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## Roots of Freedom: A Grain of Wheat

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**Abstract:** *A Grain of Wheat* is a committed political novel balanced against the exploitation of human fallibility instead of just a work of historical fiction offering illustrations and interpretations of Kenya's struggle for freedom. Ngugi's humanism, revealed by his care for his people and his understanding of what prompts them to action, dominates the novel.

**Index Terms – Post-colonialism, Neo-colonialism, Guilt, Public Responsibility, Proletarian Revolution.**

### I. INTRODUCTION

The need for social change is the subject of Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) depicting the Kenyan nationalist struggle for independence presenting an insider's account of the Mau Mau rebellion. Ngugi portrays in authentic terms the anti-colonial struggle dominated by a nationalist sentiment and subverted by the agents of colonizers. The writer rejects negritude and other essentialisms while asserting the legitimacy of African culture and tradition. "Because racism does not emanate from some Biological arrangement, I must assume that it can be changed. We can see racism as a phenomenon that has social, political and economic bases and origins and is thus, subject to social, political and economic solutions. [ ... ] Thus, Black people must realize themselves on the level of class and take anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist positions" (qtd. in Killam, "A Grain of Wheat" 6).

*A Grain of Wheat* is a classic tale of Kenya's struggle for independence seen through the character sketches of people in Thabai, a small Kikuyuni village. It is replete with political, religious and social observations along with crystallization of mid twentieth century history. The novel weaves several stories together during the state of emergency in Kenya through a series of flashbacks in the lives and experiences of main characters, focusing on quiet Mugo (the village's chosen hero and a man haunted by a terrible secret), Mumbi, Kihika, Karanja and Thompson. The plot revolves around Mugo's village's preparations for Kenya's independence day celebration - Uhuru day. The novel weaves stories within stories, the narrative interwoven with allusions to real life leaders of the nationalist struggle like Jomo Kenyatta and others. As events unfold, compromises are forced, friendships are betrayed and lovers are tested.

Kenya is in the last years of its struggle for independence, the goal is Uhuru. The people of Thabai are about to celebrate the Uhuru day which is only four days ahead. History clearly projects the sum of their efforts, the eventual victory against the British, the lowering of the Union Jack in December 1963 and its replacement with Kenya's black, red and green flag. However, via fiction Ngugi delineates far more than this, making one perceive history developing through the experience, the suffering, the commitment, the inadequacies and the treachery of the people who lived through the times.

### II. RAW CARNAGE

Thabai has a small town's usual share of freedom fighters, collaborators, colonial officers, whites of both sexes - ambitious men and beautiful girls. There are Christians, traditionalists, traitors, old codgers and number of others who claim to be called humans. The novel opens with Mugo, a resident of Thabai, a civilian who had suffered extensively at the hands of government during the freedom movement. He is a strange old man who appears to be seeing phantoms where there are none and often appears like guarding something within him which according to him everyone is out to seek and unravel on the fateful Uhuru day. Acts perpetrated by the colonial administrators and their lackeys are sometimes nothing less than the raw sadism. They seem to be motivated by a keen, though unjustifiable sense of superiority, an apparent mission to Anglicize an unwilling world. When the British colonizers came to Kenya, they strengthened their hold on the territory by building a great railroad. Waiyaki and other warrior leaders took up arms against this imposition but to no avail. Most Kenyans gradually learn to compromise with the new regime, though the seeds of revolution start sprouting underground to be culminated in Mau Mau Movement.

Mugo recalls the utter cruelties, senseless killings and tortures that the whitemen indulged in on meeting Githua, a fellow victim of the state violence, who lost one of his legs and gone soft in his head as well. "I tell you before the Emergency, I was like you before the white man did this to me with bullets, I could work with both hands" (5). The story of Githua is the story of thousands who were disabled during the struggle. The story of Githogo, a deaf and dumb boy who was killed brutally by the government troops during one of their raids in the village, follows the same track of cruelty by the Britishers:

'Halt!' the whiteman shouted. Githogo continued running. Something hit him at the back.... Apparently the bullet had touched his heart.... Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead. (6)

The last sentence "Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead" touches every heart with the power of the bullet as it hits Githogo and Ngugi through this sentence has nailed all those lies which talks of Mau Mau terrorists being killed in encounters with the troops.

Mugo, a hero of the British Concentration Camp is visited by a group of elder people - Warui, Wambui and Gikonyo - who want him to lead the celebration of the Uhuru by delivering a speech on the day reminds him of the history of the nation:

... the day the whiteman came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic witness that whiteman was a messenger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with sugar; his humility was touching. (11)

This was just a propaganda of the Britishers, who actually in the guise of religion have come to colonize Kenya towards the end of the nineteenth century. The whitemen attack the people firstly through clergy and secondly by means of its soldiers. Mugo remembers a man named Harry Thuku who exposed the game of deceit played by the colonizers, for instance the discontent with taxation, forced labour on white settler's land and of uprooting thousands as a result of resettlement schemes for British soldiers.

Soon the people saw whiteman had imperceptibly acquired more land to meet the growing needs of his position. He had already pulled the grass-thatched hut and erected a more permanent building. Elders of the land protested. They looked beyond the laughing face of the whiteman and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried not the Bible, but the sword. (12)

Harry Thuku later formed a party against the whites but was soon arrested. His arrest agitated people and the first protest rally took place in 1923. This culminates in changing the mental set up of the common masses from one of defiance to that of militant struggle. Kihika, a forest fighter, is a very sensitive youngman, highly inspired by Indian National Movement and with maturity recognizes the commonness of all such struggles against the British. Apprising his young friends Gikonyo, Mumbi, Karanja and others regarding the success of Indian struggle against Britishers he states: "Do you know why Gandhi succeeded? Because he made his people give up their fathers and mothers and serve their one Mother - India. With us Kenya is our mother" (78). Kihika, an ideal freedom fighter has inspired hundreds of youngmen. "This is not 1920. What we now want is action, a blow which will tell" (14-15).

The revolt against the colonial masters manifests itself in multifarious ways. Kihika realizes the deceitful role of Christianity intending to make a strong hold on the minds of public, and the priests are using it as a weapon to thwart the independence struggle:

We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes opened the Bible. He said: Let us kneel down to pray. We knelt down. Mubia said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasure in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth. (15)

The last sentence, "But he laid his on earth, our earth", portrays the two-pronged attack of the colonizers firstly through settlers and secondly through Church. Kihika, a shrewd leader uses numerous powerful arguments to expose the real pattern of the colonizers:

My father's ten acres? That is not the important thing. Kenya belongs to black people.... it does not belong to the whiteman. And even if it did, shouldn't everybody have a share in the common shamba, our Kenya? Take your whiteman, anywhere in the settled area. He owns hundreds and hundreds of acres of land. What about the black men who squat there, who sweat dry on the farms to grow coffee, tea, sisal, wheat and yet only get ten shillings a month? (85)

Kihika's speeches have a forceful impact because of their spontaneity and directness backed by his conviction. Among the younger generation are Gikonyo, a well-known carpenter in the village of Thabai, and Mumbi, his wife, one of the most beautiful women in the area who listens to Kihika as one of their peers. Kihika speaks before a large crowd and encourages guerrilla warfare against the British. Mugo also listens, but, unlike Gikonyo and Mumbi, he hates what Kihika says. Mugo thinks native Kenyans have no chance of successfully opposing the British, and he decides to do his job quietly to succeed in the new order of things. Karanja, who unsuccessfully sought the hand of Mumbi, feels even more strongly that the best policy is to accept the British as invincible, but Kihika by using the same religious sentiments as used by the Britishers to distract the minds of the common man, arouses people into action by referring to the death of Christ:

In Kenya we want a death which will change things, that is to say, we want a true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say that you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ. (83)

The problems of peace and reconstruction are problems of human relationship. If one approaches civil affairs with the heroics of a campaign, one runs away thrusting the responsibility on others, and this will result in disillusionment being in the hands of cynics and demagogues.

During emergency Kihika realises that violence can be justified only if it is seen as a painful necessity, in which one participates as a sort of ritual sacrifice. Though many simply indulge in their ruthless passions and are defiled while others at least comprehend the nature of the ordeal, "how many took the oath and are now licking the toes of the whiteman? No, you take an oath to confirm a choice already made. The decision to lay or not to lay your life for the people lies in the heart. The oath is the water sprinkled on a man's head at baptism" (167).

The imposition of the Emergency creates a lot of social problems not only for forest fighters like Kihika but for many others as well. More men were rounded up and taken to concentration camps, named detention camps, outside Kenya. From the accounts of various freedom fighters it is clear that the torture of the civilians had begun on a mass scale, a fact that is borne out by the passing of over a million Kenyans through the concentration camps and the "pipe-line" (51) during the four years of emergency. The torture grew as the struggle gained strength: "Kihika was tortured. Some say that the neck of a bottle was wedged into his body through the anus as the white people in the Special Branch tried to wrest the secrets of the forest from him" (17). "A common game in Rira had been to bury a man naked, in the hot sand, sometimes leaving him there overnight" (116) is a pointer to the extremely brutal and pathetic ways of the whites, turning them out of the list of humans. Even those left behind in the village were not spared from such torture. Mumbi, the wife of Gikonyo and sister of Kihika calls forth the haunting memories of burning of their houses by the home-guards.

The society of Kenya represented by these home-guards is the society overburdened with the weight of evil practices and depravity of moral values. These inhabitants of the country walk like dead men in a land which is morally and spiritually dead. These people are caught irredeemably in a vicious circle of manipulation and hopelessness by following their white masters' footsteps for torturing and terrifying the poor masses and considering this exploitation as a mode of amusement.

The determination and zeal with which Jomo Kenyatta, the first Prime Minister (1963-1964) and President (1964-1978) of Kenya considered the founding father of the Kenyan nation, had fought against the Britishers for the emancipation of his nation inspired a large number of youngmen including Kihika. But during the state of emergency declared on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1952, Kenyatta was arrested with five others on the charges of managing and being a member of Mau Mau society, a radical anti-colonial movement engaged in the Mau Mau Rebellion.

After the arrest of Kenyatta Kihika disappears into the forest and is followed later by a handful of youngmen from Thabai and Rung'e'i. A year later they successfully raid the "Mahee Police Station" (84) which infuriates the British and the Whites declare a state of emergency imprisoning numerous youngmen like Gikonyo. Even Mugo is arrested for intervening when a woman is being beaten. Despite the efforts by British to quell the Kenyan resistance, the violence continues, and the District Officer Thomas Robson is assassinated. Ngugi's message is thus clear: This is how Mau Mau was born out of the frustrations of the people to persuade the colonial masters to restore to them what was lawfully theirs.

The real motto of these raids was to obtain food and ammunition and to cripple down the machinery of oppression. Kihika and his fellow fighters were not a gang of terrorists who felt sadistic pleasure out of such killings and raids, as Kihika tells Mugo, "We don't kill just anybody.... We are not murderers. We are not hangmen - like Robson - killing men or women without cause or purpose" (166). Mugo is also taken to Rira detention camp where John Thompson is the warden.

#### IV. SHADES OF INCARCERATION

Though Mugo respects the British, but in these circumstances he feels unjustly accused and refuses to cooperate. He begins to get a reputation among other detainees as an instrument of courage. Mugo does nothing to justify their hopes but he does feel vague with grandiose religious impulses and begins to see himself as a possible messiah for his people. Finally, there is an uprising in which Mugo plays no part, and twenty one prisoners are killed. This episode places a blot on Thompson's career, the British believing he over-reacted, nevertheless he is replaced by Robson as a district officer. Soon Mugo is released and after his return to the village, Kihika, a hunted man, pays him an unexpected visit. Kihika reveals that he, disguised as an old man, killed Robson, the district officer. This news terrifies Mugo, oblivious of Mugo's cowardice- Kihika encourages him to lead an underground movement in the village and asks him to think about it and to see him next evening. Mugo resents the ethical choice that Kihika thrusts upon him. He decides to betray him and secretly tells Thompson where Kihika will be the next night. The soldiers arrest Kihika and murder him ruthlessly.

Women too play a heroic role in the freedom struggle, namely Me Kitilili and Mary Nyanjiru, who put their highest efforts to free Kenya, and through Wambui and Mumbi, Ngugi pays a tribute to these legendary females in *A Grain of Wheat*. Warui, the oldest of all those who survived, reflects on the role of Wambui: "Wambui was not very old, although she had lost most of her teeth. During the Emergency, she carried secrets from the villages to the forest and back to the villages and towns. She knew the underground movements in Nakuru, Njoro, Elburgon and other places in and outside the Rift Valley" (19).

The perpetration of atrocities imposed by the whites are gruesome and even at this moment, the fighters as well as the civilians are however not scared of the naked show of sadistic brutalities exhibited by the colonial bosses. They now become more powerful in turning out their oppressors from their land. Throughout the struggle, African collaborators played an important role on behalf of their bosses, white masters, thus, justifying people the strengths of the whites and also emphasizing the futility of challenging the invincible might of the Mzungu. Karanja, a collaborator with the British, states:

The whiteman is strong. Don't ever forget that. I know because I have tasted his power. Don't you ever deceive yourself that Jomo Kenyatta will ever be released from Lodwar. And bombs are going to be dropped into the forest as the British did in Japan and Malaya. (130)

Karanja, a man who betrays his own people by becoming a chief and working with the colonial bosses during the emergency has sunk deeper into the logic of surrender and collaboration. He has sold the Party and Oath secrets, the price of remaining near Mumbi. Karanja, an apt example of thorough dehumanization by the colonial machinery, is obsessed with the sight of power. For him, humans, especially his natives, carry no importance and he feels delighted to shoot the freedom fighters or innocent citizens, "they seemed less like human beings and more like animals. At first this had merely thrilled Karanja and made him feel a new man, a part of an invisible might whose symbol was the whiteman. Later, this consciousness of power, this ability to dispose of human life by merely pulling a trigger, so obsessed him that it became a need" (199).

#### V. WHITEMAN'S RETORT TO LIBERTY

Ngugi beautifully portrays the whiteman's response to the Uhuru too: Thompson, the D.O., a loyal British Bureaucrat too cannot reconcile with this changed new reality and finally decides to quit his job as well as country. He too reminiscences and opines that as the blacks are incapable of maintaining things, they even won't hold well all that the Britishers had made in Kenya: "Would these things remain after Thursday? Perhaps for two months: and then test-tubes and beakers would be broken or lie un-washed on the cement, the hot-houses and seed-beds strewn with wild plants and the outer bush which had been carefully hemmed, would gradually creep into a litter-filled compound" (38). His wife, Margery Thompson, too has the same feeling which she also like her husband tries to hide behind her doubts about the capabilities of their African successors:

... was she really using this kitchen for the last time? Would she never, never see Githima again? Would her flowers mean anything to whoever would take her place in this house? (44)

Thompson is one of those who regard the British colonial expansion to be an act of moral crusade to civilize the barbarian world. The British, he believes, are like "Prospero in Africa" (49), the land of Calibans. Having accepted the position he goes on to justify the British action against the freedom fighters, "No government can tolerate anarchy, no civilization can be built on this violence and savagery. Mau Mau is evil; a movement which if not checked will mean complete destruction of all the values on which our civilization has thriven" (49). However, the natives are well acquainted with the real face of Prospero.

#### VI. DETHRONING ONUS/COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY



Delving deep into human sadness, the novel encourages adopting a tolerant perspective on man's delinquency. Gikonyo, an ambitious carpenter and businessman who is married to Mumbi, confesses of taking an oath of resistance while in a concentration camp. He is moved from one detention camp to another - seven in all - and finally, after six years, has most of his revolutionary zeal drained out of him. He thinks only of Mumbi and thus signs a confession and is released. There are rumours that freedom is coming to the country, and when Gikonyo returns to the village, however, he receives two unwelcome surprises. The first is that Karanja, whom he has never respected, has risen from the leader of the home-guards (who report to the British) to the village Chief. The second is that his wife Mumbi gave birth to a son in his absence and the father is Karanja. Gikonyo is thoroughly embittered and disillusioned.

Gikonyo still struggles to come to terms with the knowledge that Mumbi has borne Karanja's child and also seething with the awareness of his dishonorable deed in the detention camp. He hates himself as his self-respect is deeply hurt, and to reassert this pride he projects all his guilt onto Mumbi, making her the scapegoat for his weakness and thus magnifies his failure. He justifies his betrayal of his comrades in the prison by idealising Mumbi to whom he wishes to return, but Mumbi too has undergone the mill of experience, who is now not simple and pure but has suffered and faltered. Utterly disappointed Gikonyo heaps all his inner rage against himself on her - and all too familiar forms of self-delusion. He cares more about vindicating himself by condemning Mumbi and clings obstinately to the hardcore pride within him as a troubled and imperfect individual. Since Gikonyo has not yet yearned to forgive himself, so he is not able to forgive Mumbi too; for acceptance of forgiveness means one must admit that one is not self-sufficient. Gikonyo cannot humble his masculine arrogance so far as to confess his need, however, later he confesses his fault and realizes that only love and understanding can conquer pride. His stubborn, individualistic, arrogant rage slowly melts and he starts missing Mumbi and finally reconciles with her.

Public responsibility runs as a major theme in the work. Are we going to take the benefits of Uhuru for granted? Are we going to lean on the achievements of those who fought for freedom without facing the new challenge which their success has created? If so, we shall be bitterly disappointed. We shall find the new power magnate taking over from the old, and acquiring the whiteman's estate for himself, not helping the cooperative group to purchase it. We shall be saying with Mugo, "the day ahead would be just like yesterday, and the day before" (3). We may even find ourselves asking with the deflated Karanja, "Was death like that Freedom? Was going to detention freedom?" (199).

Ngugi warns us that rallying slogans of the fight is mere empty escapism after the fight is won. One must look forward to the next thing to do, not through the motions of what has already been well done and completed. The last biblical quotation introducing the final section of the novel is from Revelation: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" (175) and this new world demands a new response. The heroic moment is over and time has come for less dramatic, more painstaking, detailed, complex thought and effort. The danger of opting out into mere cynicism looms large. "In the name of blackman's freedom, I salute you.' Then he bowed several times in comic deference" (5).

*A Grain of Wheat* pays tribute to those who fought however crisscrossed the moral threads had been. Kihika is not in the events tested amidst the complex demands of peace. He dies during the Mau Mau while the sort of heroic absolutes of urgent action which come natural to his extrovert and ambitious nature are still relevant. Ngugi thus preserves him as a model leader in combat, he may be self-assertive, may be compromising and violent, but he is not guilty because his conduct of affairs represents what was necessary in the given situation; and he has no chance to show whether his idealism and dedication could have been tempered by the requirements of different circumstances. For the time of clear cut vision unambiguous issues are past, once and for all, Uhuru arrives. The novel is structured in such a way so as to emphasize this and Ngugi's major character is an anti-hero who contradicts any simplification of the moral issues and draws compassion, not cheers.

Mugo, on the other hand is an anti-hero in two senses: First because he himself is taken by surprise by his own defiant bravery in the face of inhumanity - most obviously when he futilely leaps to the defense of Wambuku against the trench guards; Secondly through his being miscast by Rung'e in the role of hero, an irony which forms one of the main structural features of the novel. His truest moment of heroism is when he publicly confesses his betrayal of Kihika. This is opposed to the heroism of battlefield; it is the heroism of admitting one's guilt and weaknesses.

Perhaps both Kihika and Mugo are grains of wheat, each sacrificing himself in his own fashion so that others may be regenerated. If Kenya of Uhuru has been quickened to life owing to the death of Kihika and his kind; then the new vision inherent in the reunion of Gikonyo and Mumbi - representative figures in this context whose very names make them archetypes - is quickened by Mugo's readiness to face the final implications of his new-found, hard-won integrity. In *A Grain of Wheat*, the military struggle is in the past; the seeds of war have borne fruit; the harvest has been reaped. What, asks the novel, of the next crop? That which must be sown and tended is to be weathered in the new climate of independence and must feed the demands of peace. The old Kenya is dead; has the new Kenya been 'quickened'? Are the living beings willing or able to nurture their inheritance?

*A Grain of Wheat* presents characters who suffer for what they do and struggle to achieve what they want to become. They want to remain faithful to their convictions, but in a time of strife, motives are often provided by the most pressing influences, and often they do not have right on their side. The villagers represent the ordinary people of Kenya who with all their human foibles and frailties are forced to make compromises under terror and torture but still uphold the cause. Through a series of reminiscences the major characters of the work recall their lives' experiences before Uhuru day. For instance Mugo recalls his betrayal of the legendary youthful revolutionary Kihika; Gikonyo recalls his confession of oath during interrogation in the detention camp; Mumbi recalls the circumstances under which she was forced to submit herself to Karanja, the village Chief, the collaborator of British administration and the chief suspect of treason who betrayed Kihika; Karanja recalls his subservience to the D.O; and Thompson and his wife recall their role as a part of the British colonial administration which was trying its best to civilize the Africans.

The characters represent general masses of Kenya: Kihika represents the revolutionary youth who saw a basic unity in the struggle of the colonial world and sacrificed everything for the sake of freedom; Karanja, on other hand represents the collaborationists who are basically cowards and who put self before society; Gikonyo and Mumbi represent thousands of ordinary people, magnifying those personal relationships which went to pieces under the emergency through sheer physical separation. Through other series of traumatic experiences which the ordinary masses face during freedom struggle, Ngugi provides a hint of the things which will make their way to independent Kenya. On the Uhuru day, people are dancing and praising their leaders, still they are not unaware of their dream of independent Kenya turning sour. The way their native leaders aspire to grab property and power possessed by the whites, denying Gikonyo and other villagers a chance to own a cooperative farm, tells more than anything else, thus symbolizing the ensuring struggle between common public and their chosen leaders in new Kenya. The collaborators, who used to lick masters' shoes are victims as well, their only advantage is that, for a while, they have power on their side.

Yet, Mugo begins to unite the knots towards the end of the work. It is he who first reverses the destructive process by confessing in public. Inevitably he abandons this brave project when he discovers that his Uhuru speech is to be the occasion for the public accusation of

Karanja for the crime Mugo himself had committed and his vision reveals the man buried within Mugo. Eventually this notion leads up to the simple, stark, carefully prepared, yet breathtaking climax, when Mugo voluntarily confesses his crime before the Uhuru celebration. Ngugi emphasises that this is the moment when the events in Mugo's life fall into place. It is a brief experience substantially poignant enough for the metal of his existence to enter into a new mould:

As soon as the first words were out, Mugo felt light. A load of many years was lifted from his shoulders. He was free, sure, confident.... He was conscious of himself, of every step he made, of the images that rushed and whirled through his mind with only one constant thread; so he was responsible for whatever he had done in the past, for whatever he would do in the future. The consciousness frightened him. (204)

His fear is justified and the acceptance of responsibility is fatal for Mugo. "Your deeds alone will condemn you" says General R., "No one will ever escape from his own actions" (206). Mugo does not escape and his dignified acceptance, his calm confrontation of his deeds, changes the course of action for times to come. The crowd is overawed by his act and forgets its thirst for revenge. His alienation has been too complete to be healed. Mugo has escaped from the spiraling effect of inflicting his own sorrow upon others, and is the catalyst to start the same process of release in Gikonyo. Gikonyo learns to accept some degree of identity with Mugo, what Conrad might have called a "secret sharing", and in quite a short space of time this alters first his whole attitude towards himself, then his attitude towards others, and at length his entire course of action. Mumbi is dependent upon the pattern of Gikonyo's suffering because it is he who eventually initiates the reconciliation between them. The novel thus makes its final point not in tragic terms but in positive demonstration of alternatives for human beings.

In counterpointing various aspects of his characters' lives in *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi calls on to moderate judgments of the individuals with profound human compassion and this is his major manifestation. Secondly he instructs to move out of a period of simple heroics into much more baffling and complex realities of freedom, where again one has to face the hard facts of human greed, selfishness, deceit and self-deceit, where the enemy is now ourselves, but where one can still find love and peace in community if one stops shouting slogans and living in the past.

## VII. CONCLUSION

*A Grain of Wheat* ends on an optimistic note. The final chapter which resolves the fundamental issues between private individuals is entitled "Harambee" (211) symbolising communal solidarity. Mumbi and Gikonyo resolve their misunderstandings in a new harmony. Mumbi has set her face against revenge upon her brother's betrayer because she is convinced that this is the last thing that Kihika himself would have wished. And Rung'ei, on the verge of gloating over Karanja as the victim of just such revenge, instead comes away from Mugo's confession, humility and respect.

The Christian allegory, taken into consideration in *A Grain of Wheat*, not only constitutes the basic framework of the story but also incorporates the author's message. It is a mythological, realist work of postcolonial fiction set in the real world of Africa, detailing both African and European characters' perspectives on Kenya's struggle for independence. The novel exemplifies the gospel narrative of Jesus, a man wrongly accused of crimes he did not actually commit. Gikonyo is used to emphasise the central theme of betrayal, he is a symbol of the real fighter who was betrayed by Mumbi and Karanja, when he was out for freedom struggle. Joseph and Mary here are Gikonyo and Mumbi, an original coupling of the legend. Gikonyo is even a carpenter and Mumbi's child belongs to someone else, Karanja, a man tainted with the sins of a previous age and definitely passes these on to his child.

The child, of course, is new Kenya born with all the injustices and sins of the past to develop into its unknown future; the fact that it is offered in sacrifice on the cross of capitalism. The only glimpse of worthwhile Uhuru Ngugi provides with is the reconciliation of Gikonyo with Mumbi and her son offering hope for shining days ahead.

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