THE TWO FACES OF THE MAU MAU LEADER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NGUGI'S KIHIKA, AND MWANGI'S HARAKA[1]

> From the Great Mombassa resistance through Maji Maji to Mau Mau, our history glitters with many glorious characters . . . all these honour that great tradition of resistance.
> Ngugi, *Moving the Centre*

The extent to which the Mau Mau war against British colonial occupation has influenced creative writing in Kenya can be measured not only by the number of novelists who have introduced themselves to the world of letters by writing about the war, but also by the manner in which the nation's most established writers, like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Meja Mwangi, continue to be inspired by this event. Allied to their choice of subject is what amounts to a compulsion to present a military hero, or leader, who for the most part carries with him the aspirations of the masses and inspires them to continue with the struggle despite major setbacks. Matigari, the hero in Ngugi's novel by that name, who finds the revolution betrayed on his return from the forest, is the latest among several such protagonists in Kenyan fiction. Such recurrences call into question Elleke Boehmer's assertion that "whereas in the early novels the concept of the nation was identified with a leader figure, a Kenyatta type of patriarch, it is now seen in terms of 'the people,' bound together by their shared history and cultural traditions" (144). While the masses do participate at several levels of the conflict, their need to be led is well nigh total.

To observe that the cult of the hero, or leader, remains an obsession for Kenyan authors is not to claim that they have treated the subject similarly. These novelists display a heterogeneity rather than a uniformity, a heterogeneity which is revealed best when their work is subjected to a comparative scrutiny. Ngugi's Kihika (*A Grain of Wheat*) and Mwangi's Haraka (*Carcase for Hounds*) are similar in that they are both Mau Mau leaders, but a study of these characters in relation to each

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[1] It is indeed ironic and sad that this essay on leadership in Kenyan fiction was completed soon after Ngugi returned to Kenya on an official visit after years in exile only to be assaulted and robbed in his hotel room. His wife was raped in the same attack. At the time of writing it is not clear whether the assault was politically motivated, the consequence of a family feud, or just one of the many such crimes that are increasingly perpetrated on committed writers in Kenya and the rest of the world. That Ngugi decided to continue with his tour, despite the inhospitable homecoming, says much for his own brand of heroism and leadership.

other reveals that the preoccupations of the two novelists are by no means identical. If Ngugi concentrates on Kihika's role as a messianic hero, his martyrdom, and the "message" he conveys, Mwangi, while not eschewing Haraka's charismatic characteristics altogether, focusses more specifically on the human frailties that ultimately destroy Haraka and his band of guerrillas.

Commenting on Mugo's place in *A Grain of Wheat*, Panduranga Rao asserts that this character "reaches heroic heights not by the heroic deeds that are the province of an exceptional person but by the acts of humility which constitute the moral courage of the average man"(134). Kihika is the "exceptional person" that Mugo is not. Convinced from his earliest years that Kenya would never be free until the colonialists departed, he joins the liberation struggle, eventually becoming one of its leaders. Although he is captured by the British and executed in public to deter others from following his example, the idealism he projected when he was alive, and the martyrdom he achieves in death, instil a strong spirit of nationalism among his followers which enables them to resist the oppressors with a greater determination. Kihika's heroism, then, is a donee because, unlike Mugo, or even Karanja, he does not experience the agony of having to choose between personal security and support of the liberation struggle. To create a "politically correct" revolutionary with few angularities, who is also convincing as a character in fiction, is a major challenge for any writer. Ngugi is largely successful because he draws Kihika with some foibles; see, for instance, the presumption and arrogance evident in the directives he gives Mugo without first ensuring that Mugo is willing to risk his life for a cause he never intended to join. These insensitive instructions are reminiscent of Haldin's directives to Rasumov in *Under Western Eyes*. Mugo, like his "antecedent" Rasumov, resents this violation of space and privacy. Then, there is that other weakness that Killam has identified as "[a] tendency to show off, to draw attention to himself" (58). These peccadilloes, however, are for the most part buried in the text and marginal at best; consequently, they do not take away from what is really a very credible delineation of a revolutionary hero.

Ngugi's rendering of Kihika is convincing also because he informs the reader from the beginning that "Kihika, the son of the land, was marked out as one of the heroes of deliverance" (18). Eventually, "people came to know Kihika as the terror of the whiteman. They said he could move, maintain and compel thunder from heaven" (20-21). In Northrop Frye's terms, then, Kihika, like Moorthy in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, becomes "a hero of the high mimetic mode" (34). That is, he is not "one of us," but a person who has "authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours" (Frye 34). Once Ngugi has established that Kihika is an exceptional individual, he has little difficulty in persuading the reader to accept the Christ like aura that surrounds this leader. Kihika can make the supreme sacrifice not for self-

aggrandizement, or to satisfy a personal whim, but because he has an abiding love for the land of his birth. Then again, from his youngest days, he has that rare ability to articulate his views on heroism and martyrdom. This is what he declares to Karanja long before the declaration of the Emergency:

> All oppressed people have a cross to bear. The Jews refused to carry it and were scattered like dust all over the earth. Had Christ's death a meaning for the children of Israel? 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. (110)

This passage displays a maturity in Kihika that belies his youth. It focusses on the altruism and self-sacrifice that characterized his heroism. This maturity is seen yet again when in a later passage he insists that the masses too should be given a prominent place in this struggle:

> We want a strong organization. The white man knows this and fears. Why else has he made our people move into these villages? He wants to shut us from the people, our only strength. But he will not succeed. We must keep the road between us and the people clear of obstacles. I often watched you in old Thabai. You are a self-made man. You are a man, you have suffered. We need such a man to organize an underground movement in the new village. (218)

Kihika's insistence that the masses should be in the vanguard of the movement does not imply that there is a reduction in the stature and usefulness of the leader. Cook and Okenimkpe conclude that Ngugi rejects this messianic role that Kihika gives himself. They claim that Ngugi "deplore[s]" this "individualistic obsession " (84). Such assertions are questionable in the extreme. Ngugi never quarrels with Kihika's vision of being "a saint, leading the Gikuyu people to freedom and power" (77); on the contrary, Ngugi asserts that Kenya needs individuals, like Kihika, whose magnetism and self-sacrifice can inspire others.

Ngugi always regarded Christianity with some ambivalence. In *Weep not Child*, and certain sections of *Petals of Blood*, he illustrates how the church supported the state in trying to subjugate the masses. This "mission," which had its beginnings in colonial Kenya, is carried out with renewed vigour after Independence. Even *A*

Grain of Wheat, a novel that does not attack the church with the same vehemence, admonishes this institution for its role in sanctioning colonialism. Kihika states:

> 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 treasures in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth. (18)

Both the author and his hero, then, question the motives and actions of institutionalised religion, but they are also aware that they can harness Christianity into a powerful moral force which could destroy colonialism. Peter Nazareth even insists that "Kihika's *moral* inspiration comes from the bible" (256). To this, add Ngugi's own view that borrowing the discourse of the enemy (in this case Christianity) is a valid strategy.[2] It must be emphasized, however, that although Kihika views himself as a modern Christ, his acceptance of Christianity is qualified. He modifies Christianity to suit the needs of the Kenyan people. Consider the following passage:

> We only hit back. You are struck on the left cheek. You turn the right cheek. One, two, three-sixty years. Then suddenly, it is always sudden, you say: I am not turning the other cheek any more. Your back to the wall, you strike back. You trust your manhood and hope it will keep you at it. Do you think we like scuffling for food with hyenas and monkeys in the forest? I, too, have known the comforts of a warm fire and a woman's love by the fireside. . . . I despise the weak. Let them be trampled to death. I spit on the weakness of our fathers. Their memory gives me no pride. And even today, tomorrow, the weak and those with feeble hearts shall be wiped from the earth. The strong shall rule. . . . These are not the words of a mad man. Not words, not even miracles could make Pharaoh let the children of Israel go. But at midnight, the Lord smote

[2]See, for instance, Ngugi's interview with T. Vijay Kumar in *The Writer as Activist: South Asian Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o,* ed. Bernth Lindfors and Bala Kothandaraman, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 172-3.

> all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of the captive that was in dungeon. And all the first-born of the cattle. And the following day, he let them go. That is our aim. Strike terror in their midst. (216-17)

This passage has obvious intertextual references to the Old and New Testaments—especially to the Book of Exodus and the Sermon on the Mount. Still, the sentiments expressed here are not consonant with the tenets of Christianity so much so that Sharma concludes that "the use of biblical text and typology," displays "a curious and baffling ambivalence" (203). Maughan-Brown sees further implications in this passage. He declares: "Kihika seems to be characterised here as going some way towards endorsing a cult of violence, youth and strength such as we have seen to be an important facet of fascist psychology" (1985b, 242). He considers it significant that critics, like Nazareth and Kemoli, have omitted the inflammatory sequences in this passage, that show the Mau Mau in an unfavourable light, when citing this extract in their critical works. Maughan-Brown's decision to exclude sections that give the *rationale* for this violence is equally significant, however. The text makes it clear that Kihika and others have resorted to the Old Testament's "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" adage after years of "turning the other cheek." The violence, consequently, is essential not gratuitous. Kihika's frustration at the weakness of his fathers is not caused by any penchant for fascism but because he realizes that his ancestors had done little to prevent the triumph of colonialism. The whole question can be regarded from yet another angle, however. Benita Parry complains that Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, in their narratives of colonialism, tend to "discount or write out the counter-discourses which every liberation movement records" (43). Ngugi, in *A Grain of Wheat*, promulgates precisely such a "counter-discourse" through Kihika.

Kihika's encounter with Mugo is crucial because it is one of those rare occasions when Ngugi divests Kihika of his public image; instead, he focusses, here, on the fears, procrastinations, and frustrations of a guerrilla leader who is forced to abandon "the comforts of a warm fire and a woman's love by the fireside" (216) for a cause. In this context, Maughan-Brown's contention that Kihika is "depicted as an abstract dogmatist, a man insensitive to, and uncomprehending of, his girlfriend Wambuku" (241) is not inaccurate. But he fails to recognize that such insensitivity, or lack of understanding, is inevitable when an individual assumes the leadership of a guerrilla force. Since Ngugi's purpose, in *A Grain of Wheat*, is to show Kihika as a leader, a messiah, and as the scourge of the colonizer, a too frequent exposure of Kihika's other face would have been detrimental to Ngugi's objectives.

In *The Growth of the African Novel*, Eustace Palmer makes the following assessment of Haraka, the main character in *Carcase for Hounds*:

> The hero is General Haraka, a veritable superman whose mysterious presence dominates the novel. Mwangi evokes a convincing impression of his imposing bulk, his tremendous physical strength and courage, and his mysteriousness. [. . .] It is significant that Haraka says comparatively little [. . .] but there is no doubting that his presence, his force and his dynamism are superbly realized. This is done almost entirely through detailed descriptions of his activities and brilliant passages of introspection. (313)

Palmer's assessment is perhaps too lavish. Although *Carcase for Hounds* is a highly readable novel, it is too slight a work to merit such praise. Furthermore, by emphasising Haraka's positive attributes, Palmer gives the impression that Haraka is simplistically portrayed. Still, Palmer is justified in giving primacy to Haraka because *Carcase for Hounds*, unlike *A Grain of Wheat*, concentrates almost totally on an individual. Haraka's warriors follow him with blind devotion. The villagers fear him. And, although some commentators have argued that the main focus of attention in the novel is the clash of personalities between Haraka and Captain Kingsley, it is not really the conflict between the two personalities that is important, but Captain Kingsley's pursuit of a "trophy" named Haraka.

If Ngugi wa Thiong'o employs the theme of leadership to expose the evils associated with colonial rule and to demonstrate the manner in which some Mau Mau leaders combat these evils, Meja Mwangi's intention is to both dramatize the bravery and resilience of these warriors and to highlight the human shortcomings which thwart, and even irreparably destroy, what little chances they have of achieving their goals. Because Haraka embodies all that is best in the Mau Mau, a study of *Carcase for Hounds* is, in effect, a study of Haraka.

A striking feature of Mwangi's narrative method is his decision to place Haraka at the twilight of his career. Barring the well-executed raid on the police post, Mwangi rarely renders Haraka's military exploits in present time. Captain Kingsley remembers Haraka as "a brawny giant with cunning calm eyes that seemed to hide all feeling" (137); the mere mention of Haraka's name is sufficient to make chief Kahuru wet his pants; and, as Kimamo recalls, his general was always "tough, clear headed, a pillar of comfort, decision and confidence. He had led them through it all. From one tight spot to another, and with ease" (116). Through this retrospective mode of narration, then, Mwangi depicts Haraka, if not as a "veritable superman," definitely as a valiant and resourceful guerrilla leader. This retrospective portrayal of Haraka's abilities is rendered with a purpose. In Ngugi's presentation of Kihika, he generally focusses on Kihika's dynamic leadership and his positive contributions to the cause.

While Mwangi dwells at length on Haraka's instinctive grasp of guerrilla strategy and his ability to lead from the front, his real interests, as the following examination shows, are elsewhere.

Some commentators criticize Ngugi for giving Kihika an awareness of politics and world events that the latter could never have obtained.[3] Such an accusation cannot be levelled at Mwangi. Unlike the all-knowing Kihika, Haraka is only vaguely aware of what he and his band of Mau Mau guerrillas are fighting for. He abandoned his position as village chief and joined the forest fighters because he had struck the District Commissioner in a moment of anger. Thus, unlike Kihika, he does not become a leader for ideological reasons. Haraka is none the wiser about the "cause" even after his predecessor, the little general, had educated him about the struggle:

> He was sure they were fighting for the right cause. Out at the village he would make them understand. He would tell them about the soil, the land and the jungles the way the little general used to do. He would talk about the spilt blood and the white man's selfishness and oppression. All the things the little leader had spoken about, including freedom. The freedom of the black man in his country. Where had the little general learnt all that? From the others he said were in the south, in the capital? Or had he read it in books in an intermediate school? (54)

No doubt Haraka, in this moment of introspection, refers to the "white man's selfishness and oppression," and the "freedom of the black man;" but for a committed guerrilla leader who has been carrying on a campaign against British rule for years, he displays a vague grasp of the issues. All that Haraka knows is that the British are the enemy. The ideology that his predecessor had tried to instil into him is too complex for him to understand. This implies no criticism of Mwangi's writing. If Ngugi focusses on Kihika's beliefs and on his political programme at the expense of Kihika's "inner life," Mwangi concentrates exclusively on Haraka's trials as a guerrilla leader. Kihika is inspired by Christianity, by his knowledge of Kenya's past, and by his awareness of world events. Indeed, he is frequently heartened by the knowledge that the Mau Mau are at one with other liberation movements in the world. Haraka is very conscious, however, that he has to "[f]ight the war alone" (102). He persists in the

[3]Consider S.A. Gakwandi's comments in *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1977), III.

struggle not because he understands the complexities involved in the Mau Mau endeavour, but because fighting has become a habit. After spending years in the forest, the issues that were hazy at the outset are now totally without meaning. Unlike Kihika, whose convictions are unshakable, Haraka, towards the end of the novel, is so sure that he has been betrayed that he loses faith in the cause altogether. He is only intent on survival now, and as the animal imagery used to describe him discloses, Haraka has become one with the jungle.

Describing life in the jungle or forest is usually a major preoccupation for any novelist dealing with the Mau Mau war but Ngugi's interest is marginal.[4] Although Kihika fled to the bush to join the Mau Mau, Ngugi rarely describes Kihika's travails in the forest; instead, he concentrates on Kihika's killing of D.O. Robson, his destruction of the Mahee station, and his encounter with Mugo. Only on one occasion does Ngugi refer to Kihika's physical suffering, and even here it is restricted to Karanja's gruesome account of his execution. Since Karanja has established himself as an unreliable narrator anyway, this description does not reduce Kihika's stature in the eyes of the reader.

It would be accurate to say, then, that the role of a guerrilla leader is to some extent romanticized in *A Grain of Wheat.* Mwangi's strategy is entirely different. Haraka's foes are Kahuru, Captain Kingsley *and* the natural elements which in this novel not only provide a sense of location but are major participants in the "drama." As Angela Smith so rightly observes, in this novel, "the landscape seems actively hostile to all human action" (26). Captain Kingsley's mission to the Pinewood station to intercept the Mau Mau is aborted by a Kenyan rainstorm, and the same "monster had eaten away at the bank and washed away all the crossing logs" (26) placed across the river to help the guerrillas to retreat. Since Haraka and his men are forced to combat the weather and the other terrors of the forest, it is not surprising that they too should share the characteristics of those creatures in the bush to whom life is a battle for survival. David Maughan-Brown, however, takes exception to the animalistic language used to describe Haraka. He objects particularly to sequences like the following: "his bared teeth emitted a low snarl" (36), "he gave a growling animal sound" (81), and "the beast in him barred [sic] its fangs" (103). Maughan-Brown concludes that

> . . . the point about the writers looked at here is that the attitudes implicit in the novels, such as the manifest contempt for the peasantry, suggest a conscious and wholesale rejection of Gikuyu

[4] Godwin Wachira's *Ordeal in the Forest* (Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1968), is perhaps the best example of a Mau Mau novels which focusses on the jungle.

> culture in the attempt to arrive at an Ocol-like superiority over all things African. (214)

Another critic M. Keith Booker goes to the extent of saying that Mwangi's novels "sometimes veer dangerously close to a repetition of colonialist myths about the Mau Mau as primitive savages driven by blood lust" (42). Since this study does not include all the novels and authors examined by Maughan-Brown and Booker, it would be unfair to respond to their generalizations; what could be asserted without hesitation, however, is that their arguments are specious when applied to Mwangi's *Carcase for Hounds*. Given their ordeals in the forest, the Mau Mau have little occasion to deliberate on Gikuyu culture; furthermore, in showing that the Mau Mau are brutalized by the war and a hostile environment, Mwangi is only stating a fact. Would Maughan-Brown or Booker, for instance, accuse William Golding of defaming Western civilization in *Lord of the Flies*? More to the point is to observe that Ngugi because he chooses to paint on a broad canvas does not depict the "inner life" of the forest fighters in the same depth; in other words, given his authorial project, which is to show the reaction of about six *major* characters to the war (only one of whom is a Mau Mau guerrilla),[5] and also to focus on Kihika's political role, Ngugi is not interested in treating Kihika's day-to-day experiences as a forest fighter.

Thus far, this study has largely focussed on the differences in approach taken by the two writers. Mwangi, however, shares Kihika's tactic of informing the reader at the outset that Haraka is a person with exceptional abilities. Haraka's magnetism is self-evident. His powers of leadership alone keep his band of fighters together—although it becomes apparent after a while that the cause is irretrievably lost. The guerrillas' dependence on Haraka is such that once he is *hors de combat*, they disperse in disarray. Kimamo movingly articulates this fact once Haraka is mortally wounded and he is forced to assume leadership:

> Not a word, not a sigh came from the selected food gatherers. They melted quickly into the darkness. Kimamo knew. Those three would not come back either. If they did not get killed or captured they would surrender. The magnet that had drawn them back to the cave and kept them in the gang had rotted away in the general's side. They no longer had that feeling for the cause. Now that there was no

[5]General R, and Koinandu, who are not given the same prominence as Mumbi, Gikonyo, Kihika, Karanja, Mugo, and Mr. Thompson, are not regarded as "major characters" in this study.

> general there was no cause at all. Thus they owed nobody any loyalty, no perseverance no nothing. Kimamo, yes, they obeyed him when he gave orders, but it was hardly likely that they would remain loyal to him under pressure. He lacked that endearing, enslaving touch of the general, that had drawn them into the band. They would never come back. Nobody would. (123-24)

This passage, perhaps, captures better than any other in the novel the military genius and the charisma that had made Haraka so loved by his troops, and so feared by the British; what is more important, however, is that it articulates the all-important relationship between the leader and his followers. If the commitment to an ideology is given primacy in *A Grain of Wheat*, it is of secondary importance in *Carcase for Hounds*. Since these guerrillas are loyal to a leader and not to a cause, they are unable to initiate any action unless instructed to do so by their leader. This difference is crucial to a final assessment of the novel.

Simon Gikandi declares, in "The Growth of the East African Novel," that the "sense of defeat . . . is a marked feature in the novels of Meja Mwangi" (241). When he made this comment, Gikandi was referring specifically to Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*, but his observation is applicable to *Carcase for Hounds*, too, because the novel concludes with the Mau Mau scattered and the British troops closing in on the cave in which the dying Haraka is hiding. This "sense of defeat" is seen most poignantly after Haraka is shot. The general, who was supremely confident about his own powers and in the validity of the cause, begins to question the purpose of the war, and about his role in the enterprise:

> His enemy was there. Where were his allies, where were they? Would they come to his rescue? The truth dawned on him with shocking clarity. They were nowhere. They would not come and they would never come. They simply did not exist. They had never existed in reality? [sic] Only in the little general's mind. There and nowhere else. Haraka was quite alone now. He, his gang of forest fighters and his little war. Quite alone! The fear in his mind changed into complete emptiness. Then came understanding and hate. He had been swindled and thrown to the dogs. He felt cheated and fooled. The hate boiled up and turned into murderous rage. Rage directed at the little general, the soldiers, the governor, everybody. Mixed with this hate was fear, an instinctive fear, the fear of a trapped beast. He had been tricked into a corner and had his back to the wall. He did not wish to be destroyed. The beast in him barred [sic] its fangs in a

> bid to fight its way to safety. His overloaded mind whirled and nausea flowed through him in the brew of fear and hate. (102-03)

Mwangi, however, appears to reduce this "sense of defeat" by making Haraka a martyr, and by conveying him into another world. Angus Calder comments:

> The end of *Carcase for Hounds* evokes the famous Nazi theme of 'death and transfiguration,' as the dying Kimamo has a vision of heaven, and the one who led him through the new place, as he had always done, was the general, his general, General Haraka. (187)

While Calder regards this scene positively, others regard it as a deliberate instance of authorial misdirection. The linear development of the plot, after all, leads to the utter annihilation of the band of guerrillas, and any attempt to truncate the narrative to give it an affirmative ending would be a contrivance. Kihika's martyrdom is convincing in *A Grain of Wheat* because his belief in the movement is unshaken and because he inspires others to continue the struggle. He is decidedly the "grain of wheat" that brings forth other grain when it dies. To regard Haraka's death in a similar light would be erroneous, however. Ebele Eko has this to say of the last scene:

> The end of this novel is ambiguous. Mwangi juxtaposes the reunion of the two friends, now ghosts, with the sarcastic laugh of a hyena, which seems to have been deliberately introduced to burst the romantic bubble. . . . Haraka and Kimamo have been perfected by their unity in death. The hyena's laughter, however, seems to underline the failure in their responsibility to their soldiers and ultimately to the Uhuru cause through an ironic and tragic conflict of loyalties. (193)

The image that endures after a careful reading of the novel is Haraka's maniacal refusal to leave the cave without Kahuru's head, not his brilliant leadership. Haraka discards the "cause" for personal motives, here, and in the process destroys his guerrilla force; thus, for all his charisma and courage, he makes a very poor martyr. Furthermore, Kimamo is an equally irresponsible successor.[6]

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[6]I feel that this reading of the novel is valid even though such an approach contradicts Mwangi's stated position on the issue which he declared in an interview with Bernth Lindfors:

> Yet, in spite of being outnumbered, outgunned, and overwhelmed, they kept on

Mwangi's treatment of his hero raises questions of even larger import, however. Angus Calder asserts:

> While Mwangi shows some real insight into the role of charismatic leadership in guerrilla war, it is regrettable that his intense focus on leading individuals conveys the suggestion that the guerrilla rank and file are men of no importance, without personalities. (189)

David Maughan-Brown, while reiterating this point, argues further that for Mwangi "the very identity of the forest fighters, not only as forest fighters but as human beings is tied to the continued effectiveness of the leader" (1985a, 187). No doubt, *Carcase for Hounds* does not refer to the masses' ability to resist the oppressor. When the soldiers and the homeguards in *A Grain of Wheat* do their best to break the will of the people in Thabai, these villagers respond, defiantly, despite the punishment meted out to them:

> Then one day we started singing. More soldiers and homeguards were added to the trench. They came with whip and sticks, but somehow these could not stop our voices. A woman or a man from one end of the trench would start and all of us joined in, creating words out of nothing. (163-64)

Not only are the masses in *Carcase for Hounds* effete but even the Mau Mau warriors do not show any initiative; on the contrary, they are "resigned as a flock of sheep being picked out for slaughter" (123) when their leader is prostrated by a bullet wound. Haraka, at the height of his powers, considered his lieutenant Kimamo "hard, brave, commanding and yet understanding" (21). Once Haraka is felled, however, Kimamo shows that he is out of his depth as a leader:

> How had the general managed to get them through the years? The soldiers had always been there and he had never even once faltered in his decision or made an uncorrectable error. Decisive decisions and

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fighting, hoping that something would come to their rescue, would help them out of the situation. Eventually, when Haraka, the hero of the novel, gets killed, his spirit symbolically lives on. This was the point I was trying to stress: the spirit of resistance lives on. The fact that one little band was wiped out did not mean that the movement died. (70)

> complete command of his followers' minds. And where was he, Kimamo, failing? Where? He thought hard. Fear? Indecision? Lack of organization? Which was his greatest failure? His conscience screamed back at him. All! All were to blame. He was at fault through and through. He was one great failure. Failure as a fighter, failure as a general, all. (124)

Kimamo, perhaps, is being too hard on himself here. Their predicament was caused by a combination of Njoro's accidental discovery that an oath taking ceremony was taking place in the village, Haraka's fatal injury, and the general's obstinate refusal to leave the area without killing Kahuru first. Even the most "[d]ecisive [of] decisions" would not have served the cause once Haraka had made it plain that they would not move from the cave. Still, by making Kimamo reflect, thus, Mwangi can scrutinize the role of leadership from yet another angle. Without indulging in any value judgements, like Ngugi, he makes the simple observation that the world is divided into two categories: the rulers and the ruled, and that once the leaders are incapable of making decisions, the followers collapse.

To recognize that the led in *Carcase for Hounds* are powerless without their leader is not to endorse David Maughan-Brown's ingenious suggestion that Mwangi and other East African novelists reduce the effectiveness of the rank and file of the Mau Mau because any "take over" by these elements would threaten the writers' position. He states:

> As we have already seen, it is clearly not Mwangi's *overt* wish to discredit Mau Mau. However, when he comes to give a fictional account of the "reality" of Mau Mau his ideology determines that he focus in this way on "the leader" as his main protagonist. His fictional account makes the limits of his possible consciousness apparent. Mau Mau cannot be a *popular* movement, cannot offer a coherent alternative vision with a popular base without implicitly threatening the writer's monopoly ownership of "knowledge," "creativity," etc. In order to defend this he is willing to symbolically subject himself to a mystificatory upward identification with "the leader" whose praise singer he becomes. (211)

Surely Mwangi does not identify himself with the demented warrior at the end of the novel? Even if Mwangi had focussed exclusively on Haraka's brilliant generalship in the earlier sections, he sings neither a "High Requiem," nor a "plaintive anthem" to the dying chief. Furthermore, as declared earlier, the beatification of Haraka and Kimamo

is negated, in the final paragraph, by the "sarcastic chuckle" (134) of the hyena. What the author does at the end is to concentrate on "the sense of defeat" which is common to *all* the guerrillas, and even shared by Captain Kingsley who is convinced that Operation Haraka was ". . . a complete flop. The whole damn thing a failure" (128).

A Grain of Wheat ends on a note of cautious optimism. While Gikonyo's imminent reconciliation with Mumbi and the prospect of her bearing a child by him symbolize a new beginning for a Kenya that has just achieved Uhuru, the optimism is tempered by the recuperation of events that had preceded Independence—the betrayal of Kihika, Karanja's treachery, the killing of Mugo, and the estrangement of Gikonyo and Mumbi. While the past is an inspiration to present action, this past has to be scrutinized in all its complexity. The conclusion of *Carcase for Hounds* holds no such promise. Angela Smith contends that the "inconclusiveness of the novel when the plot has apparently been leading to a neat conclusion is deliberately disturbing and poses a series of questions rather than supplying answers" (23). The facile response to this observation would be to say that, since the novel is situated in a period when the war was still in progress, this absence of closure is inevitable. Yet such an approach is not totally satisfactory. A comment made by Mwangi is useful here. Contrasting his attitude towards the Mau Mau with Ngugi's he declares that, while Ngugi wrote "personal tragedies of a number of people who were active in Mau Mau from the social viewpoint," he was interested in "the impersonal mechanism in itself" (qtd. in Smith 18). To employ a comment by Mwangi to interpret his novel *in toto* is to fall prey to an intentional fallacy. But his assertion in part explains the open ending and bleak universe projected in *Carcase for Hounds*. Unlike Ngugi's novel, *Carcase for Hounds* neither presents nor endorses a recognisable, political programme. Haraka cannot posit a viable counter discourse to colonialism because at the end of the novel he is uncertain about the cause and not very sure whether his adversary is Captain Kingsley, Chief Kahuru, the hostile environment, or even his followers who fail to carry out their mission. To the reader, in fact, Haraka's real enemy at this juncture is Haraka himself. Mwangi, therefore, is not interested in holding up Haraka as a paragon; instead, he shows how the "impersonal mechanism" affects the dynamics between the leaders and the led, brutalizes capable individuals, and destroys human potential for a cause that is only vaguely understood by many of the major players.

Kendrick Smithyman once noted that assessing the literatures produced in the former colonies resulted in a special kind of aesthetic pleasure because they were "at base . . . simultaneously different and like" (8). What this study reveals is that a similar relationship prevails even when two writers from the same, former colony decide to focus on a subject that has fascinated its authors for half a century. There is, indeed, an intriguing contiguity in Ngugi's and Mwangi's treatment of the Mau Mau leader, and it is this contiguity that makes an intertextual analysis of their work a task

that is extremely worthwhile.

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