is thus replicated in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*. A limited comparison with a writer like Peter Abrahams illustrates the differential degrees of empathy with the oppressed people in liberal fiction. Peter Abrahams in *A Wreath for Udamo* at least places the blame squarely where it belongs. Anyone familiar with the nature of the colonial situation, Abrahams points out, "would not have the effrontery to (justify sending) out an army to crush the expression of the national aspirations of a people and then turn on its defeated leader and accuse him of (ir)responsibility" (74)

It is instructive that while Kimathi and General Kago are among the "brightest stars" (96, 250), Kago is still seen as a "notorious fighter" (152) who is "slightly crazy" (94) And because Kago dies defiant and unrepentant in the heat of battle, he cannot, even remotely, qualify as a "saint", or "man of God" like the prayerful Kimathi in the later moments of his "desperate life" (308) Prayer rather than fighting posture in this view apparently purges Kimathi's image of any "terrorist" linkage, which still attaches to Kago's and others' incurable Mau Mau "madness" (240)

Even Kimathi, before being eventually 'certified' as 'a man of God', will be consigned to oblivion as part of "the evil past" (332). The phrase in Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi* is now apologetically applied by Kabuku's 'rehabilitated' consciousness as the image of Mau Mau rather than its pervasive symbol in Kimathi. Because Kimathi cannot (apparently) be viewed here like in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*, liberal Christianity is brought into play as the epilogue falls back on historiography for the final rescue effort. A letter Kimathi "had written to a White Catholic priest, Father Marino" (337) is now seized on to further distance Kimathi from the now largely discredited Mau Mau "gospel" (224) and its fanatics. He can now implicitly be viewed as a positively heroic without the tag or the stains of the Mau Mau "evil past" linkage as alluded in Henderson's account and equally implied in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*.

History and authorial ideology thus contend throughout this historical novel as Kahiga struggles to imbue his fictional Kimathi with his own meaning. A plaque in the Kenya Archives pinned beside his last written communication and below two photographs of Kimathi, one in the forest and the other the famous one after his capture sums up what the commentator perceives as Kimathi's essential character, noting that

His last letter to Father Marino who was his priest on the eve of his execution brings him out as forgiving, education loving and very courageous in the face of fate.

It is interesting to note that in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* the protagonist vehemently opposes the *imagined priest* whom he accuses of undermining the freedom struggle by suggesting capitulation, which, as noted, is Ngugi and Micere's way of criticising colonial government missionaries and some African Christians for their crusade against the Mau Mau struggle.

In Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*, Kimathi's friendly attitude towards the catholic priest who visits him at Kamiti prison is allowed to assume an ambiguity suggesting a softening of stance, something which *the real Kimathi* never contemplated even in the most trying moments.

All we are trying to illustrate here is that a historical facet may to one interpreter mean something quite a different from can be implied from it by another. The message Kahiga derives from Kimathi's last letter could be a different message from what a historian may imply from the actual words. The meaning in the novel derives from the freedom of the artist in the creative interpretation of historical reality.

Maughan-Brown's summation of the liberal artist's analysis of Mau Mau is throughout manifest in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*. What is crystal clear here is that Kimathi is merely abstracted

from the essence of the broad freedom struggle signification. The ensuing self-contradiction illustrates that in essence

The fact that it apparently remains very difficult for an author working on the social democratic fringe of liberalism to sympathise with Mau Mau draws attention to the purely negative nature of the critique which can be mounted against colonialism from this position: an abstractly egalitarian/concretely intellectual elitist position from which the individual African can be sympathetically presented whereas Africans, considered collectively, appear within the defining framework of standard colonial bourgeois ideology (173).

The neo-colonial liberal ideology in which Kimathi and the movement are conceptualised is seen in the vision relating to the meaning of independence. The crafty General Kabuku views settler Sorrenson's farm as 'the ideal farm' (269), will undergo a nominal transformation unto 'Freedom Farm' (a good name that, Freedom Farm (270) and be appropriated intact. Echoes of Orwell's *Animal Farm*? Wrong. There is no satire intended in the representative authorial tone and view.

Instead, in various instances of rather misplaced 'comic' relief we are invited to laugh at the more 'foolish' (204) and equally 'primitive' (210) fighters who cannot conceptualise 'decency', 'smartness' and self-respect in conformity with the 'civilised' settler tastes. While Kimathi exhorts the fighters to harden their resolve and persevere in the difficult circumstances and privations of the forest, Kabuku expresses an "obvious disdain" (210) for the ordinary forest fighter who wears "clothes of animal skins" (210), and those without any penchant for European style "decent clothes" (210). He is contemptuous towards those "who would eat anything" (211) without fussing about the type of food "meant for self-respecting people" (210). There are echoes of the fighters' preferences in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* in this clash between the merely "crass" eating habits of the ordinary "primitive" (210) fighters and the refined "class" tastes of generals like Kabuku, who laments but is more mesmerised by the fact that 'a white dog ate better meals than any African, even Jomo Kenyatta who was languishing in jail' (191). The hoped for independence is therefore synonymous with the acquisition of elite status by blacks - a replication of Watene's avaricious 'animal' characters with their 'what will you take for yourself (16) expectations. We do not see any of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi's* concern with "why poor men died in the forest" questions regarding the fate of the suffering masses.

Even among the freedom fighters the supposedly unifying anti-colonial stance still has cleavages. The more 'civilised' ones like Kabuku are conscious that 'people had not been equal before coming to the forest. Some had maintained themselves in dignity (read 'some measure of abundance and comfort') while others had always been hungry' (205). Consequently, in the

envisioned sharing of the fruits (spoils?) of uhuru, the assumption that 'there would be enough for everyone, each according to his rank' (270) presupposes that there are enough settler-size farms for the senior most generals and officers to leave enough for the rank and file soldiers - not to mention the still hungry and landless masses. This is the prelude towards the acceptance of the inevitable landlessness of the former freedom fighters in the 'free, independent Kenya' (333) of the epilogue, who are presumably contented merely because 'Kenyatta rules now... (and) those former white highlands... are our highlands now' (335-336).

The most ingenious aspect is how Kimathi's heroic figure is juxtaposed for the purpose of interpellation in the new set up. As a past heroic figure, he obviously will not be allowed to subvert the 'new order' because the goal 'he had set for himself- freeing the land through armed struggle *against the British*' (19) has now been achieved (albeit in a slightly different way). "The real Kimathi" cannot, presumably, see anything wrong as long as black people are in power. Indeed the substituted (fictional) one (too bad the British hanged the real one!) of the epilogue can be manipulated to confirm from yonder netherworld, through the (surviving) pro-Kimathi main narrator, Agnes, that he is 'happy' (339) with the whole (neo-colonial!) set-up. He is now transformed for ideological purposes into what Maughan-brown calls the bridge spanning 'the gulf between the ideal projections of the ideology and the real relations of production and hence conditions of human existence embodied in the structure' (137). Agnes and her brother Theuri will wait for the 'promised' (336) land in the meantime because Kimathi has already played out his historical role.

"He had done his work. He went to rest. He is with God now. He can see from wherever he is, that we are free. And he is happy" (334).

What therefore is his historical relevance here? Kimathi's broad 'never forget we are fighting for the whole of Kenya, indeed the whole of Africa' (199) is now the vision of his new relevance. His 'Cape to Cairo' (337) view of African freedom is now the *raison d'être* for any 'aluta continua'- yonder away from Kenyan borders. The now clearly anachronistic 'last ragged bunch of freedom fighters... (with) that powerful forest smell, animal smell' (333) disconcert the sensibilities of their more 'civilised' countrymen when they emerge from the forest at the onset of political independence. One wonders how the forest flora and fauna would have made an exception by conferring some flagrancy on the heroic Kimathi if fate had allowed him to emerge from the forest with these other fighters or how the author would remove from Kimathi the 'objectionable' forest smell that denotes and clings to the ordinary freedom fighters!

Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* is thus a classic example in the style of blunting and subverting the essence of heroic images in fiction by (mis)applying their social relevance. The inalienable linkage of "the essence of the man's spirit" (Kahiga's phrase) and pertinent issues in the post-colonial situation projects the struggle and heroism of these self-sacrificing fighters as a vehicle to a new post-colonial set up that replicates them with the same scant regard like the erstwhile white masters in classical colonialism.

The reluctance to explore the disturbing questions of the meaning of independence is evident in the inherent ideology and vision. The profuse praise of (Kimathi's) heroic virtue *in historicity* implicit in 'the uhuru we fought for is now here' view only serves to implicate Kahiga in the 'conspiracy of silence' stance regarding the pertinent issues of the nature of political economy rather than colour in post-colonial Kenya. If hero-worship, 'objective', 'balanced' or authentic/realistic portrayal of Kimathi were all that was required to dispel colonialist distortions, 'progressive' chroniclers - including historians and praise singers armed with facts - would have sufficed. The rider is of course that one concedes to Wanjala's demand regard the 'mitigating' of works of the creative imagination.

Viewed in terms of the inherent attributes of real 'resistance literature' with its incisive examination from a "social relevance" perspective, the disquieting verdict must be passed that in spite of its generally positive delineation of Kimathi, Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* hardly crystallises into the hoped-for 'mature' novel anticipated in Buijtenhuijs appraisal of his earlier short stories.

Comparatively, some aspects of the 'real resistance novel' appear in the proactive viewpoint, probing questions and tone of Kibera's *Voices In The Dark*, examining the "meaning of it all" with its focus on some of the maimed erstwhile freedom fighters as beggars in a city street, who are not seen or rationalised as objects for condescending charitableness in the way Watene accepts the beggard lot in *Sunset On The Manyatta*. The satirical tone barely masks the bitter but never cynical concern for these fighters' plight and the ever hungry masses in the 'new scheme of things'. Kibera, at times using satire or direct description dares, in the words of Lukacs, to look stark reality in the 'face' without much masking.

For once independence is won from the English and the French and the populace have the privilege of being bashed over the head by their own government for a change the task becomes one of planting grass where the bulls fought. And the process of forgetting the past so as to build the future is, as the expatriate never wearies of saying, a very sensitive affair. But there will always be some people like Irungu here who think that because they lost a hand here and a hand there in a brief engagement with the enemy in Kiandarua they shouldn't tighten their belts a little more on the road to prosperity.

Well, democracy tolerates all viewpoints. (16-17)

There is no obfuscation, no attempt to see Eldorado in the poverty of these former fighters now begging in the promised land that holds no promise as yet. The sentiment here is unlike Watene's contention that 'their suffering had ceased'.

Seen in the light of Lukacs' contention in *The Historical Novel* that "archaism must be ruled out of the general linguistic tone of the historical novel as superfluous artificiality ... to bring a past period to a present-day reader" (195), Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* falls short of the 'mature resistant novel' expected in Buijtenhuij's view of his short stories. Notwithstanding its deeper insights into some salient features of Kimathi and Mau Mau, its limitations in terms of vision essentially crystallise into what Lukacs calls the "historical novel of apologetics for the present ... the content of liberal compromise ... an historical novel which drops to the level of light entertainment" (183). In the process of giving us his own image of Kimathi, Kahiga, in the words of Albert's *Contexts of African Literature*, fails "to exploit the resources of the novel to give a pitiless...picture of the new African society... after the abolition of colonial domination" (102) like Kibera does in *Voices In The Dark*.

Wawira's praise for Kahiga as a pragmatic 'realist' who avoids "the trap of emphasising his ideals at the expense of reality' ignores the inherent counter view of a vision which not only shies from examining but even obfuscates the issues in contemporary Kenya. The novel translates into a reductionist fictional resurrection which tends to subvert Kimathi's cause by emphasising more on attainment of political power by black leaders rather than the nature of the post-colonial political economy and its implications on the issues raised by the literature - especially the question of "real resistance literature". The towering figure with charisma, the subject of epic literature (though this is not an epic novel in our estimate) is at times almost equal in stature to the hero of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, though with some of the lonely "figure of the shadows" attributes in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*. This "merging of the heroic and the humane" explains the author's reasons for muting his essence out of the forest. He is in historicity capable of gaining the "understanding" we are invited to extend to him to preclude the incisive gauge against his human side where he fall short of the stoicism that calls for full empathy with him, and more importantly, *his cause* in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

Notwithstanding this weakness in vision, one cannot ignore the novel's incisive multi-dimensional, comprehensively informed history-based image of Kimathi. It does, from this viewpoint, bridge much of the implicit (historical) credibility gap between the two plays' images of

the protagonist, the contradictions of the ideology within which it is premised again notwithstanding.

It is, by and large, clear from the foregoing analysis of Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* that the novel is a (comparatively) more credible endeavour in its multi-faceted presentation of the image of the historical character. Its attempt to bridge the credibility gap created by previous fictional images is seen in its closer affinity to the historical events and allusion to the roles of other historical characters like Karari Njama and others who closely interacted with Kimathi. It does not overtax the audience's "willing suspension of disbelief" like the two plays' dramatic techniques.

Its main stylistic weakness is the excess details on other events, situations or characters not directly implicated in projecting Kimathi's image. Its otherwise 'sober' narrative style is largely responsible for allowing the reader to see Kimathi and understand his conduct in the high and low moments of the struggle without generating as much contentiousness as the plays. To this extent the novel and its all-round image of Kimathi are valuable insights that provide interesting reading especially in the high suspense moments.

But the main issues of course remain the nature of its image and its implications on what Buijtenhuijs' calls "real resistance" literature. Its success in redeeming Kimathi's image from the wholesale vilification in watene's *Dedan Kimathi* is both real and apparent - real because Kimathi's character, his strong and weaker points are viewed comprehensively, apparent because the liberal ideology undermines and at times outrightly contradicts the stated objectives of redeeming/rehabilitating his image from the earlier 'distortions'. It could probably have superseded Ngugi and Mucere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* were it not for this inherent contradiction, which Eagleton in *Marxism and Literary Criticism* calls the "distinction between a work's subjective intention and its objective meaning" (48).

This all-important question of ideology is the determining factor in judging Kahiga's contribution in "educating us about Kimathi and his role." *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* can stake its claim as "resistance literature" by transcending the merely factual/historical Kahiga's reluctance to generate further debate apparently from a fear of being dismissed off-hand as an (artistic) 'idealist' squanders the unique opportunity to create an epic novel that should have brought the historical Kimathi closer to contemporary reality.

The epilogue supposed to create this link between past and present only serves to further relegate Kimathi's relevance to the mist of history. Bardolph's "The literature of Kenya" essay in Killam's *The Writing of East and Central Africa* sees this same weakness in Mwangi's portraiture

of Haraka in *Caracas For Hounds*, where the vision fails to effectively “blend history and legend, facts and a political message for the present” (46). Ngugi and Micere do this in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Kahiga’s *Dedan Kimathi* would merely have us remember Kimathi’s heroism, and sing of his “strength and courage” (207) against a politically vanquished colonial regime without telling us how these admirable qualities should be called forth in confronting present day exigencies. Webb’s view of the African historical novel as a forward-looking work which should explore the myriad alternatives of its historical time of writing rather than the historical frame of reference is an aspect that Kahiga shies from adequately coming to terms within his *Dedan Kimathi*.

Ngugi and Kahiga cite excerpts from the “song of Kimathi” in order to imbue their meanings into Kimathi’s image. We must now focus our attention and examine what images the song genre paints of the same historical character’s essence.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE POETRY OF FREEDOM: IMAGES OF KIMATHI IN MAU MAU SONGS AND OTHER POETIC COMPOSITIONS

#### 4.0 The Freedom Songs As 'Orature In Commitment'

Apart from the vaunted valour of the forest fighters so well described in Paul Maina's *Six Mau Mau Generals*, another formidable weapon against the colonial enemy and their agents was the indomitable spirit of the masses who provided moral, material and sometimes logistical support to the forest fighters. This popular support was derived from the patriotic political consciousness inculcated into the people through an effective oral medium - the freedom songs. Kimathi, features prominently in many of the guerrilla songs.

Karuga Wandai points out in *Kimathi: A Tribunal To a National Hero* that the messages in the Mau Mau songs were imbibed and (metaphorically) 'written in the hearts and minds of people... not only in Kenya have songs of liberation assisted and inspired the movements, but all over the world music and songs have always given humans the spirit to fight and survive' (55). Wandai points out that the popular 'Song of Kimathi' "marked every major ceremony in the forest. It was their national anthem" (5). Wachanga also points out in *The Swords of Kirinyaga* that the "Mau Mau songs... were our great weapons in educating the people about the (nature of) the colonialist government" (19).

These songs were composed and sung in "the heat of the struggle" by Mau Mau fighters and their supporters. We shall examine how Kimathi is portrayed in them and some of the poems written by Kenyans interested in the theme of armed freedom struggle.

#### 4.1 Images of Kimathi In The Oral Texts

Except by those scholars inclined to view the language of rendition as restrictive in terms of communicating with a broader (literate) audience, the popular oral expression component has not received as much attention from literary critics as the published novels and plays on the theme of struggle. If their urgency has been less apparent in the post-independence period, it is not because their major theme is less relevant today, it is because no event has so far been as cataclysmic as the emergency period of 1952-60. The freedom songs still retain a strong appeal to those interested in

the whole theme. They evoke powerful emotions in those who witnessed the emergency and their call for social justice and images of unparalleled courage and heroism inspire and move even those who did not witness of the historical events of the time. Kimathi and other prominent Mau Mau leaders are continually mentioned, hence our interest in this component of Mau Mau literature in this chapter.

The images of Kimathi in the songs are inextricably linked with the whole theme of liberation. Those in translation in Kinyatti's *Thunder From The Mountains: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs* (ed) reveal this inseparableness of the man and the theme. Songs like "Our Leader, Dedan Kimathi", "The Fountain of Independence", "Kimathi Save Us From Slavery" and "Kimathi Will Bring Our National Anthem" and Gibson Gitahi's "Kimathi will come" illustrate the people's view of Kimathi as a central pillar in the vision of liberation.

Images associated with Kimathi's name in these songs are unequivocally libertarian. In "Our Leader, Dedan Kimathi", he appears as an altruistic person of heroic virtue who has courageously accepted the burden of leading by example. He thus calls on others to accept and drink from his "cup of pain and suffering, a cup of tears and death". This conferment of the saviour image and the stoicism evident in his example creates the strong appeal for the like-minded to "follow his revolutionary footstep". The religious parallel to Jesus is unmistakable. Mzee Richardson Gachigua explained that the whole "Song of Kimathi" rendered in the vernacular derives from the Christian hymn about Jesus' ascension to the mountain to pray, only that the words are adapted from the religious theme to the political one. The defeat of Satan "is substituted with the defeat of "the colonialists".

In the song, Kimathi is almost a Christ-like figure who must suffer "alone" for the sake of others, though his influence by example is directed at the individual and collective levels to infuse into these others a similar altruism for the cause of liberation. Hence the exhortation that

You must take his courage and endurance  
To courageously face tribulations or death  
Knowing that you will belong  
To the black people's state of Kenya.

In "The Fountain of Independence" his stoicism is imbued with life-giving qualities. He is perceived as symbolising and personifying the source of life in a future independent country. The statement is a powerful appellation and a strong indictment against colonialism and its vagaries. Violence and deaths are blamed on colonialism; Kimathi is the life-giving fountain, a source of life to be carefully protected not just for his own value, but also for the struggling masses. The images

are cyclical and self-reinforcing: the fountain (source of life) must be guarded "by the Mau Mau army". The cause of death and suffering - "the whites" - and the colonial exploitative system with its "robbery and violence" must be destroyed.

A notable stylistic feature in this song is the juxtaposition of opposing images illustrating the dialectical relationship of the social forces associating Kimathi with life, "the fountain" and the accompanying recognition that "those with hearts of steel were made so by Kimathi". The depth of Kimathi's humanity as life-giving spirit in sustenance of the struggle is qualified: violence as the means of liberation has been necessitated by colonialism and those who trample on the human dignity of the Kenyan people. Arising from this situation is the "hearts of steel" resolve necessary in confronting these dehumanising and life-negating forces, just as the nourishing fountain needs "to be protected with stones erected around it". The parallelism here indicates the dialects involved by delinking the conflicting and irreconcilable images of the physically contending forces of colonialism and liberation: each is acknowledged as the offshoot or counter to the other. Kimathi emerges as an unmatched symbol of almost superfluous humanity, one forced into violence in defence and affirmation of life. Images of strength, heroism and humanism infuse both the man and theme in the song.

In "Kimathi Save Us From Slavery" and "Kimathi Will Bring Our National Anthem" the theme predominates over the image of Kimathi; his role is more emphasised here. In the these of the former song there is the urgency in the people's call, urging him to

Go quickly Kimathi  
And save us from this slavery  
Kenya is filled with bitter tears  
Struggling for liberation

In "Kimathi Will Bring Our National Anthem", the people's faith is in a Kimathi who will be "the fountain of justice", to paraphrase the earlier song's title. After attaining the envisioned independence

Kimathi will identify  
Those who have been oppressing us  
And the British will be driven out  
Together with their African puppets.

Whether the focus is Kimathi or the fighting forces, the bottom line is the quest for social justice. The British and their collaborators are hated not because of colour but because of perpetuating oppression, and for being stumbling blocks in the struggle for justice and freedom.

This is also evident in Kinyatti's "Cenotaph For Dedan Kimaathi", a poem in *A Season of Blood : Poems From Kenyan Prisons* which merges history and fiction in the course of portraying Kimathi and the Mau Mau experience. The six-year sentence imposed on this historian in October 1982 because of his patriotic stand and progressive viewpoint regarding the place of Mau Mau in Kenyan history are the subject of the poems. The prison experience, Kinyatti says, provided a unique opportunity, albeit a rather harsh one for him

To study in silence  
To try to find my own place  
Among the brave men and women of our land (18).

Some of the prominent Kenyan patriots mentioned in the poems are General Baimungi, Mary Nyanjiru, J.M. Kariuki, Pinto, Me Katilili and James Beauttah. Kimathi towers above them as the "Kenyan Prometheus" evoking the mythical Greek figure who defied all odds and got the fire prohibited by Olympian gods to teach fellow men its use in various arts and was punished severely by the vengeful gods. The "poetic" historian's view of the legendary Mau Mau fighter to whom he is so enamoured is the subject of the cenotaph in memoriam.

#### 4.2 Kinyatti's "Cenotaph For Dedan Kimaathi"

The stylistic approach in the "Cenotaph For Dedan Kimaathi" poem differs significantly from Githaiga's "Kimathi wa Ciuri" poem written ten years later, which conceptualises Kimathi within a thematic context before describing his interpellated attributes. In the "Cenotaph" one sees more of the historian than poet as Kinyatti 'poetically' delves into the specifics before couching them artistic garb to yoke the conceptualised images. At some point the poet/artist surpasses the historian. In the delineation of Kimathi and the event, the basic "historics" are discernible, the initial stanza of the "Cenotaph", tells us that

He was a great freedom fighter  
A man of great passion  
A noble man  
He took an oath  
Never to cut his hair  
Until the British were driven  
Out of the country (138).

The two parts of the 'cenotaph' present a clear cut dichotomy, so to speak, of the historical and fictional components. The descriptive style states the 'essence' by dwelling on Kimathi's fate, evocative of an almost "eye witness" account in the imaginative recreation of how he suffered in the hands of his vindictive captors at execution.

The enemy cut him down  
 His body was savagely mutilated  
 Legs and arms broken  
 Skull crushed  
 Before the British were satisfied  
 That he was dead (138).

This indictment of the British overkill mentality in the ferocious counter-insurgency measures reflects the images evoked in the title's collection in the "*A Season of The Dragon*" poem. The allusion to his secret burial in an unmarked grave without the elementary respects for the dead is evident in the hints of the ignominious treatment. This is expressed in the "Not a single flower... not a coffin, Not a single mourner" alliterative phrases. The language is evocative of the excessive British vindictiveness against him. In the process Kimathi emerges as the noble heroic victim. It is instructive that the 'dreadlock' hairstyle sported by Mau Mau fighters here is not given any negative 'terrorist' connotations, but is imbued with a humanist cult inspired by (positive) altruistic image. In the second part of the poem the almost supernatural mythical characteristics highlighting the aura of Kimathi evoked in Githaiga's later poem now appear in the "Cenotaph". We hear that

When he lived  
 The rivers and mountains  
 The moon and the stars  
     worshipped him  
 When he walked  
 Thunder and lightning  
 Roared and crashed  
 Clouds raged in violence  
 He was indeed  
 A great giant among men  
 A Kenyan Prometheus (139)

The linkage of Kimathi to mythical characters like Prometheus in Greek epic elevate his heroic figure from the human level to the instrument of divine design. Kinyatti does not make the direct "great prophet of Ngai" allusion in Githaiga's later poem, but the promethean parallel in the "Cenotaph" is implicit symbolisation as opposed to the overt individuation of Kimathi in Githaiga's poem. This symbolisation aspect denotes Kimathi's lasting legacy, namely, his subsequent immortalization because

The page he wrote  
 In our history book  
 Is one of the finest  
 It will always be remembered (139).

The effortless fusing of the apparently irreconcilable realms of the poet and historian denotes Kinyatti's cardinal "poetic" purpose where

The poet in me wants to build  
A revolutionary monument  
In the hearts of our people  
which no amount of repression  
will ever demolish (147).

The revolutionary spirit of the Kenya Land Freedom Army is the bedrock, while Kimathi and like-minded compatriots are the cornerstones of the intended monument in art. Kimathi's name crops up in other poems like "The Market Woman" whose images of suffering, in "rags", and "exhausted" are accompanied by her constant "calling Kimathi and Mau Mau to return" (33).

The "Cenotaph for Dedan Kimaathi" inexorably links Kimathi with the general theme of the search for social justice. Its stylistic simplicity, structure and language can be easily understood by its intended audience - the ordinary reader rather than the sophist. It might be casually passed over or dismissed as 'banality' by 'sophisticated' literary critics. Aware of this possibility, Kinyatti in the preface pre-empts any potential splitting of hairs over the issue of literary aesthetics by candidly conceding that

These poems are not the work of a poet, rather they are the thoughts of a restless historian, recorded rhythmically to express the unbearable anguish of prison life, to dissect the horror and barbarity of the neo-colonial state and simultaneously to reinforce our people's indestructible commitment to democracy. They were not meant to please our "learned" western literary critics (xiii - xiv)

Since the poems are intended as a critique of neo-colonialism, Kimathi must needs be distanced from any association with the 'neo-colonial state' of affairs. His name is invoked against neo-colonial excesses like police brutality against university students in February 1985 in poems like 'Blood In The Classrooms', and his legacy cited as the way forward from a 'progressive ideological outlook. The 'bourgeois oriented' intellectual is exhorted to see the 'progressive' light like Kimathi and divest himself of any conformist 'intellectual slavery' disposition. Kinyatti calls on the intellectual elite to

Come compatriot  
Come down from your ivory tower  
Leave your bourgeois books to the cockroaches  
Walk with us on this road  
It is the same road  
Dedan Kimaathi followed (96).

It is significant that in his translated "Song of Kimathi" Kinyatti refers to Kimathi's "revolutionary footsteps". Kimathi and the movement are therefore interpreted from a dialectical materialist perspective. In *Kimathi's Letters* the historian sees the movement's leadership major limitation as the absence of a materialist conception of history type of ideology necessary to address the class contradictions in a nationalist struggle, while Kinyatti the 'poet' here has the leeway to manipulate poetic licence to imbue his fictional Kimathi with such attributes. We shall now examine a 'less radical' viewpoint on the legendary figure in the poem written by a teacher at Kimathi Secondary School in Nyeri

### 4.3 Michael Githaiga's "Kimathi Waciuri"

The 'Kimathi Waciuri' poem by Michael Githaiga conceptualises Kimathi within the tradition of heroic praise poetry. In this thirteen stanza poem the liberation theme precedes and Kimathi is mentioned for the first time at the end of the fourth stanza as "our great general". Thus foregrounded within the thematic context, the rest of the poem dwells on his image and role

The core attributes that make Kimathi an outstanding character are emphasised. His valour, we learn, is such that his name "struck terror in the hearts of the Johnnies" (British Soldiers). There is no connotation here of the common "terrorist" term in the sense employed by colonialist and neo-colonial writers. Kimathi creates "terror" in the enemy, the British colonialists and their collaborators. Githaiga's sensibility thus infuses into an otherwise negative term a positive concept/appellation. Similarly, we are told that Kimathi's "name spelt fire". This phrase interpolates him at two levels; there is reference to one who can reckon with the enemy; at the symbolic level the revolutionary violence, which, compared to fire, chastises to cleanse the land of colonialist evil. His uniqueness is first adequately illustrated in the seventh stanza where even nature appears subservient to his unuttered dictates

Kimathi  
 Kimathi Waciuri  
 Commander of all that was in the bush  
 Birds of the air  
 Animals of the plains  
 And creepers of the earth  
 Friend of all  
 Whose wisdom cannot be equated

Kimathi towers above the ordinary mortal here. The emphasis is purposely indicated by the use of the capital letter 'P' to denote the aura created by Kimathi's (alluded) "Presence". This

reference occurs in the forth stanza. Like a supernatural figure his influence extends to other natural phenomena, the "birds of the air, animals of the plains and creepers of the earth". Githaiga incorporates the many myths and legends around Kimathi, but the image that best captures his towering stature is his description here as "commander of all that was in the bush". The perceived linkage to the divine is expressed in the phrase "great prophet of Ngai". Githaiga here highlights Kimathi's deeply religious psyche in the course of struggle. It is instructive that Kimathi's prayers here are integrative, performed together with his compatriots rather than the lonely seclusion emphasised in Watene's play or Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*. His example and inspiration are a unifying factor here. We hear that he is

Kimathi  
 Kimathi Waciuri  
 The great prophet of Ngai  
 "Thaai thathaiya Ngai thaai"  
 His morning and evening call to prayer  
 Messages from God abound in his mouth  
 His brave troops standing to attention  
 As he spelt the will of God  
 The will of our ancestors  
 The will of our land

Thus imbued with qualities commonly associated with the epic heroes, Kimathi appears invincible, and is even alluded to as imbuing similar characteristics to his fighters who go into battle "without being seen". Invisibility comes naturally to extra-ordinary mortals, there is the incident in the epic of *Emperor Shaka The Great* where Shaka concealed in a bag escapes death when the spear thrice thrown at him inexplicably fails to penetrate or harm the infant Shaka. Kimathi's various disguises like turning into a 'leopard' or going into the enemy camp unseen are alluded to in many myths. Some are cited in Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* and in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

Githaiga's poem differs significantly from the longer epic ones in the absence of lengthy explanations on the demise of the heroic character. We are implicitly asked to accept the fact that heroes, unlike deities, have chinks in their armour, the vulnerable points for the enemy. From a stylistic viewpoint, there is no transitional developmental link from the apparently invincible Kimathi of the middle stanzas to that explaining his capture. We only get the reference to the "one dark freezing morning, (with) the sounds of guns exploding ... (when) Kimathi was captured" in the eleventh stanza.

The absence of lengthy explanation of this eventuality translates into one of the literary strengths of this poem, depending on how one looks at it. Unlike in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*, there



is no diminishing of Kimathi's stature before his physical demise. This one-dimensional praise poem thus projects the positive heroic image which remains indelibly imprinted in the minds of the audience. Unlike the progressively diminished and eventually obliterated protagonist in Watene's play, Kimathi's image here is throughout stoic. There are in Githaiga's poem elements of the symbolically indestructible Kimathi spirit, which "lives forever".

Githaiga's anti-colonial stance conceptualises Kimathi and the freedom theme within the heroic tradition without apparently being overly ideological. The poet's careful, even marked self-distancing from the colonial "darkness and doom" appellation of Kimathi and Mau Mau is notable. It is clear that the "they" are the colonisers and anti-people forces branding Kimathi so. Colonialist perversion of justice is also castigated in the last two stanzas.

The comparatively limited length of the poem still allows room to compress much of what constitutes the essence of Kimathi and the freedom struggle. When one takes into account that it was composed for performance within a limited time span (usually no more than 15 minutes in the schools' Drama Festival) then we see superfluity compressed into brevity.

Githaiga's "Kimathi Waciuri" as an artistic unit allows for little else than adequate scope to present what Okpewho in *The Epic In Africa* sees as the tendency to present "a too unified portrait of the heroic personality" (93). In longer pieces like Shaka's epic we are allowed to see some of the weaknesses of the epic hero, but Githaiga's poem was composed as a praise poem. He quoted the Kikuyu adage "Ngemi ciumaga na mucii" (Praise/Charity begins at home) while explaining his reason for writing this poem about one of the leading nationalist heroes. Kimathi was the natural choice for this teacher in the school named after him in his birthplace.

Some of the images derive and are evocative of those in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, which Githaiga said he studied as an 'A' level set text in the literature examination of 1982. He however does not share the socialist vision expressed in the play, preferring a capitalist ideology instead. At the time of writing, Githaiga was not acquainted with Watene's or Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*. But one can discern in this comparatively short piece on Kimathi the stylistic and thematic aspects highlighting what Okpewho calls "the foremost value that the heroic image aims to emphasise... excellence or the quest for it... honour, fame, the permanence of his name and spirit long after he has ceased to be reckoned among the living" (120). This aim is also evident in Kinyatti's "Cenotaph for Dedan Kimaathi". The two poems interpellate into Kimathi the attributes of immortality summed up in Maina Muiruri's description of Kimathi as "Kenya's all time hero" in *The Standard's* Madaraka Day supplement in June 1997 (iv).

Apart from Kinyatti's and Githaiga's poems, it is pertinent to mention the versions of the "Song of Kimathi" in Karuga Wandai's *Dedan Kimathi* account and Pauline Mahugu's thesis titled 'A Literary Investigation of the Agikuyu songs of Independence' where the saviour image dominates. In Mahugu's collection Kimathi is presented as a zealot, ultra-patriotic man prepared to overcome any physical and psychological obstacle in the cause he has chosen to lay down his life for. Like in Kinyatti's (translated) version, he exhorts others to follow his footsteps; they too must partake of the "cups of courage from which I drank ... cups of pain and suffering... of tears and sadness". This stoicism in the face of suffering was alluded to in Gachigua and Gitahi's views on the "Song of Kimathi" with references to the overflowing cup, the "great sea" they must cross or the "great war" they must fight. The version of the song for Mahugu's thesis is significant in its explanation of Kimathi and the Mau Mau leadership's decision to resort to armed struggle. We are told that

He said "All my days  
That I had wished for  
Are enough for me  
We are going to shed blood

This verse debunks the way Watene's *My Son For My Freedom* and *Dedan Kimathi* portray Mau Mau leaders as people consumed by bloodlust rashly ignoring 'wise counsel' and impetuously embarking and persisting in a "Slaughterous Adventure". It is on the contrary explained as the result of a long and painful soul-searching, this decision by Kimathi and the Mau Mau leadership to sacrifice lives in armed struggle when other means prove(d) futile. It is significant that Kimathi is willing to sacrifice his life for his country at his relatively young age (he was thirty-two years old when he entered the forest).

The Kiswahili 'Gakaara version' of the "Song of Kimathi" seizes on this symbol of indomitable resistance and (mis)applies it to a political ideological orientation that negates the real ideals of Mau Mau. This version delineates Kimathi's heroism but cleverly manipulates it to buttress "The Kenyatta Myth", which progressively isolated Mau Mau and suppressed the radical pro - Mau Mau nationalist politicians. By 1969 most of those espousing the Mau Mau creed had been purged from active politics. Ngugi observes in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* that "by 1975 only the name remained, a hollow echo of its patriotic origins" (56). Kenyatta's KANU constitutionalist politicians accepted Watene's criminalisation of Kimathi and Mau Mau as published the previous year without even a murmur.

#### 4.4 Gibson Gitahi's "Kimathi Will Come"

Notwithstanding such sidelining of the forest fighters, Kimathi's name is still highlighted in the songs which project the people's expectations of independence. Gitahi's "Kimathi Will Come" has its opening stanza focusing on the joy expected when Kimathi and the fighters emerge victorious. We hear that

Kimathi will come with our fighting heroes  
 All our heroes will emerge then  
 They will be met with ululations  
 And will no longer eat cold food

(Chorus)

We shall be very happy  
 When the House of Mumbi gets  
 back their lands.

These are images of celebration with tumultuous joy as the heroes headed by Kimathi emerge from the forest, are welcomed and accorded their due respect and positions of authority for the great role they have played in liberating the country. In Gitahi's song even the renegade Mathenge who opposed Kimathi's leadership of the forest fighters is perceived as eventually toeing "the correct line" as it were by acknowledging Kimathi's supremacy, for we hear that among others

Gakara came with three battalions  
 Mathenge said, "arrange yourselves"  
 With Nyeri leaders in front  
 Accompanied by ululating women.

The fighters' expectations regarding the impending independence are clear, because we are told that

On Independence day you will see  
 All our heroes that you have looked for  
 With the badges of power in leadership,  
 Woe if you sold your heritage for money

This song has the same tune as the one detailing the eviction of squatters from the Olenguruone area in Nakuru a few years before the emergency as they were herded into lorries and taken to the dry Yatta plains. In the adaptation, Kimathi and the Mau Mau are, symbolically speaking, the vehicle that will carry them (back) to their lands and freedom.

The strong emotional attachment to this meaning of the struggle here makes one understand why the people of Ihururu, Nyeri, completely refused to board the lorry bought with the

'blood' money given to the homeguard who shot and captured Kimathi. The homeguard, Ndirangu Mau, was subsequently ostracised for the rest of his life. They could not countenance his shooting and breaking Kimathi's thigh, which, metaphorically, was an act of puncturing the wheels and grounding the people's vehicle to freedom. Gitahi spoke of Kimathi with fond memories but was critical of the fact that the government(s) of "independent" Kenya had not honoured Kimathi and the forest fighters for their role in the struggle.

#### 4.5 The Patriot's "Kimathi is Here"

Kimathi's continuing relevance is expressed in a poem by an anonymous writer who identifies himself/herself only as a "Patriot". Its stylistic simplicity is evident in the lack of sophistication in terms of literary aesthetics. Its strength resides in the thematic focus on Kimathi's struggle image rather than specific character traits. The poem, which appears in the March 1999 issue of *The Crusader* is a commentary on the aftermath of classical colonialism in Kenya.

The spirit of heroic struggle evoked by the patriot is evidently intended to reinforce the "fighting Kimathi" image. The fate of former freedom fighters in post-colonial Kenyan is given prominence in the general critique of the meaning the so-called "fruits of independence" as experienced by the masses. Conventional Christianity as a vehicle for (political?) salvation is dismissed in the commencing "Halleluya" salutation which implicitly translates into a "Hail Kimathi" rallying call.

Halleluya!  
 The cry of social justice is blooming again  
 Kimathi is getting up  
 From the grave  
 Of mass graves!  
 And he is breaking in another town  
 And crying loudly.  
 What have you done  
 To the poor?  
 Why so much suffering?  
 (23).

The allusion to the ignominious treatment colonialism meted to Kimathi and other freedom fighters buried in "mass graves" is notable. The betrayed promises of the hoped-for independence provide the a justification to invoke Kimathi the "all time hero", who is now given back his (historical) role. Thus the "Kimathi is Here" title. The symbolic Kimathi, like in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* here infuses the spirit of the masses fighting against colonialism and neo-colonialism. He

therefore becomes the reference point to suggest answers regarding the meaning of independence. The patriot poses rhetorical questions related to this theme.

Halleluya! comrades!  
 Where is the land of squatters?  
 Who should have inherited the earth?  
 Where are the graves of freedom fighters  
 And their poor families?  
 Gather them up for  
 Kimathi is coming again!  
 (23).

In the poet's vision the historical Kimathi is reified, "calling again for resurrection for a new dawn" (23). His come-back means addressing questions about the betrayed independence aspirations. The question of the lost heritage taken by those Kimathi fought against in colonial Kenya is now revisited. The rhetorical question style is appropriate to address the real issues like

Where are our forests  
 Our animals, our clean water?  
 Our Mugumo trees?  
 Our medical herbs!  
 Our land!  
 With foreigners again?  
 With homeguards again?  
 With robbers  
 Looters of wealth again!  
 With traitors! With hypocrites!  
 Where is our atlas of hopes?  
 Again with foreigners!  
 God forbid!  
 (23).

Kimathi's legendary courage and steely commitment are the qualities the "Patriot" considers necessary to reinvigorate (the) continuing struggle against social injustices. The referential social/class audience are the still oppressed masses. Inebriating of conventional Christian religion is rejected as a way to salvation as the patriot poses questions like.

Kimathi is coming back?  
 In our churches?  
 No!  
 Where?  
 In the heart (s) of oppressed men!  
 The heart of  
 The worker who is exploited  
 Daily by foreign investors  
 And their agents!  
 In the heart of a woman  
 Who has been raped

Prostituted and abused  
 In the name of women liberation!  
 (23)

The patriot conceptualises the "Kimathi struggle" image from a dialectical materialist perspective, re-evaluating conventional ideological terminology where words like "liberation" are derided because the neo-colonial context has rendered their conventional semantic association(s) irrelevant. The "first liberation" of the 1960s is considered supplanted by the need for a more meaningful "second liberation". For the patriot, it is still "Not Yet Uhuru", to quote Odinga's discourse against neo-colonialism. Kimathi's vision of the way forward is thus revisited as the beckon to a new meaning of freedom completely different from that praised in Watene's *Sunset On The Maruyatta*. The patriot invites the masses to join the renewed struggle effort, hailing the view that

Kimathi is here!  
 Lets crusade for our rights  
 Lets welcome Kimathi  
 Halleluyah!  
 (23).

The major stylistic difference between this poem and those like Kinyatti's "Cenotaph for Dedan Kimaathi" and Githaiga's "Kimathi Waciuri" is that these others highlight specific character traits while the patriot subsumes Kimathi's (historical) essence as sufficient premise to commence a critique of the state of affairs in "independent" Kenya. The rationale for the "resurrected" Kimathi is that the masses are still

In the same pity  
 They were thirty-six years (ago) (23).

Like Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, the audience is invited to imbibe an image of Kimathi which depicts "the masses (symbolised by Kimathi) in the only historically correct perspective: positively, heroically and as the true makers of history" (ix).

There are certain stylistic and thematic linkages between Gitahi's vision and expectations in "Kimathi Will Come" and (the) patriot's "Kimathi is Here" poem. While Gitahi's song is aesthetically superior because of its definite rhythm, in both cases poetic license is exercised to pay tribute to a historical character around and about whom an "associate essence" is (thematically) highlighted. The implied "correct" ideology around the meaning of the Mau Mau struggle is in both cases emphasised rather than Kimathi's personal attributes. There is no attempt to portray an imagined fictional "real Kimathi" (360) implied in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* because the patriot is

content merely with "the mention of the name Kimathi" (2) as a sufficient point of departure. The patriot in this sense, presents a "Kimathi's struggle" image.

The issue (raised by one literary critic) about whether truth resides in fiction or historical accounts and "who tampers with the facts by removing the lies and fictions woven around them" might be sufficiently answered by the view expressed in Evan's *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism*. In Evan's view fictional realism is to be appreciated as a pedagogical medium in its own style because

A poem must create belief if it is to achieve its proper moral or cathartic effect; it must have the 'verisimilitude' upon which neo-classic criticism insisted so strongly, especially if it belongs to the literary kind... Modern or familiar history will not do because the truth is too well known to be tampered (with), and the poet's task, therefore, is to find a historical character sufficiently remote and imprecise to allow the poet free play... The history gives it the authority of great and credible example while the fiction emancipates the poet from the limitations of a foolish world and enables him to improve on even the best in history (4-5).

Kimathi's legendary valour in struggle against British colonialism thus finds expression in the images ascribed to him in these songs and poems. In the patriot's "Kimathi is Here" his "associate essence" and spirit of struggle, are carried forward and transposed on the present and future historical epochs.

The oral texts, as we see, highlight the qualities evocative of the heroic image which infuses the whole theme. The analysis of heroic virtue in the old English poem "Beowulf" highlighted in Gwyn Jones' *Kings, Beasts and Heroes* perhaps best sums up Kimathi's portraiture in Mau Mau songs and these poems. Although the literary traditions which highlight the perceived essence in each case are not analogous, the mythical or historical character is

in his role of hero... schooled to accept his destiny, whatever that may be... For if he accepts what is destined, without bowing to it, he triumphs over it. An unbreakable will makes him the equal of all powerful Fate, and though Fate can destroy him, it can neither conquer nor humiliate him. If there are monsters to fight, fight them. If there is hardship to bear, bear it. If grief, endure. Evade nothing. In all circumstances, at all times a man must give his best (43).

The enduring images of Kimathi in the freedom songs are, as Mahugu observes, on the whole more consistent in presenting "the picture...of Kimathi (95), which generally corresponds to... that of a super-patriotic army general who is driven by dare devilry by his belief in the righteousness of the Mau Mau cause" (149). This, she further points out, is illustrated in the style which portrays the heroic image, in a "stately language ... in character with Kimathi for it is generally believed that Kimathi is among Mau Mau notables who did not recant but faced death

courageously still believing and holding on to the strong convictions of the righteousness of the Mau Mau cause" (210)

The felt need to translate the "song of Kimathi" into a Kiswahili version to effectively reach a broad national audience disabuses and debunks such casual generalisations by scholars like Bethwel Ogot who in his "Politics, Culture and Music in Central Kenya" paper argues that because the songs make reference to "Kikuyu symbols, legends and history" (282) their message is limited and they subsequently "cannot be regarded as the national freedom songs which every Kenyan youth can sing with pride and conviction" (286). The (supposed limitations of) language of the singers and fighters in armed combat against colonialism does not equivocate in the call for justice, a point Ogot notes in his analysis of the general message in the songs. The ideology and theme are not merely anti-colonial, but throughout anti - oppression and anti - injustice. Ogot surmises that

There is in these (songs) an African voice or siren, screaming their rage and agony at injustice and oppression hammering home their determination to achieve independence, a democratically just society (279).

The songs on Kimathi revolve around this theme and incorporate the protagonist as an integral part of the general vision of independence. The justness of Kimathi's and Mau Mau's cause subsumes by extension the attainment of social justice. The Kiswahili "Gakaara version" of the song of Kimathi actually assumes that nationalist attainment of political independence under Kenyatta is a realisation of the same vision.

The glowing praise heaped on Kimathi by Mandela's 13<sup>th</sup> July 1990 Kasarani address to Kenyans is illustrative of the relevance of the issues accompanying his name in "progressive" fiction and historiography. Mandela views Kimathi and Mau Mau as precursors inspiring other armed struggles against injustice like that waged by the ANC in South Africa. *The Nation* daily of July 14th 1990 reported at length what this larger-than-life hero of South African liberation had to say of Kimathi, noting that

Mr. Mandela yesterday paid glowing tribute to Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi and General China for the role they played in liberating Kenya and for inspiring the South African freedom struggle.

Regarding Field Marshal Kimathi, Mr. Mandela said "We acknowledge our indebtedness to General Kimathi who led the armed struggle in this country against the British very excellently. And for that he paid with his life. Kimathi died but the spirit of independence, the spirit of liberation, remains alive and that is why the people of Kenya are free today....."

He inspired our struggle. As young people we tried to model our life on his own because his life was rich and worthy to be he repeated.... Kimathi died but his spirit of independence, the spirit of liberation remains alive.... We respect, we pay homage to Dedan Kimathi.... a man who was ready to pay for freedom with his own life (1-2).



These songs and poems are part of the testimony

Consequently, it is the view of this thesis that Ogot's generalised charge about the songs' alleged Kikuyu "exclusiveness" (286) does not hold considering that the issues raised have national and panafrican relevance. The Kiswahili version of "Song of Kimathi" and several others in Pauline Mahugu's collection illustrate this aspect. After exhaustive analysis of the style and content of these freedom songs Mahugu comes to the conclusion that they propagate a

Kenyan (territorial) nationalism which embraces all the ethnic communities within the country's borders. To the artists who appraise Kenya's already achieved independence, Mau Mau was a facilitator of these independence ... All in all we can confidently state that the Agikuyu oral artists as colonised men and women composed these songs for their community and for their country using the future as an invitation to action and a basis for hope (281)

Even in their succinctness, the songs, like the (comparatively) more elaborate and comprehensive plays and novels illustrate the whole (even if sometimes "strange") aura of charisma associated with Kimathi as a heroic figure. The images in the main reinforce the indomitability of spirit, even symbolic indestructibility, associated with the whole theme of heroic virtue from the people-centred perspective. They are from a comparative perspective as close and emotive in their evocation as *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

This study is evidence that Kimathi and Mau Mau are ineradicable phenomena in Kenyan history, witnessed by the copious body of literature, fictional and historical, devoted to the broad subject by historians, artists, literary scholars and critics on even the fictional works on Dedan Kimathi. It would be correct to say that Kimathi or the portraiture he is given in fictional accounts capture the not inconsiderable attention from these writers because his "associate essence" is a signifier of art's relevance or otherwise to issues touching on the lives of millions of Kenyans, indeed Africa and the so called "Third World", people whose quality of life depends on their place in the nature of political economy of the colonial and post-colonial historical epochs.

What Kimathi meant (or still means) to the people on both sides of the conflicting ideological divide in the political economy of colonialism (and neo-colonialism) is succinctly expressed into two viewpoints. In Kibera's "1954" story in *Potent Ash* a white settler's wife expresses her fear of this "destructive" character and shivers because "there's no telling what these people will do to us women if all husbands are in bed with a slight cold as if just thinking about Kimathi isn't enough" (103). This, understandably, is the settler fear about their lives, property and general privileges in the face of patriotic expression of African nationalism through armed struggle, a fear which, as Ngugi explains in *Detained*, is strangely evident in the reaction of the propertied

ruling elite in post-colonial Kenya towards any form of patriotic expression of popular will, even through educative community based theatre. This is because they are too keenly aware of their real *via-a-vis* the betrayed expectations of the struggling masses who voted in Kenyatta's KANU government during the "independence elections". In the struggle against the white man the freedom fighters were inspired by the vision which Mahugu calls "the fulfilment of a dream: *land and an independent economic existence*" (15) (emphasis hers, supported)

For the Kenyan people Kimathi means the continued nurturing of such hopes. He remains a historical symbol of the real possibility of the fulfilment of their dream of a truly independent Kenya whose policies are sensitive to the real needs of the people. Implicit in the many demands, inside or outside of parliament, that his remains be exhumed from Kamiti prison and accorded an honourable burial is the message that the Kenya government should live up to the popular ideals that sustained the hopes of the people during the freedom struggle rather than merely revisiting the memory of the heroic struggle to a citizenry whose plight is the same-poverty and landlessness - as during the colonial era. The poor woman in Kinyatti's "The Market Woman" poem is therefore "calling Kimathi and Mau Mau to return" (33). This is an expression of the necessity to continue the fight in the face of the betrayed independence expectations. In Kenyan history so far, Kimathi is the most conspicuous symbol for evoking the ideals of the freedom struggle.

The invocation of Kimathi's name in the critique of the post-colonial "state of affairs by "radical critics" is evidence of this sense of betrayal of the popular aspirations. In an article titled "Kenyatta: His Greatest Mistakes" in the *Finance* issue of August 26th, 1999, the (anonymous) author places the politically sensitive issue touching on the official treatment of the forest fighters into perspective, noting that

Kenya is perhaps the only country in which the post independence leadership deliberately ignored to recognise and honour the patriots who sacrificed for its freedom. Years after Kenyatta's death, the towering Nelson Mandela, only a few weeks from his release after 27 years incarceration was shocked to witness the indifference of Kenyan officials regarding Kimathi's wife ... Mandela's enquiry as to where Mukami Kimathi was, was brushed (aside) with the remarks that it was too wet to visit her home in Nyandarua ... It is an expression of a mean, bizarre and historically weird leadership that the remains of Kimathi himself lie buried in an unmarked grave at the Kamiti Maximum Prison ... As if to intensify the revulsion against the spirits of the freedom fighters, Kenyatta's and Moi's regimes ensured that democratic activists who defied the repressive characters of the two were condemned to wallow in the harshness of the penal colony (16)

Mau Mau Kimathi's legacy as enduring symbols against the repression of the human spirit still makes them be viewed by some very powerful Kenyans through the lenses of Henderson and the colonial settler fraternity. Until recently expressions of recognition and admiration of their

heroic deeds in “suspicious ways” (from the official viewpoint) has in the past occasioned blacklisting of prominent Kenyan intellectuals. Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Maina wa Kinyatti earned their state-sanctioned sojourns at Kamiti prison because, they aver, those in authority viewed their pronouncements in community theatre and historical research on Mau Mau as activities prejudicial to “peace and good order” - the same phrases used by the colonial government to condemn those who supported the struggle for freedom.

The implications for literary criticism examining the works of creative artists seeking to educate us about Kimathi and his relevance to present day Kenya or Africa must necessarily proceed from a realisation that the colonial legacy in African literature and literary criticism is a situation which, must be confronted by the critic assuming what Amuta calls a libertarian pedagogy for the oppressed. The critical perspectives must take into account what Onoge calls that addresses itself to “the crisis of consciousness” in modern African literature. This, essentially, is the contest between bourgeois forms of criticism which perpetuate the colonial legacy on the one hand and a dialectical approach that seeks not merely to reassert the African perspective (there are so many conflicting perspectives on Kimathi by African creative writers in Kenya) but to examine the value or otherwise of the images and content in the fictional works in terms of how these contribute to the struggle against oppressive and dehumanising forces. Amuta notes that even “aesthetic values and criteria are the products of specific groups and classes in specific societies... disagreements over the relative value in a given body of literature often emanate from larger disagreements well outside the province of literature and criticism” (3). There is no critique with a purely “disinterested objectivity” (4) Amuta notes.

This study accepts, as does Burgess in *Shaka King of the Zulu in African Literature* that non-partisanship on the part of African writer is an impossible demand because

For the African writer, literature and commitment imply one another. Either one is on the side of the oppressor or on the side of the oppressed. And I refer to physical as well as cultural domination. Literature and public behaviour go hand in hand. I am not suggesting that to be successful art, a literary work must make a political statement, but only that without a statement of some sort, the literature has no meaning within the context of modern African history. The African writer is not able to be apolitical, for the situation in which he finds himself demands a choice (xii)

Lukacs assertion in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* that we cannot but “look stark reality in the face” is the predicament of the African writer and critic in the contemporary situation because they are enjoined in the general cause for human liberation. From this premise even our disagreement with the empirical/historicist arguments of Wanjala and Atieno-Odhiambo in *literary*

*criticism* cannot ignore the instances that emphasise relevant aspects in (the) literary texts' exposition of socio -historical experience. Despite his disagreement with Ngugi's ideology in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Wanjala still acknowledges that the protagonist

In his positive light — represents the defiance of the colonial rule amongst Kenyans, and a standpoint for the total liberation of the people — He has a clear conceptualisation of the enemy of the people and by this virtue he is a level-headed critic of alienation amongst his people — His voice of criticism transcends limitations of time. He comments on the colonial injustice and moves freely to the post-independence Kenya and hits many critical blows at the Kenyan law. He is a critic of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Thus, in retrospect, the plays under discussion (and later the novel and poems) highlight the preoccupation of the Kenyan creative writer with the colonial period which has crystallised into a continued struggle against economic and other forms of oppression in the independent present (394)

The derivative social history underlying the struggles highlighted in the fiction is also acknowledged in Atieno-Odhiambo's "The Historical Sense And Creative Literature" essay where he is categorical that

In a situation of colonialism and in a situation also in the context of Africa, of independence, neo-colonialism, nationalism and nation-building, in a situation that is, of convulsions and anxieties, artistic sensitivity cannot remain uninvolved. To be committed or non-committed, for a man who is not alienated from society, for one with an artistic sensitivity is not a question that arises at all. The logic we are arguing is that an attitude of non-commitment can crystallise and become accepted only in a stabilised society where the foundations of national existence are taken for granted and where social conflict runs at a tension so low that it fails to communicate itself to art (85)

The creative writer portraying one so implicated in these struggles as Kimathi was cannot assume the detached posture of the 'neutral' neighbour in Watene's *My Son For My Freedom*. Neither can the historian. At the end of his analysis of Kimathi's role and place in Kenyan history in *Mau Mau: A Revolution Betrayed*, Kinyatti acknowledges Kimathi a heroic figure who left an indelible mark in the nation's history of struggle against oppression. In his view

Kimathi was not without weaknesses, but from reading his writings and studying his revolutionary activities, few Kenyans can doubt his dedication and commitment to the liberation of the Kenyan people and homeland.

He entered history a martyr. In the holy name of democracy and Christian civilisation, Kimathi was "legally" lynched by the imperialists on February 18th, 1957. But he lives on in the continuing struggle of our people for democracy and social justice (93).

The struggles projected in the fiction on Kimathi similarly prompts critics like Wanjala, despite his discomfiture with "Kimathi the ideologue in Ngugi's play" to applaud the fiction as equally implicated in the contemporary struggles against the same injustices Kimathi fought against. To quote Wanjala

There is in the history of Kenya, the opposing relationship between — the freedom fighter and the collaborator, the alienated and the integrated, which must be highlighted in literature. These

opposites in society mark the tension in society and the tension in the individual ... Ngugi's, Mugo's and Watene's (and later Kahiga's, Kinyatti's, Githaiga's and the Patriot's) Kimathi is part of the trauma towards true liberation that still goes marching on the East African cultural and political life as a dialectical process (393).

It is in this light Bjorkman's *Mother, Sing For Me: Peoples Theatre in Kenya* on Ngugi's *Maitu Njugira* describes the vernacular play's reflection of the colonial experience as a metaphor of "the dialectic of oppression and the struggle for freedom"(75). This dialectic is presented from various perspectives in Watene's *My Son For My Freedom* and *Dedan Kimathi*, Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* and the songs and poems on Kimathi. These works constitute various philosophical expositions of the meaning of freedom as seen or justified through the various images the artists create about the historical experience and those involved, either as heroes, villains or victims.

It becomes easier to accept Nazareth's view in *Literature And Society In Modern Africa* that to talk of the "uncommitted writer"(212) in such cases is inappropriate because "a writer who has a thesis to put forward cannot ignore the social and psychological facts which are inconvenient (or convenient) to his thesis"(213). Solzhenitsyn's portrayal of Stalin in *The First Circle* is cited as a case in point when Nazareth insists that in portraying a historical character, a writer must take into account the totality of the "objective circumstances" (215), including "all the social-political and psychological facts"(216). Taking cognisance of the forces and circumstances Stalin was faced with during the formative years the Russian revolution - the internal war against the "White Russians" and the urgent need to transform the society from the feudal to a new social order and the hostility from the imperialist forces - Nazareth sees Solzhenitsyn's portrayal of Stalin as a mere "megalomaniac" (216) as illustrating a "lack of understanding of the external social-political problems"(216) that influenced Stalin's mind and conduct. Nazareth Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle* as a case there the writer "shirked his responsibility as a novelist in giving us a distorted picture of Stalin, comparable in its absurdity and lack of understanding of external socio-political problems only to Soyinka's *Kongi*" (216).

This issue of the writer's responsibility, which as Nazareth points out, "applies just as much as to a writer under capitalism as to a writer under socialism"(213) has been our point of departure in examining Kimathi's fictional portrayal. Watene's image of Kimathi is rejected by the later writers more on the grounds of this aspect than his ability or otherwise to correctly portray *the real Kimathi*. Makouta-Mboukou's *Black Africa Literature* thus posits that

by presenting to us heroes grappling not only with imperialism, but with their own brothers, black African writers urge us to ask ourselves if sometimes we are the ones holding back the social, political and economic impetus of our own countries (124).

Kimathi's image in literature is inexorably linked to this theme of liberation, so well summed up in Fanon's *Towards The African Revolution's* observation that

The colonial peoples are not particularly communistic, but they are irreducibly anti-colonialist... their attitude in the great problems that shape the world - in this case the problems of decolonization - will conform to a spirit of solidarity, of equity and of authentic justice (94).

This irreducibility, to paraphrase Fanon's term, concretely defines and situates Kimathi in the dialectic of *true liberation*, which as Fanon emphasises, "is not that pseudo-independence in which (African) ministers having a limited responsibility hobnob with an economy dominated by the colonial pact" (105). Rosberg and Nottingham's sum up the defining characteristic of the detained hard-core Mau Mau freedom fighters as the capacity to distance themselves and become "immune from ... the white culture" (334) and its "rational thought process" (334). Mbabu's hero in *From Homeguard to Mau Mau* a fictional complimentary warns that despite colonialism's formidable military machine, the greatest weapon the white has against the African is that he "had dug roots so deep into our black souls that it was almost impossible to oust him." (146).

It is therefore sound "liberation logic" to develop a thick skin against the ideological influences enmesh the African literary writer and critic whose philosophical outlook perpetuates the colonial legacy. Fanon notes in *Towards The African Revolution* that colonialism will for all practical purposes "defend itself fanatically" (105), Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* eventually disparages "those hardcores and others still in the forest who were determined to live up to their oath and fight without surrender ... as deranged fanatics" (301), even as Kahiga acknowledges that "all they were doing, really, was to live up to what they had sworn to do when they took the sacred oath - never to co-operate with the white man or his stooges, never to reveal the secrets of the movement, never to abandon the struggle for their land" (301). In this light Wanjala's protest against the image of Kimathi recreated as a "fanatical kind" (393) in the fight against colonialism appears against the grain of the *true liberation* process he so aptly applauds Kimathi for in literature. Kahiga's reluctance to mention Stalin alongside those other 20th century figures he sees as equally involved in "the throes of revolutionary change" (175) stems, one can deduce, from a discomfiture about inadvertently endorsing the "suspect" socialist ideology in *The Trial Of Dedan Kimathi* as an alternative to the social problems of post colonial Kenya. Kahiga's acknowledgement of Mau Mau's liberation zeal where "every fighting man (was) a fanatic" (224) predictably squirms at the

real prospect of this zeal being motivated by or directed by the ideological learning of Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, hence the eventual nationalist ideology for “moderating”.

Viewed in the light of literature’s contribution to the liberation process, Vladimir Klima’s “The Ideology of The Black Literary Movement” essay in *Black Africa Literature and Language* is laudable for positing that the crucial aspects of the work of art (should) illustrate “the artist’s (capacity to) identify himself with the suffering masses” (63), especially as “an inevitable step in the process of emancipation” (69). A pedagogy of the oppressed, in which Kimathi’s historical role and image in literature are firmly rooted must, as a matter of principle and at all times, necessarily reject those instances which Amuta describes as attempts to use “literature (as) as a means of perpetuating the existing relations of domination” (199) arising from the colonial legacy.

The issue of whether we “exclude or include the individualistic bourgeois scholar in a study like this one” as posed by one literary critic therefore does not really arise for, one must agree, it depends largely on whether such scholars are willing to stake a claim in the liberation process by their creative or critical pronouncements. There is, in the final analysis, no room for equivocation in such a case. Doublespeak is condemned in the Mau Mau songs. The role or place of the bourgeois scholar in this study could well be viewed in the light of Kahiga’s Kimathi who, in response to Mathenge’s accusation that his style of leadership favours educated people answers that

I think it is a pity we do not have more of them working with us. Education is a double edged tool and can cut you up. Many educated people think they are clever, but in war, they have been shown the way by those who have never seen the inside of a school. They think it is clever to sing the British national Anthem in English. ‘God Bless the Queen’! They think it is clever to work in an office supervised by a white man. They think it is stupid to take the oath and go to the forest to live with wild animals. Don’t think I am only for the educated. I write them angry letters (257).

Kimathi is here rejecting the validity of what Rosberg and Nottingham call “the single most universally held assumption of the Kenya European... that accepting the legitimacy of the colonial system was in the enlightened self-interest of the individual African” (321) in his letters to these antecedents of the educated African bourgeois scholar. In their individual detachment from the mainstream of the struggle emotionally and ideologically, they constitute the equivocating and prevaricating of the “wealthy Gikuyu (man)” in one of the Mau Mau songs who, when chanced upon by the colonial police at an oath-taking ceremony, claimed that he was not supporting the Mau Mau war but had only gone “to fetch my dogs”.<sup>4</sup> A conspicuous echo of the master’s voice in the inability to reject the ideological linkage with colonialism and the whole value system spawned

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to “The Indomitability Of Kang’ethe” song in *Thunder From The Mountains* (.33)

by the "relations of domination". Etherton in *The Development of African Drama* sees bourgeois pragmatism as reflecting the ideology of "personal gain" (173). Kimathi does not equivocate.

Such "pragmatism", however well camouflaged and understandable in the context of certain circumstances as the irrepressible natural urge of self-preservation or rational thinking is in outright opposition to what Goldman in *Towards A Sociology of the Novel* calls an outlook on "social life... expressed on the literary, artistic or philosophical plane through the intermediary link of the collective consciousness" (9), which in literature should encourage a vision "dominated by qualitative (humane) values" (11).

We are, in the words of Lamont's *The Philosophy of Humanism*, thus inclined to reject any exposition validating those "traditional philosophical positions concerning the nature of the Universe and of man (which) constitute in their very essence disguised apologias for or ideological escapades from existing conditions"(5). Such a standpoint, expectedly, does not titillate the sensibility of the liberal conservative disposition of the bourgeois scholar(s) in Kenya or anywhere else on the continent. But then, we must assert, they are in literature and literary criticism entitled to their perspectives as we are to ours.



## CONCLUSION

### REFLECTIONS ON THE IMAGE OF KIMATHI IN LITERATURE

#### 5.1 Summary of the Findings

The works examined in the preceding chapters illustrate well the overtly political and propagandist overtones in the images evocative of the whole experience of the emergency period and illustrate the differences in perception, empathy, or sympathy, self-identification or self-distancing by different artists. Banham's assessment of the portrayal of the freedom struggle in Watene's *My Son For My Freedom* in *African Theatre Today* concludes that

Clearly, this is a difficult subject to approach without offence either to the strong nationalist feelings that were associated with Mau Mau, or to those, often Christian, people who found themselves torn between their faith and this new force. With simplicity and dignity Watene brings to our attention the horrible dilemma that faced so many Kenyans. A typical (Kikuyu) family is savagely torn apart by conflicting loyalties (85).

As one character in this earlier play by Watene points out, there is no room for "the nowhere man" (86) in this conflict, be it at the physical, emotional moral or intellectual levels. It would appear then that demands for neutrality and "non-partisanship" in criticism are themselves a belated and tall order considering that the literature itself makes such clear distinctions and judgements in explaining the validity in the viewpoints of the conflicting sides.

The fiction on a historical figure like Kimathi must of necessity also respond to the social political issues underlying the whole experience that goes the experience in its attempt to explain or justify the ideological stand points of the combatants. The artists cannot be neutral. In his commentary on the political nature of art disciplines in the *Sunday Nation* of April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2000 Philip Ochieng' succinctly explains by pointing out that

An artist is always a politician. All artists ... express socio-ethical ideological preferences. Only in the head of a liberal - with its intellectual looseness and amorality - can a work of art be "value free" and "non-political" ... the content of an art work is, therefore, always ideo-ethical, value-loaded and informed by the social ambience in which it has been produced (7).

It is, as Rosberg and Nottingham note in *The Myth Of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya*, impossible to present an "apolitical analysis of Mau Mau" (347), or indeed "Kenya's social problems" (347). This equally applies to any analysis of Kimathi's image in literature, which fits into what Makouta-Mboukou's *Black African Literature* essay on "Heroes and their role" refers to as "that literature of conflict in which the hero is identical with the author" (99). This, we must clarify, is applies inasmuch as the images are directed towards rationalising authorial ideology projected

"on the literary plane" (101). Like the Russian writers referred to, the Kenyan creative writers employ various "literary techniques and an ideology" (104), manipulating Kimathi to express their particular social visions.

The works on Kimani illustrate these aspects all through. This is evident in the two plays and Kahiga's attempted 'balancing' and 'moderating' endeavour in *Dedan Kimathi* as well as in the songs and the poems on Kimathi. Kahiga endeavours to project what Lukacs in *Writer and Critic* calls "the many-sidedness and many levels of visible reality" (10). The myriad fictional images of Kimathi arise from the artist's viewpoints on the whole experience of Mau Mau.

The patently negative and vilifying images arise from the sensibility of those post-colonial creative writers who imbibe the colonialist view of Mau Mau and Kimathi as attacks on European "civilized order" in Kenya. The language, image(s) and tone of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* echo this sensibility. By equating Mau Mau with 'chaos' these two writers buttress the colonial ideological, socio-economic and political superstructures outraged by Mau Mau and associated "Kimathian conduct". Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* is the most manifest statement in fiction; there is no discernible dissonance between its viewpoint and the colonial and neo-colonial ideology in the perception of Kimathi and Mau Mau. Within the same ideology, even Kahiga's spirited endeavour to "correct" earlier distortions translates into little more than some substantial damage control exercise on the colonial view of Kimathi.

Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* provides a radical departure with images firmly rooted in the conviction of the moral validity and justness of the struggle against various forms of oppression. Kimathi as a man "without doubt" here is almost faultless except when he allows some natural human weaknesses like kindred feelings override considerations of revolutionary justice. The ensuing noble, heroic and consistent and revolutionary is transformed into an instrument of the artists' crusade against identified socio-economic and political evils in colonial and neo-colonial Kenya. Mythification and hero-praise serve the stated purpose of Kimathi's portrayal here so well summed up in Waigwa Wachira's view that "to the extent that he physicallizes and executes this popular will, he ceases to be an individual and becomes a symbol thereof of what is positive in the masses; a man whose every thought and gesture communicates the stubborn will of a people who dare say no! to imperialist subjugation" (24). There is no apologia for "Kimathian conduct" here as a symbol of the forward movement for general human liberation.

The songs and poems also compliment and vindicate Kimathi and the fighting masses. In the poems, the liberal sensitivity given expression in the overly concern with individual "ethics and

morality" in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* is eschewed. There is no ambiguity or vacillation when voicing the issues at hand and the inalienable link with Kimathi. In the "Cenotaph" Kinyatti invites the audience to recoil against the excessive colonialist brutality visited on the "noble" person of Kimathi, as Githaiga's does in 'Kimathi Waciuri'. The images of Kimathi here are evocative of those in epic praise poetry.

In all the fictional works, Kimathi is conceptualised within identifiable ideological frameworks which define or circumscribe his (associated) essence. The images reveal direct linkages to certain ideological predications. Artistic sensibility in every instance tends to operate, as Meszaros notes in *The Power of Ideology*, "in such a way as to present and misrepresent - its own rules of selectivity, bias, discrimination, and even systematic distortion as 'normality', 'objectivity' and 'scientific' detachment' (3).

The inevitable sociological configurations of the various Kimathi images reveals art's implication in championing class interests in society. We can see, as Onoge points out in *Marxism of African Literature* that "it can either evince a consciousness that seems to conserve the society on behalf of privileged interests or exude a revolutionary consciousness congruent with the objective interests of the oppressed class... (60). The evocative images justify or oppose the nature of political economy and its social implications, literary critics to examine and determine what Onoge calls "nature of the conceptual and evocative images which infuse the social universe imagined in a writers poem story or play" (60-61). The subsequent verdicts like Wanjala's 'decidedly a better piece of art' and Waigwa's 'shabby script' assessments of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* are at one and the same time aesthetic value judgements as much as 'ideological-preferential' statements. Ideological partisanship veering towards of the critics' preferences is often an overriding factor in such judgements.

The study endeavoured to unmask what Lowenthal in *Literature and The Image of Man* calls "social meanings in literature". In the works on Kimathi, what emerges is that the artistic purpose supersedes the question of historical specifics. The artists endeavour to approximate by imagination and interpretation but do not reproduce the "real Kimathi" because he is substituted, subordinated and circumscribed in each case into the configuration consistent with each author's works' artistic purpose.

The "real Kimathi" and factual history are similarly subordinated and forged into the various "equations" manifest in the images projected.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The major achievement of this study is its illustration that in recreating historical events or characters in fiction, the discrepancies between the imaginative aspects and the factual empirical ones provide fertile ground for debate. This sometimes arises from ignorance about the nature and relationship of the fictive products to the factual derivations. At other times ideological differences between artists and appraisals of their works by literary and other critics come into play. In each of the works the fictional Kimathi serves the specific ideological purpose of the artist, however 'distorted', 'correct' or 'real' he may seem from casual perusal. Indeed the adjectives are themselves relative ideological assessments from varying perspectives. Watene's, Ngugi and Micere's, Kahiga's, Kinyatti's and Githaiga's plurality of Kimathi images rationalise the preferred political-economic and social superstructures of their creators. The specific historical Kimathi in these reification(s) constitutes dialectical opposites of the ideological images.

No single critical appraisal, however incisive can assume a "be all and end all" statement in so complex a subject. The Wanjalas and Waigwas in literary criticism are as much entitled to their divergent viewpoints as do the Ngugis and Watenes in the creative world, our individual responses to their products notwithstanding. These dialectical opposites in art and criticism constitute the salt in the ever alluring historical-discourse and creative rich world bequeathed to us by the indelible historical experience of Mau Mau and associated figures like Kimathi.

Maughan-Brown has indicated that subjectivity and relativity render the whole issue of 'correctness' elusive because the conflicting ideological positions of artists "ostensibly set out to 'prove' via their novels the correctness of their two irreconcilably opposed views of Mau Mau" (227). The fictional works on Kimathi illustrate the same predicament.

The links between the fictional images (and specific ideological predications) here are as inalienable as that between the onset of the emergency and the attainment of political independence a decade later. Kimathi is a name evocative of this period in Kenyan history: in himself was manifested the highest level of commitment to ideals whose essence was the (intended) transformation of the Kenyan masses from colonial serfdom into a people who would determine their destiny through control of their land and resources.

One can hardly reflect on the meaning of his image in literature without reference to the "what" in the history of post-colonial Kenya. Whittier's preface to Wachanga's *The Swords of Kirinyaga* intimates the need for Kenyans "to look at our recent past in a critical, scholarly and objective way" (xx). Our literary examination of the various fictional accounts on Kimathi here was

similarly oriented. In the preamble to the first performance of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* at the National Theatre in October 1976, Adagala noted that the play "puts the facts bare and affords us even greater understanding of why so many shed blood that we might be free... Kimathi's commitment to the struggle inspite of torture and the danger to himself should bring a re-dedication in us all to the cause for which he and countless others died" (15).

The essence of Kimathi and Mau Mau can hardly be discussed without reference to the social and material conditions in post-colonial Kenya. The achievements or 'fruits of independence' are constantly evaluated with reference to both.

In the Kimathi-centred and other accounts these issues are the subject of interpretation and projection from the myriad multi-dimensional perspectives. The examination of the fictional images reveals that inasmuch as one is unwilling to delink historical specifics from ensuing artistic recreation(s), one continually encounters what Irele in *The African Experience In Literature and Ideology* calls "the apparently intractable nature of the problem between historical fact and the autonomy of art" (55).

The divergent perspectives on Kimathi and the freedom movement expressed through the language, images and ensuing "social meanings" illustrate that the controversy surrounding the whole subject in history and fiction cannot be resolved simplistically by asserting that any one-dimensional image and its viewpoint is the "only correct perspective" as the authors of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* aver. Each image merely crystallises into or presents a type of "stop gap" discourse in so complex a subject as Mau Mau. In the course of reification, as Lukacs notes in *The Historical Novel*, 'history is a chaos... to which everyone may attribute a meaning which suits him according to his needs' (180).

Historiography therefore cannot be the yardstick of evaluating "fidelity to artistic creation" in these works. The contentious issue of 'correctness' subsequently takes a back seat and is supplanted by the loaded questions of the "why" in the works. Mau Mau remains a controversial subject and Kimathi himself still retains an aura of myth and mystery, perhaps because some aspects of Mau Mau are still shrouded in "a curtain of secrecy" as Paul Maina notes in the preface to *Six Mau Mau Generals*. Mau Mau, as Maughan-Brown notes, is "a highly charged issue in Kenyan politics" (260) and, it is now obvious, in art and historiography. It is presumptuous therefore to imagine that even a "comprehensive", "balanced", "rational" and "all-encompassing" approach as Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* can settle the question of "the real Kimathi" because the inescapable

question of ideology and artistic sensibility in interpreting Kimathi and the movement preclude factual replication.

Viewed from that premise, the language and image of the historical character in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* raises controversy not simply because of its disturbing resemblance with colonial literature, but because of its 'retrogressive' standpoint on issues associated with Kimathi. "Progressive" historians and literary critics subsequently view its anti-Mau Mau stance as ahistorical and "objectionable". The presumably 'moral' statements in *My Son For My Freedom* and *Sunset On The Manyatta* reflect the same 'reactionary' standpoint.

Conversely, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is astonishingly simple in its forthright statement about the theme from a 'progressive' standpoint. Kimathi here is the archetypal enduring socialist realist hero in 'resistance literature'. He is the precursor of Matigari in *Matigari*, Ngugi's later "disindividualised" fictional protagonist.

Kahiga's endeavour to present "the real Kimathi" in *Dedan Kimathi: The Real Story* in the endeavour to escape 'distortion' or embellishment only succeeds in repressing the visionary dimension in the artist. While its closer evocation of real historical experience(s) is one of its major strengths, the possibility of a "real resistance" novel emerging is squandered in the process.

The songs and poetic compositions are generally more people-centred in their delineation of Kimathi, highlighting the protagonist and theme as complementary. Their images are directly aimed at inspiring and generating reflection in relation to the underlying issues in the theme of liberation. Like in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* the theme and issues are topical and social rather than facts about Kimathi's personal history. "Historical realism" ceases to be the real concern as visionary projection supersedes historiography. Concomitantly, the aesthetically and ideologically "more correct" images are now adjudged in relation to artistic purpose, and especially the question of "quality of commitment".

The opposing images of Kimathi either as 'misguided terrorist' 'dictator' or 'murderer' in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and Kimathi as the stoic revolutionary and noble liberation hero of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are now understood. There is no dispute about the historical existence of the real Dedan Kimathi; only that he is subject to so many interpretations or appear with different masks, to be unmasked in analytical discourse.

What Lowenthal in *Literature and The Image of Man* calls the inherent "social and political bias" (iii) is abundantly evident in the language and evocative images of Kimathi in the fictional works. Watene's all destructive "dictator" (63) annihilates both the rationale for his individual

existence and the history of his "associate essence" when the armed freedom struggle is seen as a blot and Kimathi as an aberration. Inasmuch as its bestialised representatives in the forest are negated, so is their relevance obliterated. The consistency with the British settler and homeguard view of Mau Mau is evoked in Watene's image of Kimathi. This is perfectly understandable from the rationalising ideological premise and its political-economic superstructures.

The Ngugi and Micere reification of Kimathi against Watene's "aberration" becomes the "too human" (62) revolutionary hero whose clarity of vision, tenacity and stoicism of body and spirit in the fight for the Kenyan people is the departure for a new struggle against the continuing oppression of the people despite the realisation of the vision of an "independent nation ruled by the black people of our land". The charisma and unequivocal heroism in the ensuing image carry the inspiration and overtones of the call to renewed struggle against neo-colonial black oppression in echoes reminiscent of the playwrights' essentially "Not Yet Uhuru" message echoed through Kimathi.

The liberal mix of the "heroic and human" traits in the towering figure in Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi* with shades of the "brighter" and "darker" aspects make Kimathi a complex rather than the one-dimensional character in the plays. The stronger side evoke the admiration and adoration of the heroic grandeur which make the weaknesses of his "more humane side" understandable. He is at once with us and yet apart because of his unique qualities that make him a "no ordinary man" (323). His heroism infuses the revolutionary zeal that Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi imbues. Like his favourite prayer tree which falls with his capture, this composed freedom martyr in his "calm death" (18) lacks the stronger imprimatur of immortality in Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi who laughs at death in the face of the convicting judge. Kahiga's Kimathi, individualised rather than symbolised, remains the hero in historicity, largely circumscribed within the historical epoch of his existence. This attempted bridging of the dichotomy of archetypal images in the two plays retains the ambiguity and equivocation which never allow us to home in on any specific traits as exclusive to the specific definition of what constitutes "the real Kimathi" identity.

Conversely, the songs and poems highlight the attributes of the steely stoicism in the heroic image and are the rationale for the "our Kimathi" collective appropriation of his vision and commitment. As a symbol of the fighting spirit of the people in struggle against oppression, Kimathi is immortal, even in death. The Kinyatti and Githaiga images illustrate this in their language and interpellations.

The implications for art in the range of the images of Kimathi, their language and "social meanings" in fiction are that concepts like "commitment" (in or through art) may need redefinition to differentiate between "progressive" libertarian art responding to the broad aspirations of the people and "reactionary" or conservative art that stymies the popular aspirations. The two plays illustrate this; the playwrights in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* and Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are passionately committed to dialectically and diametrically opposed concepts, visions and underlying morality of what constitutes 'good' and 'evil' in their interpretation of the nature and essence of one identifiable historical character named Dedan Kimathi.

Bentley in *The Theatre of Commitment* notes that

Relative to the general social situation, the literature of commitment is radical. It is a literature of protest, not approval, of outrage, not tribute. This proposition is only reinforced by the fate of the attempts to disprove it in practice (197).

The opposites are seen the dichotomy of protest versus approval, tribute versus outrage. The sensibilities and images evoked of the whole freedom movement in works like Ruark's *Uhuru* and the fiction on Kimathi are dialectical. Ideological interpretations of what opposing values and sets of ethical and moral yardsticks consider "wrong" or "correct" in a person, conduct or whole historical event related to the state of affairs at a particular historical epoch from which are given meaning by the value point the writer appropriates to fictionalise the person or event.

To aver, as Rockwell does in *Fact in Fiction*, that "literature has no such ideological errands... is not obliged to be more committed or topical about economics, politics, or anything else, than the people in it might naturally be... and (that it is) idiocy to want everything written down into a porridge of "correct" attitudes "(21) is to ignore the basic fact that these social and political aspects influence the themes in fiction and are often the burning issues of the day to which the writers respond and attempt to give answers. The fictional Kimathis are their creators' answers to the questions of the nature of political economy and other social realities of their day.

It is for this reason that the thesis subscribes to the broad Lukacsian view in *Writer and Critic* that the question of aesthetics (and ethics) that determine greater or lesser art is the writer's empathy and insight into the whole human condition. From such a viewpoint one appreciates Gogol's incisive realism, insight and empathy with the underdog in *Dead Souls*. While this in itself is laudable, the proffered "moral rejuvenation" solution to the questions of feudalism and serfdom in pre-revolutionary Russia obfuscates the issues raised in the literature. The Kimathi fiction works



in their own way and implicit (or explicit) visions attempt to answer the questions and issues confronting the people fighting colonialism.

In its inherent ideology, Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* roots, for the mere attainment of political independence, the British-managed Lancaster House "constitutional fight" (70) in which Kenyatta and the nascent African bourgeois shunted aside the issues raised by Mau Mau. The rationale in Watene's vilification and obliteration of Kimathi and the forest fighters serves is the dual purpose of enhancing the Kenyatta myth of the "father figure and freedom patriarch" exclusively. Ngugi and Micere's negation of this perspective in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is an endeavour to equally validate what they feel version of history and the popular cause.

But the issues remain, and cannot be wished away by diversions into endless debates about "historical correctness" in fiction. We have seen the objective discrepancy between the 'uhuru' expectations and the post-colonial reality noted in Paul Maina's *Six Mau Mau Generals* (1977) and the stinging castigation of the betrayal of the people's expectations in Kibera's *Voices In The Dark*. And yet one cannot begrudge Kahiga the poetic license to insinuate that his fictional Kimathi sees a Kenyan Eldorado with the onset of political independence, merely because "Kenyatta rules" (335) instead of the erstwhile colonial governor. Similarly Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi, even Watene's Kimathi, have their right to fictional existence. Our task has been to understand their relevance or otherwise in relation to the demand acknowledged in *Writers In Politics* regarding literature's implication "in the community's struggle for a certain quality of life... the relevance of literature in our daily struggle for the right to bread, shelter, clothes and song" (75).

To dismiss as mere "sloganeering" *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi's* emphasis on this aspect is diversionary and outright escapism, as is "head in the sand" stance in so issue-loaded a literature. Any text, as Jones avers in *African Literature Today* (Vol. No. 7) "must eventually be judged by what it contains or what can legitimately be implied from it. A work of art cannot be rescued from its own deficiencies by appeals to its background" (i). We are, ultimately, saying that qualitative expression and attendant vision are the enduring yardsticks for the assessment of the images of Kimathi in these works rather than the presumed "wrong" or "correct" versions of history inherent in their language and ensuing images. This, predictably, could be the underlying reason Mazrui in his "The Patriot as an Artist" essay cautions us against using "the nationalism which is capable of acclaiming mediocre works simply because they are African" (76). This, in other words, is a call to for ever remain issue-oriented underlying Kanogo's observation in *Dedan Kimathi: A Biography*

that his trial at Nyeri "failed to address itself to the key issues" (27) of why he was armed, why he had gone to the forest and what he was fighting for.

The freedom struggle essence in this respect in what makes Kinyatti, the imprisoned Mau Mau historian (and now poet) to revisit the issues in his prison cell. In the 'Stones and Steel' poem Kinyatti evokes the steely resilience of patriotic spirit linking him to Kimathi and like-minded fighting compatriots in the forests and detention camps of colonial Kenya in restating the aims of the struggle.

This is our fight  
Our people will have the right to eat  
The right to live in freedom  
The right to happiness (80).

Bardolph's "The literature of Kenya" essay in Killam's *The Writing of East and Central* cites examples of "fictionalised history" (46). The breadth and quality of vision in works like *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* in portraying towering protagonists like Haraka in *Carcass For Hounds* and Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* illustrate a whole world of different authorial visions. Mwangi's portraiture of Haraka is perceived as "dissonant" because it does not establish the necessary linkage with contemporary issues. This has been our premise in examining the relevance of the images of Kimathi in Kenyan literature.

### 5.3 Suggestions For Further Research

The myriad dialectical meanings in the Kimathi images makes terms like 'distortion' 'correctness' and even 'real' appear as relative assessments of what the writers appropriate from history and project in fiction. This study has examined the images of Kimathi in order to see their underlying ideological essence, but there is need to further examine the broad schools of thought on the Kimathi subject to understand more than issues of ideological interpellation. Examining aspects like the stylistic/ aesthetic relationship can help determine the relationship between what Mazrui's "The Patriot as an Artist" essay in Killam's *African Writers On African Writing* highlights as the inherent relationship between "literary and historical adequacy" (80) in an author's work, and how its thematic and aesthetic aspects are integrated to reflect its whole "qualitative consistency" (77).

Concomitant to this are other interesting aspects in criticism. Are the "ideological formations" of author/critic in the Wanjala Waigwa view-points merely incidental or is there a deeper relationship between the critics empathy and insight into the broad human condition in the works over and above the merely academic exercise of literary criticism? These are potential areas

that a graduate dissertation can explore as critical responses to the creative discourse on the Kimathi subject. One can in fact examine and see whether other theoretical frameworks like reader-response or deconstruction can unravel other image constructs in the Kimathi fiction. Indeed a comparative study can be made on how far these deviate or conform to those identified in this study.

Perhaps an even more interesting area of further exploration are the possible identifiable "creative discourse continuum" linkages in the subject. The Kinyatti's and Githaiga's poems on Kimathi to some extent owe inspiration to Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* whose portraiture the two approve of. *The Potent Ash* collection of stories by Kibera and Kahiga are the debut and precursor to others like Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*. The identifiable stylistic, aesthetic or ideological linkages in the fiction flowing from the historical character and the event in which he is situated are worthy of study. The broader "lineage linkage" that may have escaped the attention of this study are worth exploring. One might even explore an aspect like 'sibling inspiration' in Ngumi Kibera's return to the freedom fighters theme in *The Grapevine Stories* two decades after the *Potent Ash* collection. The levels or types of influence in the works of these later writers might form an interesting "impact assessment" analysis of the broad topic, especially the degree to which they approximate or deviate qualify from the in type of "real resistance" mature literature so much hoped-for by Buijtenhuijs.

Open-mindedness in rigorously subjecting the various fictional images to new angles of examination should inspire new challenges for further research on Kimathi: deconstruction, New historicism and other theoretical frameworks might unravel new image constructs in the works examined in the present study.

The freedom songs equally provide myriad possibilities for further research. This adaptable genre has versions of the 'Song of Kimathi' presented by Kinyatti, Pauline Mahugu and Wandai. Many more are 'out there' waiting for interested researchers. Oral literature is closely linked to history and is a rich reservoir of information which could introduce a new dimension to the discussion on Kimathi and other freedom fighters in Kenyan history. These might shed new light and provide more insights into this promethean figure in Kenyan history and literature, and perhaps prove this study a stop-gap critical discourse which served its purposes as a 'correct' impetus for further research on Kimathi or the subject of Mau Mau.

"The Kimathi Papers" when declassified in 2013 could also provide opportunity for an interesting case study in examining the degree of 'conformity' or 'deviation' between the fiction and

the derivative "source history" for the critic or the literary theoretician interested in further highlighting or clarifying other contentious questions and issues arising from this history-based fiction.

The question of the myths surrounding the person of Kimathi has been alluded to in the endeavour to clarify of the linkages between myth, history and the creative imagination. Myths abound about Kimathi apart from those mentioned by literary critics like Cook and Okenimpke in the examined fictional texts. In view of Kimathi's reputation as a symbol of the freedom struggle research on the existing myths would supplement a study like this and probably evolve into a possible graduate dissertation. Such a study could focus on questions like what impact these myths had on the perceived strengths or weaknesses of Mau Mau in the light of Kimathi's position as acknowledged supreme leader. How widely were the various myths (like alleged capacity of a freedom fighter to throw his panga at the enemy nine miles away!) imbibed by the freedom fighters and the general populace? What type of image(s) do they reinforce about Kimathi and what are their ideological orientation(s)? Mazrui's reference to "the myths that animated them" in the foreword to *Mau Mau Twenty Years After* is an area that needs further research to shed more light on the relevant issues in view of the continuing ideological offensive against the movement by its colonial and neo-colonial adversaries. Kinyatti in *Mau Mau: A Revolution Betrayed* refers to the myths about Mau Mau, noting that colonial propaganda and some Kenyan historians have on the whole tended to peddle "blatant anti-Mau Mau myths and revised positions" (108).

In the light of the alluded evidence of the influence of colonial accounts on some of the images of Kimathi in the fictional accounts, there is an urgent need for a closer investigation of the myths surrounding Kimathi in order to shed light on those (possibly) unknown aspects of his character that the myths might propagate from "the wrong angle" as it were. Henderson's reference to "the danger of a resurgence of Mau Mau so long as any recognised leaders were at large" (21) was based on his view of Kimathi as a personification of "the myth of Mau Mau invincibility" (35) which, Henderson felt, could only be broken once and for all if Kimathi was captured alive. The related mythology, as Henderson notes, is woven around "Kimathi's (alleged) superhuman powers" (51). Investigating these Mau Mau myths about Kimathi might provide more insights into those unique aspects of Kimathi's character that gave rise to these myths, and probably explain the continuing British apprehension about Mau Mau referred to by Njagi in *The Last Mau Mau* as "The British Hand 'White Shadow' On Mau Mau Even After Independence" (36). Investigating the nature of these myths might explain why he continues to haunt the national psyche.

This study on Kimathi has demonstrated that a historical character or event cannot endure straight jacketing in fictional interpretation. Kanogo's in her review of Buijtenhuijs *Mau Mau Twenty Years After* warns that in the sphere of fiction "this (demand ) underestimates the complexities (involved)... such a view is uncalled-for, because it seeks to perpetuate a stereotyped literature on Mau Mau, which would kill the spirit of research and independent interpretation" (399).

In all these instances, the artists seize on historical material/figure and create artistic 'reality' for specific purposes. The artists' ideological leanings are evident in the language itself and images created. Goldman in *Towards a Sociology of The Novel* notes that a work of art becomes a "valid literary and artistic creation only when there is an aspiration to transcendence on the part of the individual and a search for qualitative trans-individual values ... conceptualised values... (which) could depict a positive hero" (14). The opposite is the outcome when the creative product is premised on a "nonaesthetic form of consciousness" (15). The former effect is evident in Ngugi and Micere's Kimathi, the latter in Watene's and Kahiga's protagonists.

Kimathi is perceived in diversity, so to speak. The contradicting perspectives and images are the voices of antagonistic ideologies in the artists' perceptions, responding differently to the issues raised while recreating "the essence of the man" and the historical moment. The genesis of the contentious fictional images has its roots in this differential perception of the movement.

This illustrates why the disagreements in historical or fictional interpretation cannot find a permanent and stable point of convergence. Maloba in *Mau Mau and Kenya* notes that "selective details chosen by ideological combatants to advance their positions" (180) perpetually compound the whole debate. The same is evident in the fictional images of Kimathi. Accepting ideology and its subjectivism as an inherent part of artistic creation helps us to appreciate how the "many-sidedness of visible reality" is reflected in the reification of historical characters like Kimathi in fiction.

The fate and place in history of those associated with the freedom struggle has increasingly become a subject of public debate and not the sometimes whispered conversations that the culture of silence and fear had so strongly stamped on the subject save for occasional mention during those public holidays that purport to celebrate the meaning of the freedom struggle. In his article titled "Greatest Betrayal: Dedan Kimathi has been denied decent burial" in the *Finance* of January 2000, Watoro notes that

Kenyan officialdom- from Kenyatta's to that of Moi's era - has consistently denied its freedom fighters in the three-and-a-half decades since independence. And yet the fact remains that without their role in the struggle, Kenya would not have attained independence in 1963. It would have taken

many years for the country that the whites considered their home, to get independence... It should be appreciated that the nationalist (politicians) and Founding fathers led by Mzee Jomo Kenyatta would not have accomplished what they did without the monumental contributions by the freedom fighters led by Kimathi (25).

There is an increasing interest among many Kenyans to revisit the freedom struggle era and put the events and notable personalities involved into "correct perspective", so to speak. The editorial of *The East African Standard* 9th March 2000 captured the new dispensation towards such personalities like J.M Kariuki, author of *Mau Mau Detainee* in its title "In comes History And Its Bite Hurts". Its *Sunday Nation* compliment on 12th March echoed the same in Wachira Maina's article titled "Digging Up The Past Good For The country", noting that

What we are seeing is really a revolt against *official history*. A rejection of history as invented and told by the secret service and government ...forgetting the past (Kenyatta's advice) for the sake of peace has been an excuse for keeping quiet about gross wrongs and injustices. We forgot colonial injustices for the sake of peace in independent Kenya... This is why there are serious land problems...(9).

The argument by some people that to open up this past to close scrutiny is "not necessary" is therefore misleading. It is, according to the alluded daily editorial, "to imply that it also wrong for Kenyans to remember that they fought for *Uhuru* in order that justice may be their shield and defender" (6). Kabaji's "Mau Mau Memory In Kenyan Writing" article of June 11th 2000 in *The Sunday Standard* puts the issues into perspective by noting that the accounts on Kimathi and the broad subject of Mau Mau fiction continually rekindle the issues because

The official British interpretation of Mau Mau as a reactionary and obscurantist secret society manipulated by unscrupulous politicians was more of an insult to Kenyan writers, who have been inspired to write what they consider a "realistic" portrayal of what Mau Mau stood for. Mau Mau has, thus, evolved into a ghost that keeps revisiting Kenyan writers ... To exorcise this ghost one has to write about it. Interestingly those who write on this subject recount the period with such total involvement that lacks in works dealing with the present realities. But, even more relevant, writers dealing with the present challenges always find a historical framework to link their works to Mau Mau. No wonder, the role of memory in moulding history, the role of history in shaping the present and the responsibility of the present to the past, all have become issues of debate as we count our losses thirty six years after independence (20).

Kimathi is so symbolic a figure in this struggle for any literary critic to charge that a discussion of his portraiture in the realm of fiction is tantamount to ignoring "the historical issues in Kenya's colonial and post-colonial epochs". The truths (or lies) about Kimathi and the freedom struggle that colonial and official history would rather be covered up or never be unmasked from certain literary angles are too much part of the reality in the post colonial experience to remain forever buried in colonial graveyards or suffocated by the blanket of official silence after Kenyatta

declared Mau Mau an "evil thing that should be forgotten". A historical figure like Kimathi around whose name these national issues are so emotively evoked will continue to be a subject of interest as long as the interpretational smokescreens alluded to in Buijtenhuijs *Mau Mau Twenty years After* persist. That is why Emmanuel Mwendwa's in his February 18<sup>th</sup> 1998 article on Kimathi in *The Standard* titled "Memories Of A Gallant Warrior" describes Kimathi as a figure about whose actual role in the freedom struggle "there has been debate". This discourse attempts to come to terms with the historical experience of the armed struggle as projected in the fictional works. And perhaps the most appropriate way of concluding the present study would be to respond to the question raised by historian William Ochieng' in his November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1999 article in *The People* daily about whether Kenyans "have time to discuss freedom fighters" (6).

The answer, to anyone even most disinterestedly familiar with the tone of a study like this one is, as would be expected, decidedly in the affirmative. The freedom struggle continues to be a persistent, emotional and very thought-provoking subject in Kenyan politics, history, literature and journalism. In his article on the fate of the freedom fighters in *The East African* of February 28<sup>th</sup> in year 2000, fifty years after the colonial government Mau Mau, Githongo puts the issue(s) into perspective, noting that

The place of the Mau Mau and men and women like Dedan Kimathi in Kenya's history remains the single most significant unresolved issue of the country's nearly 40 years of independence... To many Kenyans, Kimathi was a nationalist hero, a simple man who led the poor in an uprising for their freedom, land and dignity as Africans against the world's most powerful empire... The Mau Mau liberation movement is one of the most written about and extensively researched topics of modern East and Central African history. It inspired many and repelled others; it continues to haunt the national psyche; Kenya governments continue to fear it. It is as if they felt in their secret hearts like usurpers, pretenders eating the fruit of trees they never planted...

Kenyan regimes have also been uncomfortable with the memory of men like Tom Mboya, Pio Gama Pinto and J. M. Kariuki. What today's leaders do not realise is that unless they make peace with yesterday's heroes, more recent ones seem false and superficial. Kenya seems so intent on forgetting its past that we seem reactionary and out of step with the wider aspirations of the African people (11).

Ochieng's article makes no mention of Kimathi, but those concerned that examining Kimathi's portraiture in *fiction realism* might imply that "historical issues" are "ignored" and that Kenyans may "not have a Kimathi to pen volumes about" need only examine this resurgence of interest in Kimathi's place in Kenyan history. *The People daily* in its commemoration of the 43<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Kimathi's death in the armed freedom struggle emphasised the need for Kenyans to understand, appropriate from and draw lessons from the freedom struggle in the light of their

colonial and post-colonial experience. In *The Swords Of Kirinyaga* translation of one of his famous speeches in the forests Kimathi told his comrades in arms that

Truly I say unto you, we are the heroes that will be remembered by the future generations forever. Our names and pictures will never be forgotten (169).

Except for his awareness that colonialist would tell all types of lies about the freedom fighters in their accounts (like Henderson's in *The Hunt For Kimathi*) the legendary freedom fighter in all probability never expected that he and his compatriots could be the subject of the myriad fictional images in accounts like Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*, Ngugi's and Micere's *The Trial Of Dedan Kimathi* Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*, and various poems on him examined in this study. He was, of course, aware of the version of the "song of Kimathi" the fighters sung in the forest.

The still unspoken and unwritten volumes on this broad subject are more than this volume could contain in its stated scope. William Ochieng calls the debate on the freedom struggle an intractable "unwinnable debate" (6). This study views it as an ever-dynamic subject with its various views deriving from different schools of thought in history and fiction. A synopsis of it all might one day be presented by an ambitious creative artist composing an epic spanning the different phases of the Kenyan history of struggle against oppression and injustice, juxtaposing Kimathi alongside other indomitable characters before and after the "emergency decade". This would provide an excellent opportunity for a further comprehensive critique of creative works on such historical figures and the freedom struggle, augmenting this and other studies like Maughan-Brown's *Land Freedom & Fiction*.

This study will, hopefully, provoke rather than pre-empt further debate in our understanding of the socio-historical forces that created Kimathi in real life and subsequent fiction. As an added invitation into the literature of "the Kimathi footsteps" the critique will, again hopefully, draw others to highlight the issues that come to mind with the name.



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## APPENDICES, EXCERPTS AND SOURCES

## RIRIA KIMATHI WITU AMBATIRE

1. Riria Kimathi witu ambatire  
Kirima-ini ari wiki  
Ni etune hinya na umiruru  
Wa kuhoota Nyakeeru
2. Ni oigire makinya makwa mothe  
Maria nii ndagereire  
Nomo nainyui makegerera mo  
Na munyuire ikombe icio
3. Mwanyuira ikombe cia umiruru  
Iraa nii ndanyuiriire,  
Ni cia ruo ningi ni cia thina  
Na maithori na kicha
4. Mutikamakio ni guthaamanio  
Kana guikio njera  
Kana gukua kana kunyanirwo  
Ngai, niwe uri tha na inyui
5. Tukurira tondu turi andu airu  
Na tutiri a Nyakeeru  
Ngai ota Jomo ndangitutiganiria  
Ngai ari tha nyingi
6. Ni oigire matuku makwa mothe  
Maria nii nderiri-irie  
Ni marikite kunjigana  
Ni tuguita thakame
7. Munyui akimunyita mbaru  
Akiambata Nyandarua  
Ni oigire ni numiriro ihii  
Cia kuhoota Nyakeeru
8. Ihii ikiuma na icaciri  
Ciari kenda muiyuru  
Na iria ingi ikiuma gicuka  
Cia kuhoota Nyakeeru
9. Tukuhooya na maai na mata  
Ngati ciinuke kwao  
Niamu muti utari na maciara  
Nduhandaguo mugunda



## WHEN OUR KIMATHI ASCENDED THE MOUNTAIN

1. When our Kimathi ascended  
The mountain alone  
He prayed for strength and courage  
To defeat the whiteman
2. He said the paths  
That I have followed  
Are the same ones you'll follow  
And be drinking from the same cups
3. If you drink from the same cups of courage  
From which I drank  
They are painful and of suffering  
And of tears and of grief
4. Let detention not worry you  
Or imprisonment worry you  
Not even death or destruction  
Ngai is he who is merciful to you
5. We weep because we are black people  
Not white people  
Ngai, like Jomo will never forsake us  
Ngai is full of mercy
6. He said, "All my days  
That I had wished for  
Are enough for me  
We are going to shed blood"
7. Munyui supported him  
As he climbed Nyandarua  
He said, let me be followed by boys  
Who will defeat the whiteman
8. The boys responded with great enthusiasm  
They were "nine full"  
And others came from Nairobi  
To defeat the whiteman
9. We pray with water and saliva  
That the home guards may go  
back home  
For a fruitless tree  
Is never planted in the garden

## FIELD MARSHALL DEDAN KIMATHI

1. Kimathi wetu alipopanda Mlima wa Nyandarua  
Aliomba nguvu na ushujaa, kushinda wabeberu
2. Alisema "taabu nimepata ya kutosha kabisa  
Nitatoa moyo wangu wote, kwa watu wa nchi yangu"
3. Vijana nao wakamfuata, mlimani Nyandarua  
Wengi walitoka Risavuni, na wengine Nairobi
4. Kimathi akawambia vijana, "nyinyi askari jeshi  
Mtapigana kwa ushujaa, tumshinde mkoloni"
5. Mkinywa kutoka kombe langu, nililokunywa nalo  
Nila taabu na uchungu mwingi, Kwa nchi hii yetu
6. Tena mfuata nyayo zangu, pale nilipitia  
Mtapata ushujaa mwingi, tumshinde mkoloni
7. Naye Mathenge akaingia Jeshi lake nguvu  
Akashika zamu magharibi na Rift Valley yote
8. China naye akasimamia, mlima Kirinyanga  
majenero wengi wakachacha, Kwa vitu vya uhuru
9. Vita vikali vikawaka Kenya, damu ikamwagika  
Vilio vingi kila pahali, watoto na kina mama
10. Wengi sana nao wakafungwa, na kuhamishwa mbali  
wakapigwa na kuteswa sana, kwa ajili ya uhuru
11. Jomo akateswa juani kali naye akavumilia  
pamoja na wafuasi wake, ili tupate uhuru.
12. Waliobaki walinguruma, Odinga, Mboya, Kiano  
"watu hawa wafunguliwe, wapigania haki ya Mwafrika"
13. Waliokufa wakipigana, kwa nchi na uhuru  
Twakumbuka kwa mioyo yote, Mungu waweke salama
14. Nasi ambao tumebakia, na tuheshimiane  
Taifa moja bila ukabila, katika Kenya huru
15. Sasa tuna Serikali yetu, Kenyatta Waziri Mkuu  
Wote harambee tuimbe pamoja, Chini ya bendera yetu

*Source: Pauline Mahugu's thesis. (499-500)*

## FIELD MARSHALL DEDAN KIMATHI

1. When our Kimathi climbed Mt. Nyandarua  
He prayed for strength and courage to defeat the  
Imperialists
2. He said "I've suffered enough  
I will sacrifice my life for my people and land"
3. The youth then followed him up Nyandarua Mountain  
Many had come from  
The Reserves and others from Nairobi
4. Kimathi told the youth "You are the army  
You'll fight heroically to defeat the colonialists.
5. If you drink from the cup I drink from  
It is a cup of suffering and much bitterness  
for our country
6. If you follow my footsteps  
You'll gain much courage; we defeat the colonialists"
7. And Mathenge with his strong army joined  
He took control of the Western side, and the  
whole of Rift Valley
8. China took control of Mt. Kenya  
Many Generals became fierce because of the war  
For independence
9. War broke out in Kenya, there was bloodshed  
Much wailing everywhere from children to women
10. Many were jailed and detained very far  
They were beaten and tortured for our freedom
11. Jomo was tortured in the hot sun and he endured  
The suffering  
Together with his followers, for us to be independent.
12. The remaining people, Odinga, Mboya, Kiano roared  
"Release these people; the heroes of Black rights"
13. Those who died fighting for our country and freedom  
We remember them in our hearts; May God bless them  
In peace
14. And us who are alive, Let's respect each other  
One nation without tribalism in a free Kenya
15. Now we have our own Government

Kenyatta the Prime Minister  
 Let us sing Harambee  
 In union under our flag

*Source: Pauline Mahugu's thesis. (501-502)*

### **KIMATHI NI AGOOKA**

Kimathi ni agooka na njamba cia ita  
 Njamba ciitu ciothe niguu ikoimira  
 Ni ikoigirwo ngenu na ikunguirwo  
 Na itugacooka kuria ino cia heho  
     Tugakeena muno  
     Nyumba ya Mumbi  
     Igicokerio ithaka

Gakaara ni okire na mbutu ithatu  
 Mathenge ni oigure ngwenda mwibange  
 Atongoria a Nyiri marungii mbere  
 Atumia marumiririe ngemi  
     Tugakeena muno  
     Nyumba ya Mumbi  
     Igicokerio ithaka

Muthi wa wiyathi niguu mukoona  
 Njamba ciitu ciothe inia mucaragia  
 Na thumbi cia unene uthamaki-ini  
 Magai manyu ni mwendirie mbia  
     Tugakeena muno  
     Nyumba ya Mumbi  
     Igicokerio ithaka

Turi a kunyarirwo guku thi yothe  
 Ona nginya ciikaro ciitu inyarirwo  
 Nayo miiri itu inyarirwo muno  
 Mutigetigire mworagia ni ni!

### **Kimathi Will Come**

Kimathi will come with our fighting heroes  
 All our heroes will emerge then  
 They will be met with ululation and celebration  
 And (they) will no longer eat cold food  
 We shall be very happy  
 When the house of Mumbi  
 Get back their lands

Gakaara came with three battalions  
 Mathenge said, arrange yourselves  
 With Nyeri leaders in front

Accompanied by ululating women  
 We shall be very happy  
 When the house of Mumbi  
 Get back their lands

On independence day you will see  
 All those heroes you have looked for  
 With the insignia of leadership in authority  
 Woe if you sold your heritage for money  
 We shall be very happy  
 When the house of Mumbi  
 Get back their lands

We are persecuted all over the world  
 Even our dwellings are destroyed  
 And our bodies are so tortured  
 Do not be afraid, you used to ask when!

*Source: Gibson Gichuhi Gitahi (personal communication)*

### **Our Leader, Dedan Kimathi**

When our Kimathi ascended  
 Into the mountains alone  
 He asked for strength and courage  
 To decisively defeat the colonialists.

He said that we should tread  
 The paths that he had trodden,  
 That we should follow his revolutionary footsteps  
 And drink from his cup.

If you drink from the cup of courage,  
 That cup I have drunk from myself,  
 It is a cup of pain and of suffering,  
 A cup of tears and of death.

We are tortured because we were Black;  
 We are not white people  
 And we are not of their kind.  
 But with Ngai in us  
 We shall defeat the colonialists.

Do not be afraid of imprisonment  
 Nor should you lose heart for being detained.  
 Even if they confiscate our property  
 And kill us  
 Do not ever despair:  
 Because of our faith and commitment  
 We shall defeat the enemy.

You must take his courage and endurance  
 To courageously face tribulations or death,  
 knowing that you will belong  
 To the Black people's state of Kenya.

*Source: Thunder from The Mountains*

### **The Decisive Moment In Our Struggle**

Many people will weep with joy  
 When Kimathi comes  
 With Kenya's Independence  
 Chorus

Those who have faith in the struggle  
 Will rejoice when Kimathi comes  
 Bringing Kenya's Independence

He will not come as powerless as before  
 He will come with power  
 And with great faith in the masses  
 He will make his political base at Kianyandarwa  
 And the House of Mumbi and all Kenyan nationalities  
 Will be freed from slavery

We will rejoice together  
 When we get back our freedom  
 Which has caused so many of us  
 To be detained and others imprisoned  
 Those who betrayed us  
 Where will they run to?

He asks the young men and women  
 "Who are the stronger  
 You or the elders?  
 Our land was taken from them  
 Without much resistance  
 And if you don't fight for it now  
 Whom will you blame?"

This is the decisive moment  
 For the Kenyan masses  
 We must fight hard to get our land back  
 Because if we delay there will be others  
 Who will come pretending to be our friends  
 But they will be our great enemies  
 They too will take our land  
 And we shall have a difficult time getting it back

*Source: Thunder from The Mountains (840)*

## The Fountain of Independence

The Fountain of Independence

Sprang from Kimathi

And he said it would be guarded by the Mau Mau army

And it would be protected by the stones erected around it

We shall destroy you, the whites,

Because you only know robbery and violence.

All the whites who are here

Are now in great danger:

The Mau Mau forces will destroy you.

The Kenyan masses will sit in judgement over you

And they will order you to go back to your country

We shall destroy you, the whites,

Because you only know robbery and violence.

You whites must know that you will leave this country

Because this is not your country.

You came here to rob and oppress us

It is time you went back to Europe.

Then only black people will be left here

To enjoy the fruits of their toil

And rights of their land.

Those with hearts of steel were made so by Kimathi

He recruited Kago and he sent him to Nyandarua

To fight for our liberation.

We shall destroy you, the whites,

Because you only know robbery and violence.

*Source: Thunder from The Mountains, (89)*

## Kimathi, Save Us From Slavery

Good Ngai who supports our national army,

Who kindly receives African people's sacrifices,

As long as you are still our guide

The enemy cannot defeat us.

We pray to you with love and respect

And with patriotic feelings,

And with unity in our struggle.

With you in us we shall drive the foreigners out.

Go quickly Kimathi

And save us from this slavery.

Kenya is filled with bitter tears

Struggling for liberation.

Remember that the white colonialists hate us.

They hunt us day and night

Their aim is to exterminate us all.

Mau Mau is preaching love and unity in struggle.  
If you want to share patriotic love  
Join Mau Mau without delay.

Go now Kimathi!  
Bring us Independence  
Kenya is filled with bitter tears  
Struggling for our liberation.

*Source: Thunder from The Mountains, (90)*

### **Kimathi Will Bring Our National Anthem**

Kimathi will bring our national anthem  
Along with a flag of liberation from Nyandarua  
When we seize back our freedom.

Because we are true members of the movement  
We will arm ourselves  
And firmly tell the British oppressors to leave.

You shall see our people  
Who have so long been oppressed  
Seizing independence under Kimathi.

Kimathi will identify  
Those who have been oppressing us  
And the British will be driven out,  
Together with their African puppets.

Those of our people  
Who have been oppressing us  
Will be thrown into the bonfire  
Because they collaborated with the British  
And helped them steal our land.

They will be asked by our people:  
"Because you were deceived by the British  
And sold our land,  
Why don't you follow them now?"

We, the African people of Kenya,  
Will all rejoice when our land  
Which was sold  
By those who wanted to be chiefs  
Is returned to us.

*Source: Thunder from The Mountains, (91)*



## KIMATHI WACIURI

The mountain  
 The ridges  
 The bushes and the forests  
 Deep valleys and gorges  
 Thick with vegetation  
 Underneath we hid, crept and lived  
 As we fought for our country

Men of substance  
 Brave, young, hot blood running on our veins  
 Our dear homes  
 Our loved ones  
 Sisters, brothers, fathers, mothers, wives, children and  
 all we forgot

Not because we chose to  
 But our country needed us  
 Our land cried for freedom  
 Our people cried for freedom  
 Our blood was to be the price

Into the bush we went  
 The forest of the mountains of Nyandarua and Kirinyaga  
 Became our homes  
 We had no fear  
 How could there be  
 Under the inspiration of our great general?

Kimathi  
 Kimathi wa Ciuri  
 How my heart weeps  
 My eyes swell with tears  
 And my spirit sinks with heaviness  
 With sadness  
 With your memories  
 Oh Kimathi,  
 Great Kimathi

Your very name  
 Struck terror in the hearts of Johnnies  
 They dared not hunt for us  
 Where they knew you would be  
 Your name spelt fire to them  
 And the homeguards sucked their knees  
 As they huddled in terror  
 When they heard of your Presence.

Kimathi  
 Kimathi wa Ciuri  
 Commander of all that was in the bush

Birds of the air  
 Animals of the plains  
 And creepers of the earth  
 Friend of all  
 Whose wisdom cannot be equated

Kimathi  
 Kimathi wa Ciuri  
 The great prophet of Ngai  
 "Thaai thathaiya Ngai thaai"  
 His morning and evening call to prayer  
 Messages from God abound in his mouth  
 His brave troops standing to attention  
 As he spelt the will of God  
 The will of our ancestors  
 The will of our land

Then we would go into battle  
 With zeal  
 With vim  
 With the silence of the wind  
 And camouflage of the bush  
 All from our wise leader

Into the midst of the enemy we went  
 Without being seen or noticed  
 And then  
 (whistle)  
 The bushes woke, moved  
 Cut down the Johnnies  
 Their intestines hung out  
 To feed the vultures of the sky

Then  
 One dark freezing morning  
 The sound of exploding guns  
 Ta-ta-ta-.....  
 On the ridges of Karuna-ini and Kahiga-ini  
 Our general lay bleeding  
 With a bullet of the white enemy  
 And Kimathi was captured  
 "The leader of darkness and doom is captured"  
 they pronounced!

Oh Kimathi  
 Kimathi wa Ciuri  
 Woe to the hangman who took your life  
 Your body be gone  
 But your spirit lives for ever

Oh Kimathi  
 Kimathi wa Ciuri

Six feet down  
 Below the grounds of Kamiti prison  
 Rest in peace!

*Source: Michael Githaiga, teacher at Kimathi Secondary School, 1995*

### **Cenotaph for Dedan Kimaathi**

I

He was a great freedom fighter  
 A man of great passion  
 A noble man  
 He took an oath  
 Not to cut his hair  
 Until the British were driven  
 Out of the country

He never finished the journey  
 On the crossroad of our struggle  
 The enemy cut him down  
 His body was savagely mutilated  
 Legs broken  
 Skull crushed  
 Before the British were satisfied  
 That he was dead

Not a single flower  
 At his funeral  
 Not a coffin  
 Not a mourner  
 Armed soldiers  
 Surrounded his dead body

II

When he lived  
 The rivers and mountains  
 The moon and the stars  
 Worshipped him  
 When he walked  
 Thunder and lightning  
 Roared and crushed  
 Clouds raged in violence  
 He was indeed  
 A great giant among men  
 A Kenyan Prometheus

The page he wrote  
 in our history book  
 is one of the finest  
 It will always be remembered

We are proud to be his blood

To be the seeds of his guts

*Source: Maina wa Kinyatti. A Season of Blood. (138-139)*

### **Kimathi is Here**

Hallelujah!

The cry of social justice  
is blooming again:

Kimathi is getting up

From the grave

Of mass graves!

And he is breaking in another town,

And crying loudly.

What have you done

To the poor?

Why so much suffering?

Hallelujah! Comrades!

Where is the land of squatters?

Who should have inherited the earth?

Where are the graves of freedom fighters

And their poor families?

Gather them up for

Kimathi is coming again!

Hallelujah! Kimathi is coming again!

Climbing Mount Kirinyaga again

Calling again for resurrection for a

New dawn!

Where are our forests

Our animals, our clean water?

Our Mugumo trees?

Our medical herbs?

Our land!

With foreigners again?

With home-guards again?

With robbers

Lottery of wealth again!

With traitors!

With hypocrites!

Where is our atlas of hopes?

Again with foreigners!

God forbid!

Hallelujah!

Where are our Slum dwellers!

In the same pity

They were thirty-six years (ago).

Kimathi is coming back?

In our churches?

No!

Where?

In the heart of oppressed men? The heart of

The worker who is exploited  
 Daily by foreign investors!  
 And their agents  
 In the heart of a woman  
 Who has been raped  
 Prostituted and abused  
 In the name of women liberation!

Kimathi is here!  
 Lets Crusade for our Rights  
 Lets welcome Kimathi  
 Hallelujah!

Patriot,  
 Nyeri.

## INFORMANTS/SOURCES

### Michael Githaiga, Kimathi Secondary School

The "Struggle for Excellence" motto of Kimathi Secondary School in Karunai-ini might well have partly inspired for Githaiga's composition of the 'Kimathi wa Ciuri' poem, as much as his commitment to drama. Githaiga took his 'O' level exams at Githiga Secondary School in Kiambu, and his 'A' levels at Shirno la Tewa School in 1982. His interest in poetry grew during 'A' level studies. With his deep appreciation of drama, he composes poems for school drama festivals. The Kimathi poem was performed during the District Drama Festivals at Nyeri High School in 1995. Githaiga is an official of the District Drama Festival committee.

Having witnessed many performances of poetic compositions he decided to come up with an original composition on a unique subject. He chose Kimathi as a subject because

- He wanted to produce a composition on a national hero
- He wanted to justify the name of the school. As a teacher at Kimathi Secondary School, a poem on Kimathi would be appropriate because "Ngemi ciumaga na mucii" (generosity/charity begins at home)
- He considers poetry a pastime, and has produced other compositions but not published any.

The close relationship between literature and history is not on Githaiga. Having from Githunguri in Kiambu, the stories he heard from some of Kimathi's contemporaries at Karunai-ini added an interest first aroused by his reading of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as an 'A' level text in 1981-82 (he was not aware of the existence of Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* at the time of meeting the researcher, nor apparently, Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi*). His later posting as a teacher to Kimathi Secondary School further added his interest in the theme. He is a teacher of history.

Githaiga is aware of liberation struggles though he does not subscribe to the Marxist dialectical materialist theory. He expressed praise for Gorbachev for dismantling the communist system because it was oppressive, and De Clerk for dismantling apartheid. The Marxist analysis, he argues, is only relevant in relation to the feudal system. Githaiga prefers the capitalist system, provided there are strong labour laws to protect the working class. He does not share the socialist vision of the authors of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. He is not aware of (any) other English language poetic compositions on Kimathi.

Githaiga is a graduate of Kenyatta University.

### **Mzee Robertson Gichuki Kagenyo**

Mzee Robertson Gichuki Kagenyo of Karunai-ini is an elder of the P.C.E.A church in the area. Born in 1925, he was 71 years old when talking to the researcher on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1996. He belongs to the age-group (*nika*) that came to manhood during "Ng'aragu ya Mianga" (the famine of cassava) in 1942-43 and says Kimathi belonged to the same age-group. He described Kimathi as a sportsman and a good dancer of "Gituamba".

According to Mzee Gichuki, Kimathi attended Karuna-ini Primary School before going to intermediate school at Tumu Tumu. He never went to Burma as alleged by some people, but served in a unit called "Fanya koo" which he later left after finishing recruitment training. He worked as milk clerk and teacher in his own area, and later at an European farm in Ol'Kalou. Mzee Gichuki went too Naivasha but later met Kimathi at Nyahururu. When people became determined to fight for freedom, says Gichuki, Kimathi became an oath administrator, defied all colonial threats against him and went to the forest. According to Mzee Gichuki, when the colonial government in 1952 put a prize of ten thousand shillings for Kimathi's capture, Kimathi swore that if anybody caught him, before four years were over he would give him the same amount! Kimathi was fully convinced nobody would get him before then, which appears prophetic because it was only on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1956- exactly four years after the declaration of the Emergency- that Kimathi was captured. God, according to Mzee Gichuki, appears to have granted Kimathi his wish to survive for that long in the struggle.

Mzee Gichuki owns the plot on which Kimathi was shot and captured. The colonial security presence, he says, was so heavy at the time when Kimathi crossed from the forest to the inhabited "reserve" area at dawn on the fateful morning. As Kimathi crept up the valley to cross back into the forest, he was seen by a home guard, shot and arrested, then taken to Kahigai-ini home guard post in present day Kanjoora sub-location and later to Nyeri.

Mzee Gichuki was not a forest fighter, but was working in Nairobi. Apart from such details about Kimathi he is not familiar with songs on Kimathi.

### **Mzee Richard Ndegwa Gachigua**

Mzee Richard Ndegwa Gachigua remembers his days as one of Kimathi's pupils at Karuna-ini School. He especially remembers the P.E. lessons Kimathi taught them sometimes accompanied with song. He describes Kimathi as a very active teacher who would not lose a single minute after P.E. before going back to class, where the students would find him. The researcher at times saw Mzee Gachigua defy age to demonstrate Kimathi's way of teaching the P.E. songs in the discussion.

Gachigua took the oath in 1952 but did not become a forest fighter. He became as a Mau Mau Scout, taking letters, messages/information to and from the forest. He remembers in 1953 taking supplies to fighters in the Muringato part of Nyandarua forest. He saw Kimathi only after his capture.

Mzee Gachigua is familiar with the songs on Kimathi. The famous "Song of Kimathi", Gachigua told the researcher, is based on the biblical hymn describing the experience of Jesus when he ascended the mountain to pray for strengthening in his mission of salvation. Gachigua strove to remember the biblical hymn and to relate the various verses in the "Song of Kimathi".

### **Gibson Gichuhi Gitahi**

Gibson Gichuhi Gitahi, from the Kanyinya part of Karuna-ini was among the inner core of fighters closest to Kimathi in the forest. Born in 1923, he was 73 years old at the time the researcher met him on October (18<sup>th</sup>) 1996. Gitahi said he was initiated into manhood with the "niika ria Muthetha" in 1942. He worked as a tailor ("wira wa carahani") before the emergency. When he entered the forest in 1953, he became one of Kimathi's closest and most trusted bodyguards. He remained with Kimathi until he (Gitahi) was caught by the colonial security forces in their pursuit of Kimathi. Gitahi's capture is mentioned in Ian Henderson's *The Hunt For Kimathi*. Thereafter, Gitahi became part of "surrenders group" ("macarenda" in his term), former forest fighters recruited and armed by the colonial security forces to track their erstwhile compatriots in the forest and force them to surrender. By the time Kimathi was captured, Gitahi was in "surrenders" camp at Nyeri after his own capture in mid - 1955.

Gitahi is a fountain of knowledge on Mau Mau songs. He composed some detailing experiences in the forest. He sung verses from the "Song of Kimathi", though at times his memory appeared to falter in the attempt to recall the order to the verses. Those he remembered well he sung with clarity. Even at his age, the outlines of the strong fighter were still discernible- tall and still walking upright. The song anticipating Kimathi's victorious return from the forest "Kimathi Ni Agooka" was sung to the researcher by Gitahi. Many songs about Kimathi were sung in the "reserves" while others mentioned his name even when he was not the subject, Gitahi told the researcher.

On the question of land and freedom, Gitahi says these issues were seen from a nationalist perspective by the fighters. Kimathi was viewed as the one who would lead them to victory in these matters. In Gitahi's words

"Kimathi athitangurwo kuraira Kenya, no tikuraga mundu"

The translated meaning is that "Kimathi was persecuted because of fighting for Kenya not because of killing anybody"

And so in the expected victory song "Kimathi Will Come," Gitahi explains the people's expectations that Kimathi would emerge heroically from the forest at the attainment of independence



with "thumbi cia unene" (heroes badges/insignia) and the fighters would be accorded honour befitting victorious heroes. Kimathi would be recognised as a great leader in the country, and so should be honoured because the independence he was fighting for was attained although he died in the process. "Ritwa riake riigwo na gitiyo rimenyereirwo" (His name should be well preserved and accorded the proper honour) Gitahi urges.

Regrettably, Gitahi says, the latter has not happened officially with respect to Kimathi or the freedom fighters. He says the fighters have been neglected and treated "almost like animals" rather than rewarded. Surviving freedom fighters, he says, should have been called to a meeting, all of them, whose agenda should have been how to give full recognition and honour to Kimathi and all freedom fighters.

On the Mau Mau ideology, Gitahi says that although the fighting forces were mainly Gikuyu, the vision of the struggle was for the whole country. Gitahi clarified this in response to a question about the constant reference to the "House of Mumbi" in the land and freedom songs. He pointed out that the fighting had spread as far as parts of Maasailand (Rift Valley). Asked whether his children know the freedom songs, Gitahi said they have not asked him to teach them. They are grown-up men. Gitahi is a grandfather.

### **Beatrice Wambui wa Ndiritu**

Wambui wa Ndiritu impressed the researcher by the tone of courage she still expressed as she talked of the experiences of the emergency. She said her age was about 60 years. Her role she told the researcher, was to carry food to the forest fighters. At one time she was in the forest with a group of fighters who included one of Kimathi's brothers, Wagura Wachiuri.

Wambui Ndiritu later left the forest voluntarily, escorted by her fellow compatriots. Returning to 'normal' life she took herself to the homeguard post at Karuna-ini (as security regulations demanded in the emergency), but stubbornly refused to take the guards to the forest, or be screened. She was therefore taken to the chief's post at Ihururu and later remanded at Nyeri before being taken to Kamiti Prison where she remained for one and a half years. By the time Kimathi was captured Wambui Ndiritu had been released. People rushed to the Kahiga-ini homeguard post as the news of his capture spread. Wambui showed great courage even then, acknowledging Kimathi (who had been demonised by the colonial government) as a fellow freedom fighter even at the risk of more suffering. From where he was lying guarded, Kimathi recognised and called out to her.

Kimathi: "Uuria ni Wambui wa Ndiritu? Kai atangikirekwo oke angeithie?" (Is that Wambui of Ndiritu? Why don't you allow her to come and greet me?)

Not even the danger of being associated with the "wanted" and now captured Kimathi could stop Wambui fearlessly went and greeted Kimathi. Fear was not part of her, she said, because her

experiences in the forest and detention had made her overcome it. She could recall several verses of the "Song of Kimathi" which she sang to the researcher.

Wambui believes Kimathi must have been buried very secretly, perhaps even away from Kamiti, otherwise the information network among these in Kamiti at the time might have known. She says Kimathi was famous nationally, even during this time. Wambui Ndiritu exuded that indomitable courage that freedom fighters are famous for, "Those with hearts made of steel were made so by Kimathi" is the fortitude shown by this woman freedom fighter.

### **Hutchinson Waweru Kahure**

Apart from teacher Githaiga, Kahure of the support staff of Kimathi Secondary, Kahure expressed strong interest in the whole subject of the freedom struggle. Although not conversant with specific about Kimathi, his view is that "Rugano rutiri rwandikwo biu" ("The full story has not been written") because of political intricacies. He feels that the Kenyatta government did not take deep interest in Kimathi as a freedom fighter, and that on the whole, there has been an attempt to downplay the role of Kimathi and the freedom fighters. Kahure urges that the history of the freedom struggle be written in detail without confusing issues so that children will get the correct story. He attributes the downplaying of the freedom fighters role to interference by homeguards in the Kenyatta administration who were uneasy with the "true history" because they feared people would realise they were not the correct people to be in authority.

Accordingly, Kahure feels that efforts should be made to use sources who knew Kimathi well to write his story before the generation which fought for freedom passes away. The greatest value and recognition that can be accorded the struggle for Uhuru is for it to be well documented - even if only for the sake of the satisfaction to be derived from such a task itself. "This responsibility is now in the hands of scholars like you", Kahure told the researcher.

DEDAN KIMATHI  
C/O H.M. PRISON  
17th FEBRUARY, 1957

Father Marino  
Catholic mission  
P. O. Box 25  
NYERI

Dear Father,

It is about one O'clock night that I have picked up my pencil and paper so that I may remember you and your beloved friends and friends before the time is over.

I am so busy and so happy preparing for heaven for heaven tomorrow the 18th February 1957. Only to let you know that Father Whellam came in to see me here in my prison room as soon as he received the information regarding my arrival. He is still a clear kind person as I did not firstly expect. He visits me very oftenly and gives me sufficient encouragement. He provided me with important books with more that all have set a burning light throughout my way to paradise, such as:-

1. Students Catholic Doctrine
2. In the likeness of Christ
3. The New Testament
4. How to understand the mass
5. The appearance of the Virgin at Grotto of Lourdes
6. Prayer book in Kikuyu
7. The Virgin May of Fatima
8. The cross of the Rosary etc.

I want to make it ever memorial to you and all that only Father Whellam that came to see me on Christmas day while I had many coming on the other weeks and days. Sorry that they did not remember me during the birth of Our Lord and Savior. Pity also that they forgot me during such a merry day.

I have already discussed the matter with him and I am sure that he will inform you all.

Only a question of getting my son to school. He is far from many of your schools, but I trust that something must be done to see that he starts earlier under your care etc.

Do not fail from seeing my mother who is very old and to comfort her even though that she is so much sorrowful.

My wife is here. She is detained at Kamiti Prison and I suggest that she will be released after some time. I would like her to be comforted by sisters e.g. Sister Modester etc.. for she too feels lonely. And if by any possibility she can be near the mission as near Mathari so that she may be so close to the sisters and to the church.

I conclude by telling you only to de me favour by getting education to my son.

Farewell to the world and all its belongings, I say and best wishes I say to my friends with whom we shall not meet in this busy world.

Please pass my complements and best wishes to all who read Wathiomo Mukinyu. Remember me too to the Fathers, Brothers and Sisters.

With good hope and best wishes,

I remain dear Father

Yours Loving, and Departing convert.

D. Kimathi.

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It is also interesting to analyze briefly the image of the few 'nationwide' Mau Mau leaders who have been active during the Emergency and who were, in order of importance: Dedan Kimathi, Stanley Mathenge and Waruhiu Itote (General China).

As far as Dedan Kimathi is concerned the situation is quite clear. As the nominal leader to all the Mau Mau Armies and as the man who laid down his life for the independence of this country (he was executed by the British in 1957), he has become a personification of the armed struggle, and his image is very positive indeed. In nine out of ten cases, his name is quoted when people want to single out a "Mau Mau hero, and he is the only fighter who has a street named after him in Nairobi, ... He is not only described almost everywhere as a 'brave and valiant fighter for freedom and a great leader of his people in the forest', his admirers also almost invariably stress his kindness and gentleness. 'He was such a nice man' a lady from North Tetu, where Kimathi lived, said to me, almost with tears in her eyes. J.M. Kariuki also explicitly mentions the fact that people who have known Kimathi thought him 'a very gently, kindly man'. In 1971 in Nairobi, I even met a boy of about fifteen years of age, also from North Tetu Division, who was apparently convinced that Kimathi, not Mr. Kenyatta, today would have been the president of Kenya if the British had not killed him. 'He was a big fighter, not Kenyatta', was the principle argument used by this informant to give weight to his thesis. I do not know if his opinion is shared by many people in Kenya, but it is certainly symptomatic of the high esteem in which Kimathi is held by Kikuyu today (78-79).

Buijtenhuijs, *Mau Mau Twenty Years After*, 1973

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI