UNIT 3 *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI* – READING THE TEXT

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to provide a detailed summary of the play. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* written by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo. However, it is not a plain summary but is also an elucidation of issues wherever there is a need for contextual elaborations – historical, political and social. Extensive quotations from the text have been reproduced to support the points made during the summarization and also to provide inter-connectivity.

Before we discuss the detailed summary of the play, it would be in order to make the observation that **The Preface, Acknowledgements** and **Preliminary Notes** also carry significant statements by the authors about the play and must be read carefully for the evaluation of the play. Therefore, before summarizing the play proper, we present a critical summary of the Preface.

3.1 'THE PREFACE'

The authors state that it was in August 1971 that they first thought of writing this play. The authors also let the readers know that their literary interests and collaboration goes back to their 'undergraduate days at Makerere of the early 60's where we used to share many literary interests including editing *Penpoint*, reading and directing plays.' The immediate provocation for their agreeing to write this play was a joint realization by both of them 'that Imperialism was the enemy of all working peoples' – a realization they had reached after both of them had 'lived in North America and travelled in Western Europe' and after they had 'encountered capitalism in its home ground'. Taking the example of the United States of America as an instance of imperialism the authors observe that while America had 'huge highways, skyscrapers, the world's most efficient systems of communication, tremendous leaps in science and technology, every kind of material luxury one could think of, there was 'the appalling poverty of workers especially those in the black and Puerto Rican Ghettos' and 'All the

advantages of modern science and technology, the wealth produced by the labour power of many people, went to the hands of a few'.

The authors also observe that there existed 'American Imperialist projects of theft through deception, murder and enslavement of the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America. There was the American direct occupation of Vietnam and South Korea: there was the indirect American control of South Africa and Palestine.' America's immense wealth, the authors observe, 'was gained through the impoverishment and misery of millions!'

A discussion about the war in Vietnam, the authors observe, 'led us back to Mau Mau, the actual subject of our discussion' and they wondered whether the theme of Mau Mau struggles had been exhausted in their literature. Other related questions, for instance, that agitated their thinking were:

> "Had this heroic peasant armed struggle against the British Forces of occupation been adequately treated in our literature? Why was Kenyan Literature on the whole so submissive and hardly depicted the people, the masses, as capable of making and changing history? Take the heroes and heroines of our history: Kimathi, Koitalel, Me Kitilili, Mary Nyanjiru, Waiyaki. Why were our imaginative artists not singing songs of praise to these and their epic deeds of resistance? Whose history and whose deeds were the historians and creative writers recording for our children to read?

The play, structured differently from the tradition of plays in Europe, is divided into what the authors call 'Movements' that are preceded by an 'Opening'. Given below is a detailed summary of all the Movements as also the Opening.

3.2 THE OPENING

The stage directions for the Opening tell the readers/viewers that the venue of the action is a courtroom where a white judge is presiding. Seated near him is an African clerk who is described to be 'fat' and 'important-looking' but who is 'fiddling nervously with papers'. The use of the adjective 'nervously' to describe the state of the 'important-looking' clerk is to send a signal to the readers/viewers that something significant – unusual – is about to take place in the courtroom.

Next, the focus of the stage directions shifts to the person in the dock who is described to be in chains. This observation sends a signal to the readers/viewers that the accused is perhaps too dangerous to be allowed to free movement of his body. Simultaneously, it is perhaps also indicative of the gravity of his alleged crime. This latter inference is also borne out by the fact that he is being guarded by a 'European District-cum-police officer' – Waitina – and two African K.A.R. – the full form is Kenya African Rifles – soldiers who are 'heavily armed'. The suspense builds up about the prisoner since despite being chained, he is being guarded by armed soldiers and an officer. Adding to the suspense is the observation by the authors that the courtroom is 'overcrowded'.

The next set of stage directions carry a whole lot of significant socio-cultural and political information: 'Africans squeeze around one side, seated on rough benches' while the 'Whites occupy more comfortable seats on the opposite side'.

The segregation is symptomatic of the racial divide in the country which extends even to the courtroom – right in front of the law. And the contrast between 'rough benches' and 'more comfortable seats' symbolizes the difference in economic status of the two – Africans and the White Europeans – right under the nose of the law. In fact, it is the court which has provided for this differentiated treatment between the two segments of the society.

It is important to note here that the directions themselves have been very carefully thought out by the authors and communicate significant information not only about the state of affairs in Kenya but also about the shape of things to come.

After it has been observed as a final part of stage directions that there is 'Dead silence' and the Judge begins to speak.

The Judge addresses the accused in the dock, speaking aloud his name and other related details about his identification: 'Dedan Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, alias Prime Minister or Field Marshal, of no fixed address…' One may pause and observe here that the contrast created by the pronouncement by the judge that Dedan Kimathi who has an alias or a Prime Minister or a Field Marshal but does not even have 'fixed address' is done with the deliberate intention of making fun of the accused.

The judge then goes on to announce the charge laid against him – Kimathi is 'found in possession of a firearm, namely a revolver, without a licence, contrary to section 89 of the penal code, which under Special Emergency Regulations constitutes a criminal offence'. He then asks the accused whether he confesses his guilt or not. The stage directions state that Kimathi 'remains silent, defiant'. The stage directions once again give an indication about the impending confrontation between the judge and the accused, between the white colonial rulers and the black colonized ruled.

The judge, feeling slighted and hence angry on this act of defiance of his authority, threatens the accused that this would tantamount to 'contempt of court' and the accused could be punished for this by being 'sent for a certain term to jail'. Since Dedan Kimathi still remains silent and hence defiant, a murmuring starts among the audience. The judge reads aloud the charge again and asks the accused to state whether he considers himself guilty or not.

The stage directions state that for a few moments there is silence after which the whole stage goes dark suddenly. This 'sudden darkness' is symbolic of many things simultaneously. It symbolizes a complete rupture in communication. More significantly, it anticipates the shape of events to come which would lead to the death of Kimathi eventually since darkness symbolizes death. At the same time it also draws the reader/viewer's attention to the dark – non-transparent – aspect of the farcical trial which is about to follow.

Thus we see that the 'Opening' which is a kind of prelude to the actual action of the play is significant in both providing the socio-political background and setting the tone for whatever is to follow.

What are usually described as Acts in western drama are described as Movements in this play. The play has been divided into three Movements which the authors claim should in fact be viewed as a 'single Movement'.

3.3 FIRST MOVEMENT

The directions before the opening of the action in the First Movement state that 'Darkness reigns'. There is the sound of 'Distant drums that grow louder and louder until they culminate in a frantic, frenzied and intense climax, filling the entire stage and auditorium with their rhythm.' With the coming on of the 'Twilight', loud singing by a crowd of peasants is heard. Once again, the authors' directions are that the voices of the peasants combine 'aggression with firmness'. The song which is in Swahili, is apparently a song of freedom. Simultaneously, there is the sound of a gunshot. Groans and screams follow after 'whiplashes are heard falling on human skins'. Sad music now takes over as 'the Black Man's History takes place on the stage'. The enactment of the history is in four phases, signifying the milestones in the history of Africa: the first phase shows the hoodwinking of black African chiefs by slave-traders wherein 'Several strong black men and a few women are given away for a long, posh piece of cloth and a heap of trinkets'; in the second phase, 'a chain of exhausted slaves, roped onto one another… row a boat across the stage, under heavy whipping'. The third phase shows 'A labour force of blacks, toiling on plantation under the supervision of a cruel, ruthless fellow black overseer' and the fourth phase shows 'An angry procession of defiant blacks, chanting anti-imperialist slogans through songs and thunderous shouts'. The song is once again a freedom song showing the determination of the blacks to 'unchain the people'.

The significance of the directions as well as the enactment of the Black Man's History is to not only provide the audience with the socio-political background of wherever has happened to Africa and Africans during the last few hundred years but also – more significantly – to make them aware that whatever is to follow is a part of the same history and there is a continuum in the struggle of Blacks from Africa to America.

'Now definite dawn breaks over the stage' and the 'action focuses on two retreating Mau Mau guerrillas into the 'bush' with machine guns on the ready'. Off stage sounds of 'rough kicks, slaps and whiplashes' are heard together with voices of protest. Then an African official – Waitina – and a hooded collaborator – Gakunia who also doubles up as Gatotia – are seen to be instructing the African soldiers to present before them 'those Mau Mau villagers two by two' for screening. On a nod from Gakunia, some are detained for further questioning. Among those brought before Waitina is a 'fruitseller – Matunda' who appears to be acting funny and even Waitina is amused by his 'antics'. However, Waitina tells the fruit seller to go "to Manyani to sell your fruits there". The directions given at this point tell the readers that "we should see the man frustrated" (p.8).

The scene now changes. It is proper daylight. A woman is seen walking across the stage. Between 30 and 40, she is mature, slightly built good looking with a youthful face. Though "apparently a simple peasant, the woman is obviously world-wise, and perceptive of behaviour and society. Throughout, her actions are under control: her body and mind are fully alert.

Fearless determination and a spirit of daring is her character. She is versatile and full of energy in her responses to different roles and situations. A mother, a fighter, all in one." (p.8)

She walks straight into the mouth of a gun wielded by a white man, Johnnie who is a soldier. He asks her for her 'passbook' to which she replies that 'women, they don't carry passi'. He then eyes her seductively and begins to flirt with her:

"Women are their own passbooks, eh? Even to heaven (grinning seductively) Do you live around these parts?" (p.9)

Suddenly he becomes tense on seeing her carry a kondo – a small basket generally carried by women and asks her to 'put it on the ground. Now hands on your head. Move a step back. Two steps. That's good. Don't try any tricks now.' (pp.9-10) This incident is intended to highlight the state of paranoia that prevails among the whites. Picking up the basket, he observes – 'You never know what's hidden in these shenzi things!'

Seeing fruit, he cannot help picking up a banana and eating it. As it turns out, he has had a hard night's work.

"Of course. A white man also gets hungry especially after a whole night without sleep or food. Had to fight off those bloody terrorists until daybreak"

Then Johnnie discovers suddenly that there is a bread wrapped in the parcel that the woman has been carrying:

"Ahh, just bread… Rather heavy bread, I must say. Bush millet, eh? Could have been a grenade. They are quite cunning, you know. Homemade guns. Homemade machine guns. Fanatics! Shall we have a bite?"

He is about to break the bread into two when he is suddenly distracted by the woman 'kneeling on the ground, almost reaching out for his legs' and beseeching him not to break the bread since it was meant for her hungry children. She supplicates to him to let her go.

A sudden noise from somewhere nearby scares him and he runs away in a hurry. The woman too gets away. Two African soldiers appear on the stage. Their conversation updates the readers on the current socio-political situation as also gives them a peep into the past vis-à-vis Kimathi and the 'Mau Mau'.

The first soldier is quite sceptical about the whole exercise of hunting for Mau Mau terrorists:

> "Where are the terrorists who are supposed to be all over Nyeri? We've been patrolling all night without as much as catching sight of a single one of them . Simply harassing innocent villagers. The way mzungu makes us thirst to kill one another!" (p.12)

The second soldier replies to this by observing that "The bloodyfuckin' Mau Mau are finished without that bugger Kimathi." (p.12)

Through their conversation we also come to know that 'their bloody Kimathi is appearing in court at Nyeri today. This afternoon.' While one of them hopes that there would be 'no attempt to rescue him. Something like what happened last night", the other observes that "…I don't think they will try again. Mau Mau… They are funkin' cowards. They won't come out into the open in daylight and fight it out like men." (p.13)

As they discuss the details of Kimathi's character, the audience/readers are presented with two opposite views about Kimathi the individual and his deeds:

> "Second Soldier: …Angry mothers who have lost their husbands and their children might want to tear that beastly Kimathi to pieces!
>
> First Soldier: Wapi? That's what Bwana Shaw Henderson says. But he doesn't know the people. Kimathi is a hero to the people. They love him like anything, say what you will."
>
> …
>
> …
>
> Second soldier: …But …let me tell you, after the trial, after Kimathi is hanged, there will be no more fighting. It will be the end of this bloody struggle. Mzungu! Don't play with him.
>
> First Soldier: Well, time will tell."

After the soldiers have left, the woman comes out of her hiding, observing to herself about a comment made by one of the soldiers –

> "What was one of those soldiers said? "The way the enemy makes us thirsty to kill one another." How right he was! He must be one of the lost sons of the soil. H'm. Take the case of us peasants, for one. We are told you are Luo, you are Kalenjin, you are Kamba, you are Maasai, you are Kikuyu. You are a woman, you are a man, you are this, you are that, you are the other. (After some thought): Yes. We are only ants trodden upon by the merciless elephants." (p.14)

She wraps her bread back, resolves to 'find the fruit seller quickly' and is about to start off when a youth enters, chasing a girl. He catches her, holds her down roughly and demands his money. Seeing this, the woman reproaches him for ill-treating a girl:

> "Shame on you. A big boy, well, a young man like you! And you want kill your sister! Your own mother's daughter!"

On his continuing to quarrel with the girl and abusing her for letting the girl escape his clutches, she berates him:

> "You are a woman's son? I have a mind to wring your neck. Running about and fighting like that when screeners and army jeeps are all over Nyeri. Where is your heart? Can't you see that you are big enough? That you could easily be taken to Manyani? What has she done?" (pp. 15-16)

She then asks him to tell her about himself and the girl. After a brief hesitation during which he examines the woman closely, the boy 'involuntarily begins to tell his story:

> "It was in Nairobi, you see. She and I and other boys and girls used to roam the streets together…

…We scrounged into every dustbin from Kariobangi to Grogan Road. But mostly we'd hang around big hotels: New Stanley, Norfolk, Grosvenor. There were a lot of settlers and tourists and we would carry their bags. Sometimes we would act

crippled or blind and deaf. They would give us money – some of them as much as ten shillings! The police would often come chasing us away, but we managed. Somehow." (p.16)

He then goes on to say how one day she – the girl – had run away without giving him his share of money earned by carrying bags of a fat American. And 'Today by luck, I saw her'.

Touched by his story, the woman gives the boy twenty shillings to go eat something and bring her back the change. While he is gone, she observes to herself:

> "It is the same old story. Everywhere. Mombasa. Nkuru. Kisumu. Eldoret. The same old story. Our people… tearing one another… and all because of the crumbs thrown at them by the exploiting foreigners. Our own food eaten and leftovers thrown to us – in our own land, where we should have the whole share. We buy wood from our own forests; sweat on our own soil for the profit of our oppressors. Kimathi's teaching is: unite, drive out the enemy and control your own riches, enjoy the fruit of your sweat. It is for this that the enemy has captured him." (p.18)

The Boy goes on to narrate his story – how a greedy relation of his father had deprived them of their land in Nyeri, reducing his father and him to workers in Nairobi where his father died of an accident on a machine and he was forced to fight "with dogs and cats in the rubbish bins, for food… and we became men and women before our time." (p.19)

Narrating her own story in the city where "I was a bad woman", she tells them that she knew the vicious bind of "Fighting..Drinking…Fighting…Drinking… Kangari, karubu, busaa, chang'aa…Mathere Valley…Pumwani…all that and more." (p.19) She then goes on to tell them how she changed after hearing "The call of the people". Inviting the Boy to understand the real nature of things, she tells him this:

> "The day you 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 under such grisly circumstances?" that day, my son, you'll become a man. Just now you are a beast and the girl was right to call you a brute." (p.19)

She lets them know later about Dedan Kimathi who has been captured by the colonial administration and who had been fighting to ensure that "the soil will be restored to the people. Our land shall one day be truly ours". (p.21)

Finally, she assigns them a task:

> "There, outside the prison gates or outside the courtroom, or somewhere between the prison gates and the courtroom, you will find a man selling oranges. He will be wearing a red shirt. He will be singing: "Oranges cheap today! Thandaraita – aaa." Give him this loaf of bread." (p.21)

The First Movement ends with the Boy recalling the words of the Woman, "The day you'll ask yourself… what can I do so that another shall not die under such grisly circumstance… that day you'll become a man, my son." (p.22)

3.4 SECOND MOVEMENT

The scene is outside the court where quite a big crowd has gathered around. The Woman disguised as a man in a red shirt, is selling oranges from a basket 'he' is carrying.

Inside the court, "Whites enter, women dressed as if for a show, fanning their faces. Men swagger in with pistols belted around their waists. They sit on one side of the court." (p.23)

The stage instructions state that "As the Africans enter, it should be a study in contrast with their torn clothes and tattered shoes. They are frisked by the African soldiers under Waitina's orders. Sticks or anything that might suggest a weapon are removed from them. N.B. Throughout the court scenes, Africans are defiant towards the settlers and the colonial authorities while appreciative of Kimathi's stand… In the court, blacks and whites sit on separate side. It is as if a huge gulf lies between them." (p.23)

After the entry of Shaw Henderson dressed as a judge, the prisoner – Dedan Kimathi – is "brought in under heavy guard, with chains on his feet and chains on his hands. He is pushed into the witness box by Waitina who is flanked by First and Second soldiers." (p.24)

The judge then reads out the charges against him:

> "Dedan Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, alias Prime Minister, or Field Marshal, of no fixed address, you are charged that on the night of Sunday, October the 21st, 1956, at or near Ihururu in Nyeri District, you were found in possession of a firearm, namely a revolver, without a licence, contrary to section 89 of the penal code, which under Special Emergency regulations constitutes a criminal offence. Guilty or not guilty?" (p.24)

On Kimathi remaining silent, the judge warns him of contempt of court and repeats the entire charge. Kimathi questions his right to try him – "By what right dare you, a colonial judge, sit in judgement over me?" (p.25) The judge reminds him that he is charged with 'a most serious crime. It carries a death sentence.' Kimathi now enters into a polemic with the judge questioning the very basis of colonial justice:

> "Kimathi: To a criminal judge, in a criminal court, set up by criminal law: the law of oppression. I have no word.
>
> Judge: Law is law. The rule of law is the basis of every civilized community. Justice is justice.
>
> Kimathi: Whose law? Whose justice?
>
> Judge: There is only one law, one justice.
>
> Kimathi: Two laws. Two justices. One law and one justice protects the man of property, the man of wealth, the foreign exploiter. Another law, another justice, silences the poor, the hungry, our people" (pp. 25-26)

Kimathi then goes on to list the 'crimes' of colonial administration:

> "Protected the oppressor. Licensed the murderers of the people
>
> Our people,

whipped when they did not pick your tea leaves
your coffee beans
Imprisoned when they refused to "ayah"
your babies
and "boy" your houses and gardens
Murdered when they didn't rickshaw
your ladies and your gentlemen."

The polemic ends in the judge adjourning the court until the next day. After the judge had left, a settler rushes at Kimathi, pointing his gun at him, he threatens to kill him:

"Field Marshall/Prime Minister. Fucking black monkey. Listen, you'll die now, wog.

I'll teach you justice…
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" (p.28)

The scene briefly shifts to the street where the woman disguised as Fruitseller is seen selling oranges. After she has left, the boy comes looking for the Fruitseller, holding the loaf of bread in his hand, spots the Girl and runs after her demanding his money.

Next, we have the First Trial.

The First Trial

The stage instructions tell us that "All four trials of Dedan Kimathi take place in his cell.

…Kimathi sits in a corner, long chain from his leg dragging behind him." (p.31)

Shaw Henderson enters and identifies himself as 'I am a friend' and tells Kimathi that the people have 'sent me to talk sense into your obstinate head'. He says further that he had come to 'make a deal': "You must plead in court tomorrow. And you must plead guilty?" (p.33) He promises to spare his life, citing the examples of 'China. Gati. Hungu. Gaceru' whose lives they had spared after they became 'our collaborators'. Henderson recalls how as children they – Kimathi and him – used to play together the game of the horse and the rider. Kimathi in turn reminds Henderson that he always wanted Kimathi to play the horse so that he could ride him.

Henderson asks Kimathi to stop the blood-bath, observing that 'your people are the losers, Dedan'. Kimathi's reply is typical of a nationalist freedom fighter:

> "With the British, we have been losers all the way – yes – but this is a new era. This is a new war. We have bled for you. We have fought your wars for you, against the Germans, Japanese, Italians. This time we shall bleed for our soil, for our freedom, until you let go." (p.34)

On being told by Henderson that he was dreaming again, Kimathi says, 'Yes. And I shall keep on dreaming till my visions come true and our people are free.' On Kimathi's observation that 'Kimathi will never sell Kenya', Henderson leaves in a huff, threatening that 'I'll get you yet. I swear I'll get you. I, Shaw Henderson, will break you. I know the native mind. Black man, I'll have the last laugh.' (p.36)

The Second Trial

In the second trial, Kimathi recalls his childhood, particularly the influence of his blind grandmother on him:

> "I was blessed by a blind grandmother,
> A peasant, a toiler.
> She imparted her strength, the strength
> of our people into me." (p.36)

He recalls the various dances by different peoples of Kenya before the intervention of colonialism –

> "They used to dance these
> Before the white colonialist came
> In the arena…at initiation…
> during funerals…during marriage…
> Then the colonialist came
> And the people danced
> A different dance." (p.37)

He recalls how he became a leader of the struggle of the people:

> "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?" (pp.37-38)

At this point, when he is soliloquizing about 'hunger, disease, sorrow', he is visited by a Trade-cum-businessman's delegation, who observe that 'this is holding back investment, the flow of money, development'. On Kimathi's questioning whether money is development, one of them – the banker – cites the example of foreign banks as the makers of modern Kenya:

> "Now you'll agree with me that they did transform this land. Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale, Kisumu. Modern cities, Modern Highways." (p.38)

Then the Indian who is a part of the delegation, joins in –

> "In India – a, ve got our independent. Freedom. To make money. This here, our true friend. Not racialism. Leaves your customs alone. You can pray Budha, pray Confucius, pray under the trees, pray rocks, vear sari… your culture…songs…dances..ve don't mind…propided…ve make money… priend…priend." (p.39)
>
> When Kimathi reminds the Indian that Kenyans passing through India during the war had seen 'hungry peoples, beggers on pavements… wives selling themselves for a rupee…', the Indian can only mutter – 'Little, Little…'.

Soon the delegation is pleading with Kimathi to confess, repent:

> "Co-operate – like the surrendered generals. Tell your people to come out of the Forest. We need stability. There never can be progress without stability. Then we can finance big Hotels…International Hotels…seaside resorts…Night Clubs…Casinos…Tarmac roads…oil refineries and pipelines… The tourists from USA, Germany, France, Switzerland, Japan, will flock in. Investment, my friend, development, prosperity, happiness." (p.40)

On being questioned by Kimathi about the fate and role of 'my people… The oppressed of the land…all those whose labour power has transformed this land', the reply of the Banker is typical:

> "Toilers there will always be… There are servants and masters… sellers of labour and buyers of labour. Masters and servants." (p.40)
>
> On being called 'Judas' by Kimathi the members of the delegation go out.

The scene now shifts to the street outside. The Girl enters, soliloquizing about her life:

> "All my life I have been running. On the run. On the road. Men molesting me. I was once a dutiful daughter. A nice Christian home. It was in the settled area. …I ran away from school because the headmaster wanted to do wicked

> things with me. Always: you remain behind. You take the wood to my house. You take this chalk and books to the office. Then he would follow me and all he wanted was to touch my breasts. So I left school. I wanted to stay home and teach myself how to sew or do something with my life. But my father would have nothing of it. He called me an idler and sent me to pick tea leaves for that cruel settler, Mr. Jones. How he used to abuse and punish us! I had to run away from home… In the city it was the boys…I lost my virginity while trying to run away from losing it. How else could I live?" (p.41)

Now the Boy enters the scene and soon enough a quarrel ensues, the girl mistaking the Boy's sincere apology for another trick of his. In the melee, the bread falls down and out comes the gun, on seeing which both are shocked beyond belief. The boy thinks that he has been tricked by the Women to land him into trouble and proposes to report her to the police. Suddenly he hears a voice – the Woman's – telling him:

> "The day you'll understand why your father died: the day you'll ask yourself whether it was right for him to die so; the day you'll ask yourself – what can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstances, that day, my son, you'll become a man." (p.43)
>
> He changes his mind saying, 'But how can I turn/Against her call/And/Live?'
>
> They leave.

Third Trial

This time the delegation visiting Kimathi comprises an African Businessman, dressed like an Englishman, politician and a Priest. Kimathi seems to recognize the Businessman and tells him that he has been 'sitting on hot coals of trials and temptations' and asks him to 'Ease my heart' (p.44). The African Businessman reminds Kimathi that he had stood by him. He had contributed money to the cause and his shop at Masira used to be an 'oathing centre'. He goes on to ask Kimathi – 'Don't you think we have won the war?' In return, Kimathi asks him whether their opressors had surrendered. The reply by the African Businessman is again typical of collaborators:

> "It is not, eeh, exactly like that. But there have been two important announcements. They have said: No more racialism. No more colour bar. In public places. In administration. In business. In the allocation of loans. In the grabbing, well, in the acquisition of land. Partnership in progress, that's the new motto. Is this not what we have been fighting for? Any black man who now works hard and has capital can make it to the top. We can become local directors of foreign companies. We can now buy land in the White Highlands. What Highlands no more. It's now: willing Seller, willing Buyer." (p.45)

At this point, the politician takes over and tells Kimathi that they had been given the choice to independence 'province by province'. Kimathi rejects his contention as that of 'new drinkers of honey from human skulls' and calls them 'Neo-slaves". Once they leave, the Priest approaches Kimathi. Like the others, the Priest too urges Kimathi to "Surrender. Call off bloodshed. New Life, New Brotherhood in Christ." (p.50). He informs Kimathi that "We are now Africanizing the Church.

We want to see Christ reflected in our culture. Drums in Church. African Bishops. African

Moderators. African cardinals". (p.49) Kimathi, however, refuses to see the kind of light that the Priest is trying to show him. He considers them as collaborators:

> "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." (p.49)

Finally, he too is asked to go: 'My trial has begun'. As the Priest leaves, Kimathi soliloquizes:

> "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!" (p.51)

The scene changes back to the street where the Boy and Girl are seen talking to the Warder of the jail, asking if he had seen 'a man selling oranges around here'. Stranded with the gun, they leave to devise the strategy of reaching the gun to Kimathi. After they have left, the Woman enters, disguised as Fruitseller only to discover that the Warder she had expected to see is not there. The Warder informs her that the fear of an armed rescue could have led to sudden changes of guards. She goes out.

Fourth Trial

Kimathi is visited in the jail by Shaw Henderson who asks him to 'Stop dreaming' and wake up to the reality. Kimathi is furious:

> "What more 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?
>
> …Shaw Henderson! Trader with people's lives!.
>
> …Yes, self-appointed saviour of our people. Listen and listen well. I will fight to the bitter end. Protect our soil. Protect our people. This is what I, Kimathi wa Wachiuri, swore at initiation." (p.54)

Listening to all this and more, Henderson reacts wildly, striking Kimathi 'with hands, legs, gun and swearing as he strikes'. Finally, he orders Waitina to instruct Gatotia to 'give him intensive treatment' in the torture chamber.

The stage instructions at this point tell us that as Waitina lifts the whip, '*lights go off and the audience only hear noise from the torture chamber. Gradually, semi-darkness. In semi-darkness we watch the miming of black history (earlier enacted) going on, against the torturing behind the scene.*' (p.56)

Further stage instructions tell us that :

> "*Kimathi, blood-stained, shirt torn, emerges from the torture chamber kicked, pushed from behind. He can hardly walk. He falls on his hands and feet. Henderson, Waitina and Gatotia and the two soldiers follow, holding some of the instruments of torture. They stand in a group except the human soldier who stands apart, slightly hiding his face in shame. Kimathi is obviously broken in body.. BUT not in spirit."* (p.57)

After Henderson has handed him a piece of paper, ordering him to 'Sign – surrender', Kimathi tears it into pieces, '*throws the pieces in Henderson's face*' and says:

> "Our people will never surrender."
>
> The Second Movement ends with this.

3.5 THIRD MOVEMENT

In the Third Movement, the scene is early morning, near the gate of the jail house where Dedan Kimathi has been held. Boy and Girl, dressed as Masai, approach the Warder and express a wish to see the prisoner – Kimathi. The Warder is surprised – "Wonders will never cease. Masai? Kimathi? Who are you fooling? Go away!" (p.59)

They tell him that they want to greet him and give him the loaf of bread they are carrying. Observing that he has been starving on his duty, he snatches the bread from them. He is about to break it when suddenly there is a sound of an aeroplane and throwing the bread, he rushes off. The Boy and Girl retrieve the bread and are about to go away when they run into the Woman, still dressed as a fruitseller. She reveals her real identity to them and they are quite surprised.

They move away to confer. "Both Boy and Girl sit at the feet of the woman", who "now represents all the working mothers talking to their children." (p.59)

The Boy asks her – "Why did you trick me into carrying a gun?" to which she replies that that was a kind of initiation for him. On her enquiring whether he was afraid, he confesses that he was… "But the Girl here…. She was all strength and daring and no fear." The woman praises them, observing that –

> "Instead of fighting against one another, we who struggle against exploitation and oppression, should give one another strength and faith till victory is ours." (p.59)

She then informs them that "Yesterday was a day of setbacks. First the screening and the Johnnies! I walked into the mouth of a gun! Then, after we parted, I found out that fruitseller so that you would easily recognize me. The court adjourned sooner than I had thought: I then followed the crowd. I was going to speak to the Warder, another contact. I found that he too had been transferred to another place. So only you remained. I kept on looking for you. Between here and Majengo, there is not a place I have not visited. Great risks: but the task once started must be completed?" (p.60)

She reveals to them the plan to rescue Kimathi and assigns them the crucial task of starting the shooting when Kimathi is taken to court. Suddenly, the Girl, losing

interest in the whole thing, asks a basic question – "Who really is Dedan Kimathi?" to which the Woman replies – "Leader of the landless. Leader of them that toil." (p.61)

The Boy and Girl then narrate some of the stories – these are legends in the making – that they have heard about the miraculous feats of Dedan Kimathi. For instance, they believe he once disguised himself as a European inspector of Police, enjoyed the hospitality of a dinner by the Governor and escaped. Again, they believe that "he could turn himself into an aeroplane" or "walk for a 100 miles on his belly" or "that he could mimic any noise of a bird and none could tell the difference". (p.61) The Woman replies to these beliefs of the Boy and Girl by observing, sadly and contemplatively:

> "It is true children, that Kimathi could do many things. Even today, they sing of the battle of Mathari; the battles he waged in Mount Kenya; the battle of Naivasha. Yes, they sing of the enemy aeroplanes he brought down with only a rifle! He was a wonderful teacher: with a laugh that was truly infectious. He could also act and mimic any character in the world: a story teller too, and many were the nights he would calm his men and make their hearts light and gay with humorous anecdotes. 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!"

The scene now shifts to A Guerilla Camp in Nyandarua Forest where in a court-cum-general meeting, a trial of two British soldiers and one African K.A.R. is in progress. Kimathi is seen to be questioning the prisoners about their names, regiments, places of origin back in United Kingdom and the background of their parents. On learning that their parents were poor, Kimathi observes:

> "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?" (pp.64) On their refusal to do so, they are led away to be punished.

Kimathi then turns to the K.A.R. soldier who pleads – "Truly, I'm black. Black like you. Spare me brother.

Kimathi comments:

> "And yet you fight against us?
>
> A true mercenary!
>
> You fought for imperialism in Burma!
>
> You fought for them in Japan!
>
> And now you fight for them
>
> Against your own country?
>
> Against your people's interest! (pp.64-65)

On learning that they are paid only a hundred shillings per month plus posho, he ridicules them –

"I thought they would bribe you with more!
A share in their Export-Import trade,
A share in their tourist hotels,
A share in their wheat fields
A share in their stolen wealth.
Only that? (p.65)

They too are led away to be punished.

Kimathi now turns to the general meeting and addressing them, he observes –

"We now must open new fronts
We have sent envoys to arouse
Warriors from Nyanza,
Giriama people at the Coast
And also young Kalenjin braves
To set a grand alliance of Kenyan People
And chastise the enemy for ever.
…
…
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 praise for them all day:
Waiyaki, Me Katilili
Mbatiani, Koitalel.
And vilify collaborators:
Mimias, Wangombe
Karuri, Gakure
Kinyanjui, Luka –
All who sold us to foreigners to aid
their own stomachs and their family store.
We must learn from our past strength
Past weaknesses
From past defeats
And past victories." (pp.66-68)

Next, another group of offenders are brought in who are guilty of negotiating with the enemy. These include Kimathi's younger brother, Wambararia. Kimathi is shocked:

"My kindred brother –
To negotiate behind my back?" (p.71)

A debate ensues about the kind and quantum of punishment to be meted out to the offenders. At this point, Kimathi points to the Woman and observes:

"Do you see this woman?
How many tasks has she performed
Without complaint
Between here and the villages?
How many people has she
snatched from jails, from colonial
Jaws of death!
…
…
When this struggle is over
We shall erect at all the city corners
Monuments
To our women
Their courage and dedication
To our struggle? (p.72)

While the fate of the offenders is being decided, the news is brought in that they have managed to escape upon which Kimathi orders – "Shoot them on sight".

This was a kind of flash back after which the scene now shifts back to the Courtroom where the trial of Kimathi is to be resumed. While the judge is reading out the charges to Kimathi, the Woman enters the court but is identified by the collaborators and is apprehended, chained and led away. While she is leaving, singing songs of freedom, the Boy and Girl enter and take the place vacated by her on the bench. When the judge asks Kimathi to plead 'Guilty or not guilty?', Kimathi's reply is typical of freedom fighters –

"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." (p.82)

Admonishing the collaborators like Hungu Gati, Gatotia for their acts of betrayal and lauding the bravery of the Woman who he had seen being arrested, chained and led away a short while ago, he proclaims –

"But our people will never surrender
Internal and external foes
will be demolished
And Kenya shall be free (p.83)

After the judge pronounces the judgement "Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, you are sentenced to die, by hanging. You will be hanged by the rope until you are dead" and leaves the court, the Boy and Girl stand up suddenly, break the bread, hold the gun and speak together – "Not dead!"

In the ensuing melee, darkness falls for a moment, after which "the stage gives way to a mighty crowd of workers and peasants at the centre of which are Boy and Girl, singing a thunderous freedom song. All the soldiers are gone, except for the First soldier who shyly joins in the singing from behind."

The play ends on this note.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed in detail:

- The Preface, Acknowledgements and Preliminary Notes that carry significant statements by the authors about the play.
- The summary of the play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* along with the elucidation of the historical, political and social issues.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the broad movements in the structure of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.
2. What view of the justice system emerges from the exchanges between the judge and Dedan Kimathi.

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Cook, David & Okenimkpe, M. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, London: Heinemann, 1983.

Killam, G.D. *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, London: Heinemann, 1980.